

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF MINORITY FEMALE  
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' BACKGROUNDS ON CURRENT PRACTICES AND  
POLICIES FOR MINORITY STUDENTS**

**A Doctoral Research Project  
Presented to  
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Doctoral Committee Chair  
Esteves School of Education  
The Sage Colleges**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the  
Degree of Doctor of Education  
In Educational Leadership**

**Maria Trinidad Hernandez**

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“It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light” (Aristotle). “The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams” (Eleanor Roosevelt).

## **ABSTRACT**

### **A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF MINORITY FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' BACKGROUNDS ON CURRENT PRACTICES AND POLICIES FOR MINORITY STUDENTS**

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The Sage Colleges, Esteves School of Education, 2018

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While the study of women in leadership positions in the workplace is not a new idea (Bjork, 2000), the focus on underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership within the field of education is considerably new (Litmanovitz, 2011). Although gains have been made in the last thirty-five years for women entering into administrative positions, much progress is yet to be made for true equality to exist for women in the area of school and district level educational administration (Gerson, 2009.) Moreover, the number of diverse educational leaders remains stagnant, widening the existing gap in the correlation between minority student-teacher-administrator ratios (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

This study unveiled the knowledge constructed from the self-perceptions and lived experiences of minority female in district level and school level leaders in Upstate New York, as well as their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students. A review of the relevant literature demonstrated a need to diversify the leadership workforce in public schools due to the impact that minority educational leaders have to serve as a positive role

model for minority students in their districts. (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004). Goldsmith (2004) found that minority students were more optimistic and liked school better when schools had a high number of minority administrators and particularly when high numbers of minority teachers were employed in the school. Having high numbers of minority teachers is important to find those connections for students to develop their identities and to promote future aspirations (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). A qualitative research design was used to conduct the study and data was collected from twelve female minority school level and district level educational leaders. The researcher's research questions specifically addressed achievement and college and career readiness of minority students by focusing on goal setting, policy, and allocation of resources. The study consisted of four research questions that elicited twelve different findings. The findings from the research support that the experiences and upbringing of these female minority leaders influence their decision-making when it comes to minority students in their district.

Several recommendations have come up as a result of the study, however, some of the most important ones had to do with racism, hiring practices, the importance of mentors, finding equity, the need to educate others about minority students, and the need to invest in programs that aim at eliminating the achievement gap.

Key Words: equity in leadership; equity in education; minorities, achievement gap, culturally proficient school districts.



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## **CHAPTER I**

### **Introduction**

In the current economic, political, and social climates, a pervasive belief that “our quality of life depends on our quality of leaders” has resulted in high expectations for today’s leaders. (Bennis, 2003, p. 5). Educational leadership is subject to these same forces. In all areas of institutional function, school leadership is crucial to the success of those we mean to educate. (Waters, Marzano, McNulty, 2010).

According to Leithwood (2001) leaders contribute to student learning directly and indirectly, through their influence on other people. Research further shows that educators can have significant impacts on student motivation and can influence some of the future identities that students develop as they grow up (Destin & Kosko, 2016). Today’s school administrators have different demands than before. The job has become more complicated and comes with the expectation that administrators need to be visionaries able to motivate educators to achieve outstanding instruction, which in turn, will positively impact student success (Yulk, 2001).

However, the position of ‘educational leader’ is plagued by gender biases and negative perceptions of women in society (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009). Research also reports disparities between the experiences of female public administrators and their male counterparts (Morrison, 2012). The “good ole boys club” still seems to be thriving and may be disadvantageous to women looking to secure an administrative position. (Eckman, 2004).

Even though leadership is changing and evolving, gender inequality continues to be an issue in educational administration, particularly regarding the experiences of women in top leadership positions (Litmanovitz, 2011). Glass and Franceschini (2007) argued that women are still not obtaining leadership positions in public education as easily as men in both K-12 and

higher education positions. Although leadership has traditionally been associated with more masculine traits and abilities, management experts now highlight a wider range of female characteristics and qualities in leadership positions (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009).

The literature describes that women have different leadership strategies and characteristics than males. When exploring leadership characteristics of women, the literature pays attention to the extent that they exhibit nurture and care in their leadership strategies. Women may be prone to develop deeper relationships with students and staff, they are generally more engaged in their work, are considered more skillful developing relationships, managing their schools, and overall develop and maintain closer-knit organizations (Shakeshaft, 1995). Conrad and Rosser (2007) asserted that positioning females in leadership roles in public education enriches the administrative field. Studying and reviewing females in leadership positions by focusing on their backgrounds, life issues, and experiences might provide insight on how to develop ways for gender diversity to be included in leadership positions in the public educational setting.

Moreover, not only is there a need to evaluate gender disparities in education, but also research has focused on the benefits of minority and female leadership in educational institutions. Eagly (2007) stated that as organizations are becoming more diverse, more diverse leadership will be required to fulfill these roles. Therefore, a broader range of leadership styles will be needed to match the changing population.

The U.S. is becoming a nation of minorities (Conrad & Rosser, 2007). The shortage of minority teachers in public schools has reached an ultimate low at a time when U.S. schools are becoming more diverse than ever (Conrad & Rosser, 2007). In addition, the need to have ethnic diversity in those who occupy leadership positions is also greater (Schaerer, Vickers, Hansing, &

Harvey, 1996). Having minorities in leadership positions not only can provide role models for the faculty and staff and students in a district, but it also aids in improving the understanding of different cultures and in possibly attracting more minorities to fill educational positions (Schaerer, Vickers, Hansing, & Harvey, 1996). Consistent with this research is that of Sanchez, Thornton and Usinger (2008) who claimed that in order to increase minority leadership in the future, special attention needs to be focused on the recruitment, retention, and development of minority teachers.

A positive relationship between minority administrators and improved student outcomes can be noted in academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates of minority students (Dee, 2004; Villegas & Irvine, 2010, Williams & Loeb, 2012). By sharing the same cultural background and experiences as these minority students, minority educational leaders can model success and relate better to parents and other minority stakeholders (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

Minority leaders have the power to help and shape students' lives and the ability to support and help students maneuver the intricacies of school environments and school cultures (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Further, they can also influence teachers and have a positive impact on parental involvement (Williams & Loeb, 2012). For this reason, it is extremely important for those in charge of recruiting to search the best possible candidates, entice, employ and secure this type of crucial and influential leaders (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

### **Purpose Statement**

This grounded theory study involved twelve minority female district level and school level leaders serving public school districts in Upstate New York. The intent of this grounded theory research study was to understand the lived experiences of several minority women

educational leaders. This study unveiled the knowledge constructed from the self-perceptions and lived experiences of minority female educational leaders in Upstate New York, as well as their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students. It identified common threads of career paths, educational empowerment, and gender pride manifested in respondents' success as school and system leaders. Their experiences may highlight certain barriers that marginalize women in the educational system and the role that is played by an educational leader's cultural competency in the development of successful programs and services for minority children and families.

In this study, female minority district and school level leaders provided rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their perceptions on their own histories of individual and community resilience, the characteristics of the social obstacles they faced, unique narratives of their upbringings and aspirations, as well as their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

### **Research Questions**

This study is organized around the basic, overarching research question: What are the self-perceptions of minority female district and school level leaders, their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students in their district?

The following sub-questions will also be taken into account:

1. Do the personal experiences of female minority district and school level leaders affect the attitudes they have towards minority students in their district?
2. Do the personal experiences of female minority district and school level leaders influence the way they select programs designed to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district?



3. Do female minority district and school level leaders make conscious decisions to affect the path and shape the college and career attitudes of minority students in their district?
4. Do the personal experiences of female minority district and school level leaders affect the way in which they engage with parents of minority students to support/create a partnership for college and career readiness?

## **Background**

The most recent data from the National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS) from National Center for Education Statistics (2013) from the 2011-2012 school year shows that the distribution of race among 89,810 public school administrators (principals) was as follows: 80 percent were non-Hispanic White, 10 percent were non-Hispanic Black or African American, 7 percent were Hispanic, and 3 percent were another race/ethnicity. The data broken down by gender shows that out of the 52 percent overall female administrators (principals) in public schools, 64 percent were in primary schools, 42 percent were in middle schools, and 30 percent in high schools, and 40 percent in combined schools (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2013). The NCES census demographic and geographic data program, however, does not provide data on female minority educational leaders; therefore, it is very difficult to estimate the right percentages for these two subgroups together. Nonetheless, after reviewing the data and the literature, it can be concluded that the numbers for both categories combined continues to be very low. Moreover, as the NTPS has information only for principals and teachers, it provides a small slice of the broader set of leaders that this research was looking for.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) found that 40% of women in central administration positions identify the superintendent's position in their goals at some point in their career. They further reported that 7% of superintendents and 10% of assistant, associate, or deputy

superintendent positions were filled by women of color in 2003. Another study found that only 12% of these positions were filled by white women and 1.1% by black women as compared to 81.7% white men and 5.1% black men (Glass, 2000). Out of 13,728 superintendents in the United States public educational system, 1,984 (14.5%) are women. In 1991, only 8% of the superintendents were women, as compared to today where we have 30% (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). However, currently more men still hold more administrative positions. Even though women hold 75% of all teaching positions, they only hold 30% of leadership positions, earning just 81% of what men earn in the superintendency (Cook, 2013). Women will continue to remain at a disadvantage in the educational field when compared to men as long as the overall cultural expectation that they have more responsibility than men outside work continues (Cook, 2013).

The latest statistical information from AASA in 2016 (American Association of Schools Administrators) identifies women as comprising 21.7% of its membership. Due to the lack of data, documentation of female representation in the district level educational leadership ranks continues to be unspecific, and at the average of 0.7 annual percent increase in their representation, it would probably take about 77 years for women to be represented in this top administrative position (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Therefore, determining the representation by ethnicity is even harder, as the data usually only reflects sex or ethnicity, but rarely both. Warner (2014) reported a percentage of only 23% females occupying Superintendent positions in 2012.

The U.S. population is comprised of 50.8% women. Among the employed women between the ages of 25 and older, 37% of women have earned a bachelor's degree or higher as of 2010 compared to 35% of men (US Census, 2015). In 2014, 40% of this group held college

degrees, compared with 11% in 1970 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). In addition, women represent 47% of the U.S. labor force. Further, Flynn, Heath, & Holt (2013) describe how women are better prepared than ever before; however, they continue to be underpaid when compared to their male counterparts by a 23% difference in salary.

Although the overall progress of women is confirmed to be improving in several different areas, it is still not uniformly improved across all areas (Schmitt, Spoor, Danaher & Branscombe, 2009). Despite modest gains in the representation of women in educational leadership, women continue to be hired into administrative positions at a disproportionately low rate compared to the percentage of women hired into classroom teaching positions (Grogan and Brunner, 2005). Nonetheless, this disparity cannot be explained by lack of qualifications or aspiration (Grogan and Brunner, 2005).

Changes in population demographics mean challenges for public schools (Center for Public Education [CPE], 2012). The National Center for Education Statistics, estimated that about 50.4 million students would attend public elementary and secondary schools in the 2016-17 school year. Of the approximately projected 51 million students enrolled in pre-k through grade 12, it was estimated that white students comprised 24.7 million of the total population; however, the percentage of white students is expected to decline as the enrollments of students of other ethnicities increase through at least the fall of 2024. Currently, of the total Pre-K -12 student enrollment, there are approximately 24.7 million white students, 7.8 million black students, 13.3 million Hispanic students; 2.7 million Asian/Pacific Islander students; 0.5 million American Indian/Alaska Native students; and the remaining 1.5 million students was made up of two or more races. (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015).

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2011) by 2055, the U.S. will be comprised of a racial and/or ethnic majority. The current predominant race in the United States is the non-minority white population, accounting for 72 percent of the total population living in the United States (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). However, the non-minority white population is also the slowest growing population.

The Hispanic population grew by 43% between the years 2000 and 2010, increasing the Hispanic population from 35.3 million in 2000 to 50.5 million in 2010. This growth accounted for more than half of the 27.3 million increase in the total U.S. population. The U.S. population in 2010 was made up of 16 percent Hispanics. The non-Hispanic population grew comparatively slower over that period of time at about 5 percent (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011).

As student populations shift and become more ethnically and culturally diverse, school districts should recruit, employ, and retain minorities in key leadership positions (Sanchez, Thorton & Usinger, 2008). Minority educational leaders may be better situated than their Caucasian counterparts to grasp social disparities in the educational experience and share experiences of social marginalization, as well as create bonds between students, parents, and other educational stakeholders while modeling success for everyone (Sanchez, Thorton & Usinger, 2008).

The Wallace Foundation's research on school leadership identified an "empirical link between school leadership and improved student achievement." (Wallace Foundation, 2011, p. 3). Others have noted the apparent correlation between student achievement and talented educational leadership (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 9). As reported: "Leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers' engagement in professional community, which in turn, fosters the use of

instructional practices that are associated with student achievement” (Wahlstrom, Louis, Leithwood, & Anderson, 2010, p. 10).

However, there are unique pressures that apply to educational success, and as a result, there are many different approaches to school leadership. Elmore (2003) suggested that successful academic leadership, including student achievement and institutional improvement depends on having the right focus of change. Leithwood and Riehl (2003) found that good educational leaders guide their schools through the challenges that arise from increasingly demanding school environments. They stated that successful schools are due to successful school leaders, and likewise failing schools are linked to weak leadership traits. Perreault and Lunenburg (2002) call for changes in public education and leadership to meet 21<sup>st</sup> century challenges.

Gender stereotypes continue to permeate in our society, including in the education world. (Ridgeway, 2001). Due to beliefs already established in our society, “even wealthy, powerful women are disadvantaged by gender status beliefs compared to their wealthy, powerful male peers” (Ridgeway, 2001, p. 638). Stereotypes of this nature still prevail in people’s minds (Ridgeway, 2001). Prejudice toward female leaders stems from preconceived beliefs and biases that many people have about the characteristics that a female should have, and the traits required to be a leader (Ridgeway, 2001). When thinking about women as leaders, two stereotypical ideas come to mind; those about their ability as leaders and those about their gender in general, incongruences that affect their career advancement (Eagly & Karau, 2002). However, female leadership is often criticized because it lacks the direct and assertive stereotypical qualities of good leaders (Eagly & Sczesny, 2009).

Flynn, Heath, & Holt (2013) discussed the necessity to address all the inconsistencies and troubles that female leaders face daily to be able to reach parity, and finally advance their leadership careers. According to the authors, these inconsistencies are the reasons why women cannot celebrate a positive picture of progress.

At the present rates of hiring and promotion of women, equality in the educational work field may not be accomplished until 2085 (Warner, 2014). Nonetheless, there is ample evidence to suggest that women can be, and are, just as capable as men when they serve in an administrative position (Morison, 2012). Some authors observed that women are, “more inclusive, more consensual, more empathetic, and more concerned with the process than men.” (Morrison and Zeimba, 1997, p. 2).

Despite concern over these disparities, there is sparse literature addressing conceivable solutions for this problem. Lack of access to positions, lack of support from networks/mentors, the absence of positive role models, prevalent attitudes towards power and leadership, and family demands are some of the examples of the issues found in the literature that relates to women and the impediments they face when securing a position in educational administration (Shakeshaft, 1989). Eagly & Carli (2007) also cited some of these factors in their research as some of the barriers encountered by women that impede their progress. Heilman (2012) also described similar stereotypes encountered by women in their career advancements. Grogan & Brunner (2005) defend the idea that applicants and stereotyping should no longer be used as excuses for underrepresentation of women in educational administration and the superintendency.

Additionally, because female minority educational leaders have similar experiences to minority students in their districts, they can be considered better situated to communicate effectively about educational demands, convey the principles of successful academic strategies,

and model successful behaviors in a way that takes advantage of cultural competency (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

Minority administrators have the ability to support and help students maneuver the intricacies of school environments and school cultures (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Minority leaders can also influence teachers and have a positive impact on parental involvement. For this reason, it is extremely important for those in charge of recruiting to search for the best possible candidates, in order to entice, employ and secure this type of crucial and influential leader (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

Minority leaders also have the power to help and shape students' lives (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Female minority educational leaders may also be better suited to craft positive academic aspirations and model success for minority students by acknowledging the strengths and challenges of working within particular and cultural understandings (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008; Tillman, 2004). In short, female minority educational leaders may be better able to relate to students' levels of discomfort while providing positive expectations through motivation and achievement, especially in schools that have high numbers of minority students (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

In sum, due to the changes in demographics and the evident correlation between leadership and achievement, educators need to seek, train, and retain qualified female minority educational leaders to positively affect the schooling outcomes of minority students in their districts due to the researched impact educational leaders have on student achievement (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

## Definition of Terms

This section defines terms and acronyms used throughout this study.

*Race:* According to the Census Bureau (2017) race is defined as the individual's response to the question of 'race' based upon self-identification depending on what they chose to label themselves as. The Census Bureau collects data on race following the guidelines provided by the U.S. Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and these data are based on self-identification (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017).

*Culture:* "The thoughts, behaviors, languages, customs, the things we produce and the methods we use to produce them. It is this, the human ability to create and transmit culture, that differentiates us as humans from the rest of the animal world." (New York State Department of Education [NYSED] 2006). This term is defined as "the beliefs, customs and practices that are common to a particular social group, place, or time." (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

*Minority:* An inferior group whose members do not have as much control or power over their lives than members of a group that is more dominant or superior (Schaefer, 2012).

*Educational Leader* – This term refers to any School Administrator/Supervisor, School Building leader, School District leader, School District Administrator, School District Business Leader or School Business Administrator that holds a Permanent or Professional certificate in New York State according to OTI: NYSED (Office of Teaching Initiatives: New York State Education Department, 2017).

*College Readiness* – This term refers to a level of "academic preparedness in which a student is sufficiently prepared for postsecondary education or training without the need for remedial coursework." (Office of the State Superintendent of Education [OSSE] 2016).



*Career Readiness* – This term refers to a “student who possesses both the necessary knowledge and technical skills needed for employment in their desired career field.” (Office of the State Superintendent of Education [OSSE] 2016).

### **Significance of the Study**

The researcher interviewed 12 female minority district level and school level leaders. These interviews allowed participants to provide descriptions of their work lives. Through their answers, participants talked about their resilience, and the obstacles they faced while growing up and pursuing their careers in administration. Participants shared stories of their upbringing, shared their opinions, their attitudes and behaviors, and also the influence and what it means to be a minority, in particular, when serving minority students in their districts.

This study explored the history of twelve minority women who currently hold district level and school level leadership positions in New York State. This study was designed to gather information about the perceptions, obstacles, and successes of minority women in climbing the ladder to obtain leadership positions in public school institutions. Different instructional settings and demands, including different socioeconomic environments, contributed to the backdrop for the information gathered in this study. The results of this study provide educational leaders with perception-oriented information on how the recruitment, hiring and retention processes may exclude such women from being competitive candidates (or even being considered) for leadership positions.

Studying the perceptions of minority women about institutional expectations, workplace demands, hiring opportunities, and institutional advancement can provide more information and new perspectives on issues related to hiring obstacles and retention problems. Finally, by studying the impacts that minority women can have in schools, especially schools with

significant minority populations, this research study can help provide guidance to the need to rethink hiring practices to ensure that such positions are available to minority women who aspire to become educational leaders.

In addition, school leaders will find value in this study by reflecting upon their own instructional leadership behaviors and how they impact others in their districts. Important research cited in this study has found a significant relationship between the leadership characteristics of the leader and student achievement. This study may help to guide educational leaders as they consider the professional development of teachers and the critical role that minority educational leaders play in crafting and supporting the educational vision and common goals of minority students.

### **Assumptions**

Two of the assumptions of this research were that the interviewees answered the interview questions in an honest and sincere manner. It was also assumed that participants gave 100% effort in their participation.

Another assumption from the study was that the inclusion criteria of the sample was appropriate and, therefore, assured that the participants had all experienced the same or similar phenomena (Creswell, 2008). In addition, it could be assumed that participants had a sincere interest in participating in this research.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Analyzing the limitations of a study helps to facilitate consideration of the potential flaws or shortcomings of the results and limitations of the ability of a study to produce generalizable results (Creswell, 2008). In this case, the study sample was relatively small due to the actual number of minority female educational leaders in educational leadership positions. Interpreting

and generalizing from the results of the survey was also an important limitation of the study due to the small sample selected.

The study consisted of only 12 female minority district level and school level leaders making the sample size of participants a limitation of the study. The perceptions and opinions of these female minority educational leaders were analyzed; however, this study is not generalizable.

In identifying the subjects for the study, the researcher noted that the applicant pool and cultural competency and perspective may have varied based on the cultural, economic, and social circumstances of the region. However, because only twelve participating subjects fit all of the project's criteria, and due to the geographical limitations, the results of the research might not be generalizable to other regions of New York state or even other states.

Furthermore, it was not assumed that responses from this small sample could accurately reflect the same experiences and behaviors of all minority women leaders holding educational leadership positions. Participants presenting a bias, either consciously or unconsciously, may have compromised interview results (Creswell, 2008). Also, the information gathered from these interviews might not be generalizable to all minority female educational leaders.

The researcher inputted the design, data collection, and analysis of the research with the intent to gather answers to questions that would impact the current practice and policies of minority female educational leaders (Creswell, 2008). The researcher is a female minority administrator in New York State and acknowledges that this may be a source of unintended bias. By adhering to structured interview protocols and well-thought out questions, as well as the careful analysis of data including the use of direct quotes when reporting the research, the researcher intended to minimize bias (Creswell, 2008). The researcher also carefully reviewed

the participants' responses multiple times to identify patterns that suggested bias or other predispositions that might compromise the results of the study (Creswell, 2008).

Another limitation was that the answers were all dependent in response to the current contexts and experiences of those interviewed, therefore, some of the opinions collected could be just that, mere opinions and not factual information.

Another limitation involved in the study was that out of the twelve female minority educational leaders, only ten of the interviewees moved through the ranks to obtain an educational leadership position within their own districts, and two of the participants obtained an educational leadership position as external hires. The lack of participants was partly due to the fact that the percentage of minority female educational leaders in educational leadership positions is very small.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This section identifies the parameters of the research, including the methodologies chosen and populations excluded from this study. The following delimitations have been considered as this study was conducted:

1. Although this study concerns educational leaders and choices such leaders make, the research has a narrow focus on minority women who serve in leadership roles. Accordingly, only minority women employed in full-time educational leadership positions have been included in this research. Limiting the study to educational leaders who identify as minority and women was intended to focus on the unique circumstances of this subgroup of educational leaders and generate new insights on the perspectives of the profession of this traditionally and persistently underrepresented group of educators.

2. The subjects in this study included only female educational leaders employed in Upstate New York. Having participants from other areas, and/or selecting a sample from the whole State would have been extremely difficult and time consuming for one researcher to accomplish in the amount of time allotted to create the study.

### **Organization of the Study**

The dissertation process consisted of five chapters. Chapter One included the introduction to the problem, history, purpose of the study, the overview of the literature, the research questions, definition of terms, and assumption, limitations and delimitations. Chapter Two provided an overview of the relevant literature to the study. Chapter Three described the setting, the research methodology, the data collection, and analysis used in the study. Chapter Four presented the findings of the study. Finally, Chapter Five described the conclusions and recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **Introduction**

This chapter reviews the literature and research related to minority female educational leaders. This study involved a grounded theory study, consisting of twelve minority female district level and school level leaders serving public school districts in Upstate New York. The intent of this grounded theory research study was to understand the lived experiences of several minority women in district level and school level leader positions. This study unveiled the knowledge constructed from the self-perceptions and lived experiences of minority female in district level and school level leaders in Upstate New York, as well as their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students. In this study, female minority district level and school level leaders provided rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives including their perceptions on their own histories of individual and community resilience; the characteristics of the social obstacles they faced; unique narratives of their upbringings and aspirations; as well as their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

While the study of women in leadership positions in the workplace is not a new idea (Bjork, 2000), the focus on underrepresentation of women in positions of leadership within the field of education is considerably new (Litmanovitz, 2011). The study of women in education was introduced in the mainstream conversation for the first time in the 1990s and has continued to draw attention since (Bjork, 2000; Morrison, 2012; Glass, 2000). Despite the surge in attention to such issues there remain significant disparities. Women comprise 76% of teachers in the United States but are only 50% of school principals, with only 12 out of the 50 largest school districts employing women as superintendents (Conrad & Rosser, 2007). Moreover, only 17 state superintendents or commissioners of education across the country are female (Conrad & Rosser,

2007). NYSCOSS (New York State Council of School Superintendents, 2016) reported that in 2016, only 30% percent of superintendents were women.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2016), the percentage of minority principals in public schools has largely remained the same for the last 25 years. It was reported that 87 percent of principals in public schools were white during the 1987–88 school year, 9 percent were black, 3 percent were Hispanic, and 2 percent from other minority groups. Data showed that in the 2011-12 school year the percentage of minority principals had no significant change, the percentage of white principals went down to eighty percent, and the percentage of Hispanic principals was seven percent (NCES, 2016; U.S. Department of Education Schools and Staff Survey Report, 2013). In 2015, 13.4 percent of education administrators in the U.S. were Black or African American, 3.8 percent were Asian, and 9.3 percent were Hispanic or Latino (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Nonetheless, by the year 2025 more than half the population will consist of minorities (Singer, 2002).

This study investigated the career paths of female minority educational leaders, the factors that affected females' decisions to pursue educational leadership positions, and female educational leaders' thoughts on how to increase the numbers of females serving in leadership positions. This chapter will first overview the problem of the underrepresentation of minority women in educational administration positions. After this, the chapter will explore related literature on educational leadership. Then, it will concentrate on female leaders followed by the issue of the underrepresentation of women in educational leadership positions. Finally, this chapter will talk about minority leaders and then it will focus on the underrepresentation of minority leaders in education.

## **The Problem**

The underrepresentation of women in charge of schools and/or in positions of power at the district level within the field of education is prominent. The dearth is greatest for minority women. Research reveals an institutionalized exclusion that, while varied across states, is nonetheless ubiquitous, and not reflective of an increasingly diverse population.

Historically, women have been vastly and disproportionately underrepresented in educational leadership positions (Amey et al., 2002). Fewer women reach educational leadership positions such as the superintendent's role. Scott (1980) reported that in 1974, only 86 women had achieved superintendent positions in the U.S. In 2000, the US Department of Education reported that only 1,984 out of 13,728 superintendents in our nation were women, even though 76 percent of all K-12 educators in the country are females.

However, Glass and Franceschini (2007) describe how women continue to be excluded from all leadership positions in education as compared to men. Even though there has been a steady, albeit modest, increase in all levels of female leadership in education (Vogt, 2007), Grogran and Shakeshaft (2011) estimate that if this pattern continues at a 0.7 percent annual increase, it will take about 77 years before females are no longer a minority in the superintendency.

Although gains have been made in the last thirty-five years for women entering into administrative positions, much progress is yet to be made for true equality to exist for women in the area of school and district level educational administration (Gerson, 2009.) For principals, in 2011-2012, 52 percent of public K-12 school principals were women. However, when broken down by school level, it was reported that in elementary schools, 64 percent of principals were



women; in middle schools, only 42 percent were women and in high schools, only 30 percent of administrators were females (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013).

### **Demographic changes in the US**

In addition to a disparity between men and women in leadership positions, there is also an underrepresentation of minorities in K-12 school leadership and district level leadership positions as compared to student populations. Notwithstanding the growing number, although modest, of women occupying all educational leadership positions, data still shows that the shortage of minority women in K-12 school level leadership and district level leadership positions is even greater (Ortiz, 2001) especially as compared to the changes in student demographics (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). According to employment statistics from the 2010 Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, minorities comprise nine-percent of what are considered “senior level” educational positions which include superintendents, and assistant superintendents. Also, it is reported that minorities only make sixteen-percent in the category of school level leaders. As reported during the fall of 2014, the United States is projected to become a “majority minority” public school nation; the number of minority students in public K-12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-minority white students (Maxwell, 2014). Demographics of U.S. schools have changed, but without affecting a corresponding shift in the racial makeup of school principals (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Tourkin et al. (2007) reported that in 2003-4 school year, 82 percent of principals in U.S. public schools were white, and 18 percent were minorities. Across the nation, 5.3 percent of principals were of Hispanic origin, and 10.6 percent of principals were African-American (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Furthermore, in almost half the states, 90 percent of principals are white (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

Over the last two decades the U.S. population has become more diverse than ever. The population of the U.S. shifted between 1980 and 2008. The White population constituted 80 percent of the total population in 1980 but decreased to 69 percent in 2000, and by 2008 had decreased to 66 percent. Between the years of 2008 and 2025, the minority populations are expected to grow at a faster rate than the rest of populations (NCES, 2010). By 2025 the U.S. population is predicted to be 58 percent White, 21 percent Hispanic, 12 percent Black, and the rest of the minorities will make up the remaining 9% percent (NCES, 2010).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports a discrepancy between the numbers of minority teachers relative to minority students (NCES, 2014). Between 1999-2008, there was an increase of minority teachers from 15 to 17 percent; however, during that same time the number of minority students increased from 39 to 45 percent (NCES, 2014). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reports that nearly 75% of educational leaders were white, while 13% were African American, 9% Hispanic, and 4% Asian. This intensified the racial incongruity between students and teachers (Aud et al., 2010). Lack of minority teachers implies that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the pool of potential principals and may lead to a similar mismatch between principals and students (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

In recent years, schools have progressively become more and more diverse, both ethnically and culturally (Kowalski et al., 2011). The Census Bureau projects that by the year 2100, the U.S. minority population will become the majority with non-Hispanic whites making up only 40% of the U.S. population (Census Bureau, 2014). However, diversity among school leaders has not reflected the schools' rapid change in demographics (Howard, 2006).

Gender bias and beliefs have shaped the idea of what traditional roles for men and women are. Valverde (2003) also describes public beliefs that minorities are "intellectually

inferior” (p.104). Valverde (2003) discussed that many women have no power and that minority women fight with constant gender and racial issues that prevents them from advancing professionally in higher education leadership. Racism presents more of a deterrent for minority women to achieve administrative educational positions than the discrimination white women suffer from gender bias (Valverde, 2003).

As U.S. schools become more diverse, they should seek to narrow the gap of minority leadership positions in the school systems, especially because of the effect they have on minority students (Sanchez, Thornton & Usinger, 2008). Educational leaders and those in charge of making hiring decisions have the responsibility to awaken the leadership qualities of minority school employees and lead them to seek administrative roles (Sanchez, Thornton & Usinger, 2008).

The problems of gender and ethnic diversity reflect a system wide inequality in both school and district level positions of educational leadership. The current leadership does not reflect the potential candidate pool of teachers, nor does it reflect the demographics of the population at large. The underrepresentation of women and especially minority women in leadership roles highlights opportunities and challenges facing educational leadership enterprises today and going forward.

## **Leadership**

School leaders have opportunities to impact students’ learning and affective experiences, both directly and indirectly. Leadership plays a role in improving student learning; however, this influence is underestimated in current research (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). Nonetheless, the idea that leadership improves student learning supports the need to

improve the current leadership as a key to successfully implement school reform (Leithwood, et., al., 2004).

Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom (2004) described successful leadership as one that helps the organization set goals and directions while influencing members of the organization to move forward in those directions, regardless of the style adopted by those in charge. They further identify different kinds of leadership. For instance, instructional leaders have a focus on improving classroom practices to shift the direction for the school.

Transformational leaders focus more on school and classroom circumstances that need to change in order to improve learning (Leithwood, et., al., 2004). Participative leaders concentrate on decision-making (Leithwood, et., al., 2004). However, regardless of the approach taken, successful leadership is the one that affects change and positively transforms the school environment to improve student learning (Leithwood, et., al., 2004, p.6).

Waters, Marzano & McNulty (2010) found that school leaders have a statistically significant effect on student learning. In further research, Waters and Marzano (2007) describe how district level leadership also has a measurable impact on student achievement. Likewise, Leithwood, Patten & Jantzi (2010) defended the idea that effective leadership positively affects student achievement. Leithwood, et., al., (2010) said: “Leadership effects on student learning occur largely because leadership strengthens professional community; teachers’ engagement in professional community, in turn, fosters the use of instructional practices that are associated with student achievement (p. 10).”

According to Leithwood (2001) the actions of leaders also have an indirect, influential impact on students in the learning process. In part, leaders’ contributions to student learning are determined by how they identify their organizational priorities and how they spend their time on

these tasks (Leithwood, 2001). Leaders should recognize the indirect impacts of their leadership choices on the satisfaction of student needs and focus attention on student needs in order to affect learning outcomes in a positive manner (Leithwood, 2001). Hallinger and Heck (1998) likewise reported that leadership activities such as establishing school goals, implementing school vision, and even initiating social networks and social structure improves learning outcomes.

In addition to academic outcomes, many researchers find that leaders can affect other student outcomes. For example, Leithwood, Patten and Jantzi (2010) found that leadership influences students' experiences. Successful leaders improve learning in their institutions. However, improving instruction, although important, it is not the only factor that contributes to student achievement (Leithwood, et al., 2010).

Hallinger and Heck (1998) described three different ways in which a leader can affect student outcomes. The authors described direct effects, "where the principal's actions influence school outcomes"; mediated effects "where principal actions affect outcomes indirectly through other variables;" and reciprocal effects "where the principal affects teachers and teachers affect the principal, and through these processes outcomes are affected." (p. 166). Regardless of the approach taken, they found that principals do have a statistically significant, meaningful and measurable effect on school effectiveness and student achievement (Hallinger and Heck, 1998).

Research indicates that leadership characteristics of exceptionally effective principals include a propensity for innovation and flexibility toward administrative implementations and the educational systems within which they function (Dinham, 2005). In fact, there is specific evidence of a direct connection between a 10% increase in student achievement and the efficacy of the principal (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2010).

Effective leaders generate positive outcomes including motivation and engagement through their interpersonal relationships with their staff and through the ways they help the teachers organize and scaffold their functions (Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Leading by example (DuFour and Marzano, 2011) equates to effective leadership. When administrators use faculty meetings and other similar venues to model effective teaching strategies, they help develop the capacity of teachers in the classroom, therefore, improving student achievement (DuFour & Marzano, 2011). Research further shows that educators have a significant impact on student motivation, engagement, and can influence some of the future identities that students develop as they grow up (Destin & Kosko, 2016; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995).

Destin and Kosko (2016) identify multiple ways educators can positively affect students. Educators can influence the lives of students by making them aware of unfamiliar opportunities. Further, they can show students the link between education and the attainment of a more desirable job with a higher income. Moreover, educators can impact students' lives by showing students all the intricacies of the financial resources available to them to overcome the high costs of education, especially those resources available for low-income families. Destin & Kosko (2016) proposed that informing students of the opportunities can increase student motivation and help them be more focused on schoolwork. Students that come from neighborhoods with fewer resources can also benefit from learning about social mobility which also has a significant effect on the motivation and focus on school for this subgroup of students (Destin & Kosko, 2016).

Effective leadership supports high student achievement by allocating adequate resources to their team and providing them with the clear and specific guidance required to achieve high expectations (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2000). The more leaders show their involvement with the learning and take time to foster relationships with teachers, the more likely their leadership will

influence student outcomes (Waters, Marzano & McNulty, 2010). Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe (2008) also report that leadership affects students' social lives, their well-being, their attitudes to school, and how leaders can influence students' engagement in schooling. Evidence reveals increased positive educational outcomes when the leadership's focus is on the training, pedagogical qualities, and efficacy of the faculty instead of on students directly. (Robinson, Lloyd & Rowe, 2008)

### **Women in Leadership**

As noted in the background section, women are underrepresented in educational leadership. There are many reasons for this, such as school boards not being educated enough about the qualifications of female candidates, the inability of female candidates to relocate, and a female candidate's family responsibilities (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

In a study of 110 women school leaders, Noel-Batiste (2009) found that 84% believed women are still frequently perceived in stereotyped roles, such as caretaker of children and caretaker of the house, or secretaries, teachers, and librarians. Shakeshaft (1989) also supported this idea with his research.

Many women consciously navigate career obstructions, such as being expected to act, speak, dress, groom, and conduct themselves based upon their sex, not present in the careers of their male counterparts, suggesting that female administrators are prone to distinctly dissimilar professional experiences than men (Morrison, 2012). Moreover, changes in perception are difficult to achieve because notions of leadership are deeply-rooted (Grogan and Brunner, 2005).

Research also suggests that the lower number of females in educational administration is not because they do not aspire to access a career as the one that men hold, or because women lack adequate leadership characteristics; but is likely because women, especially minority

women, do not have access to the same opportunities as men (Banks, 2000). The normative force of the “good ole boys club” frequently appears to continue to drive social and hiring patterns (Eckman, 2004). Likewise, Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) concluded that white males have a tendency to promote other white males, which helps build this notion of the good ole boy network.

Moreover, if a female applies for a job and she is unsuccessful, she may become very discouraged which, in turn, might make her female counterparts feel the same way (Carroll, 2001). "When competent, qualified women compete unsuccessfully for administrative jobs, it discourages other women from venturing in the same direction" (Carroll, 2001, p. 9). In contrast, males tend to deal with rejection by refocusing their efforts on the next opportunity (Carroll, 2001).

Perceptions about women are a major factor facing women in leadership positions (Antonaros, 2010). Prevalent issues raised in the literature suggest perceived differences in the hiring decisions between men and women for educational top-level administrators (Antonaros, 2010; NYSSCOS, 2012). In part, gender disparities may stem from persistent beliefs about inherent differences between men and women (Barnett & Rivers, 2011) or perceived fits between gender and job (Lowe, 2011). Further, the New York State Council of School Superintendents reported gender as a restricting factor for women to advance in their careers (NYSSCOS, 2012).

When employers select only people who are similar to themselves or their colleagues, it creates a disadvantage to the "others," people who do not share the social or economic characteristics of those in hiring positions (Linos & Reinhard, 2015 p.7). Bias leads people to only associate with others who are similar to them or someone who reminds them of somebody they know and/or like (Linos & Reinhard, 2015). People tend to hire individuals that have



qualities attuned to those that employers are familiar with. In addition, the need to remain 'status quo' creates a bias that causes employers to look for prospective employees who are similar to the people that they have always hired (Linos & Reinhard, 2015).

Another reason women are not in leadership positions involves their scarcity in the prerequisite positions. Traditionally, internal promotions to leadership positions stem from roles more often held by men. Certain tasks and jobs predominantly carried out by men in schools catapult those in these positions into leadership roles (Glass, 2000).

Furthermore, Glass (2000) found that women do not hold positions that lead to superintendent positions and/or any other higher administrative jobs. Glass (2000) also found that activities such as middle school and secondary school coaching positions that are usually preferred and performed by men have led to administration positions. In many cases, male superintendents benefitted from prior experience in different administrative roles, including department chair positions at the Junior/Senior and secondary level that assisted the transition into office administration positions and even superintendents' roles. In contrast, although elementary schools comprise more than two-thirds of the nation's schools, most elementary schools do not have assistant principal's positions or department chairs (Glass, 2000). Given that most women in education work at the elementary level, it has proven to be difficult for women to gain experience in administrative roles that could feed into higher administrative positions (Glass, 2000).

Gender stereotypes in leadership have an effect on women getting leadership positions (Litmanovitz, 2011). Even though women are applauded for having excellent leadership style traits associated with effective educational leadership performance, the disproportionate employment of women in these capacities shows that people still prefer masculine approaches in

educational leadership positions, making it more difficult for women to obtain these male-dominated leadership roles (Eagly, 2007). Gender appears situated as an important governing dynamic of educational leadership (Litmanovitz, 2011). Not surprisingly, gender bias persists on a broader, societal level in a way that indirectly trickles into the ideal image of the school administrator, revealing unfavorable perceptions of women as leaders (Litmanovitz, 2011; Morrison, 2012).

The intensive nature of the demands on leadership positions could explain why leadership positions have become more acceptable to men than women due to men's approach to leadership (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Men tend to assume a more task-oriented leadership style (Eagly & Karau, 2002). On the other hand, other research shows that women's leadership styles rely more on the quality of interpersonal relationships (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002). These stylistic differences create discrepancies that can lead to differing perceptions about female leadership capabilities (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Women can be characterized less often as 'task-leaders,' because many communicate and connect with the people they work with on a personal, caring, and professional level due to their friendly, thoughtful, sensitive, sensible, and pleasant characteristics (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Nonetheless, the male tendency to an aggressive approach to leadership is presented as the primary reason why men occupy more leadership positions than women in the workplace (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Research indicates that inherent gender differences in leadership roles reflect the different institutional lifestyles, creating a problematic condition for women which not only include those challenges faced by women who serve in administrative roles, but also the persistent underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions (Litmanovitz, 2011). Similarly,

Leithwood and Hallinger (2002) assert that the investigation of gendered leadership is of significant importance because of the questions it raises concerning the “values of institutional life” (p.218). The study of gender and leadership bring to light awareness to the issues around women in leadership positions, and it brings forward new ways of thinking about leadership that challenge the traditional ones (Leithwood and Hallinger, 2002).

Likewise, according to Heilman (2001), a large portion of people in society still believe that certain positions are better suited for specific genders, and gender bias is one of the reasons why women are less likely to be at the top of organizations. In educational organizations stereotypes endure that successful leaders should be authoritative and disciplinarians (Kruger, 2008). In contrast, women are often characterized as more emotional and collaborative both in individual personalities and in group dynamics (Kruger, 2008), delegating or leaning toward a more facilitative leadership (Montgomery & Growe, 2003).

However, for some, the very notion of effective leadership is associated with male traits (Heilman, 2001). According to proponents of such perspectives (Heilman, 2001; Eagly, 2007) women do not possess the necessary qualities to become leaders. The male-dominant leadership frame has acted to the disadvantage of women aspiring to find leadership positions in the workforce (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). The notion that leadership is associated with male characteristics is deeply embedded culturally in social practices and language (Heilman, 2001). Adjectives such as “competitive,” “aggressive,” or “dominant,” are commonly used to label leaders, which are also words typically associated with male behavior (Heilman, 2001). While both men and women can be effective leaders, the difference is attributed more to a perceived congruence between gender and job (Lowe, 2011).

Research confirms the existence of gender bias, the difficulties in the career paths of female educational leaders, the need for mentors for these female minority educational leaders, the necessity to have a supportive board that is compatible with the district-level leader, and the need to find balance between personal and professional responsibilities (Tallerico, 2000a).

In a qualitative study involving 35 women superintendents, it was noted that women superintendents admitted to being aware of their gender and the implications that came from it from the time they got up and got ready to go to work in the morning (Banuelos, 2008). Women superintendents also talked about the stress they suffered because they were negatively perceived as leaders simply for being a woman. These female leaders stated that “men were treated with esteem and they were well respected, whereas on the contrary, women were treated with disrespect and often times felt that their authority and decision-making was also questioned” (p. 2).

Skepticism still surrounds the idea that women will overcome the challenges that prevent them from obtaining leadership positions. It is widely believed that the obstacles women face when trying to climb the educational leadership ladder will not allow them to achieve parity with men in top executive positions (Heilman, 2001). Moreover, although improvements in gender equity have taken place, women continue to be significantly underrepresented in school administration positions which also emphasizes the much-needed progress that still remains to be done (NYSSCOS, 2012; Litmanovitz, 2011).

In sum, the lack of women administrators is not necessarily attributed to the women’s lack of qualifications and/or not having the proper certifications (Banks, 2000). But rather, women have many obstacles to overcome on their path to leadership, including institutional expectations, gender bias, gender stereotypes and lack of opportunity.

## Minority Leaders

The challenging conditions surrounding female educational leaders are generally exacerbated within minority subgroups. There are multiple reasons why minorities are less likely to be selected for leadership positions, many of which mirror those of the total female educational leaders' population. Additionally, mirroring an element of the female educational leaders, minority women typically possess specific characteristics that uniquely qualify them for leadership roles (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). These additional facets of women's leadership challenges are noteworthy and offer additional insights into the broader issues.

As noted earlier with regard to gender, the educational system has an underrepresentation of minority professionals in educational leadership positions. This is especially relevant in relation to the minority composition of student population in the U.S. (Kowalski et al., 2011). District level leaders are typically non-minority males (Kowalski et al., 2011). Superintendents tend to be middle-aged men who have previously served as secondary principals, and as such, have attained a secondary education bachelor's degree (Kowalski et al., 2011).

A review of the relevant literature demonstrates a need to diversify the leadership workforce in public schools. The two main arguments in favor of such diversification, as identified by Villegas and Irvine (2010), include the following: "(1) teachers of color serve as role models for all students; (2) the potential of teachers of color to improve the academic outcomes and school experiences of students of color" (p.176). However, the number of diverse educational leaders remains stagnant, widening the existing gap in the correlation between minority student-teacher-administrator ratios (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reports a discrepancy between the numbers of minority teachers relative to minority students (NCES, 2014). Between 1999 and 2008, the number of minority teachers grew from 15 to 17 percent; however, during that same time there was an increase from 39 to 45 percent in the number of minority students (NCES, 2014). Numbers of minority administrators are disproportionate as compared to student populations (Aud et al., 2010). There are several reasons to expect an underrepresentation of minorities in school leadership positions (Aud et al., 2010). One of the reasons is due to the underrepresentation of minorities in the teaching field. Because one of the requirements of administration positions is classroom teaching experience, this causes a disproportionality of minority education leaders (Aud et al., 2010).

Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger (2008) also discussed some entry barriers that effectively constrain the professional advancement of minority educational leaders. Some of these barriers presented are disparate salaries, the lack of multicultural perspectives in the curriculum, and the fact that leadership programs do not often enlighten prospective educational leaders about how their ethnic background can influence their leadership (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008.)

Research demonstrates that minority educational leaders serve as a positive role model for minority students in their districts. (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004). Goldsmith (2004) found that minority students were more optimistic and liked school better when schools had a high number of minority administrators and particularly when high numbers of minority teachers were employed in the school. Having high numbers of minority teachers is important to find those connections for students to develop their identities and to promote future aspirations (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

Despite all of this, minorities are less likely to be chosen to be leaders for several reasons. Some research found that minorities felt that when interviewing for a position, they had been passed over for a job simply based on their race and/or ethnicity (Schiller 2004). To support this research, Marshall & Holey (2006) described that minority women encounter more difficulties in achieving an administrative position than white women do. Minority women still face “gender role expectations” in administrative roles (Marshall & Holey, 2006). Other researchers suggest that if the "replication” strategy accurately depicts the manner in which school administrators are replaced, minority candidates would be systematically excluded, as the majority of experienced administrators are white males (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Tallerico, 2000b).

For these reasons, it is important that those in charge of recruiting search for the best possible candidates, entice, employ and secure this type of crucial and influential leader to shape, influence, guide and motivate not only minority students, but the school institution as a whole (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Likewise, Browne-Ferrigno and Muth (2004) emphasize the impacts of recruiting prospective educational leaders from the pool of teachers who work in the school districts. Principals who take on this task in a responsible manner are able to establish a beneficial relationship of long-term interaction, career guidance and also professional support for their teachers. Principals who recruited their protégés provided a great influence on the teacher’s decisions to move into administrative positions (p. 476).

Minority leaders have important characteristics that make them good leaders. Although principals from any background can relate to minority students, having an understanding of the minority students’ backgrounds and home environments works in favor of minority administrators as it is believed that due to this similarity in background, they can better determine rewards and consequences that are more appropriate (Carr, 1995; Reitzug & Patterson,

1998). Also by sharing the same cultural background and experiences as these minority students, they are able to model success and also relate better to parents and other stakeholders, therefore, schools should not risk the potential of losing these people with such positive influence on their students and/or others (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

Minority administrators have the ability to support and help students maneuver the intricacies of schools' environments and social norms (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Minority leaders can also influence teachers and have a positive impact on parental involvement (Williams & Loeb, 2012), a factor linked to having positive effects on student achievement (Leithwood, Pattern, Jantzi, 2010).

Research supports a positive correlation between the placement of minority principals and improved student outcomes. This positive relationship can be noted in academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates of minority students (Dee, 2004; Villegas & Irvine, 2010; Williams & Loeb, 2012). Minority administrators resolve issues with empathy and creativity in districts with a significant minority student population by motivating those minority students and inspiring the students to participate in school culture (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

However, at present, most minority school employees are placed in lower-paying, less skilled roles, such as volunteers, translators, and school aides in schools with high concentrations of minority students (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Staff members who truly show potential to achieve a teaching career could be encouraged to pursue a higher educational path (Sanchez et al., 2008), because they could ultimately end up filling up some of the school leadership opportunities available.



Importantly, diversity in educational leadership may provide a better chance for minority students to succeed in high school and beyond (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). The personal experiences and struggles of minority women are unique and, in many important ways, offer alternatives to status quo perspectives. Affording educational leadership the benefits of female minority perspectives suggests better access to multicultural diversity in school environments (Haar & Robicheau, 2009) and may better equip schools to accommodate and encourage the fast growing minority population in public schools in the United States (Magdaleno, 2006). However, despite the enrollment numbers of minority students in U.S. schools are projected to increase annually and surpass the number of White students (National Center for education Statistics [NCES] 2016), the underrepresentation of minority women in educational administration continues to be a problem (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

As U.S. schools become more diverse, school districts need to foster the leadership strength qualities of minority women and set them on a path to seek administrative roles (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Diversity in educational leadership will serve the changing demographics in ways that the status quo may be unable to accomplish (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

Increasing minority leadership translates into college and career readiness for students as well. Integrating minority leaders into the structure of the school and curriculum could transform both the school culture and expectations of students and teachers, especially for students who are traditionally held to lower expectations such as minority students and English language learners (Usban, et al., 2001). College and career readiness is expected of all students, but in many cases educational systems continue to leave minority students at a competitive disadvantage (Usban, et al., 2001). The United States Department of Education projects that the

percentage of minority students will increase to 64% by 2100 (Usban, et al., 2001). Under such circumstances, "[s]chools should come up with programs that are responsive to the unique needs of various, multiethnic student populations" (Usban, et al., 2001, p. 15). The change in the demographics of the students has presented various difficulties for educational systems as they try to tackle issues like cultural differences and language barriers.

Having discussions with secondary school students about the importance of education can change a student's viewpoint about his or her place in the public eye. Students planning to attend college may benefit from career, educational, or technical guidance that will help them explore the new and unfamiliar college environments (Dee, 2004). Dee (2004) utilized information from the Tennessee Project STAR class-size experiment, which randomly linked students and instructors within the school, and found that a partnership with a same-race educator positively affected the math and reading achievement of white and black students by roughly 3 to 4 percentile points.

In a second study, Dee (2004) utilized information from the National Education Longitudinal Study to analyze whether an instructor's opinions of a student may be influenced by the racial pairings of educator and student. In the latter study, Dee (2004) identified a higher probability that the educator would label a student as problematic when the student does not have a similar race/ethnic background as the educator. These studies suggest that the race of an educator may be a significant factor in the instruction, and therefore achievement of minority students. Notably, the impact of an educational leader's race is not limited to student performance. Several studies support the hypothesis that a principal's race may be relevant to a host of student outcomes other than achievement and may also be relevant to other impacts on

teachers' performance (Dee, 2004). Therefore, maintaining the status quo will fail to provide college and career readiness benefits to minority students.

In sum, as with women, there are not enough minority leaders to represent, or model, for students that are like them in the educational system. This continues to be a problem due to the influence research has shown they have on minority students' motivation in school and beyond. Having more minority leaders could lessen some of these challenges that students face to being college and career ready, however, a growing body of research supports the notion that racism continues to underlie many of the persistent cultural insensitivities experienced in school by students from diverse backgrounds (Leithwood, 2001). Research relating to the persistence of racism also suggests that many common responses to racism, such as multi-cultural educational policies, operate to perpetuate, rather than counteract historical and deep institutional racism:

“[...] multiculturalism perpetuates a kind of color-blind relativism that implies that although people's skin color may be different, they are regarded in our society...as equal and the same. This pretense both masks and denies the very real prejudice, conflict and differential achievement of students in most schools” (Shields, LaRocque and Oberg, 2002, p. 117).

## **Summary**

Despite the educational conversations in American culture about individual chances to succeed the doors of opportunity are not equally available to women and especially minority females (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Karau, 2002). The achievement into leadership positions has historically disfavored women and minorities, and the disparities are evident in educational leadership positions.

The literature review revealed that minority women are faced with significant social and economic hurdles in furthering their careers (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Expectations in the home, cultural practices, inadequate access to effective mentors, and status quo maintenance disrupt the playing field so that minority women do not have an equal chance at leadership positions (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman, 2012; Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). Due to the continued underrepresentation of females, and in particular minority females, in the male dominated educational leadership world, this research project focuses on examining the lives of several minority educational leaders and their affects on minority students in their district, and in particular how their leadership can bring about positive change in the lives of the sub-group of students they serve.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **Methodology**

#### **Purpose of the Study**

This study involved a grounded theory study and included twelve minority female district level and school level leaders serving public school districts in Upstate New York. The intent of this grounded theory research study was to understand the lived experiences of several minority women educational leaders. This study unveiled the knowledge constructed from the self-perceptions and lived experiences of minority female educational leaders in Upstate New York, as well as their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students. It identified common threads of career paths, educational empowerment, and gender pride manifested in respondents' success as school and system leaders. Their experiences may highlight certain barriers that marginalize women in the educational system and the role that is played by an educational leader's cultural competency in the development of successful programs and services for minority children and families.

In this study, female minority educational leaders provided rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their perceptions on their own histories of individual and community resilience, the characteristics of the social obstacles they faced, unique narratives of their upbringings and aspirations, as well as their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

#### **Research Questions**

This study is organized around the basic, overarching research question: What are the self-perceptions of minority female educational leaders, their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students in their district?

The following sub-questions will also be taken into account:

1. Do the personal experiences of female minority district level and school level leaders affect the attitudes they have towards minority students in their district?
2. Do the personal experiences of female minority district level and school level leaders influence the way they select programs designed to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district?
3. Do female minority district level and school level leaders make conscious decisions to affect the path and shape the college and career attitudes of minority students in their district?
4. Do the personal experiences of female minority district level and school level leaders affect the way in which they engage with parents of minority students to support/create a partnership for college and career readiness?

Chapter Three covers the following topics: (a) research questions; (b) research design; (c) sample, and sampling procedures; (d) instrumentation; (e) data collection; (f) data analysis; (g) validity and reliability; (h) research bias; and (i) summary (Creswell, 2008.)

### **Research Design**

Due to the need to obtain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon studied, in this case, female minority educational leaders' behaviors, attitudes and practices, and decision-making a qualitative approach was selected for this study. This qualitative approach provided the opportunity to study the subject area in depth in order to gain a better understanding (Creswell, 2008) of the practices, attitudes and behaviors that allowed minority female educational leaders to build their own capacity to effectively improve minority student outcomes especially as it relates to college and career readiness.

Qualitative research is effective when the purpose of a researcher is to understand the process by which events and actions take place (Creswell, 2008). Merriam (2001) stated that qualitative researchers try to find and understand a certain phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives of those involved (p. 11). Strauss & Corbin (1998) also stated that qualitative methods are used to obtain feelings, thoughts, and emotions that otherwise will be difficult to learn about through other research methods. The parameters considered included setting, actors, events, and processes (Creswell, 2008) of the leadership experiences of female educational leaders. Maxwell (1996) affirmed that the advantages of qualitative research are multiple. He stated that this type of research allows for processes to be identified rather than outcomes, and it also allows for a greater concentration on people and scenarios.

### **Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The population for this study was minority female district level and school level leaders in New York State (NYS). The sample consisted of 12 female minority educational leaders in New York State. An educational leader, in this study, is considered someone employed in an academic administrative title as defined by NYSED BEDS classifications in a public school district in NYS (New York State Education Department, 2012). Leadership titles of participants in this study included Superintendents, Directors of Curriculum, Principals, and Assistant Principals.

Regardless of district level or building level leadership, the study looked at the influence of personal experiences of people in these leadership roles, thus regardless of their sphere of influence (district wide vs. building etc.), the focus is on how their personal experience influences their attitudes and behaviors within their scope of practice. The female minority educational leaders in New York State that were selected for the study were chosen based

through a purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling was used to find participants that provided the researcher with the best information to understand the problem being studied (Creswell, 2008). By analysis and investigation of publicly available information, such as the NY Census, NYSCOSS (New York State Council of School Superintendents,) NYSAWA (New York State Association for Women in Administration) through which the researcher found information about the number of minority female educational leaders in New York State, the researcher was able to determine the participants that were the focus for this study (Creswell, 2008).

### **Instrumentation**

After completing the review of literature, and before any data was collected, the researcher designed a research instrument (Creswell, 2008). Interviews are the best way to gather data when trying to explain and understand a phenomenon (Vogt et al., 2012). The interview questions used during the interview process were developed based on information revealed in the review of literature. The researcher purposefully did not utilize multiple questions, leading questions, and yes/no questions to minimize confusion and poor responses (Creswell, 2008).

The same list of questions was asked to each participant. Asking everyone the same questions means that the data collected was much more focused, themes emerged more quickly, and they were easier to analyze and makes the study more reliable (Creswell, 2008). The interview protocol consisted of interview questions that addressed demographic information, student achievement goals, policy advocacy, and allocation of resources. The interview questions elicited information about the background and upbringing of the minority female educational leaders interviewed and how this affects or not their decision-making and the way they affect or not minority students in their districts (see Appendix C for interview protocol).



The instrumentation for this study involved semi-structured interview questions that incorporated direct as well as indirect questions (Creswell, 2008). This type of interview process allows the researcher some freedom as to the order to follow with the questions during the interview process. The interviews were conversational in style and they offered the researcher the opportunity to dig deeper into a topic when necessary to better understand the answers provided (Creswell, 2008).

The protocol followed for this research grouped similar questions to aid with the flow of the conversation, and although the actual conversation did not necessarily follow the order that was predetermined, by having a protocol in place helped the researcher keep track of what had been answered and what still needed to be covered (Creswell, 2008; Harrell, et.al., 2009).

The researcher pilot tested the instrument on a minority female educational leader who did not participate in the study but was willing to answer the questions for testing purposes. While testing the questions, the researcher looked for problems and whether or not the answers were actually addressing the questions that needed to be answered, and also to make sure that the terminology of the question was properly understood by the respondent (Creswell, 2008; Harrell, et.al., 2009).

## **Data Collection**

Through a detailed study of publicly available information, the researcher was able to choose a group of minority female educational leaders in New York State who became the focus for this study. Once the participants were selected, they were asked to participate in an interview by receiving an invitation letter sent to an email address available on their district's websites (see Appendix A). After the participants agreed to participate, they were asked to sign consent (see

Appendix B), once the consent was signed, the researcher was ready to begin to interview the participants. An interview protocol was followed for each interview (Creswell, 2008).

The researcher followed the interview protocol by introducing herself, the organization of the study, the reason why this study was important for the researcher, and also the reason why the particular individuals had been asked to participate in the interview process. The researcher also laid the ground rules, which included the explanation of the length of time of the interview and provided assurance that the information would be confidentially safeguarded (Creswell, 2008; Harrell, et.al., 2009).

After IRB approval, minority female educational leaders were sent introductory letters by email (Appendix A) detailing pertinent information about the researcher and the research. The permission to record form (Appendix B) and a brief explanation sheet were sent (Appendix C) to respondents who accepted to be a participant in the study.

The permission to record and participate in the study were returned and/or collected during the face-to-face interviews or received in the mail. All the relevant educational leaders who responded with interest in the study were interviewed. Marshall and Rossman (2006) describe interviewing as “conversations with purpose” (p. 108). By employing this method, the participants are able to express their views and the responses are valuable and useful. Also, the researcher can obtain a lot of information in a shorter period of time (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

After signing the informed consent, the researcher commenced to interview the participants. An interview protocol was designed for the interview process. Every participant answered the same questions. Asking everyone the same questions means that the data collected was much more focused, themes emerged more quickly, and they were easier to analyze

(Creswell, 2008). Each interview lasted approximately forty-five minutes in length and the interviews were done in a couple different ways. Three of the interviews were conducted in the participant's office, and nine of them were conducted by phone. During the interviews the researcher asked a series of open-ended questions. The interviewer recorded the interviews with a digital recorder. In every effort to maintain anonymity, the interviewees were provided with confidentiality assurances and the interviewees' names and affiliations remain confidential. (Creswell, 2008).

### **Data Analysis**

After all of the interviews were completed, a transcriber transcribed the audio from the interviews and then the transcriptions were securely uploaded by the researcher to NVivo (NVivo for Mac) a data analysis software program (QSRinternational, 2011). Raw data was collected from the interviews, and later it was reviewed and categorized into themes (Creswell, 2008).

The digital recorder used to tape the conversations was secured in a filing cabinet in the researcher's office. All recordings from the interviews and the transcribed documents were protected by password in the researcher's computer. The data from this research will be saved for three years and after that, the researcher will overwrite and delete it from the computer (Creswell, 2008). Each school district and each educational leader were assigned a different code for confidentiality purposes (Creswell, 2008). The researcher reviewed the interview documents. While reviewing the transcribed interviews the researcher developed a set of codes for recurring themes (Creswell, 2008). Finally, the researcher looked at how the emerging themes answered the original research questions and how they could be grouped to look at the results (Creswell, 2008).

## **Validity and Reliability**

Validity measures whether the process utilized for the research actually measured its intended purpose (Creswell, 2008). For this study, validity was recognized in several ways. First, to create the survey questions, validity was attained by reviewing other studies in order to create the research questions that would guide the study (Creswell, 2008). The researcher used the expertise of a minority educational administrator that was not a participant in the study to help determine whether the questions would produce helpful and sufficient data for the purpose of this study (Creswell, 2008). The non-participating minority educational leader reviewed the interview questions intended to be used in the study by the researcher. The input of this minority educational leader was key in determining the validity of the interview questions. In order to ensure validity, the researcher also reviewed the questions, and gathered the data to determine themes and patterns (Creswell, 2008). As another step to ensure validity, the researcher used member checking (Creswell, 2008) to have the participants of the study review the responses given during the interview process. Through this process, the participants were able to check the transcripts of their interview to check for accuracy (Creswell, 2008). None of the participants provided negative feedback about the transcripts, and they all concurred that the transcripts provided were accurate to the best of their knowledge.

To assure reliability for this qualitative study, the researcher followed an interview protocol (Creswell, 2008). The same interview protocol was strictly followed without deviating from it (Creswell, 2008) except to clarify when needed, and/or to follow up on the participants' responses, and the research questions used for the study were those approved by The Sage Colleges Internal Review Board (IRB) which also helped to assure reliability. The researcher did

not alter the transcripts in any way. Reliability was also supported during the process of assigning codes and during the analysis process as well (Creswell, 2008).

### **Researcher Bias**

The researcher is a female minority educational leader. The researcher had to conduct this study with an open mind in order to control personal bias utilizing proper procedures to prevent bias from influencing the study. The researcher's personal perceptions and experiences as a minority female educational leader were not allowed to influence the data to minimize bias, and every effort was employed to prevent bias from influencing the results of the study. To neutralize the researcher's biases, the study was conducted in accordance with interview protocol and the interviews were largely limited to the script. In addition, the researcher made all efforts to be consistent in analyzing and categorizing the interview transcripts when applying codes to the interview transcripts.

### **Summary**

In order to understand the lived experiences of several minority female educational leaders, interviews took place where rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives were provided, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, their upbringing, their opinions, their attitudes and behaviors and how these positions affected those who they serve, in particular, the minority students in their district.

The qualitative research design was the research method chosen for this study. This design was chosen because it allowed the researcher to thoroughly examine the data and categorize it in a manner that was useful and replicable. The population for this study consisted of minority female district level and school level leaders serving in public school districts in New York State. The sample participants possessed the knowledge, understanding, and experience

that the researcher needed in order to conduct a meaningful study. The instrumentation method used for this study was semi-structured interviews.

The next chapter in this dissertation will present the findings from the research study gathered from the interview questions during the interview process.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

The intent of this grounded theory research study was to understand the lived experiences of twelve minority women in district level and school level leadership positions. This study unveiled the knowledge constructed from the self-perceptions and lived experiences of minority females in district level and school level leadership positions in Upstate New York, as well as their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students in their districts. In this study, female minority district level and school level leaders provided rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives including their perceptions on their own histories of individual and community resilience; the characteristics of the social obstacles they faced; unique narratives of their upbringings and aspirations; as well as their opinions, attitudes, and behaviors.

This research project was designed to gather stories and evidence on the experiences of female minority district level and school level leaders through the use of interviews. These minority female educational leaders were able to provide descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their perceptions of their resilience and the obstacles they faced, their upbringing, their opinions, their attitudes and behaviors and how these positions affected those who they serve, in particular, the minority students in their district. All the data collected was reviewed and categorized according to the four research questions that guided this study.

This chapter is organized into four sections. The first section presents a narrative with information about the participants of the study as well as visual chart that presents the participant's information. The following sections present the findings gathered through the

analysis of the data collected through the interview process. Some of the responses of the participants are quoted to present the evidence that answers, and relates to, the original four research questions. The final section offers a summary of the chapter, and a brief introduction to chapter five.

### **Descriptive information**

The study sample consisted of twelve minority female district level and school level leaders from different school districts in upstate New York. Table 1 provides characteristics of the minority female district and school level educational leaders that participated in the study. Ten out of twelve female minority leaders interviewed moved through the institutional hierarchy to obtain educational leadership positions in the districts they already worked. Two were new to the district in which they obtained educational leadership positions. Eight of the twelve minority female district and school level educational leaders started their careers teaching at the elementary school level. Four started their careers teaching at the secondary level. Three of the leaders currently serve as district Superintendents (S), two serve as Directors (D), one serves as a Director of Special Education, one serves as a Director of Curriculum, five serve as Principals (P), and two hold positions as Assistant Principals (AP).



Table 1 – Characteristics of Participants

	<i>Years in education</i>	<i>Years as administrator</i>	<i>Current Position</i>	<i>Promoted within the organization</i>	<i>Teaching Experience</i>
<i>S1</i>	22	14	Superintendent	Yes	Secondary
<i>AP1</i>	9	2	Assistant Principal	Yes	Elementary
<i>D1</i>	17	7	Director	Yes	Secondary
<i>D2</i>	28	10	Director	Yes	Elementary
<i>P1</i>	15	3	Principal	No	Elementary
<i>P2</i>	16.5	6	Principal	Yes	Elementary
<i>S2</i>	21	10	Superintendent	Yes	Secondary
<i>S3</i>	34	20	Superintendent	Yes	Secondary
<i>P3</i>	19	13	Principal	Yes	Elementary
<i>AP2</i>	11	2	Assistant Principal	No	Elementary
<i>P4</i>	22	11	Principal	Yes	Elementary
<i>P5</i>	13	4	Principal	Yes	Elementary

### Research Question 1

*Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders affect the attitudes they have towards minority students in their district?*

The first research question explored how the personal experiences of minority females in district level and school level leadership positions impacted the attitudes they have towards minority students in their district. All twelve of the female minority district level and school level leaders interviewed reported that they believed their background and upbringing affects

how they behave towards minority students in their districts. The data collected through the interview process allowed the researcher to categorize and organize the findings according to the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants as follow:

- All of the female minority district level and school level leaders interviewed discussed that their own beliefs and perceptions of themselves affected the way they behaved towards minority students.
- Another dominant theme that emerged from the interview process was that all twelve participants expressed having experienced some sort of discrimination and/or racism on a regular, almost daily basis. Each of the interviewees envisioned as one of their responsibilities to inspire minority school employees and leading them on a path to seek administrative roles. The participants expressed the idea that being aware of their challenges and the struggles that they had to go through, made them more mindful of the struggles minority students could potentially experience. Thus, they described that it made them able to relate to their own experiences to influence, shape and, in a way, protect this particular subgroup of students in their districts.
- Seven out of twelve minority female school level and district level leaders interviewed also spoke about the gender disparities and the struggles related to this they encountered while trying to move up the ladder and how that made them even more aware of who they were.
- All twelve women expressed their reliance on a relationship with a higher being who provided inspiration and courage to pursue their career aspirations.

All twelve participants described that their own beliefs and perceptions of themselves affected the way they worked with minority students. For example, P.1 a Principal, discussed this by describing her own confidence:

[...] having to assimilate into different cultures and be able to accept other people and really be confident in who I am as a leader. I think that could be one of the reasons why people do not do as well. You know, you have to be confident with yourself and have a respect for yourself and have that kind of thick skin. As long as I know that I am doing what is right, it doesn't really matter what color you are or who I work with and what color they are. But, I think a lot of that plays a part in my upbringing.

Superintendent S.3 viewed herself as a role model and spoke about the influence she has on the minority students in her district: "There is a need to have more minority leaders. Many great Hispanic women leaders have touched my life. And I feel I can do the same for others."

When faced with the same question, A.P.2 an Assistant Principal, agreed that her upbringing affects the way she does things for minority students.

[...] absolutely my history or my upbringing, my background totally influences. And, I am very happy for it because now I am more connected to it in the sense that I realize I am who I am because of it. And, I'm going to hold onto that. It's important to me and also important to better serve our minority students.

When asked about being aware of her upbringings when dealing with minority students Principal P.5 responded:

I don't want to put language as far as a negative sort of impact or anything, but there is definitely a certain level of empathy and awareness. I look at those students in that sort of manner. It is important to make connections with them to keep them in school.

In the following example, one of the Directors interviewed described how being aware of people's backgrounds and heritages helps you better understand individuals. Director D.2 said:

I'm going to go back to my phrase that the title means nothing.... If you can't understand where people come from, you can't help, and you can't judge. I think the biggest sin we have as we become leaders is you begin to judge. And that's when you stop holding the ability to change. So, if I want change, change must always be within me.

When addressing this question, Principal P.5 very proudly stated: "I am proud of being African-American [...] I know I am making a difference."

These female minority leaders also talked about their resilience and willingness to change the world's perceptions of how minorities are viewed. One of the five principals interviewed P. 3 talked about the connections she found on television shows while growing up and how much different it was as compared to the portrayals of minorities now:

You know? You used to watch the Cosby's on television. That portrayed a different type of black family on television that we are used to now. And yes, we might not all be doctors and lawyers and have wonderful kids, but African-Americans are not all from the 'ghetto' either.

All of the women interviewed felt confident and were very proud to report their heritage. All of them thought that they could make a difference. They all agreed that their ability to effect change is not dependent on color, or an accent, or race, or nationality. The interviewees expressed strong support for the notion that ability to effect change comes from the daily decisions and work they do, combined with attention to make sure every student can be successful. One of the Directors interviewed expressed her views as to what it felt to be a black woman, Director D.1 said:

I would say without question that being a black woman totally affects my behavior as a leader and how I look at the minority students in my district. And I would say that's primarily because I think the work requires you to be authentically you and I am authentically a black woman so there's just no way for it not to impact.

All the female minority educational leaders interviewed justified their behavior toward minority students in their districts based on the experiences they each had while growing up, and also based on their professional struggles.

The second theme that emerged from the data had to do with racism. Twelve out of twelve minority female educational leaders expressed having experienced some sort of discrimination and/or racism on a regular, almost daily basis.

All twelve of the interviewed minority female educational leaders suggested their experiences with and perspective on racism influenced their views on the roles and responsibilities of their leadership positions. All of the women viewed this as a significant challenge. The women reported experiencing discrimination based on race.

Twelve out of twelve of the women interviewed expressed having experienced acute racism early in their careers as they were trying to establish themselves. For example, Superintendent S.2 talked about experiencing racism without even knowing what it was.

In big urban school districts, you don't belong to a building, you belong to the district. So, there's always a lot of movement of administrators. They move you all over the place. In my third year as an assistant principal, I got moved from my dear, dear middle school that I just adored to a high school. And I was like, ugh, because I loved middle school. That was my passion. As soon as I got there, it was in the middle of August, I had to write some reports up. And I handed them to the principal, who was a Caucasian

male, who responded to me the next day. He asked me to his office and said ‘I’m very impressed. You write very well.’ And I said, my response to him was, ‘Well, shouldn’t I? Because I went to college?’ But, little did I know that I was experiencing... I wasn’t raised in the United States... I was experiencing the first thing that I would come to know as profiling because it was profiling, which is a form of racism. But, at the moment I didn’t understand that.

Most of the women also reported encountering racism when they became administrators. One of the Principals P.1 interviewed talked about this: “Sometimes, I feel like I have to prove myself again and again because I’m different. I don’t want the kids to have to experience the same [...]” Principal P.1 added:

I had a local medical facility come to visit our school because we have the full-service model and I have a doctor’s clinic, so they want to see what that’s like. And the question came out about, you know, whether or not we see things that are more intense here. I kind of took a little bit of offense to that question because I felt like there was like a hidden racism behind it.

Likewise, Assistant Principal A.P.1 further noticed: “And even though I like what I do, wow, it’s a predominantly white world that I’m living in, truly now more so than when I was a teacher. And it’s very challenging.”

The women identified other common practices, such as “the good ole boys club,” the perceptions that people have towards minorities and the general intolerance for people with different backgrounds as contributors to the persistence of racism. Principal P.1 talked about the need to have some sort of cultural awareness training to educate people about other people’s backgrounds and to be able to relate to them better: “Racism and ... segregation pieces are things

that people grew up with. I think we need to do more... sensitivity or like more of reversing it ... to see yourself in someone else's shoes."

Superintendent S.2 went on to say about this same topic:

I'm very proud [...] But I never saw the true connection of how my parents raised me and the values that I had until I actually came here because it conflicts, not to me, but it conflicts... in the way that I interact with people. And then I have been reminded. And, it's interesting because visually a lot of people think I'm black-American but some of my black colleagues here have kind of, I don't want to say put me in my place, but have opened my eyes to something I've never experienced before... that you are not us. And that was very interesting because I've never ever experienced that before. And it made me closer to understanding that [...] not only are you Latino but you are the first-generation Latina and it really has opened my eyes. And I'm still working through that. But, it opened my eyes because the mentors that I mentioned to you, and some of the people I've been very close with, are black-Americans. And, I have been able to connect with black-Americans and Latinos. So, to now experience that at this level here, it was just weird. I can't even, I just never, it was very interesting.

All of the interviewees reported that their experiences influenced their beliefs that their leadership duties included acting as a counterforce against racism in schools.

Principal P.2 added that she was driven by the negative feelings she experienced from interactions with her colleagues. She concluded by resolving on the importance of teaching children to feel empowered no matter where they come from. She stated:

I was very connected to the parents and to the students. They never said to me, 'oh, you're not one of us.' It was nothing like that. But, the teachers, kind of going back with

the teachers, would say things. And, it made me feel that I have to do right by my kids, my students, and that I have to empower them so that when they go into the ‘real world,’ that they’re armed to be very resilient and to be able to fight back in being educated in a way that they’re not going to be bullied but they’re going to be empowered.

According to eight out of twelve minority female educational leaders, mental health issues among students are on the rise. Moreover, the interviewees reported that mental health issues are worse for minority students due to the fact that minority parents have less access to reliable health resources. In addition to that, and interrelated to the racism theme, eight out of twelve minority female educational leaders explained how racism and racial discrimination are a factor that could adversely affect mental health issues. Being discriminated against can create chronic emotional stress that could potentially lead to lack of self-esteem which in turn could lead to low or no academic growth or achievement, therefore, it is very important to be aware of this and do everything possible to avoid this pitfall.

Superintendent S.2 said: “It’s important to take care of their immediate needs first. I had a local medical facility come to visit our school because we have the full-service model and I have a doctor’s clinic.”

According to Superintendent S.1 it is crucial to be aware of the children’s needs, “we have kids with parents that are going through a lot of different issues, and the kids come in to school and they’re upset in the morning because of certain things that they’ve encountered the night before, or even that morning...this impedes their learning.”

Seven out of the twelve female minority educational leaders reported that mental health concerns confront many minority students at an earlier age than their Caucasian counterparts. Assistant Principal AP. 1 explained:



As a full-service school we take care of some of their medical needs. We take care of their dental needs and take care of medical needs. We also try to address their mental health needs here in the building, too. We have the food pantry in my building that gives out food to about 50 families on the weekends so that helps a little bit. So I feel like we're trying our best to take care of a lot of those things [...]

Director D.1 discussed the linkages between health, poverty, and students' academic achievement. She stated,

Poverty affects their mental health at times when they don't know if their parents are going to be home at night. I think our kids worry about their own parents and their siblings when they don't know if their parents are going to be home because they're working, because they're in another country, because they're illegal.

Another theme that emerged from the data to answer research question number one, had to do with gender. The interviewees admitted to being questioned by their colleagues as to whether they would be able to do their jobs due to their backgrounds. The participants discussed this could be perceived as another challenge, and something important to be aware of when dealing with students of minority backgrounds. The interviewees repeatedly talked about the lack of respect they felt by some of their colleagues. This issue was not specifically addressed during the research part of the study; however, the interviewees stated that they were not always respected in their places of work due to their race and gender which is interconnected to the last theme.

Seven out of the twelve minority female educational leaders interviewed identified gender power disparities as a significant force in their experiences, suggesting a common and

pervasive experience of living in a “man’s world.” Referring to this topic Superintendent S.1 said:

It’s a man’s world and I have more than being a woman against me. I’m a woman. I’m Latino, Puerto Rican. I’m small. I have darker skin. And I have a lot of things against me. So, it’s very difficult [...] We need to change that!

Director D.2 also described being challenged by gender disparities in her place of work, as she stated: “[...] And me striving to be the best that I can be, I have to be better than that because the expectation is that... you know, I am not a man... I don’t know it all.”

When asked about the topic, Superintendent S.2. talked about advocating for herself:

I have been very blunt about asking questions like, “are you asking me this because I’m a Hispanic woman and I fit, and/or don’t fit the profile or do you want to know how I’m thinking in my intellectual ability?”

The last finding that emerged from the data had to do with faith. All twelve interviewees referenced God in response to the questions regarding their strengths and support network. All twelve women expressed their reliance on a relationship with a higher being who provided inspiration and courage to pursue their career aspirations. Principal P.5, for instance, stated: “there’s a higher power watching over me.”

Each of the interviewees explained that spirituality was an integral part of their young lives and continues to play a significant role in their daily lives. All of the interviewees continue to devote time to their beliefs. Superintendent S.1 said: “I know my beliefs helped me not only personally, but also professionally.” Likewise, Assistant Principal A.P. 1 stated, “I constantly thank God for each and every day.”

Director D.1 recalled the importance of attending church with her grandmother. She explained that her grandmother taught her to find comfort in God, “In order to cope with the challenges I encounter, and in order to be positive and not let that affect my life, I pray a lot.”

On this same topic, Principal P.4 said: “I don’t believe in making excuses. No matter what skin color I have [...] God has given me the strength to see past that.” Principal P.5 announced a profound importance of her church: “My pastor is one of the most influential people in my life.”

These were the primary themes that emerged from the data that were used to support research question number one. Twelve out of twelve female minority school level and district level leaders believed that their own beliefs and perceptions of themselves affected the way they worked with minority students. All of the interviewees talked about the need to abolish racism, and they also mentioned how gender power disparities need to reduce to achieve equality and fair treatment, especially for minorities.

## **Research Question Two**

*Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders influence the way they select programs designed to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district?*

The researcher investigated how the personal experiences of female educational leaders may have influenced the selection of programs to improve the academic opportunities and performance of minority students in their districts. Four themes pervaded the interviewees’ responses, including:

- Twelve minority educational leaders interviewed agreed that there is a need to reevaluate curricula to improve academic opportunities and /or performance of minority students in

the district, along with the need for access to literature on diversity. Seven out of twelve interviewees supported the need to invest in multicultural resources.

- All twelve minority female district and building level leaders stressed the importance of the need to have appropriate professional development to improve equity in education, to better serve our minority students, and to create cultural awareness.
- Twelve out of twelve school level and district level minority leaders agreed on the fact that finding mentors and having somebody to guide you, support you and advocate for you became an important and intricate part of their identity. Because of this, they thought it was important to create and foster mentoring programs for the minority students in their districts to be able to help them navigate the intricacies of school, as well as to provide support and a sense of belonging. All of the interviewees indicated the importance of having a connection with somebody in the field, especially a minority mentor they could relate to.
- Eight out of twelve minority female educational leaders identified a need to eliminate biases from educational institutions.

Leaders were asked about how their personal experiences potentially influenced their selection of programs designed to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district was. The first theme that emerged was the need to reevaluate curricula to improve academic opportunities and /or performance of minority students in their districts, and that respondents identified a need for multicultural literature.

Seven out of twelve female minority educational leaders interviewed stated that children need to experience their own identities in the selection of classroom literature. They also suggested that this will not be possible unless libraries contain books that portray cultural

differences. The interviewees' responses were consistent with the notion that there is a significant need to invest in literature resources that illustrate and celebrate diversity. For example, Director D.1 noted: "We definitely need literature and making sure that we have an array of it. You know multi-cultural literature and literature that's of interest to students."

Seven out of twelve interviewees supported the need to invest in multicultural literary resources. For example, Principal P.1 said:

I mean, I don't know about you but growing up I never saw a Latino in a book. Maybe I think in high school I finally saw Cesar Chavez. That was it. So, I never saw us in a book.

According to the women interviewed, students should have access to literature that provides both a mirror of their own experiences and a window into others' lives. The women suggested that teaching appreciation for differences may be as simple as reading books about diverse people and cultures to children as early as kindergarten.

On this topic, Superintendent S.1 explained the difference in multicultural offerings in schools in other countries as compared to the U.S. "I would like to see more of a range of different levels of multicultural books in schools [...] In Puerto Rico we teach our students all sorts of different things... I don't see that here."

Assistant Principal A.P.1 said: "I think all the power of whether or not someone is college and career ready comes from elementary school. [...] We need to have classes and libraries full of different resources. [...] We need to promote cultural awareness through literature."

The second theme that emerged from the data was the need for cultural awareness and build understanding regarding understanding other's cultures. These leaders identified that equity

and being culturally competent is a continual goal in schools and suggested that professional development could be an avenue to find a solution to this issue.

Principal P.2 noted on the need to create cultural competency:

I think poverty is a huge issue, I'm seeing it from where I am at [...]. I feel that that is being concentrated on, which I am not saying it shouldn't, but there are deep seeded historical colonial imperial issues that are not being truly confronted when it comes to education, whether it's gender, LGBTQ, ethnic, linguistic, racial issues, that there are truly no honest authentic conversations about that and that really, they are the foundations of these problems.

School systems face challenges as the demographics in student population change and they are required to address issues such as cultural differences and language barriers. On this topic, Director D.1 indicated:

This is a black issue. Poverty makes it worse. But it's not because of poverty that they don't succeed. It is mainly because they're black that they're not succeeding, and we don't know how to teach them and we're not even close.

All twelve of the interviewees stressed the fact that we need to find (or create) equity in education, which can be addressed in part by providing appropriate and meaningful professional development for teachers, administrators, staff, and community members. Principal P.2 stated:

I have an influence on whether minority students are college and career ready or not due to my position. We do a lot of embedded P.D. and I do it sometimes as well. So, I think we have a direct link to administrators and teachers. And, I feel, I think we can do a better job because... professional development one shot deals don't work. It's more of a

consistent type of working with the teachers and having them see what the practical side of the work that they're doing is and that they're immediately using it.

Similarly, Principal P.3 described the need to have the right professional development to learn how to teach minority children appropriately:

White females do better than anybody else in school. And then, yes, white boys do pretty well. But there's still something to be said about the fact that we don't know how to teach boys and we don't know how to teach people of color. We don't know how to teach children of color [...].

Director D.2 reported: "We don't know how to teach minorities. We don't know how to help the parents help their kids. People don't understand the struggles they go through just because they are different. Teachers need meaningful professional development."

On the same topic of professional development, Superintendent S.1 noted:

Most of us want to believe in the equity of the education system but there isn't any equity. Let's be clear: there isn't any equity. So, if we truly really believe that we want to service these students, we have to make sure they leave elementary school on grade level because otherwise they are going to fail.

Superintendent S.3 said: "There seems to be a very slow process. We do not have qualified bilingual teachers in the programs. We need to come up with different pathways to address their needs."

Assistant Principal A.P.1. stated:

My struggle... is what happens in middle school. Kids start getting funneled into honors, regular or remedial. [...] If you're funneled into honors, you're going to graduate from high school .... If you get funneled into remedial, more likely you are going to drop out.

This needs to change. We need to change people's mentalities. Minorities have the right to attend these classes as well.

Principal P.1 stated her opinions on the lack of equity and opportunities for these students:

I see already there is a level of tracking. No one would probably call it tracking. But, for example, if you take like the honors classes in the district. You won't see very many minorities. And, you know, for minority students whose parents are not involved, they may not have the right information so that the students can land in an honors track type of situation. For example, there are prerequisites. If you didn't know about that in the middle school, you're kind of already eliminated at the high school.

Another topic that came up through the interview process to address the need to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district was to create more cultural awareness. Six out of the twelve interviewees expressed a dire need to create and foster cultural awareness. These women suggested that valuing diversity means accepting and respecting differences between and within cultures.

Assistant Principal A.P.1 said:

I think it motivates me every single day because I spent my entire career serving a community much like the one I grew up in. And so I think that my ethnic background is probably, in my mind, present in every decision I make when I think about other children of color.

Director D.1 added:

My husband was sharing some data and he was like, 'Do you realize how few Latino administrators there are in this district?' And I was like, 'No, I guess I never thought of



it.' He was like, 'It's like 1% of all administrators.' [...] So, I get it. We are, as women of color, we are not a voice that's often heard.

The interviewees also stated that it is important to pay attention to the task of shaping society in a more multicultural way. Superintendent S.2 reported: "We need to start having conversations around how to be more culturally responsive and how do we add that component to all the things that we do here at our school."

All the women interviewed advocated for integration of cultural knowledge into every facet of the academic institution. The interviewees suggested several pathways, including training to effectively utilize cultural facts and the creation of school policies responsive to cultural diversity. Likewise, the participants of the study suggested that curricular materials should portray positive images of values, behaviors, attitudes, practices, policies, and structures of all cultures to facilitate effective cross-cultural communication. Teachers often misunderstand the behaviors of poor and minority students because they do not understand the cultures they come from (Cole, 2008). The interviewees conveyed the notion that recognition, respect, and value for all cultures, as well as the integration of cross-cultural values into the educational system results in a culturally competent institution that can better meet the needs of diverse groups while fostering progress and understanding.

The importance of professional mentoring and having somebody you can rely on was the third major theme that emerged from the data regarding this second research question. Mentoring was reported to play a significant role in each of the interviewees' lives. All twelve of the minority female educational leaders interviewed discussed the benefits of having a mentor and/or role model. Each of the interviewees found a mentor and/or role model that helped ease the transition from teaching into administration. All of the participants spoke of the importance of

having minority mentors, a factor which was understood by the interviewees to bolster their influence and inspirational force.

Superintendent S.1 reflected on her experience by describing the mentoring experience as instilling a desire to become better. She said: “I had a great mentor. She was amazing. She was a black African-American teacher and she always said to me, ‘you can be whatever you want to be, remember that. It’s up to you.’”

The interviewees all described their relationships with their mentors as significantly positive influences in their career development. Principal P.5 stated:

We need mentors like us. We are comfortable with each other.... If I feel or know that this person has experienced the same barriers and struggles that I went through, it makes me feel so much validated. I can feel the connection.... It is thanks to my mentor that I am where I am.” Likewise, Assistant Principal A.P.1 indicated that her mentor helped her develop her leadership capacities to attain administrative positions.

According to AP.1:

My principal was a great mentor to me. He was a black male. So my principal tapped me on the shoulder, told me about the administration program and he said he thought I would make a good principal. And so that’s how I started the program. It was definitely thanks to his support and encouragement that I am where I am.

Due to the shortage of female minority educational leaders, some of the participants indicated that they turned to their own families and friends for mentorship and support. Director D.2 talked about the importance of having a mentor and due to lack of them in the professional setting said sometimes you have to turn to other venues to find one: “Currently as director I had a friend mentor who’s been fantastic. She is Hispanic. But in leadership positions I’d have to say it

was my Puerto Rican family, I mean, my father, my brother have inspired me in watching what they did to do what I do.”

Similarly, Principal P.1 explained:

I would say that my family has a very strong education and work ethic. I had the opportunity to go to private school coming out of what you would call a ghetto or minority poverty community. And I just always knew that I was going to college and I would be finishing and getting to the highest level.... I think my mother and my father had a lot to do with that, as well as having some very good minority educators in my life that I could relate to.

Director D.1 focused on the benefits of race and identity: “There is a need to have people in the building that the kids can relate to. They need to see that Latinos, blacks, etc, can be something in life. When I went into administration I was put into the program strictly by recommendation. [...] You need people to push you and believe in you [...]”

Similarly, Superintendent S.2 reported that in her district, students could see that: there’s somebody in a higher position and, you know, I serve as a role model. I walk through the high school and there are not very many African-Americans....As a matter of fact, I’m in a district where there are only 2 African-American administrators: myself, who was recently employed, and ... an assistant principal in the high school. And when I say minority, I’m talking specifically African-Americans. So, the students here are not used to seeing that. So, for me, it’s a good thing. You serve as a role model, you know, people can see that oh, you’re not the janitor, you’re not the cafeteria lady.... And, you know, there’s nothing wrong with that. But, it does play a role.

Finally, Principal P. 2 spoke about the mentoring she received from her own family:

My Dominican mother, two Puerto Rican friends that I consider mentors, my daughters, yeah. I mean, I have a good support system. So, I would say my whole support system was very encouraging. I mean, it was funny though to me that they said, ‘things aren’t always greener on the other side.’

Each of the interviewees identified a pressing need to have minority educational leaders, especially in school districts with large minority student populations. The interviewees felt that prominent figures in leadership positions would facilitate stronger connections between the students and their schools, thereby generating more of a feeling of ownership and belonging.

The last theme that emerged from the data was the need to eliminate bias.

Notwithstanding their personal experiences with bias, the interviewees suggested that cultural bias can be minimized by cultural competency and fostering the development in an open attitude in educators and everybody in general. Director D.1 explained: “The major barriers are biases and the lack of conversation in problem-solving around that topic.”

Superintendent S.2 focused on the role that her preparation and personal strengths play in subverting biases against her heritage. Superintendent S.2 talked about how confident she was when she finally got an administrative job because she knew she was totally capable of doing what was expected of her and more: “As you get wiser through the years, I have always made sure that the jobs I get are not because I’m a Hispanic female but because I deserve them because of my work ethic.”

Several of the interviewees cautioned about the impacts of teacher expectations on student achievement. Eight out of twelve minority female educational leaders identified a need to eliminate biases from educational institutions. Consistent with the literature on this subject, it

was noted that teacher expectations for a particular student can be subconsciously influenced by factors other than the child's academic ability.

Superintendent S.3 stated: “While some people appreciate the diversity existing between their culture and that of another person, there are also plenty of individuals who look down upon the cultures of other people.”

Director D.1 talked about being aware of her ethnicity and how it is important to know who you are:

It’s quite funny. I’m African-American but I have a Hispanic last name. I find that in my field of director of special education or even on the administration level, especially in special education, it is very rare that I find someone like myself. If I could just imagine being at the regional meetings, I think I might find maybe five, maybe six special educator African-Americans and that would be in a mixture of male and female, you know, out of 200. So, you know, my ethnicity does play a role.

Principal P.1 supported this idea by adding:

I’ve had some good experience, some bad experience, but I know who I am. I know I’m just as important as anybody else. It doesn’t matter my color. I could tell you just being a director or administrator in this field you see surprise when people come to the large office to see the person in charge and you see my name [...] You assume that maybe I’m Hispanic. And then you get in to see me and you know you see this black woman here. I even had a situation where I would be in a room with some people who don’t look like me, they ask for the head person, and they go to somebody else. So, it’s ‘Oh, you’re not the director?’ ‘No, I am. How can I help you?’

These were some of the themes that emerged from the data that were used to support research question number two. Twelve out of twelve female minority school level and district level leaders strongly supported the idea of reevaluating curricula to improve academic opportunities. The need to have more access to diverse literature was unanimously discussed by all the interviewees. Likewise, seven of the twelve female minority school level and district level leaders talked about the need by school districts to invest in multicultural resources. Twelve of the interviewees talked about the need to create appropriate professional development to improve equity in education and address the need to create more awareness around the idea of cultural proficiency. Also, the need to create connections through mentoring was discussed by the twelve participants. Lastly, eight out of twelve advocated for eliminating biases from educational institutions.

### **Research Question Three**

*Do female minority educational leaders make conscious decisions to affect the path and shape the college and career attitudes of minority students in their district?*

The data analysis for the third research question is presented in this subsection. Two themes were identified in the minority female educational leaders' responses. They included:

- Ten out of twelve interviewees talked about the importance of investing in programs that aim at eliminating the achievement gap. Ten of the female minority educational leaders interviewed expressed the need for reliable access to better resources and more financial support to facilitate investments in programs that eliminate minority students' achievement gaps and make the students ready for college and career paths.
- Seven of twelve interviewees shared their thoughts about the need to educate others about minority students by creating opportunities to build a more culturally competent school,

and to educate others to be more culturally proficient and be more aware of other cultures. Nine of twelve interviewees spoke about how important it is to advocate for the needs and rights of minority students. “Cultural competence is a key factor in enabling educators to be effective with students from cultures other than their own. Cultural competence is having an awareness of one’s own cultural identity and views about difference, and the ability to learn and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. It is the ability to understand the within-group differences that make each student unique, while celebrating the between-group variations that make a country a tapestry. This understanding informs and expands teaching practices in the culturally competent educator’s classroom” (National Education Association, 2017, retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/39783.htm>)

First, investing in programs that aim at eliminating the minority students’ achievement gap was an important issue that the interviewees talked about. When asked about this, for example, Director D.2 answered:

We should have an impact on whether every kid is college and career ready, every child. It so happens that our achievement gaps are largely populated by minority children so that’s where you want to say, ‘well then you need more support for minority kids.’ But within all those, there will be a little bit of everything. We should be held responsible [to] every child... it just doesn’t have to be at the same time, but that by the time the kid graduates, every child is prepared for college or career readiness.

The interviewees also frequently expressed a dire need to allocate resources to support the needs of minority students and close achievement gaps. For example, Assistant Principal

A.P.1 said:

I think it's really slow and I think the biggest barrier is just financial resources. That is the disparity in our district when it comes to who is performing and who is not performing. And then we go back to that conversation about advocacy and voice. And a lot of my families don't have voice and don't know how to advocate for their needs. But the families that are getting a lot out of this district do know how to advocate and do know how to get things and resources allocated to them that might seem, if you think about the grand scheme of what's going on in the district, like a little foolish. You know, so we are going to spend money on Chinese but only 20 children take Chinese at a high school and then we are going to ignore the fact that we have... 300 kids at the high school that need help reading, but we won't hire a reading teacher.

Others described particular programs that they thought would help eliminate the gap for some students. For example, Superintendent S.3 stated: "We need summer programs- small group tutoring during the day and after school help. [...] There's an array of services available that [is] not being utilized."

On this topic Assistant Principal A.P.2 stated:

As a society [we] have to be very careful [...] I mean, because they don't have the access that you or I have right now as middle-class people. They don't have the access of quality housing. They don't have the access of quality storefronts to be able to buy quality food. And if some of their health needs aren't being met, I would challenge you to find where the nearest doctor's office is and where the nearest dentist's office is and then try to consider that then I have to take, you know, a transportation system that really is just not easy to manage because it might take me two hours to get to that dentist's office. And



then I'm working and I'm easily replaceable because the job that I have is low-skilled.

So there's a lot of things that come into play when it comes to why people do what they do. And it's not just because they live in poverty or just because they happen to be living in poverty. It's that poverty has created a situation that makes it very hard to get out of poverty.

Not surprisingly, the experiences of the interviewees also confirmed that students living in poverty often begin their schooling experiences at a competitive disadvantage, suggesting that support and services to address their needs is vital to equality in education. Seven out of twelve interviewees addressed poverty when questioned about the college and career path of minority students.

Seven out of twelve female minority school and district level leaders interviewed identified a substantial need to educate others about the circumstances of minorities in education. Creating programs to become more culturally competent and educating others to be more culturally proficient and aware of other cultures was a topic that the women interviewed deemed important to change the perceptions people have about minorities in general. At least seven of all the interviewees identified a substantial need to educate others about the circumstances of minorities in education. Seven of the females interviewed suggested that institutionalizing the education of teachers could change classroom norms, including the ways that they may unconsciously marginalize their minority students.

For example, Principal P.1 claimed:

And, then overall, just raising the bar regardless of the color. A lot of educators just don't have the expectation that the students can do it. And if you have a student that already is

not motivated, combined with a teacher that's not going to push you, it's a lose-lose situation.

Many of the interviewees associated the need to educate others as a need to obtain more and better advocacy. Nine of the interviewees reported on the need to advocate in their school districts for the needs of minority students and their families. Superintendent S.2 said:

So, coming to this new job I have, I would describe that there is a beginning of equity wanting to be planted but the trees are kind of tiny, flowers are still small, while others are blossoming much higher. But I have been meeting some very smart, smart scholars that are minorities. I just read in some advertising that the first drum majorette is going to be a Hispanic child. So, I think that we have a responsibility to educate our town; our community of the potential and that diversity has richness, not negligence.

Director D.2 reflected on the manner in which educational advocacy will draw on the educational context, specifically identifying the stark divide between urban and suburban circumstances:

I think it's opened my eyes to what they either have encountered coming from other places or lived with. I mean, the urban child is a unique child. Nobody recognizes a child for the huge amount of resilience urban children have. And if you put these urban children in a suburbia, they would thrive. But if you put suburban children in an urban environment, they will not. And, it's because urban children have resilience that none of us can even start to imagine. And it's allowed me to be humble to them.

Likewise, Principal P.5 reported: "[...] I am dedicated to making a significant impact for a quality of life for all minority, especially those minority students I serve."

School level and district level minority female leaders advocated for changes to address the achievement needs of students with minority backgrounds in their districts. Some of the practices addressed by the participants to create better opportunities for this sub-group of students included proper allocation of resources, along with the need to find better resources to eliminate the achievement gap for minority students. Financial constraints and the need to educate others to change their perceptions and behaviors towards minority groups was another topic discussed, as well as, creating the need for advocacy for minority students and their families.

#### **Research Question Four**

*Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders affect the way in which they engage with parents of minority students to support/create a partnership for college and career readiness?*

The fourth research question in this study was supported through data gathered from the interview questions that specifically addressed whether or not the participants created opportunities for partnership with parents of minority students.

- Nine out of twelve the minority female school level and district level leaders interviewed for this study talked about creating connections with students, family and community members by fostering partnerships, and avenues to facilitate communication between families and districts.
- All twelve of the female minority educational leaders reported that they have implemented various family engagement practices to normalize parental support in the educational process and ensure that families have access to the requisite knowledge to help their children.

The interviewees consistently suggested that although greater family involvement in the educational process yields improved student performance, this phenomenon is not universally understood or implemented in schools. For example, Principal P.1 said:

They don't know. Parents don't know. I really am trying to bring more information to them. Being new to this district, I'm looking to do more college and career readiness in maybe school student embedded jobs or shadowing or internships that students can do right here on campus.

Principal P.3 explained:

You know, some students are doing very well, and I give them the mommy talk in the absence of mom talk or try to get to the end of the picture, you know, "if this is what you wanna do, then this is what you need to get there. And I say there are a lot of opportunities. I even use the sometimes people think they want to be a doctor but maybe you don't have the skillset to be a doctor, maybe you don't have the academic part of it but maybe you just want to work in a hospital. And there are so many different variations of opportunities [...]

The school level and district level minority leaders expressed a commitment to securing sufficient resources to help parents understand and navigate the intricacies that schools present. Superintendent S.1 said: "It's important to provide the appropriate resources. [...] Some of my instructional coaches from my building are going to provide after school workshops for families to help them navigate the educational process of their kids."

Nine of the female minority educational leaders interviewed for this research talked about the deep satisfaction they got from helping others in the community, especially those who are underrepresented in the school and community and may not know where to find an ally. Nine out

of twelve minority women interviewed talked about the importance of making connections with families and students in order to create supportive partnerships to bridge school and community.

Assistant Principal A.P.1 said: “we’re making a big push on finding ways to engage our community, our families, to be a more active participants in the kids’ learning.” Likewise, Principal P.5 stated, “You know, the parent engagement is critical. So, yeah... We have a community school setting so our community schools.... We do a lot of work around community and family engagement.”

Principal P.1 indicated, “often times those students who need us the most, but are often times forgotten, feel more comfortable approaching me.”

All twelve of the female minority educational leaders reported that they have implemented various family engagement practices to normalize parental support in the educational process and ensure that families have access to the requisite knowledge to help their children. The development of several factors was critical, including cultural, attitudinal and trust-oriented interactions. The interviewees were particularly invested in the home-school connections afforded by avenues such as volunteering, collaborative community outreach, and solicited decision-making. Twelve out of twelve minority female educational leaders in this study reported taking affirmative steps to foster family and community partnerships. The interviewees discussed their regular meetings with volunteer and nonprofit groups, educational partners, mental and physical health partners, and parent groups to communicate the districts’ goals, vision and mission, and policy and procedural changes. For example, P.4 stated: “We need to collaborate with parents to make it real in their life. Many of the families still believe it is not obtainable.”

## Summary

All of the interviewees provided thoughtful descriptions of the challenges they encountered as relatively benign inconveniences, and not as insurmountable obstacles. In each instance, the interviewees told stories about determination, drive, self-esteem, and self-worth, and in each instance, they found that they were sufficiently equipped.

These women talked about the importance of identifying available opportunities and the process of creating opportunity.

These women described the challenge of encountering a barrier as a choice between succumbing to one's fears or taking the next step forward, one-step at a time, always with the dream and goal in mind.

The women in this study were especially cognizant of their aspirations and ethics because these women – as minorities and women - were forced to recognize the importance of character to success as an educational leader. Moreover, as they recognized their circumstances, they also solidified their purpose of instilling in the minority students in their districts the fact that education determination is the best way to ensure success.

All of the women in this study were determined to succeed in the jobs that they had making a positive change within their own working environments. Despite the adversity faced, they all turned to mentoring, family, and friends to keep grounded.

Spirituality was also mentioned as a significant element to benefit the challenges, experiences, and health and well-being of these minority leaders.

In response to the question regarding the effect of the interviewee's experiences on her attitudes toward minority students, the major themes that were consistently identified in this

research included: (1) beliefs and perceptions; (2) racism; (3) gender power disparities; (4) religion.

In response to the question regarding the effect of the interviewee's experiences on their selection of programs to improve the learning of minority students, the responses suggested the following themes: (1) need to reevaluate curricula and invest in multicultural resources; (2) need for appropriate PD (professional development); (3) mentoring; (4) elimination of bias.

Responses to the question regarding whether female minority educational leaders intentionally influence the college and career attitudes of minority students in their district included: (1) eliminating the gap; (2) need to educate others.

In response to the question regarding the effect of the interviewee's experiences on the way they engage with parents of minority students to support/create a partnership for college and career readiness, interviewees suggested the themes of: (1) creating connections with parents, students, and community members by fostering partnerships; (2) implementation of parental engagement practices.

These themes provided insight into the experiences of the female minority leaders interviewed and how they affected the minority students they serve.

The next chapter will provide a final discussion on the challenges that these twelve female minority leaders encountered in their professional lives and the ways they used to cope with these challenges. In addition, it will describe how the experiences of their resilience and desire to succeed, shaped and affected the lives of those whom they serve, especially the lives of the minority students in their districts.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **Introduction**

The intent of this grounded theory qualitative study was to understand the lived experiences of several minority women school level and district level educational leaders. The study explored the relationships between the personal experiences of twelve minority female educational leaders in Upstate New York and their attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making regarding the college and career readiness of minority students in their district.

During the interviews, these female minority educational leaders provided rich descriptions of various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience to the obstacles they faced, their upbringings, their opinions, their attitudes and behaviors, and how their circumstances affected the students they served.

The following research questions were used to facilitate the study.

#### **Research Questions:**

1. Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders affect the attitudes they have towards minority students in their district?
2. Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders influence the way they select programs designed to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district?
3. Do female minority educational leaders make conscious decisions to affect the path and shape the college and career attitudes of minority students in their district?
4. Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders affect the way in which they engage with parents of minority students to support/create a partnership for college and career readiness?



This chapter presents a discussion of the research findings and conclusions and provides some recommendations for future study that emerged from this research project. This chapter is organized in the order that the research questions were presented.

### **Summary of Findings and Discussion**

This research project produced several findings from the data gathered regarding the relationships between the personal experiences of twelve minority female educational leaders in Upstate New York and their attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making regarding the college and career readiness of minority students in their district. Other findings not anticipated by the research questions also emerged during the study. Summary discussion of the findings is presented in the next sections of this chapter with each research question.

### **Research Question One**

**Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders affect the attitudes they have towards minority students in their district?**

**Finding One – Beliefs, attitudes and upbringing shape the way in which female minority educational leaders relate to minority students.**

In discussing their resilience and willingness to change peoples' perceptions, the interviewees felt confident in their abilities and professional competencies to make a difference supporting the literature that states that minority women have positive enough views of themselves and their ability to do any job if they were given the opportunity (Banks, 2000). Hogg and Vaughan (2005) also state that depending on the attitude of a person, you can consistently expect a certain behavior.

All twelve of the female minority district level and school level leaders interviewed reported that they believed their background and upbringing affects how they relate to minority

students in their districts. Despite the small overall number of female minority educational leaders, the minority women interviewed believed that more minority women could overcome systematic discrimination and experience professional success. The literature highlighted resilience as a characteristic of people who have overcome social challenges such as socioeconomic status, gender, and ethnicity; three of the main factors for segregation in communities (Corcoran & Nichols-Casebolt, 2004). All the participating women were very proud to report their heritage. All of the female minority educational leaders interviewed thought that they could make a difference through their leadership. Also, they reported that their successes were based on a productive work ethic and commitment to the successes of their students. These findings reinforce the research that shows that educators have a significant impact on student motivation, engagement, and can influence some of the future identities that students develop as they grow up (Destin & Kosko, 2016; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995). Minority administrators have the ability to support and help students maneuver the intricacies of schools' environments and social norms (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Minority leaders can also influence teachers and have a positive impact on parental involvement (Williams & Loeb, 2012), a factor linked to having positive effects on student achievement (Leithwood, Pattern, Jantzi, 2010).

### **Finding Two – Discrimination/ racism & mental health issues.**

A fast-growing research area demonstrates that racism is one of the reasons for the insensitivities that students from different backgrounds experience in school (Dei, 1996). All twelve participants expressed having experienced some sort of discrimination and/or racism on a regular, almost daily basis. The women interviewed insisted on being evaluated based on their credentials, abilities, and other characteristics that are relevant to their job responsibilities not the color of their skin. Being aware of their challenges and the struggles that they experienced made

these minority females leaders more mindful of the struggles minority students could potentially experience. Accordingly, they described that experiencing racism made them able to relate to their own experiences to influence, shape and, in a way, protect this particular subgroup of students in their districts.

Glass and Franceschini (2007) described how women continue to be excluded from all leadership positions in education as compared to men although this has begun to improve over the past 11 years. In support of this research finding, most of the interviewees expressed having experienced racism in their careers as they were trying to establish themselves, and even after they had been established and proven their worth.

Valverde (2003) also described public beliefs that minorities are “intellectually inferior” (p.104). Valverde (2003) discussed that many women have no power and that minority women fight with constant gender and racial issues that prevents them from advancing professionally in higher educational leadership. Racism presents more of a deterrent for minority women to achieve administrative educational positions than the discrimination white women suffer from gender bias (Valverde, 2003).

The experiences of the interviewees were consistent with the trends observed in the literature. As has been cited elsewhere in this study, pervasive discrimination undermines aspirations of equity in and beyond the classroom. Brown (2005) defended the idea that the lack of mentoring minority teachers receive for leadership positions could be the reason as to why there is a shortage of minorities in leadership positions. Each of the interviewees envisioned their responsibilities to include inspiring minority school employees and leading them on a path to seek administrative roles. This finding is consistent with the research of Sanchez, Thornton, and Usinger (2008) who advocated such leadership as among the responsibilities of school

administrators. In effect, the research provided that the more people are encouraged, and the more barriers are removed, the more diversity will flourish in public education leadership, thereby improving the chances that minority students will have to succeed in high school and beyond (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Most school districts do not have a formal way to replace vacancies in leadership positions, therefore, many principals use tapping to identify possible candidates (Myung et. al., 2011). Principals tap teachers who they think have an aptitude to become school leaders, however, principals also have a tendency to favor teachers of their own race and men over teachers that are equally qualified. “Recruitment can increase the pool of candidates for leadership positions and, if done well, can target individuals with the potential to be most effective, thus improving the quality of the pool of candidates for leadership positions” (Myung et. al., 2011, p. 699) Having a minority principal increases the odds of a teacher of the same race to be tapped (Myung et. al., 2011).

It is evident that racism affected these women personally and professionally, however, none of the twelve women allowed this to hinder their success. Minorities continue to experience discrimination and unfair treatment from dominant cultures, therefore, it is important to value diversity by accepting and respecting differences between and within cultures, and also tied with the research findings, the review of the relevant literature demonstrated a need to diversify the leadership workforce in public schools.

### **Mental health issues related to minority status due to discrimination and racism.**

Interconnected with the racism finding are mental health issues in minorities. Despite the increased awareness regarding the impact of mental health problems to the well-being of our children and their families, disparities in access to quality mental health services persist, especially for ethnic minority children, who usually receive less, and worse, health services

compared to their non-minority white peers (Department of Health and Human Services, 2006.) Psychological distress is often associated with low socioeconomic status and discrimination by race. Minority children that are of low socioeconomic status are more likely to be exposed to negative influences such as alcohol, tobacco and drugs (Wallace, 1999); therefore, these children are also more inclined to use these drugs and display disorderly behaviors (Dubow, Edwards, & Ippolito, 1997). Most of the women interviewed talked about the mental health increase that students are currently experiencing, and the need to address these issues early on to help with prevention and/or treatment.

**Finding Three – Gender disparities continue to be a problem regardless of racial differences.**

Seven out of twelve minority female school level and district level leaders interviewed spoke about the gender disparities and the struggles they encountered while trying to move up the ladder and how that made them even more aware of their own identity. Research has stated that gender bias and beliefs shape the idea of traditional roles for men and women (Valverde, 2003). Research has indicated that inherent gender differences in leadership roles reflect the different institutional lifestyles, creating a problematic condition for women which not only include those challenges faced by women who serve in administrative roles, but also the persistent underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions (Litmanovitz, 2011). In such circumstances, Glass and Franceschini (2007) argued that women are still not obtaining leadership positions in education as easily as men, supporting the idea of gender disparities presented in the findings of the study. Further, the New York State Council of School Superintendents reported gender as a restricting factor for women to advance in their careers

(NYSSCOS, 2012). Likewise, Heilman (2001) said that leadership is still associated with male characteristics and it is deeply embedded culturally in social practices and language.

“The glass ceiling” continues to operate to the disadvantage of professional women, insuring that racism, isolation, bias, and misjudgment continue to characterize the experiences of minority women. Consequently, understanding and accepting gender as part of the school culture should limit the discriminations created by it (Bolman & Deal, 2008).

**Finding Four - Reliance on a higher being that served as an anchor and guidance to never give up.**

Although this theme was not part of the literature review, it emerged as a very important theme amongst all the interviewees. All twelve women interviewed expressed their reliance on a relationship with a higher being who provided inspiration and encouragement to pursue their career aspirations. Along with family support systems, mentors, and friends, the interviewees talked about the power of prayer and the reliance on a higher being which served as support to overcome the hurdles they encountered in their professional roles. Faith was relied on to overcome challenges and find courage to never give up on their dreams. Many studies have indicated that religious practices and faith create an overall sense of comfort and positively affect a person’s health by promoting life satisfaction and overall well-being (Koenig, 2012). This positive impact is greater on people that are under stressful circumstances, suffer from mental health issues, and/or have a physical illness in general. Reliance on a higher being helps individuals cope with negative life events (Koenig, 2012). Likewise, dealing with life’s hardships may also result in more peoples’ dependence on faith. Faith, is therefore considered a major coping factor in difficult or stressful life circumstances.

## **Research Question Two.**

**Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders influence the way they select programs designed to accelerate or enhance the learning of minority students in their district?**

**Finding One – Need to reevaluate curricula and need to find more multicultural resources.** Twelve minority educational leaders interviewed agreed that there is a need to reevaluate curricula to improve academic opportunities and /or performance of minority students in the district, along with the need for access to literature on diversity. Seven out of twelve interviewees supported the need to invest in multicultural resources. They suggested that there is a dire need to develop a new approach to school policies concerning cultural diversity. They further believed that past iterations of policy development failed to promote development of curricular materials that effectively and progressively reflect cultural difference in a positive manner. The interviewees all suggested that a reevaluation of curricula and more multicultural resources would better integrate cultural competency regarding values, behaviors, attitudes, practices, policies, and structures across cultures.

Seven out of the twelve female minority educational leaders identified a need for multicultural and diverse literature resources in schools. These findings reflect the disparities between the changes in demographics that are not met by corresponding changes in library resources or school curricula. Without keeping pace with social changes, library resources will be perpetually inadequate to allow children to find personal connections with the characters in the books they read. The interviewees suggested immediate, far-reaching results in which children have access to books that reflect their experiences, backgrounds, and heritage. Along with this finding, the research of Colby and Lyon (2004) stated that having access to

multicultural literature helps children relate better to their culture, exposes children from different cultures to experience other cultures, and also gives an opportunity to open lines of communication to address issues on diversity.

**Finding Two - Need to access appropriate professional development.**

Even though this was not part of the literature review, all twelve minority female district and building level leaders stressed the importance for the need to have appropriate professional development to improve equity in education, to better serve our minority students, and to create cultural awareness. In this study, all twelve of the minority female educational leaders stressed the need for equity in educational opportunity, including the need for appropriate and meaningful professional development for minority women teachers, administrators, staff, and community members. By failing to address the cultural gap between students and teachers, and not being able to understand students' cultural perspectives, teachers and school personnel allow themselves to make the correlation and attribute student failure to socio-economic, racial and poor family dynamics of the students they serve (Nieto, 2000), therefore it is imperative to have appropriate professional development to better educate and instruct those who are in charge of our students.

**Finding Three – Minority women leaders' recognition of the value of minority mentors in their own experiences caused them to value serving as minority mentors for the students in their charge.**

Minority leaders have the power to help and shape students' lives. Minority administrators have the ability to support and help students maneuver the intricacies of school environments and school cultures. Twelve out of twelve school level and district level minority leaders agreed on the fact that finding mentors and having somebody to guide you, support you



and advocate for you became an important and intricate part of who they are. Because of this, they thought it was important to create and foster mentoring relationships for the minority students in their districts to be able to help them navigate the intricacies of school, as well as to provide support and a sense of belonging. Sanchez, Thornton, and Usinger (2008) supports this idea in their research by suggesting that having educators of the same cultural background and experiences as the minority students allows those in positions of power to model success and also relate better to parents and other stakeholders.

There are multiple studies that indicate minority educational leaders are effective as role models for minority students (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004) in terms of their capacity to serve as personal connections for students who are developing identities and future plans (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). As diversity in American schools continues to increase, the mentoring role of these minority leaders must include encouraging minority students to consider becoming school leaders themselves (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). The more increased diversity leadership we have in public education the better chances minority students will have to be successful in high school and beyond (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008). Goldsmith (2004) found that minority students were more optimistic and engaged with their educations in more diverse school settings, particularly in schools that employed high numbers of minority teachers. Mentoring is an approach that aims to promote success among minorities who aspire to achieve jobs in higher ranks in education (Gonzalez-Figueroa & Young, 2005).

Gonzales-Figueroa and Young (2005) revealed that the minority women mentored reported wanting to have mentors of similar ethnicities. Having a mentor that understands the challenges and experiences that the minority mentees went through is a benefit. Through the findings of this study, it is evident that when minority administrators have mentors of similar

ethnic backgrounds, it helps to preserve the cultural and ethnic identity of the individual and pushes them to succeed.

#### **Finding Four – Eliminate biases in hiring.**

Eight out of twelve minority female educational leaders identified a need to eliminate biases from educational institutions. This finding is consistent with research that reports disparities between the experiences of female administrators and their male counterparts (Morrison, 2012). The position of the educational administrator is plagued by gender biases and negative perceptions of women in society (Morrison, 2012). The “good ole boys club” still seems to be thriving and may be disadvantageous to women looking to secure an administrative position, even after a position is acquired (Eckman, 2004). Supporting this finding Sanchez, Thornton and Usinger (2008) defended that educational leaders and those in charge of making hiring decisions have the responsibility to awaken the leadership qualities of minority school employees and lead them to seek administrative roles.

#### **Research Question Three.**

**Do female minority educational leaders making conscious decisions to affect the path and shape the college and career attitudes of minority students in their district?**

**Finding One – There is evidence of a need to invest in programs to eliminate the achievement gap.**

Ten out of twelve interviewees talked about the importance of investing in programs that aim at eliminating the achievement gap. Ten of the female minority educational leaders interviewed expressed the need for reliable access to better resources and more financial support to facilitate investments in programs that eliminate minority students’ achievement gaps and make the students ready for college and career paths.

Supporting this theme, the research of Hallinger and Heck (1998) reported that leadership activities such as establishing school goals, implementing school vision, and even initiating social networks and social structure improves learning outcomes.

Socioeconomic status and ethnicity are intimately interconnected (American Psychological Association, 2017). There are discrepancies in median net worth between households identified as white and those identified as minority. During the interviews, the interviewees confirmed the idea that students from minority backgrounds, often living in poverty, frequently begin their schooling experiences at a competitive disadvantage, suggesting that support and services to address these deficiencies is necessary to find equality in education. The economic conditions that students and families face are likely to affect the academic performance of children, consequently, school districts should re-evaluate their educational programs to better serve minorities.

**Finding Two – There is a need to educate others to be more aware of multicultural issues to avoid misconceptions and insensitivities.**

Seven of twelve interviewees shared their thoughts about the need to educate others about minority students by creating opportunities to build a more culturally competent school and to educate others to be more culturally proficient and be more aware of other cultures. Nine of twelve interviewees spoke about how important it is to advocate for the needs and rights of minority students. As indicated by Wooderson-Perzan and Lunenburg's (2001) there is a necessity for educational leaders and others to comprehend racial disparities, work with multicultural students, and concentrate their efforts on the district's population.

Most of the interviewees identified a need to educate teachers to change the negative perceptions of minority students. The interviewees also expressed the need to educate others and

the need to advocate for minority students and families. The need for cultural competency awareness is particularly important given ongoing shifts in population dynamics and the rapid growth of minority populations in the school system.

All of the women interviewed stated the need for educational administrators to help foster an open attitude toward difference in a multi-cultural society. According to Dweck (2006) a growth mindset is the one that thrives on challenge and sees failure as a springboard for growth and for stretching our existing abilities. The women interviewed believed that dedication and hard work would result in the development of every single student's abilities. Unfortunately, preconceived ideas and biases interfere with the ability to see difference as valuable. Often times, teachers have preconceived notions that affect their engagement with students. Albert, Cochran-Smith, and Zollers (2000) stated that educators need to examine and eliminate their biases in order to meet student needs appropriately. Educators often fail to understand how their own biases and backgrounds may influence their ability to understand the needs and viewpoints of their students (Albert, Cochran-Smith, & Zollers, 2000). Successful leaders are those who have the capacity to encourage educators and students in addition to promoting change in their organization. (Wooderson-Perzan & Lunenburg, 2001).

When educators adopt a 'growth mindset,' they can help students adopt one as well. There are multiple benefits for students who are able to develop a "growth mindset" around the concept of social mobility, and with which educators can assist. Specifically, students with the "growth mindset" may experience increased motivation and improved grades in school, and feel less useless (Bowman & Destin, 2015).

#### **Research Question Four.**

**Do the personal experiences of female minority educational leaders affect the way in which they engage with parents of minority students to support/create a partnership for college and career readiness?**

The contributions of leaders to student learning is primarily indirect, and stems in large part from the organizational focus and time allotted to selected tasks (Leithwood, 2001). By sharing the same cultural background and experiences as these minority students, minority educational leaders are able to model success and also relate better to parents and other minority stakeholders. School districts should view cultural commonalities as resources and should consider ways of benefitting from such positive influences on their students and/or others (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

**Finding One – It is important to create connections with students, families and community to affect change.**

Nine out of twelve minority female school level and district level leaders interviewed for this study talked about creating connections with students, family and community members by fostering partnerships and avenues to facilitate communication between families and districts.

Research has suggested that minority educational leaders serve as a positive role models for minority students in their districts. (Magdaleno, 2006; Tillman, 2004). Goldsmith (2004) found that minority students were more optimistic and liked school better when schools had a high number of minority administrators and particularly when high numbers of minority teachers were employed in the school. Likewise, Sanchez, Thornton, and Usinger (2008) stated that having high numbers of minority teachers is important to find connections for minority students to develop their identities and to promote future aspirations.

It is important to look at the leadership characteristics of women, particularly to the extent that they exhibit nurture and care in their leadership strategies. Women may be prone to developing deeper relationships with students and staff; they are generally more engaged in their work, are considered more skillful, and overall develop and maintain closer-knit organizations (Shakeshaft, 1995).

Student performance may also be impacted by the racial interactions between students and their administrators or teachers, specifically in regard to increased trust and respect when dealing with adults who share trust and respect. Theoretically, these adults can improve students' confidence, ease stress, and overall promote enthusiasm for learning.

### **Finding Two – Implementation of family engagement practices.**

All twelve of the female minority educational leaders reported that they have implemented various family engagement practices to normalize parental support in the educational process and ensure that families have access to the requisite knowledge to help their children. Twelve of twelve female minority educational leaders interviewed reported that they have implemented various family engagement practices to ensure that families have the knowledge and resources to assist schools in helping all students learn, as well as the importance of including the parental support in the educational process.

In order to increase family involvement in the educational setting, strong leadership is needed. Schools are successful in engaging parents in the educational process when they form partnerships that are responsive to the needs of parents and are encouraging and welcoming to the parents (Haynes, Comer, & Hamilton-Lee, 1989).

The female minority educational leaders interviewed expressed the need to consider the different cultural attitudes minority families may have towards school and the need for school

administrators and teachers to develop mutual trust among stakeholders in order to encourage and foster the involvement with all families.

Nine out of twelve women said that they were committed to bringing in resources to help parents understand and to be able to navigate the intricacies of the school settings, and also putting the resources where they are really needed.

This study was organized around the basic, overarching research question: What are the self-perceptions of minority female district and school level leaders, their attitudes, behaviors, concerns, and aspirations in relation to minority students in their district? Unanimously, twelve of the twelve female minority interviewed for the study concurred that their personal convictions, backgrounds, upbringing and values guided the decisions they made towards minority students in their district.

### **Recommendations for Practice.**

1. Preparation colleges and institutions should shift their focus to better prepare teachers to be agents of change and to embrace the many educational benefits that diversity offers by allowing students to learn from one another, to share their backgrounds and experiences, to harvest mutual respect, to promote equal status and to share common goals. This idea is becoming more and more popular amongst schools of education; however, more work needs to be done in this field and colleges should concentrate their efforts to promote and achieve these goals in a more widely way moving forward.

2. The segregation of the past still affects the hiring patterns of the present. Baron and Bielby (1985) suggested taking into consideration individual minority hiring decisions due to the positive outcomes they create in organizations. It is recommended that Boards of Education must commit to providing a quality education for every student. Boards of Education should strive to

adopt and implement a framework for hiring new employees through the evaluation of future policies and strategies. Boards of Education should also consider looking through a racial-equity lens when they revise and write BOE (Board of Education) policies for schools. Boards of Education should consider the impact their decisions and hiring practices have on all students, in particular, those students that come from disadvantaged backgrounds that suffer from the still prevalent status quo. It is important to develop a statement of hiring practices to minimize implicit bias for implementation by Boards of Education.

3. Design and implement internal programs for career mentoring for minority women. Each of the interviewees reported benefitting from some type of support network, including mentoring. Some of the interviewees reported relying on personal support networks, such as church, family and friends. Roldan and Stem (2006) proposed two avenues to building successful relationships in corporations: (1) networking; and (2) finding a mentor. Likewise, Blank, Slipp, and Ford (2000) stated that cultivating relationships, networking, and having mentors are fundamental components to be successful. Wyche (2008) was also a proponent of mentoring. Mentoring is key for minorities to be able break the glass ceiling. Wyche (2008) also talked about the importance of minorities being mentored by a minority mentor stating that in order for minorities to be successful, their mentors need to make them aware of the obstacles they might encounter. However, this report was unable to identify any institutionalized or established program to provide such services. Educational institutions should review any and all resources committed to career development in otherwise underrepresented employees and consider programs that will help diversify educational leadership. Districts need to consider the additional funding that having a mentoring program will require and look at their budget to allocate some funding resources to make this possible.



4. Engage all families in educational opportunities about career paths and opportunities for all students, focusing on the success that comes with education achievement without regard for socioeconomic difference. Parents and local leaders in both urban and suburban districts should collaborate to help and support racially and ethnically diverse public schools. Leaders should work with educators to promote a curriculum that encourages a more intercultural understanding for all. To achieve this, however, districts should gain the support and financial backing from higher levels of government through their legislators.

5. Institutions should think about how to get more women (and particularly more minority women) to positions of leadership. Information regarding the characteristics of females and minority females in leadership roles could be highlighted in university preparation programs and college level classes to show, prevent, and hopefully address the issues female administrators may experience in pursuing their careers. Grant money could be provided by higher education institutions, or even at the state level, to provide scholarships for women and minorities to advance in their career. These grants could entice more women and minorities to pursue their SBL/SDL (school building leader/school district leader) certificate.

### **Recommendations for Policy**

1. Promoting an appreciation for ethnic diversity by changing racial demographics in school leadership will increase school's understanding of ethnic diversity in our K-12 educational system. As our demographics change and our K-12 student population becomes more racially and ethnically diverse, our political leaders need to support the importance of having diverse educational settings to better serve and prepare our next generation. The changes of the 21<sup>st</sup> century may provide the opportunity to shift the focus of the K-12 agenda to embrace diversity issues and to capitalize on the potential educational benefits that occur when learning

that takes place from one student to another in diverse classrooms. “Researchers have documented that students who are exposed to students with different ethnic and cultural backgrounds usually have improved cognitive skills, are better critical thinkers and are good at problem solving.” (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). It is important to note that not only low-income students reap the benefits from being in a more diverse classroom, but also those who are in middle and upper classes. It is recommended that districts rethink and redesign educational systems that promote equity. It is also recommended that schools review practices in and out of school, and how resources are allocated to promote and achieve equity in education by all.

2. Support the funding of continuing education to ensure that women and minority teachers are qualified for opportunities to advance. When we offer diverse learning environments to our students, we are offering environments that are more apt to prepare students for a more diverse society by promoting cross-cultural understandings and reducing the potential of having racial stereotypes (Williams & Loeb, 2012; (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). Those who work in environments that are more diverse come up with better ideas to solving issues (Wells, Fox, & Cordova-Cobo, 2016). Financial help should be provided for those minority female educators who wish to achieve a career in education due to research showing that they, in fact, have the ability to affect student’s lives and attainment of future educational careers.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

The twelve female minority educational leaders who participated in this study provided personal and insightful information about their experiences as minority leaders.

All of the minority women interviewed in this study told stories of overcoming social and economic barriers to obtain educational leadership positions, and all of the leaders reflected on

the influence of those struggles on their professional perspectives. The findings from this study suggest pathways toward empowering female minority educators to use an authentic voice in communicating their strengths and influencing the direction of educational programming.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are provided.

1. This research unveiled some of the realities consistent with the literature review, however, due to the small sample size interviewed, it is hard to generalize the findings. A future quantitative research study is needed to gather data from a larger population of female minority leaders. Although there is no obvious reason a larger sample size would produce different results, a larger sample size would likely reveal more persuasive evidence of pervasive practices and strategies of overcoming bias in the educational system.

2. It is suggested that future research is needed to more fully understand stereotyping that hinders the advancement of minority women and what could be done to dismantle it. The question of stereotypes and their impacts in the hiring process continues to be a contentious field of study across all employment sectors, including education. Such a study could be designed to determine how those who serve on hiring committees view (consciously or unconsciously) race, gender, and stereotypes. Such a study could furthermore be useful in identifying and understanding the ways that those involved in hiring process data on race and gender. The complicated, negative effects of disparate expectations where gender and race are factors are generally well observed, but many school districts may not be cognizant of the extent of such expectations in their districts.

3. A future research study could explore existing educational programming on anti-racism programs, gender and race-based differences in district hiring, and any new opportunities that may be available across the curriculum for minorities and women to gain experience as

administrators in order to ensure that current best practices are being applied. The impact of reducing disparities of race between educational leadership and student populations needs to be studied in depth, both nationwide and in particular contexts. Although many school districts recognize the importance of minority leaders for student access to education, many school districts are not aware of racial disparities in their districts. A future research study could explore local racial disparities, with attention given to local social, economic and environmental circumstances.

4. The questions of disparate expectations and other obstacles to minority women educational leaders continues to be a source of debate in the field of education. It is recommended that a case study analysis be designed to expose specific, contextual data on the influences and obstacles relevant to creating a minority woman educational leader. Through case study method, a researcher could isolate specific events and interactions and analyze their impact on perception, drive, and success of a particular educator. Additionally, a thorough case study could also explore how mentoring relationships have succeeded (or otherwise) under different circumstances. In addition, although this research suggests that small advances have taken place, and that a few more minority women are breaking the 'glass ceiling' more data could be collected from minority women to find out why the barriers these women go through still persist.

## **Conclusions**

This study has identified a body of research on the benefits of minority and female leadership across the educational institution. This study detailed the successes of twelve minority women in building from their histories and environments to develop professional personas that were seen by hiring officials as effective leaders. Because this research is important to mitigating a history of racism and gender bias, it must be undertaken at the administrative level.

It is critical that district leaders have an understanding of the problems caused by historical bias and exclusion. Because hiring involves superintendents and the Board of Education, it is important to establish an expectation of race and gender to ensure that biases are isolated and eliminated in the hiring process. More professional development and trainings should be offered to educate those in positions of power to inform decisions that would help in reaching parity in educational leadership positions.

Despite evidence to demonstrate that female leaders are just as effective as males, (1) people still prefer a male boss as opposed to having a female in charge; (2) women still struggle getting into and obtaining careers in educational administration; (3) women are still not regarded as effective leaders; and (4) minorities are affected even more than anybody else by these barriers (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

The low numbers of women in leadership roles may be attributed to women's responsibilities at home, lack of educational opportunities, lack of female role models, district hiring practices, and other barriers that create difficulty for women attempting to become school administrators (Litmanovitz, 2011). However, gender only predicts expectations in the difference of leadership style between a male and a female, not about effectiveness (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Eagly (2007) stated that as organizations are becoming more diverse than ever, a commensurate diverse leadership will be required to fulfill these tasks. Therefore, a more diverse leadership style will be needed to match a more diverse population. Educational institutions should place an emphasis on leadership training that addresses multicultural issues related to preventing biases and racism. Greenwood and Christian (2008) agreed that organizations that adopt and support cultural trainings, demonstrate better attitudes towards people with different gender and that are culturally different from them. The positive relationship between minority

principals and improved student outcomes can be noted in academic achievement, lower dropout rates, and higher graduation rates of minority students (Dee, 2004; Villegas & Irvine, 2010, Williams & Loeb, 2012). Research further shows that educators can have significant impacts on student motivation and can influence some of the future identities that students develop as they grow up (Destin & Kosko, 2016) therefore, it is important for those in charge of recruiting to search the best possible candidates, entice, employ and secure this type of crucial and influential leaders (Williams & Loeb, 2012) to shape, influence, guide and motivate not only minority students, but the school institution as a whole.

In light of the body of literature and the findings from this study on minority female educational leaders, the researcher concludes that additional study is needed in many of the researched areas. The investigator believes that other aspiring female minority educators could greatly benefit from the valuable information found in this study and could greatly benefit from future research in this topic. It is the hope of this investigation that the information gained from this study could facilitate a sea change in the hiring of more minority women into leadership positions, both due to encouraging and preparing more minority women for the role and by changing the perceptions of hiring entities.

Teaching about social mobility shows students the multiple pathways that they could follow to achieve their goals. Researchers suggested that when educators take the time to educate students about their options about the different pathways they can follow, whether it is college and/or non-college options, it leads to a larger number of students being more involved in school, therefore, keeping them away from crime and dropping out (Smith, Pender, & Howell, 2013).

It is believed that organizations will greatly benefit from being able to access a more diverse pool of candidates. It is the intent of the researcher that by using the findings of these

new studies the number of minority female educational leaders will increase potentially benefitting their organizations through diverse perspectives, beliefs, and practices.

The personal experiences and struggles of minority women are unique and, in many important ways, offer alternatives to the traditional male dominated approach. Affording educational leaders the benefits of female minority perspectives could potentially offer better access to multicultural diversity in school environments (Haar & Robicheau, 2009) and may better equip schools to accommodate and encourage the fast growing minority population in public schools in the United States (Magdaleno, 2006).

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## **Appendix A**

### **Letter to Potential Participants**

Date:

To:

My name is Maria Trinidad Hernandez and I am a doctoral student at Sage Graduate Schools in Albany, New York, in the Educational Leadership Program. I am currently working on my dissertation and conducting a study to learn more about minority female educational leaders, their challenges, their attitudes, behaviors and decision-making in terms of college and career readiness for minority students in their district.

This will be a qualitative study. Participation in the study will require face-to-face interviews, phone contacts, e-mail, or Skype session with educational leaders (superintendents, principals, assistant principals, pupil services) in New York State. The interviews will be audio taped/recorded and transcribed. The data gathered from the interviews will be reviewed for accuracy by having the participants check the transcripts of their interview. Once the data is collected and checked for accuracy, analysis will begin to explore the relationship between the personal experiences of minority female educational leaders in New York State and their attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making regarding the college and career readiness of minority students in their district.

The data gathered from interviews will remain confidential. For the duration of this study, all information will be stored on a password protected laptop computer and hard copies of documents will be locked in a file cabinet. Only the researcher and members of the dissertation committee will have access to the study data. There will not be any identifying names on the audiotapes. In addition, the participants' names will not be available to anyone other than those serving on the committee. The results of the research will be published in a typed document and may be published in a professional journal or presented at professional meetings. After the completion of the dissertation, the audiotapes will be destroyed.

I may be contacting you by telephone to discuss the research project. At that time I will answer any questions you may have regarding the research study. If you have any questions or concerns prior to that feel free to contact me at [hernam@sage.edu](mailto:hernam@sage.edu) or my doctoral chairperson, Dr. Francesca Durand at [duanf@sage.edu](mailto:duanf@sage.edu). I appreciate your consideration and I hope to work with you in this study.

Thank you,

Maria Trinidad Hernandez - Graduate Student  
Sage Graduate Schools

## Appendix B

### Informed Consent Agreement

School of Educational Leadership  
Principal Investigator, Dr. Francesca Durand  
Student Investigator, Maria Trinidad Hernandez

#### *A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF MINORITY FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS' BACKGROUNDS ON CURRENT PRACTICES AND POLICIES FOR MINORITY STUDENTS*

You are being asked to participate in a research study titled “*Attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making of female minority educational leaders regarding the college and career readiness of minority students in their district*”. Maria Trinidad Hernandez, a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership Program at The Sages Colleges, under the direction of Dr. Francesca Durand, her dissertation chair, is conducting the study.

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of several minority women educational leaders (An educational leader will be considered someone employed in an academic administrative title as defined by NYSED BEDS classifications in a public school district in NYS) who will give rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, their upbringing, their opinions, their attitudes and behaviors and how these positions affected those who they serve, in particular, the minority students in their district. If you decide to participate, you will be interviewed for about 45 minutes. Audio equipment will be used to ensure accuracy of the information and written transcripts of all interviews will be created. At any time during the interview, you may request for the audio recorder to be turned off.

If you have any questions about the study prior or during the study, I will be more than please to accommodate these questions or concerns. The data will be coded and categorized into patterns as the primary basis for organizing and reporting results. The risk associated with involvement in this study although minimal include that personal identifiable information could be disclosed. In order to minimize these potential risks, the confidentiality of all participants will be maintained with the utmost care. All of the information collected from the interviews will be confidential. Your name and other identifying features will not be used in analysis of the research. The information from the data will be confidential, which will be done by identifying you by the use of a pseudonym such as “Superintendent A”, “Superintendent B” and so on.

The transcribed responses will be reviewed by you and also by the student investigator for verification and accuracy. All recordings of your interview will be destroyed once they have been transcribed and your assurance of the student investigator accuracy of your responses. You may refuse to participate/ terminate the interview or your participation in the study without

prejudice or penalty. If you do choose to participate in the study, you may choose to skip any questions you rather not answer.

In event that you are harmed in the participation of the study, you understand that compensation and/or medical treatment is not available from The Sage Colleges. However, compensation and/or medical cost could be recovered by legal action.

If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact either Maria Trinidad Hernandez at (518) 848-4053, [hernam@sage.edu](mailto:hernam@sage.edu) or Dr. Francesca Durand at (518) 292-1835, [duranf@sage.edu](mailto:duranf@sage.edu) This research has received the approval of The Sage Colleges Institutional Review Board, which functions to insure the protection of the rights of human participants.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and/or had explained to you the purpose and requirements of the study and that you agree to participate.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Consent obtained by: \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Initials of the Researcher

**Appendix C**  
**Interview Questions**  
**The same set of questions will be asked of all participants.**

**Introduction:**

Hello, I am M. Trinidad Hernandez from the Sage Colleges School of Education, and I am conducting a study with female minority educational leaders.

Thank you for taking time to help me with the study. With your permission, I am going to ask you a series of questions and listen to your answers. All answers are confidential, and your identity will not be revealed\*. This interview should take about 45 minutes.

Before we can begin, I need to go over a few things:

1. I would like to tape record the interview to make sure that we have accurately captured the information you are providing. If you prefer that I do not tape record that is all right, too.
2. If you do grant me permission to tape, you may ask at any time that we stop the recorder. And if you are reluctant to continue the interview at any time, let me know, and I will stop.
3. Before I can start, I must have your consent in writing (provide form if interviewee has not brought one with him/her and be sure all relevant areas are completed).

**Interviewer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**District Interviewee(s) Name/Title:** \_\_\_\_\_

1. Tell me about your current position and provide a short version of your history as an educator.
2. Did you have something or someone in your life that helped you/motivated you to achieve the position you currently have?

3. Do you think your background has influenced your behavior as a leader? How? please provide examples.
4. Do you think as a minority leader your background has affected your attitudes and aspirations in relation to minority students?
5. How would you describe the progress being made toward meeting district achievement goals for minority students in your district? What barriers have you come up against?
6. What policies or practices have you put in place to address the student achievement needs of minority students in your district?
7. How do you measure the impact of the policies and practices you have advocated for to meet the needs of minority students in your district?
8. Do you think you have any influence on whether minority students in your district are college and career ready?
9. Do you do anything to involve minority families in the educational process?

## School of Health Sciences

65 1st Street  
Troy, New York 12180  
sage.edu

December 7, 2015

Maria Trinidad Hernandez  
209 Priddle Point Road  
Gloversville, NY 12078

### IRB PROPOSAL #322-2015-2016

**Reviewer: Francesca Durand, Chair**

Dear Maria:

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your application and has approved your project entitled "Attitudes, behaviors, and decision-making of female minority educational leaders regarding the college and career readiness of minority students in their district." Good luck with your research.

Please refer to your IRB Proposal number whenever corresponding with us whether by mail or in person.

When you have completed collecting your data you will need to submit to the IRB Committee a final report indicating any problems you may have encountered regarding the treatment of human subjects, if the project goes on for more than one year.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Francesca Durand, PhD  
Chair, IRB

FD/nan

CC: Dr. Francesca Durand

#### THE SAGE COLLEGES

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