THE COURAGE OF OUR PASSION: EXAMINING THE PERSONAL COSTS

NEGOTIATED BY THREE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN EXECUTIVE

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN URBAN CONTEXTS

A Record of Study

by

SUE WEBB PAGE

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

December 2007

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Approved by:

Chair of Committee,	Linda S. Skrla
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ABSTRACT

The Courage of Our Passion: Examining the Personal Costs Negotiated by Three

African American Women Executive Educational Leaders in Urban Contexts.

(December 2007)

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This record of study is an examination of the personal costs negotiated by three African American women central office educational leaders. The focus is to identify the personal costs that these women experience as they work as leaders in three different urban educational settings. The purpose of this study is to give voice to these women and to promote the utilization of their knowledge and skills by identifying the costs, consequences of the costs and the ways these women cope, as well as to provide research for the small number of African American female central office leaders. This qualitative study included some of my experiences related to personal costs as well, since I share race and gender characteristics with the women participants and was an integral part of this research study. In addition I used feminist and Black feminist epistemology to guide my work.

To access the data, I interviewed each woman twice in a location of her choice. The interviews were audio-taped and then transcribed. The transcriptions were read and re-read and the data unitized. The data were coded by the action or type of experience.

Data were compiled into categories and then within each category subcategories were noted. The categories were derived from a combination of codes emerging from the data as well as core themes of Black feminist epistemology.

The women in my study were well educated; two of them had doctoral degrees. They noted cost associated with their work as professionals as well as costs associated with their families and home life. Some identified costs were reduced time with families, health issues, few mentors, the scrutiny and burden of being the only African American female on their level in their organizations and salary inequities. To manage the costs the women utilized hired assistance, utilized the support of family and friends, were prayerful and maintained a commitment which centered on the vocation of children's education. Recommendations for solutions include a collective sponsorship to address the costs. In addition, it is in the best interest of everyone in schools to have more women like these leaders.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my parents, June and Robert Webb. You taught me passion

and courage. I am forever grateful for your example and your wisdom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All along this doctoral journey, I must have written this section in my head a thousand times. I think it was a source of motivation for me because I knew once I put it down on paper it meant that my study was complete and my work was performed well enough to defend it. As I sit at the computer writing this piece, I find composing the acknowledgement more difficult than I ever imagined. First of all, whenever I am reading books the "forward" or "acknowledgement" is one of my favorite parts to read because it gives me insight into the author as a person or the factors that motivated the work. I want readers to know about me. The value and appreciation I feel for *all* of the people who carried me to this point are unfathomable. Secondly, the depth of my emotion right at this moment makes me afraid that I will exclude someone, who is very important, and 'sorry' would just not be sufficient. So indulge me as I work to acknowledge the gifts of people who have influenced and supported my passage. Because this work is very personal, I have many people to recognize and I will do so in groups.

Texas A & M University-- My "dream team" of Dr. M. Carolyn Clark, Dr. Joseph O. Jewell, and Dr. James J. Scheurich led by Dr. Linda Skrla is the most awesome doctoral committee assembled. Your dedication to my scholarship through time, attention, schedule rearrangements, guidance and challenge is far more than I could ever hope. Dr. Skrla, you and your work are incredible. Thank you for being my chair.

My association with the university began with the Houston Independent School District cohort group. When I think of this group I am reminded of our classes in the Weslayan building and our late nights in the hotel in College Station as we collaborated or conspired. Paula J. and Barbara T. --those Starbuck's meetings were my lifelines. Your wisdom kept me employed and kept me focused on finishing my study. Who else would understand the trauma I was experiencing! Dr. Madsen, thank you too. You helped me to learn to "embrace the ambiguity!"

I seemed to need encouragement from all aspects of my life. These folks helped to provide it while I was in the job arena. Dr. Tracee Grigsby and Dr. Rose Benitez— thank you for regularly asking, "So tell me, what have you done? What is your plan for the week?" Your interest in my work kept me going and I was always happy to share it with you. Your advice, tools and support were very much appreciated. Karen Hayes, you shared your books with me two years ago! I will finally return them. My friend, Joyce Eddings, these stories are really our stories. You brought me to this position and shared all of the joys and trials it brings. Fortunately, we're here together. Thank you for your consistent encouragement and assistance with this project.

Sherri T., Jennifer S., and Jean W., you were extremely helpful as I was learning to conduct my own studies. You did not have to share your experiences and your time with me, but you did and I am much obliged. To my 'research assistants,' Kenneth Epting and Melvin Waits, I appreciate the vacations and days we spent in the library. You challenged my thinking, organized me, supported me, made me laugh and most of all were my friends. Mel, you *earned* your name being mentioned here.

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My family-- My brothers, Rob and Clif Webb- your caring and challenge really helped to raise me right. Clif, though you'll never read this, you taught me to learn from, and to honor our ancestors, that is one of the reasons I cite Jo Ann Gibson Robinson. In the last few months my sister, Natalie Webb would never let me give up. "We *are* having a graduation!" In addition, you taught me the work is not finished. We have more stories to write because we have lived, and (for three of us) continue to live "a full life!"

Most importantly, without you, Anita Marie Page, I *know* this work would not be completed. Thank you for transcribing my interview tapes. Your knowledge, expertise, editing, and encouragement were applied at precisely the right moments. You championed even my minutest accomplishments. This last year you paid more than rent! Thank you, Alicia Janaye Page, your research and editing assistance exemplified that families do *work* together. You are the most precious daughters, Marie and Alicia, and I love you endlessly.

And lastly, thank you to Donna, Anne, and Shelly. You are phenomenal women and I am thankful you shared your stories with me. I hope I captured at least a portion of the gifts you have. Your courage, passion and wisdom benefit many children and the people who educate them. I appreciate your inspiration.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

When I was an aspiring administrator embarking on my first administrative position, my female principal told me, "Administration affects one of two things for women, either health or marriage and sometimes it negatively affects both health and relationships." I heard her but did not really listen. I did not seek out ways to address the "relatively predictable pitfalls along the way" (Ramsey, 1997) of educational administration. Therefore, I moved through my administrative career being in service to the educational stakeholders while not necessarily thinking about the personal costs being paid.

Prior to becoming an administrator, I taught for seven years. For the last twenty years, however, I have held positions as an assistant principal in middle and elementary schools, an intern in a school district human resources department, an associate principal of instruction at a high school, a principal, a director of secondary schools, an assistant superintendent of secondary education, and an area superintendent. During my first ten administrative years, I worried about the time I spent away from my family. I was frustrated and concerned that I was not being the kind of mother and wife that was expected. I did not make many home-cooked meals or have my home as neat and tidy as the home in which I was raised. I was tired all of the time and was criticized by my

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This record of study follows the style of *Educational Administration Quarterly*.

family for putting my school and the students before them.

Although my marriage ended, I believe my daughters continue to do well. They are now women, although that sounds so unusual for me to say out loud. I am very proud of them. One is gainfully employed as a teacher and the other is in college. In addition, I manage to maintain good health. In the meantime, I am still learning which challenges I should confront and which ones I should ignore in order to maintain my mental health. All of these experiences have occurred and continue to occur with costs both conscious and unconscious.

As an African American woman, the connections I make with other women and the support, advice, and encouragement that we share help me to negotiate the challenges. Over the years, I have had numerous conversations with women about the issues we face in order to be school leaders. Our jobs are demanding, and we make choices and sacrifices on a regular basis that affect our professional and personal lives. Additionally, oftentimes we are silenced. The very expression of our perceived costs may lead to consequences with which we may not be ready or able to deal. Therefore, with so much at stake, not only for our schools and our families but also for ourselves, the personal costs that female administrators negotiate must be appraised. These negotiated costs have consequences that impact us, our families and friends, our school districts, and our communities at large.

For that reason, the intention of my study was to examine the perceived personal costs that African American female central office administrators faced and to consider the strategies (Morris, 1999) used to meet these challenges while directing and leading in

urban school districts. What are the personal costs that African American female district-level administrators in urban settings negotiate and how are they regarded? Viewing the challenges and determining the ways African American female central office level administrators respond to the complexities of their personal costs in order to be executive educational leaders will offer an opportunity for selected members of this group to articulate the perceived personal cost. Others can recognize and appreciate the costs and the women's responses to them. Therefore, research is warranted in order to address the unique issues. I purposefully tapped into these issues as viewed through the lens of race and gender as an African American female researcher working in conjunction with other African American female central office executives. The specific group of central office African American women who work and lead in urban contexts experience race and gender simultaneously. Parker and ogilvie [sic] (1996) stated, "Research on leadership should benefit if we get away from White researchers studying White participants and then generalizing the findings across racial, ethnic and gender groups" (p. 191). Therefore, the findings are applicable to them and not generalized across other groups.

Overview of the Literature Review

The purpose of my research is to focus on African American women in educational leadership by drawing upon the experiences of women in order to inform. As we, researchers, educate one another to acquire a critical conscious, we can see how important airing diverse perspectives can be (hooks, 1990) in moving the field forward. As a result, I will contribute to the field by focusing on the standpoints of African

American female central office executives. In order to achieve my intention, I used literature related to feminist scholarship in educational leadership, Black feminist thought, intersectionality of race and gender, and biculturalism.

Women in Educational Leadership

Much of the work (Brown, Irby, & Iselt, 2002; Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 2003; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Pavan, 1999; Young & Skrla, 2003) involved with women in educational leadership concerns superintendents or principals. The women from whom I intend to draw knowledge are between the superintendency and the principalship. In addition, little research was found specifically addressing central office executives. For this reason, I selected pieces for my review of the literature from works related to women superintendents (Beekley, 1999), female leaders, and chief executive officers (CEOs) (Brunner, Grogan, & Prince, 2003; Clark, Caffarella, & Ingram, 1999; Hemel, 2005; Sixel, 2006) as well as some of the studies (Bloom & Erlandson; 2003; DeFelice, 2002; Loder, 2005) from research related to women principals. The purpose for these selections is recognition that the female educational leaders included in my study have high profile positions more closely aligned with the superintendency and positions of corporate CEOs. Yet, some costs drawn from the literature that include principals reflect costs central office leaders experience. In addition, my study may have bearing on African American women who seek or are called to serve in superintendency positions, since frequently women will evolve to the superintendency via teaching, then being a principal and a central office administrator (Beekley, 1999). Therefore, inclusion of

women in leadership literature is mandatory in laying the groundwork for my scholarship.

Feminist scholarship draws on the experience of women. With my intent to focus on research for women, I utilize R*econsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership* (Young & Skrla, 2003), which contains a multiplicity of references to guide our way as researchers. A purpose of the book, the authors wrote, is to assist those who are discovering or reexamining the literature on women in educational leadership. By capturing the essence of feminist research on women in educational leadership in one text, the authors allow novice researchers like me, and experienced investigators to have a compilation of representational literature. For my purposes, Young and Skrla's work is profound and several references from their work are utilized in my study related to the personal costs that African American women pay to be central office leaders in urban contexts.

Black Feminist Thought

Research that considers an African American female standpoint is necessary because the number of African American female superintendents is not increasing proportionally to the number of African American female school district executives currently serving as central office administrators or those who are certified to do so (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Therefore, the use of Black feminist thought is salient to my work due to the characteristics that Collins (2000) employs to conceptualize this framework. The six features of the framework are following. *Lived experience as a criteria for meaning* allows a standpoint that is personal and often taken for granted by

African American women. This particular contour of Black feminist thought provides merit for the exertion of effort that exists and has been given by African American women through their daily lives. The validation of the importance of these lives is offered.   When utilizing this lens to view the experiences of African American women through our understanding, Black feminist thought is highly valuable (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Taylor, 2001; Williams, Brewley, Reed, White, & Davis-Haley, 2005).

To appreciate the experiences of other African American women, I reflect on personal expressions shared with me. For instance, my mother imparted stories about growing up with a mother and father who worked each day outside of their home. My grandmother set expectations that her daughters would take care of one another and accomplish their chores as well as complete their schoolwork. Although my mother stayed at home, I learned from my grandmother's experience through my mother. My attitude is similar to my grandmother's because my daughters were frequently alone and they were responsible for completing their school assignments with little assistance from me. In addition, because they attended school outside of our home district, a family friend gave them a key to his home so they would have a place to do their work, have snacks and relax. Without his assistance, they would have to remain at my school until I finished my work as an educational administrator for the day. My grandmother's wisdom and my mother sharing her experiences influenced my behavior and acceptance of support for my work outside of my home.

The *use of dialogue* is another attribute of Black feminist thought and a means of articulating the experiences which define our lives. With a purpose of creating

interconnectedness and relationships, this characteristic is displayed in the work of

Dillard (2003), who notes that research requires a connection and responsibility to the

subjects as well as the reader. To make her work clear, she wants the reader to feel as if

a conversation is occurring. Similarly, Bloom (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p.18)

described "feeling connected" to the women in her study as they shared an

"understanding of oppression." Williams et al. (2005) discuss their study respondents

encouraging each other and drawing together because of articulated common

experiences and backgrounds.

Several studies (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Williams et al. 2005; Zook, 2006)

record African American women's uniqueness and capacity for empathy in Collins'

(2000) distinguishing factor *ethic of caring*. A pervasive sense of African American

women's actions to contribute to the community or to assist others in achieving is noted

(Johnson-Bailey, 1999). This caring is evidenced in the women's careers and vocations

that promote the betterment of the community or the individual especially through

education. African American women who are central office educational executives

frequently speak of their passion and motivation being fueled by making a difference in

the lives of students who face significant obstacles. They not only care about the

children, but they also hold themselves personally accountable for giving them the best

education.

An e*thic of personal accountability* is highlighted in the work of Dillard, 2003**;**

hooks, 1990; Perkins, 1993; and Williams et al. 2005. This ethic requires definite

positions on issues and assumes responsibility for arguing them while possibly

encountering personal risks. Yet, "Black women are not praised for their adaptability, courage, and resiliency in the face of grim odds" (Parker & ogilvie, 1996, p. 201). For example, as an assistant superintendent, I approach my work with integrity and sound reasoning. My role is to serve principals as they work with teachers who educate our youth. I work hard to make sure that my decisions are made by considering what is in the best interest of students. In addition, I try to be fiscally responsible when serving the students. Their needs must be met and money carefully spent even if it means that the school day structure is modified. When my supervisor expects me to put the needs of the organization first and ignore simple modifications which result in thousands of dollars being saved, I feel conflicted. When adult issues supersede student ones and money is mismanaged because of adult issues of control, I express my dissatisfaction. As a result, my behavior is viewed as not being a "team player," but my personal sense of accountability will not allow me to be silent to "get along." I feel responsible for supporting children in the schools and judiciously spending taxpayers' money.

Being thoughtful before acting and wise about decisions are behaviors that stem from reflecting on understandings. *Black women as agents of knowledge*, another feature of Black feminist thought, demonstrates a tradition of connecting lived experiences with intellectual work (Collins, 2000) and recognizing that two major movements, civil rights and women's liberation, have neglected to address issues of Black females (Brush, 1999). The wisdom of these agents comes from living and acknowledging the value of others who have reflected upon the lived experiences. The knowledge is shared in a variety of forms such as the words of community and family

members to provide hope and encouragement (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Zook, 2006), the choice of research agendas and published works in peer reviewed journals (Cozart & Price, 2005; Dillard, 2003; Houston, 2000), and plays, poems, and choreography that illuminate intelligence (Bell-Scott, 1994; Deavere Smith, 2000; Smith, 2000).

An example of choice of research agendas comes from my own scholarship. I have been chastised by intellectuals for selecting the topic for the doctoral record of study that I have. I have been accused of not considering the personal costs of other races and ethnic groups. It has been suggested that personal costs may be confirmed in feminist work so my work is not valued because I choose to view it from a Black feminist stance. This expression gives the impression that because White women experience some of the same personal costs; my work is not unique enough to contribute to knowledge. Standing firm in my resolve, I reclaim Black feminist intellectual tradition (Cozart and Price, 2005). I draw upon the words of Alice Walker as cited in Cozart and Price (2005), "I write not only what I want to read…understanding that if I don't do it, no one else will…I write all of the things I should have been able to read" (p. 175). A reader who makes personal connections is one who understands the text at hand. Consequently because of the scarcity of available literature related to this topic, other African American central office women would welcome the opportunity to read works to which they have a relationship.

The final characteristic, *toward universal truth,* in Collins's (2000) Black feminist thought framework, is cited in several studies (Brush, 1999; Dillard, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Loder, 2005). This characteristic points to understanding truth to

be situated in our own experiences in a certain point in time. Our seeking to understand the standpoints of others while recognizing that our own subjectivity is influenced by social conditions is another aspect of this characteristic. Believing that truth is particular rather than universal, we must identify unrecognized and unheralded works as we search for truth in unexpected places (Cozart and Price, 2005) and build coalitions with radically different thinkers (hooks, 1990; Smith, 2000a). In addition, we must recognize that our situations are influenced by the social conditions of race and gender experienced simultaneously.

Race and Gender Intersectionality

African American females encounter challenges that are unique to the group due to the influence of the combination of a marginalized race and gender perspective. Review of the education literature illuminated that research frequently considers race and gender as separate distinctions. However, Crenshaw (in Schiller, 2000) and Glenn (2002) explain that intersectionality is the study of the simultaneously experienced definitions of race and gender. Focus on the intersection (Brush, 1999; Collins, 2000; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Jackson, 2006; Johnson-Bailey, 1999) is limited and yet, Schiller (2000, p. 122) quoted Paula Giddings, "Black women are at the intersection of race, [and] gender." My research in understanding the personal costs considers the intersection of gender and race as it affected African American women in urban contexts as central office school district leaders. Thus, the integrated analysis of racial and gender social constructions (Glenn, 2002) are considered as I pursue my investigation.

As Dillard (2003) advocated, we must move beyond the biological constructions of race and gender and examine the social construction.

Biculturalism

Continuing with the literature review, my search took me to the notion of biculturalism as it related to African American females working and living in America. Parker and ogilvie (1996, p. 203) report the definition of biculturalism as the "challenge of managing the tensions between two cultural worlds (one Black and one White)." This dual and even sometimes triple movement of negotiating various cultures based on race, gender, and class factors is analyzed through several pieces of literature (Bloom and Erlandson, 2003; Parker and ogilvie, 1996; Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Zook, 2006).

Within predominately White, male, middle-class culturally-defined organizations, "African American women executives are more likely to suffer from the interactive effects of racial and gender discrimination" (Parker and ogilvie, 1996, p. 201). These women find themselves negotiating multiple roles in varied contexts and experience life as more than just a professional or a woman or a Black person (p. 204). Authors Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), cited very few examples of high achieving African American women who are not skilled in the craft of negotiating Black community culture as well as professional demands from a middle-class, White male culture. As African American female executives, we "are obliged to cross boundaries and straddle Black and White worlds" (p. 205).

While working in these two worlds, the need to constantly prove our capabilities and worth or to adapt to others' ill-at-ease feelings has caused mental and physical health issues for some African American women. This negative impact on a woman's psyche is associated with the personal costs that African American women experience when meeting role demands from bicultural living (Denton, 1990; Jones and Shorter, 2003). Many Black women seem to break down with the pressure of varied performance expectations in diverse arenas. We seem to lose some self-identity and personal integrity when we must adapt to and adopt so many varying roles.

Patterns of assimilation or accommodation are noted as African American females live. For instance, Houston (2000) illuminated the tremendous pressure exerted by the expectations of a middle-class, White male culture related to language. African American women must assimilate by adjusting our speaking patterns to be "as non-Black as possible" (p.13). In addition, because African American women must negotiate two worlds, we cannot afford to be fools but are required to be knowledgeable and wise (Collins, 2000; Williams et al., 2005) in order to address bicultural stress (Denton, 1990).

Personal Costs

The research literature that I have encountered has neglected to define "personal costs." Very few researchers have acknowledged the personal costs and even fewer have attempted to review these issues from an African American female standpoint. In order to successfully tackle the issues raised about and by personal costs, it was imperative that I attach concrete meaning to the phrase personal cost, from an educational

perspective. I, therefore, reviewed some literature that identified some ideas related to personal costs and I have grouped the studies under headings. I selected topics I have encountered through personal conversations with women school executives and from readings that I believed represented these costs.

The costs identified in the literature included several studies (Brunner, 2000; Prince, Brunner, & Grogan, 2003) that noted the women's voices that are lost in aggregate data sets because as African Americans their numbers are inconsequential. With such small numbers women are under scrutiny due to the combination of race and gender (Jackson, 1998; Williams et al., 2005) or gender alone (Sixel, 2005). These women in the work force may also be homemakers and experience costs due to their multiple roles (Hochschild, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, 1999; Parker & ogilvie, 1997). Considering their role as primary caretaker, women may postpone leadership positions (Hemel, 2005; Loder, 2005; Ramsey, 1997) to fulfill the requirements of caring for children or elderly parents without the added burden of additional job responsibilities.

Within the work environment there are specific issues that women face (Aguirre, 2000). Brunner (2000) and Gewertz (2006) highlighted behaviors that when exhibited by men were viewed positively, yet when women exhibited the same behaviors, they were viewed negatively. For example, a man focusing on task completion is labeled "driven" and a woman displaying the same behavior is considered "cold and hard-nosed." Additionally, women were required to be more qualified by having more experience, more certification or more education than White men in order to compete in the job market (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999). Once women

were offered positions of school system leadership, they may have to accept less pay to be superintendents (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Gewertz, 2006). While in the work context, women's responsibilities as role models (Brunner, 2000; Evans, 2003) and relationship builders (Brunner, 2000; Ely, 1994; Myers & Ginsberg, 1994; Parker & ogilvie, 1996) are viewed as requirements for female leaders. Added to my definition of personal costs are studies that address women's issues related to mental and physical health (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Scott, 2003) and the work environment.

The following subheadings I use are comments that I have heard since becoming an administrator and which, to me, express some of the personal costs as noted above, that female leaders experience.

"How do you do it?"

Female leaders draw attention (Sixel, 2005), and African American female leaders' scrutiny is intensified (Zook, 2006). Women superintendents reported the need to insulate themselves from constant public attention and comments about their families, homes, clothing and general physical appearance (Beekley, 1999; Pavan, 1999; Ramsey, 1997) because of their gender and unique roles. Likewise, African American women who are administrators also may endure similar scrutiny. For example, when I received my first administrative job in an urban school district, many people knew me because I was one of two African American secondary school administrators. It was common for me to be described by my complexion, race and gender, and then to be quickly recognized. In fact, one of the reasons I was even interviewed at the particular school district was as a result of a recent lawsuit settlement involving racial discrimination. The

suit contended that the district consciously excluded people of color from consideration for administrators. Therefore, my physical appearance was a benefit for getting an interview but my skill had to prevail.

"I need a wife."

This request calls for someone, usually a woman, to carry on the duties and daily chores such as childcare, food shopping and preparation, and household cleaning. These are the tasks that are performed by women in the "second shift" as Hochschild (1989) explained. They also are the ones that become increasingly difficult to manage when women become administrators. Shortly after my hiring as an administrator, I was encouraged to apply for a principalship but I declined because I had small children. I could not fathom caring for my family and tackling a principalship without live-in help. That arrangement was not an option for me because I had neither the space in my home nor the financial means to support such assistance.

Therefore, as an assistant principal, I recall partnering with another single, female administrator to address my childcare needs because her children were ten years older than mine. I would provide rides to some of her high schoolers' events and in exchange, they would babysit my girls. Frequently we shared meals together because we could understand the challenges each faced as mothers who were also secondary school administrators.

"I can bring home the bacon, fry it up in the pan, and never let you forget you're my man," lyrics from a popular perfume commercial in the late 1970s, gives the impression of the superwoman (Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The roles expressed

are contradictory (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). Not only is the expectation that female

central office leaders handle their jobs with care and efficiency but also handle their

homes as well. These cultural expectations dictate that women may work outside of the

home but the family must always receive care and attention. Societal expectations lead

to personal stress or negative health issues for women. As a result the family needs "a

wife," people (the use of the plural is intentional due to the gravity of the

responsibilities) to carry on the roles and behaviors associated with women.

"Affects your health…"

Although, women often lament excessive weight gain, high blood pressure,

diabetes, foot problems, lack of exercise, and other negative health issues, I have not yet

encountered much literature that documents well the physical costs of African American

female executive school district leaders. Considering the number of female school

district administrators who experience some sort of negative physical impact partially

related to the position, I found educational research in this area sorely lacking.

However, Scott (2003) discussed the psychological cost of female superintendents when

they have to strike a balance between being too "feminine" and too "masculine."

Having to negotiate this balance can be costly for African American women.

The psychological quandary of constantly having to second guess my actions and to

consider how others perceive them is often frustrating. It has been my experience as a

central office executive that I am frequently in a precarious position. I must not be "too

smart," (masculine) by having good ideas, defending them, or questioning decisions by

asking, "why?" which may intimidate supervisors. If I do then, I am perceived as having

a bad attitude. On the other hand, I cannot be "too soft," (feminine) by getting approval for every decision or action before implementation, which may cause me to lose the respect of those I lead. I experience this predicament as a disappointing waste of time when I feel that my energy is better spent finding and solving problems, which hinder student success. Fortunately for me, I have an exercise partner who listens to my bemoaning and who helps to keep me focused on my purpose as an administrator, which is to lead those who educate students. After many miles, I am renewed with a plan of action or at least exhausted enough to let it go. For me, this exercise allows for physical and mental well-being; however, based on my personal conversations I am aware that this coping strategy is not the norm for many African American women.

"Act like a man…

Act like a man but keep in mind how women are perceived will be differently and not always positively. Adopting male characteristics such as those mentioned in the previous paragraph as well as using harsh, demanding, or belittling tones of voice can be harmful to women because words or behaviors exhibited by men and positively perceived may have very negative consequences for women. Additionally, African American females frequently display leadership characteristics that are identified as Anglo male responses and others that are Anglo female modes of behaving (Parker & ogilvie, 1996). We may be labeled as too aggressive (White male characteristic) and as failing to create a non-conflicting environment (White female mode of behaving). Balancing actions and perceptions can be very stressful especially when our leadership styles cross White gender norms and thus define us as androgynous (p. 196).

"You've got to leave at five."

Very often, women, no matter what their race or ethnicity, do not leave the office at five o'clock when a typical work day ends. Work demands require them to work longer hours. Long hours at work diminish quality of personal and family life and may result in the leader sacrificing friendships and family relationships. The key to being patient is having something to do while you wait. Therefore, Pavan (1999) suggested that families have outside interests to cope with the wife/mother's demanding work schedule. Even with the family and friends' cooperation and understanding, the female educational executive must expend time nurturing these relationships, both the professional and personal ones.

Statement of the Problem

The focus of my inquiry is to identify the personal costs that African American female administrators experience as they work and lead in district-level urban educational settings. We do not know enough about the personal costs women pay to do the job. By investigating the personal costs and analyzing the data, I identified the acknowledged costs African American female central office administrators face. Identifying the personal costs and the ways African American women cope extends our understanding.

Although when I began in administration I had two children younger than second grade and a spouse, I worked 10- and 12-hour days. As a campus administrator, my personal life was being squeezed by the professional life (Clark, Caffarella, and Ingram, 1999) and I frequently heard, "I don't know how you do it, working and taking care of

your family." The socially constructed expectations of professional women (Hemel, 2005; Young, 2003) questioned how I could be successful in my career and my home life to the levels required because both roles demand exorbitant amounts of attention. The expectations perpetuated the myth of a superwoman; a woman can do it all *because* she is a woman and societal constructs hold her to that expectation (Hochschild, 1989).

Collins (2000) in the forward of her book apologizes to her family for subjecting them to many nights of fast food while she updated her work on Black feminist thought. She, like many women, expressed guilt over not fulfilling socially expected gender roles. For me, as circumstances would have it, my family life was affected ultimately. I wondered if a lack of attention to the family via cooking, cleaning and devoting time was a cause for tension and growing distance between my husband and me. Whatever the reasons, I divorced and raised the girls to womanhood as a single parent while I continued my work as a principal.

Many years have passed since the cautionary words were shared with me. In the interim I have encountered other female school administrators who have lamented the personal costs they have expended to fulfill their professional roles. The demands of their executive responsibilities have in some way affected their relationships (Blount, 2004; Myers and Ginsberg, 1994) whether heterosexual or same-sex, included scrutiny of every action, demeanor, or physical characteristic (Beekley, 1999; Gewertz, 2006; Mendez-Morse, 2003; Pavan, 1999; Ramsey, 1997; Sixel, 2005), created emotional and health-related issues (Beekley, 1999; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Scott, 2003), or a combination of the issues noted which create a culture that is just not supportive of

women in leadership positions (Beekley, 1999). Most of the women I observed who discussed their personal costs served as teachers and building principals prior to their movement to the central office as administrators. Their stories were somewhat similar, however during these informal discussions, African American women expressed some subtle nuances. These differences include being the only one (African American female) in their level of leadership position, feeling odd because their ways of leadership do not fit the expectations of the majority group, being the champion of the "underdog" and arguing the cause, or hearing certain phrases that automatically trigger the race of the person being described. Their personal costs are more fully explored through their recounting of their experiences.

Many questions arise whether discrimination or sacrifice is related to race, gender, or an intersection of those characteristics. African American women express conflict concerning representation of race or gender. For instance, whether or not disagreement with a Black male constitutes disloyalty to the race (Simien, 2004) is a concern expressed. My exploration was not a comparison of women of color and Anglo females or even to African American males. The investigation was strictly of African American women's life events and their responses to those events which highlight the personal costs they negotiate, however similar or dissimilar those experiences (Houston, 2000; Simien, 2004) may be. My work involved uncovering and bringing value to the participants' recollections (Tillman, 2002). In addition, how do their recollections of their personal costs affect their work as central office school district leaders?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of my research study was to examine the personal costs and to expose those costs through the voices of three African American female central office executives in urban school districts in Houston, Texas. Through their stories, the costs they pay, the consequences, and the ways they cope were expressed. The potential contribution was to provide a systematic investigation into the implications of going forward as African American female school district leaders. I sought to give voice to the women who are participants and to promote the utilization of their knowledge and skills as they affect the labor market. Additionally, I sought to augment the current research related to African American women. Hence, my research considered their needs, interests, and experiences in order to inform. Foremost, this contribution was to the research *for* African American women.

Because we do not have enough research-based knowledge related to this topic, my research is relevant to a host of audiences. The primary audience is other African American female urban central office executives whose experiences and challenges may be similar to the women in the study.   To that end, however, the research will also benefit several groups in the educational community who interact with this group, such as African American female urban central office executives' mentors, superintendents for whom they work, school boards that may employ them, and schools of education that prepare these leaders. Another target group is the families and friends of African American female urban educational leaders who support their loved ones. Therefore, the purpose of this research was to focus on the personal costs, thereby enlightening readers

and researchers who may then work to improve the circumstances of African American female urban central office executives by addressing these personal costs.

Research Questions

I do know that as an African American female, personal costs occur because I have lived them and informally I have heard the stories of other women. As a result, I expected complexity and ambiguity as I proceeded in this study. Sadly, I have not encountered much literature that focuses exclusively on African American females and the personal costs negotiated. In addition, I know that without a research focus, the personal costs that African American female central office administrators encounter are negated or minimized and as Loder (2005) interprets, "Until a group is aware of their subjective injustices, little change will be made" (p.771). Seemingly, unless African American female urban administrators explain the personal costs they negotiate, they and others who follow will continue to pay the price until those inflicting the injustice are enlightened. Therefore, my research is important because of the impact these women have on the lives of students through their professional careers, and the impact on their families and friends through their personal lives.

"Women are viewed as women first and administrators second" (Grogan, 2000, p.124). Consequently, I examined what the personal costs are that African American female administrators experience and perceive with the dual adjectives (Aguirre, 2000; Dillard, 2003; Schiller, 2000) that precede their title of administrator. Through this research, I seek answers to the questions:

1. What are the personal costs these women perceive?

2. What consequences do these personal costs contribute to their lives and roles as African American female central office educational leaders?

3. In what ways do they cope with the challenges borne by the personal costs?

Overview of the Method

Epistemological Frame

My research focus was an examination of the personal costs that African American female, urban central office executives negotiate. As a result, I considered feminist and Black feminist epistemology to guide my work. Feminist literature is work that "explores the significance of gender relations" and issues (Grogan, 2000). In addition feminist research takes the needs, interests, and experiences of women into account to improve their lives in some way. This feminist stance alone, however, is insufficient for my research. Equally important to note is that the data sources for my study are African American. Hence, I view the work from a standpoint which concurrently reflects race and gender and I utilize a Black Feminist epistemological frame. This "theoretical construct is appropriate for explaining and understanding the experiences of African American women" (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p.19). As a result, my selection of this framework was purposeful to be sure that the complex roles and multiple identities that African American women face are taken into consideration as I conduct my study.

To specifically consider that the women in my study are African American, I framed my work employing the tenets of Black Feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2003; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). The framework at first glance might seem to be

a cross of feminist and critical race theories. However, my aim for using this epistemology was to conduct research with this unique group of African American women, by recognizing the intersection of race and gender in their lives (Glenn, 2002; Simien and Clawson, 2004). Simultaneously, I acknowledged their voices related to the personal costs they encountered as they performed their work as urban central office executives.

Using a Black feminist standpoint moved me toward truth that is situated in socially influenced experiences and conditions. My personal charge was to utilize Black feminist thought in such a way that I would be "reclaiming Black women's ideas [that] involves discovering, analyzing and reinterpreting the works and ideas of Black women" (Collins, 2000, p.29). Some examples of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000) I employed to analyze the data are lived experiences as criterion for meaning, Black women as agents of knowledge, the use of dialogue, the ethic of caring and the ethic of personal accountability. Therefore, during and after interviewing the African American women who I selected to provide data for my research, I was responsible for justifying the claims and categories I purported in a thoughtful systematic way.

As a result, my investigation was performed using qualitative research methodology. The use of qualitative study was elected because my work was inductive combined with grounding in Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000; Creswell, 2003; Huberman and Miles, 1994). Additionally, using this research methodology allowed for "unedited, uncensored, women talk" (Bell-Scott, 1994; Brunner, 2000). Although this

form of articulation has been a part of teaching in the African American community, it is not widely utilized in the representation of research (Dillard, 2003).

In the typical research recipe, or "ways of knowing," the researcher is often detached, (Creswell, 2003) which did not fit my style. The small number of participants and the very personal nature of the questioning I employed, required trust and an attachment to the respondents. In thinking about this need for connection, I looked to the work of Dillard (2003) in which the researcher was an integral part of the research study. The research she undertakes necessitated a connection and a responsibility to the persons and communities being engaged in the work. As a result, I decided to seek data sources that share some biological and sociological commonalities with me. Traditional researchers may perceive this close association as a limitation to the study. Conversely, it is the responsibility of the researcher to select methodology which closely aligns with the intended study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985is the reason I intentionally used these data sources and qualitative methodology for conducting my inquiry.

Overview of the Data Sources and Site Selection

African American females who are current central office level administrators and whose responsibilities as such require them to supervise school principals who are situated in urban school districts are the data contributors for my study. These characteristics were selected because of the dearth of research related to African American female central office executives and the small number of women who fall into this category. The women hold positions in school districts that require them to work outside of a school, most notably in a central or district office. Their administrative roles

are leaders of the school district without having the title of general superintendent.

Instead, these women have titles such as deputy, assistant, or area superintendent.

Additionally, they are not building level administrators such as principals. I refer to

them as executive educational leaders, central office executives or school district level

leaders. Also, their educational work environments are contained within Houston,

Texas. My research highlights their perceived and acknowledged personal costs as

African American females in high-level administrative positions and their possible

candidacy for superintendent positions.

Overview of Data Collection

The data were collected from semi-structured interviews. Bernard (2002) defines

semi-structured interviews as having a focus and an interview guide while allowing for

further probing. During interviews, respondents have an intentional means for recalling

experiences and feelings. The opportunities to deepen responses and discussions were

important factors as the women shared their stories. Some specific questions were asked

as we explored the perceived personal costs, however in order for the women to share

candidly I permitted time for the women's direction of the conversation. The

conversation stimulated further questions and encouraged new leads. This type of

interviewing also allowed the respondents to share the control of the semi-structured

interview.

The data collection plan also considered the environment, time, and accuracy of

the collection. Therefore, these interviews were conducted in an environment that was

the participants' choice. I met with each woman personally and individually, rather than

one large group of respondents, to increase the level of security of the conversation. In addition, out of respect for their time and in appreciation of their participation, I accommodated their schedules and met in the mornings, afternoons or evenings as they requested. Furthermore, to capture accurately the story of the costs these women have negotiated, each interview was tape-recorded. Once the interview was transcribed, I sent the transcription to the appropriate woman to solicit her clarifications or additions to the information she provided.

Overview of Data Analysis

As Laible (2003) insisted researchers must "consider the purpose, content, and results of our research with regard to how well it fits the lives of those studied and how it will affect a positive change" (p. 189).   Therefore, analysis of the data was on-going. I first looked for the women's definitions of personal costs and how they coped with the costs. While reviewing the transcripts and unitizing the data, I also looked for emerging themes. As I continued marking the text and coding, I noted the themes that were powerful because the categories were either chock full of excerpts or had only one or two words, sentences or phrases (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In addition, I categorized the data according to core characteristics of Black feminist epistemology. Later I divided the data into distinctions that were most closely associated with family or work themes.

Overview of Trustworthiness and Creditability

For the women included in the study to see themselves as partners in this research effort, I expressed my appreciation for their willingness to participate and I

discussed with them my desire to accurately reflect their stories. Creswell (1998)

stresses the necessity for gaining the participants' confidence and qualitative research

demands that trustworthiness is achieved (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The taped

research interviews were conducted face-to-face. I began with an explanation of the

reason for the research and my personal background. Then, I spent some time getting to

know the women and to assuage any trepidation they may have about their participation

or the presentation of the data and findings. I assured them that they had control to stop

the tape at any time. Additionally, in any other written documents, I protected their

identities and the identities of their districts with pseudonyms to minimize any harm. To

capture an accurate translation of what I heard and what the participants meant during

the interviews, I offered the opportunity to make any additions or clarifications to the

transcripts.

　　　　During subsequent interviews, I clarified the data and engaged in deeper

discussion with the women to make certain that what I reflected was as close to the

"truth" as possible. I sought to maintain trustworthiness and credibility to the

respondents and my integrity as a researcher. In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research,*

second edition, Denzin and Lincoln (2000) and the host of researchers who contributed

to this work, clearly note that trustworthiness and credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

may be achieved through member checks. In any case, I sought to build trustworthiness

and credibility by having colleagues review the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The

purpose of these member checks was to create a high level of comfort in the truthfulness

of the data.

Significance of the Study

Because little attention in literature has been paid to the personal costs that African American female central office leaders in urban contexts face, my study was meaningful. Most studies as mentioned previously and those following in the review of the literature focus on women educational leaders who have been situated in the principalship or superintendency, not in the central office. Even less scholarly work has investigated the personal costs African American female educational leaders negotiate in urban areas. Grogan (1999), in her work regarding race, class and gender as it relates to female administrators, attested that little study has been recorded specifically regarding females of color, and as a result their contributions have been marginalized. Therefore, the time has come for study of the personal costs, which impact African American women who are central office administrators in urban contexts. Their perspectives were important research for women.

Grogan (2000) described the traditional educational leadership literature as focusing on males, especially Anglo males, and consequently "provide(s) only a partial understanding of" what the female experience is. Noteworthy was the fact that women comprise only 7.1% of the nation's superintendencies (Montegnegro, 1993), and of these positions an African American woman fills about one percent. Grogan (2003, p. 16) also noted, "A superintendent is not encouraged to put family needs first." As a result, many women may shy away from the position. Her recommendation was to view the superintendency from the "perspective of the potential superintendent "and to consider the needs and demands the potential superintendent candidate may face.

In the future, women of color most likely will comprise the pool of administrators considered for superintendencies in urban areas as indicated by current practices (Jackson, 2006). Likewise, the settings that African American females currently are offered in which to lead (Grogan, 1999) are urban areas. Considering that these superintendent positions may be filled from the ranks of the central office administrators, it is noteworthy that most executive women are in the central office in the curriculum and instruction department (Prince, Brunner, & Grogan, 2003) as opposed to other departments or jobs within a school district. As a result, the very women who occupy central office positions in urban local school districts and provided data for my study may either very well be future superintendents or the findings from the data they imparted may impact future urban superintendents.

In order to provide a voice which may lead to a fuller understanding of the lack of gender and ethnic diversity of our nation's superintendents and how to overcome this reality, I examined the personal costs that African American females must negotiate to be successful educational executives. In 1998, 33% of the area, associate, deputy and assistant superintendents in the United States were women (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). If the central office is a possible pipeline for the superintendency, then it is equally important to influence that pipeline by discovering the costs that African American females negotiate and those which may keep them from seeking the superintendency. I focused my study on three African American female educational executives who are not superintendents but who hold or held high-ranking positions

within their urban school districts. They imparted stories of the personal costs they perceive they have paid, and the ways they overcome them.

Investigation of the personal costs these women negotiated as they go about their work as district educational leaders was important. Research (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006) indicates that the number of African American female superintendents is not increasing proportionally to the number of African American female school district executives currently serving as central office administrators or those who are certified to do so. Consequently research, which considers an African American female standpoint, is necessary to identify some of the factors which may inhibit African American females from seeking school district leadership.

Due to the intense job issues African American female educational leaders face (Aguirre, 2000; Alston, 2005; Jackson, 2006; Ramsey, 1997) and the high probability of their leadership as urban superintendents, (Gewertz, 2006; Grogan, 1999) recognition through research of the personal costs African American central office females encounter is warranted. I proceeded by asking three African American women who are educational executives to define what they perceive to be the personal costs, to identify the consequences of the costs, to describe how they currently manage those costs, and to offer their recommendations. Once I gathered the data, I organized it according to issues related to their families and to their jobs.

The personal costs the women pay may be inhibiting their professional aspirations. For two of the women moving to the job of the superintendent from their current positions is unattractive. As I sought to contribute to the research *for* women,

especially African American women, and thus a valued way of knowing, I reflected on the desires, interests, and experiences of these women as it relates to the personal costs they negotiate as urban school district leaders. Utilizing the findings to inform other African American women central office executives, as well as those who interact with them, may indirectly and positively impact urban educational systems.

Organization of This Record of Study

This record of study is organized in five chapters and a reference section. Chapter I provides the purpose and significance of my study, an examination of the personal costs that African American female central office educational leaders in urban contexts negotiate. Chapter II is a presentation of the intersection of the pertinent literature related to this topic. Considered is the literature concerning women in educational leadership, Black feminist thought, race and gender intersectionality, and biculturalism as it relates to African American women in America. Chapter III describes the methodology, data sources, data collection, and data analysis. Interpretation of the data and record of the findings are included in Chapter IV. Chapter V provides the conclusions and implications for further research. This record of study concludes with references.

Definitions

For the purposes of this study, I defined some terms that I consistently use while pursuing this investigation. Depending on the publication date of the literature I selected to cite, African American and Black are words used to refer to people of African descent who live in the United States. I used these terms inter-changeably but most often I used

the term, African American, since this is a more commonly accepted label used lately. Important to note was that my work included African American women in the United States. I made this distinction, however, because I recognized that using the term Black can also be related to people who are of African descent but who live in other countries.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

While examining the personal costs African American females encounter as urban central office educational executives, I attempted, through a review of pertinent literature, to determine and to describe the personal costs that these women negotiate and how that may impact their lives and their work. Additionally, I explored, listened to the words of the respondents and organized their expressions in a meaningful way for those involved, the participants including the researcher and the reader. These benefits were due to the utilization of qualitative methodology. Therefore, this investigation was viewed through several lenses. Disclosing the intersection of various categories thus gave rise to the fundamentality of my research.

The challenge for me was to utilize appropriate pieces of literature, which helped to frame my study. Finding little work published exclusively about female central office administrators and, more specifically, African American female, I relied on a variety of literature, which includes superintendents and principals. As a result, in this document, I first reviewed studies related to women in educational leadership and then move to literature associated with Black feminist thought. From there, I examined the intersection of race and gender from a sociological standpoint and follow with an examination of the bicultural experience of African American women. These lenses provided voluminous work. Therefore, I selected those works related to educational careers, to the intersection of race and gender relationships, and to African American women's experiences to assist in focusing my research topic and to help guide my

research questions. These studies framed my inquiry in exploring the personal costs that African American female central office administrators negotiate in urban arenas.

Women in Educational Leadership

Historical Perspective

Turning to the literature related to women in educational leadership, I encountered a piece published in the Review of Educational Research in 1981. The author, Julia Adkison, wrote that research on women in leadership was gaining increasing attention. The work of Dr. Adkison was funded through a grant from the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education under the auspices of the Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA). Her focus was a review of the work regarding women in leadership published since 1974. In the abstract, she commented that most of the work found in unpublished doctoral dissertations had been reviewed by Charol Shakeshaft and therefore, her review centered on published work. In her analysis of the published articles, she revealed the small body of work related to minority women in education. Thus, her notation gave meaning for my work as I examined the personal costs that African American female educational leaders continue to face three decades since WEEA was enacted and Dr. Adkison conducted her review.

In 2001 WEEA was reauthorized, highlighting the continued importance of research related to women in educational leadership. Two years after the reauthorization, and despite comments that attention to female research agendas was excessive, *Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership* (Young and Skrla, 2003) was published. This work, coupled with WEEA's reauthorization, caused

me to reflect that feminist research should be the basis of my research agenda in my quest for a doctoral degree. As I sought to contribute to the field of education, I recalled the work of Young and Skrla (2003) that cited Denzin and Lincoln. They recognized a point in time when "deep reflection and examination are required to move forward" (p. 2), and influenced my research focus.

Highlighting the need for feminist research, for example, was the creation of gender inequalities and the maintenance of those inequalities within school systems that are addressed by the work of Young and Skrla (2003). The theme of inequality was documented in the fact that researchers and practitioners in the field of educational leadership are predominately men (Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 2003) and understood to be Anglo men. Most texts about the superintendency were written for and about men (Brunner, 2000). Consequently, if men are the researchers and the practitioners, it was from their perspectives that best practices were identified (Aguirre, 2000; Barton, 2005; Grogan, 2003). The inclusion of women's perceptions of their worlds was critical to developing complete scholarship (Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 2003) while considering that those who own the power have the ability to define good practice and ignore the feminine (Barton, 2005).

A feminist research focus must be extended to include more work by and for women of color, especially African American females (Banks, 1995; Roth, 2006; Taylor, 2001). As I considered the research on women in educational leadership and how it has risen and ebbed over the course of the years, I turned to the introduction of *Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership,* where I located the

authors' examination of the topics in which research related to women in educational

leadership was identified. Young and Skrla (2003) categorized significant research,

which asked how and why phenomena such as few women in upper administration exist.

Using their topics as guides, I noted other researchers who espoused similar research

agendas and hence added credence to the importance of the inclusion of my scholarship

as a female African American educational administrator in an urban context. To further

define the value for feminist research, I specifically noted the personal costs that women

and especially African American women negotiated to be educational leaders. Some of

the costs overlapped with other ethnic groups of women; however my focus was to

highlight the costs that African American women identify.

Negotiated Costs

While exploring the world of female educational leaders, Scott (2003) wrote,

"Women are not the center of the action…their world revolves around the schedules and

enterprises …of others as they coordinate and hold the threads of many lives together"

(p.86). These women cared deeply about the people in their organizations and this

caring was expected as part of being feminine (Brunner, 2000). Not only was the

expectation that female superintendents run their districts, but they managed their homes

as well. Cultural expectations dictate that female work was centered on the home and

family (Glenn, 2002; Goldberg, 2002). In addition to caring for the people at the

workplace, female executives may be conflicted as they continued their traditional roles

of women as caretaker and homemaker (Hochschild, 1989; Myers and Ginsburg, 1994).

The impression that females can do it all, every day, was an expectation, however, that

may lead to stress in women who lacked the sufficient support systems. These systems

may include "domestic help, social support, and companionship of committed partners"

(Blount, 2004, p.103). An example of these expectations came from DeFelice (2002)

who shared a piece of writing on her typical day as a school leader, wife, and mother,

and noted that her "me time" lasted about 5 minutes during which time she fell asleep.

This "me time" occurred after she had come home from work, cared for her children and

tucked them into bed. Meanwhile, her husband regularly spent three hours at the driving

range. Gender roles in traditional marriages caused women to experience challenges in

having a career while meeting family life expectations (Blount, 2004; Herber, 2002;

McFadden & Smith, 2002; Myers and Ginsburg, 1994).

     "I don't know how you do it; your work and taking care of your family." This is

a comment that I heard as a married female with children working as an administrator in

an urban school district. The implication of this statement was that as a female

administrator, I must still carry on the duties and daily chores such as childcare, food

shopping and preparation, and household cleaning that women in the home usually

fulfill. Hochschild (1989) in her seminal work called it the "second shift." Social forces

impacted expectations related to gender (Aguirre, 2000; Hemel, 2005) as represented by

women who expressed guilt over not fulfilling their roles as wives, mothers, and

caregivers. Despite the long hours women superintendents (or other female central office

executives) worked, there was frequently an expectation that she would give 150% when

she was at home as well. Women are faced with contradictory roles (Ruderman &

Ohlott, 2002), "you can have a career like your father but you should be like your

mother and make the family your number one priority." This societal expectation can lead to personal costs for women (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Frequently women are compared to men (Cox and Nkomo, 1990), even though women's experiences in education were deeper than a simple comparison, and those unique experiences require explicit study. Authors Young and Skrla (2003) recognized distinctive aspects of women's lives and documented these through a selection of feminist studies of gender, socialization, and the power of language in the production of inequity. Scott (2003) discussed the psychological cost to female superintendents when they have to strike a balance between being too "feminine" and too "masculine." Women may feel it necessary to act like a man, but they must also keep in mind how they are perceived. The perception may be different and not always positive.

Even the communication of females may cause personal consternation in the work place. Adopting socially constructed male characteristics can be harmful to women because words or behaviors associated with men and positively perceived may have very negative or conflicting consequences for women (Gewertz, 2006; Taylor, 2001). They may be labeled as too aggressive rather than assertive, or too dictatorial rather than taking a lead. Feminist leaders seek to create environments that are collaborative, are participatory, and work for issues of social justice (Barton, 2005). How, then, do African American women perceive these characteristics and at what personal cost? What are the consequences and how do they cope? Considering these questions created the necessity of study with African American female central office

level educational executives, especially as they consider greater leadership roles, such as the superintendency (Bjork & Keedy, 2001).

Balancing actions and perceptions can be very stressful (Gewertz, 2006) and unsettling (Brunner, 2000). Conflict arises for women when they wield power within their work environment and yet the female gendered identity is not to have power (Barton, 2005; Morris, 1999; Scott, 2003). For some women, their success is empowering others and sharing power (Barton, 2005; Morris, 1999). Morris (1999) cited Gallos who suggested that without relationships of shared power women reported feeling less fulfilled (p. 354). Conflict causing stress surfaces in emotional speech, as well. Emotional speech is construed as being feminine (Scott, 2003), yet the superintendency is defined in masculine terms (Brunner, 2000; Scott, 2003), such as "powerful, authoritative, decisive, politically astute and competent" (Scott, 2003, p.83). Controlling emotions as much as possible is so important because for female leaders "attitude makes an enormous difference" (Zook, 2006, p. 192).

Being emotional is considered to be weak (Holtkamp, 2002), and yet there is "good" emotion, which spurs people to action and engages their passion. Scott (2003, p. 95) pointed out, "District staff, particularly the males, generally regard emotions, even the 'good' ones, as something to be controlled, handled, or contained." This type of control, at least in the public arena, allowed the female to be viewed or to perceive herself as gender neutral (Brunner, 2000; Morris, 1999; Skrla, 2003) and to master the art of the corporate demeanor (Zook, 2006). Morris (1999) described one female administrator who compartmentalizes her life. When she is at home she is a wife and

mother and when she is at work she is "neither male nor female, just an administrator" (p. 352). The implication was that the lack of gender associations may contribute to a positive perception and ultimately to her success. However, what cost must she pay personally to be viewed as genderless?

Consistent scrutiny was another personal cost women may encounter. With such small numbers of female superintendents (Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Brunner, 2000; Skrla, 2003), women are highly visible (Aguirre, 2000) for their physical characteristics. Sixel (2005) reported that some people think that females, who are chief executive officers (CEOs), draw additional scrutiny due to their leadership roles and subsequent high visibility. Likewise, women who are superintendents often characterize their lives as one of living in a fishbowl. The community not only judged their behavior but inspected their hair, make-up, clothing, and families. Beekley (1999) described one superintendent who worried that she should take extra time when dressing to go to the market because there would be talk about the color of her sweatpants. The author continued quoting the husband of a superintendent, "Your private life is pretty much wide open" (p.168). The women in Beekley's study lamented the "heightened visibility" (p.178). Everyday actions became the topic of public attention (Ramsey, 1997) and every aspect of their lives was scrutinized. Several female superintendents talked about living outside of the districts that they served to provide some anonymity (Beekley, 1999; Pavan, 1999). As a result, their weekends were devoted to their families and this distance served as a safe-haven (p. 120). Important to note, however, is the requirement of many school districts'

policies that the superintendent live within the district's boundary. Therefore, escaping high levels of visibility may be problematic.

Furthering the imbalance of the underrepresentation of women in high-paying leadership positions (Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Gewertz, 2006; Kowalski and Stouder, 1999; Young and Skrla 2003), is the reality that men achieved administrative positions at a rate which far exceeded women (Bjork and Keedy, 2001; Brunner, 2000; Skrla, 2003a), despite the fact that many more female administrative candidates existed due to the number of female students in educational administration classes (Brunner, 2000), and there were a greater number of females in the profession (Alston, 1999; Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Scott, 2003). The small number of women superintendents was also attributed to an employment process, which limited the opportunities for increasing a female hiring percentage (Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Jackson, 2006; Norton, Webb, Dlugosh, & Sybouts, 1996; Tallerico, 2000).

In addition to the small number of women, Dana and Bourisaw (2006) cited a Babcock and Laschever study that showed the inequity by revealing that even when women achieved a position of educational leadership such as the superintendency, they may still earn less than a man because they are less likely to negotiate the financial remuneration package. Or, as one African American female superintendent observed, there was concern whether a woman and a long-time district employee had the capabilities of handling the job, and therefore she was offered less salary than was posted for the position (Gewertz, 2006). Considering this lack of female representation in positions of educational leadership and the circumstances that caused this dearth to

continue, the time was suitable for my study which focused on the personal costs that African American women pay to be district level leaders in urban districts and subsequently, the loss of possible superintendent candidates.

Women experience elimination and silencing in ways such as the "glass ceiling" (Clark, Caffarella, & Ingram, 1999; Jackson, 2006), or in the case of some, a "concrete ceiling" when they are *told* they don't *want* to be administrators (Marshall, 2003), their experiences are ignored or marginalized in literature (Young & Skrla, 2003), and as women's leadership characteristics are based on male understandings (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). These types of silencing of women's experiences and the gender expectations are captured quite well in the frequently undocumented leadership actions of Chicanas (Mendez-Morse, 2003). A characteristic of Chicana feminism, Mendez-Morse wrote, is the reclaiming of the leadership of Mexican and Mexican American women. The author shared the story of Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, a woman in the seventeenth century "who was often criticized for being too masculine" (Mendez-Morse, 2003, p.164). This criticism it seems, stemmed from her writings, her skill in speaking out, and her failure to obey her superiors. Her actions exemplified breaking out of a mold and not accepting minimal acknowledgement (Mendez-Morse, 2003).

As women work as leaders, other costs are articulated. Another cost female central office executives described was related to health issues. Although women often lamented excessive weight gain, high blood pressure, diabetes, foot problems, lack of exercise, and other negative health issues, I have not yet encountered much literature, which adequately documents the physical costs of executive leadership, although stress

was noted in several studies (Aguirre, 2000; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Scott, 2003). Considering the number of female school leaders who reported experiencing some sort of negative physical impact of the position, I found educational research in this area sorely lacking. However, Scott (2003) discussed the psychological cost of female superintendents when they have to strike a balance between being too "feminine" and too "masculine." The burden of the constant tension of making sure that they were not stepping out of the gender or race norms, leads to a greater incidence of health-related issues such as hypertension and depression among African American women, noted Williams et al., (2005). Some women in the Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) study speak of disengaging emotionally to manage the feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment, anxiety and shame. They may gain a sense of control by blaming themselves for the experiences of bias due to race and gender. The presence of health related issues is noted as women work and lead in urban educational contexts.

Although there is not one definition of personal costs, several aspects are included in finding meaning for feminist research in this area. Through the studies that I previously mentioned and the questions I raised, I have a commitment to advance the body of knowledge available by searching and seeking answers to my questions, which address the personal costs that African American female central office executives face. An effect of Young and Skrla's (2003) work is my inspiration and direction to intently move the field forward. The authors enrich our understanding of women in educational leadership research and challenge us to reflect on the past and to proclaim the future with confidence that feminist research is strongly entrenched in the study of educational

leadership. As a result, I choose to extend this body of research with my work on the intersection of gender and race related to the personal costs of central office executives who are female and African American. In engaging in this study of the personal costs negotiated by these women, I considered the epistemological approaches (Scheurich & Young, 1997) which will afford the best frame for my research.

Epistemological Approaches Considered

The writings of Julie Laible in *Reconsidering Feminist Research in Educational Leadership* (2003) are also influential. Her sensitivities cause her to question her ability to accurately reflect the knowledge gained from her study with Mexican American females because of her own culturally generated biases. In the same way, as I completed my study I considered my biases and specifically address through my methodology those of which I am aware. My close attachment to this subject caused me to be acutely sensitive to my personal experiences and how they influenced my thinking regarding my participants. And yet, I proclaimed somewhat of a connection with my participants since I share race, gender, and job title with them.

To address the concern about the relationships built between researcher and participants and the implications of the research, Young and Skrla (2003) looked at utilizing sensitive research methods as they offered works with alternatives and suggestions. Skrla's (2003) work in "Mourning Silence," described the fear some female superintendents felt while working in a male-dominated role and in an attempt to help these women to feel safe, to open up and to share their experiences. In order to put the women at ease, Dr. Skrla conducted the interviews in a conversation style with

colleagues rather than the traditional interviewer/interviewee scenario. Similarly, being concerned about the highly visible positions of authority my respondents possess and the sensitive nature of seeking their perceptions of the personal costs they pay, I encouraged them to be partners with me as we engaged in this project.

As I considered my direction, I reflected on work of other feminist researchers and worked to extend the current research. For example, Brunner (2000) carried out an investigative study in which she examines female superintendents' experiences through their discourse. She noted a huge void relating to the study was the inclusion of an entirely Euro-American participant group. In order to lessen this void of limited research relating to women of color, I examined the personal costs solely of three African American female urban central office executives. Via their discourse, I acquired comments and expressions which provided the data for my research.

In addition to the consideration of the previously noted epistemologies and because my focus considered the intersection of race and gender, in framing my inquiry I included literature associated with Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000) and weaved its evolution in various time periods while denoting its distinctive features.

Black Feminist Epistemological Approaches

Collins (2000), in her well-documented work, discussed African American women's social location and our intellectual traditions in what she described as Black feminist thought. The very vocabulary of Black feminist thought conjures negativity, claimed Collins. Afrocentrism was maligned in the 1980s and 90s, feminism was discredited, and "Black" was questioned by "race" scholars (Collins, 2000, p. 21). And

yet, African American women are frequently identified by both our race and gender. The distinct set of social practices with which African American women deal despite the multiplicity of social locations of Black women of African descent throughout the world are representative of the importance of this race and gender identification which viewed simultaneously may be conceived negatively.

With roots in Black feminist thought, the work captured in an Endarkened epistemology (Dillard, 2003) also sought to determine how reality is known through social constructions (Aguirre, 2000) versus biological ones. In contrast to the negative images and to emphasize the lives of African American women positively Dillard purposefully selected language that seeks to break the power of "mental, spiritual and intellectual colonization of African Americans and other marginalized people" (p.132). As a researcher, Dillard moves away from viewing the respondents as "ingredients in our research recipes," but worked to stay connected with her participants and her research (p.134). To exemplify this connection, she included her life notes expression within the display of her inquiry (p. 135). In the same way, as I proceeded with my study, I worked to stay connected with and to empower my participants as I reflected their words and ideas and included my experiences with theirs.

Reflecting on this particular piece of written work in which I am engaged, I found Black feminist thought an appropriate epistemological framework for my scholarship. As I matriculated in the Texas A&M University doctoral program, I was frequently taken aback by information that was considered research that I perceived as taken-for-granted knowledge. Realizing now that truth is not really truth until it is

researched and recorded, I have a new respect for those pieces of knowledge that have been passed down orally or those lived experiences that I have minimized. Also, I recognized that part of my socialization did not value lived experiences as research or critical ways of knowing. Like so much of Black American life for me, "it's just the way it is." I feel certain I am not the only one who has this attitude (Glenn, 2002). Upon reflection, I am compelled to work to bring this taken-for-granted knowledge to the mainstream.

Thus, part of my self-reflection was reawakened while reading Patricia Hill Collins' revised tenth anniversary work *Black feminist thought*. In her preface, she wrote about her first edition as a researcher who neglected her written work while reflecting. I was drawn to that statement because much of my reading caused tremendous amounts of self-reflection especially in the framing of my study.   Like Collins, I had difficulty with my written expression because the studies I read caused so much reflection. I thought about my employment and private life experiences as an African American woman. Therefore, I thought the intertwining of oppressions primarily race and gender, found in Black feminist epistemology were particularly useful in framing my work.

It is this convergence of race and gender that provided the unique frame for Black feminist thought. A number of studies highlighted in Schiller's work (2000) confirm the belief that African American women were marginalized in both the feminist and civil rights movements. The former group ostracized us because of a lack of sensitivity for the conflicts we faced due to our race, while the latter movement

diminished our concerns because of a lack of respect given to our issues as women in a patriarchal society. African American women live sexism and racism simultaneously and neither movement recognized the discrimination on multiple sides (race, gender, and even economic status). Therefore, Collins's work which embraced the combination of race and gender experiences was noteworthy. Outlining six characteristics of Black feminist thought, Collins (2000) clarified this unique frame while recognizing that some of these characteristics may be shared with other bodies of knowledge.

The first dimension of Black feminist thought described the core themes that exist because Black women have common experiences (Collins, 2000; Jackson, 1998; Schiller, 2000). Some of the common struggles were fighting against negative stereotypes that limited opportunities and harmed self-concepts, as well as access to education and employment (Brush, 1999; Jackson, 1998; Schiller, 2000). Brush (1999) clarified that both racism and sexism were contributors to the domination of African American women and therefore one factor cannot supersede the other. Black feminist thought according to Collins (2000) is the intersection of race and gender oppression that produced a collective consciousness for African American females. For example, Brush (1999) noted Rose Butler Browne's experience at her 1937 Harvard dissertation proposal hearing. Ms. Browne described her interpretation of her committee's (comprised of five White men) attempt to discredit her work and to keep the academic doors of an earned Ph.D. in education firmly shut. Browne's analysis of her experience focused on race and ignored the marginalization of her womanhood. At the time of her research, segregation

due to race was most likely more poignant and overt than gender discrimination, in her sociological experience.

No Black woman's standpoint exists, wrote Collins (2000), but a collective Black women's standpoint does exist and our various responses was the second characteristic of Black feminist thought. The experiences may be similar but our responses may vary. Some women ignored society's negative images and embraced positive aspects of their identities (Jackson, 1999), while other women fought actively to extinguish negative concepts imposed by dominate groups (Collins, 2000). Noted was the Black woman's struggle and habits of survival. In work recorded about Sojourner Truth and Maria W. Stewart, both women with little formal education who impacted American society with their leadership and calls for respected identity of Black women (Collins, 2000; Perkins, 1993), in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, respectively, the fight to eradicate racism and sexism was revealed.

Unlike the experiences of Truth and Stewart, the research of Parker and ogilvie (1999) indicated that discrimination was less overt today resulting in new strategies for survival. The authors suggested that study of the coping strategies currently employed by African American women executives was needed research. They also discussed the scarcity of empirical data on African American women executives' leadership styles. Noting the leadership commonalities found with Anglo females as well as with Anglo males, the authors determined that this mix of traits in African American female executives clearly indicated the need for further research that specifically addressed gender-race orientation (p. 206).

The aforementioned research indicated that African American females are products of our experiences and our interpretations of those experiences. Therefore, the standpoints are fluid because our situations change and are unique (Collins, 2000). An indication of this fluidity also occurred during Johnson-Bailey's (1999) research with graduate and undergraduate African American women who were 34 to 54 years old. She noted the quickly-formed bond as she interviewed each one and attributed this bond due to empathy that African American women feel towards one another because of race and gender. Additionally, Dr. Johnson-Bailey (1999) pointed out that class differences existed and were not as easily discussed, and at times, presented walls during the interviews.

Making connections between experience and consciousness directed the work and scholarship of Black feminist thought (Collins, 2000; Williams et al., 2005). The very act of living as an African American woman "included specialized knowledge that investigated the specific themes and challenges of the time" (p. 31). Collins posited that taking these core themes and infusing them with new meaning validated Black women's everyday knowledge, which is frequently taken for granted. She continued by asking, "Can only Black females produce Black feminist thought?" Her response was "no," and she likened it to Black female artists only painting Black females. This view was in sharp contrast to Laible (2003) who worried that her experiences and enculturation did not allow her to accurately capture the experiences, thoughts and actions of the Mexican-American girls included in her research. However, based on their expressions, I believe that both Collins and Laible wanted us, as researchers, to represent the respondents'

reflections and words with integrity while being aware of the lenses through which we interpreted our work. Such sensitivity, awareness and action promoted those marginalized groups and individuals as providing knowledge and worth (Collins, 2000.) According to Collins (2000), there was a need for autonomy and the recognition of the valuable experiences Black females have to share.

The social injustice of oppression, which may be described as groups of people being hopeless for advancement, occurred for African American women through gender and race (Collins, 2000; Perkins, 1993). Perkins mentioned Gwaltney's 1980 work "that the minds of men and women are the same but the experiences of living makes women use their minds in ways that men don't have to think about" (p. 24). Former Harvard president, Lawrence H. Summers helped highlight this belief with statements regarding the innate differences between men and women, thereby upholding the lack of women in fields such as science and math (Hemel, 2005). Hemel wrote of the university president's belief that "women [were] remaining underrepresented in the upper echelons of academic and professional life in part because many women with young children were unwilling or unable to put in the 80-hour workweeks needed to succeed in those fields" (¶ 7).

Summers' statements seemed to recognize biological differences but fail to identify the social impact of those biological differences. They indicated that he has no idea of or is unwilling to see the oppressive nature of his statements. His words signified that it is the females' responsibility to care for young children as well as the expectation that if one does not work long hours, one cannot be successful. He seemed to ignore

how society might contribute to these issues of caring for children and flexible working hours, which would allow for the inclusion of women's knowledge and work in all fields.

Consequently, it is critical to recognize and promote the "essential contributions of African American intellectuals" (Collins, 2000, p.34). This recognition and promotion, according to Collins, was asking questions, especially asking the *right* questions and engaging in research with and for African American females. She noted the work of E.B. Brown who studied service workers. The researcher, Brown, saw these devalued workers, washerwomen, in a much more positive light than society would normally view them, and recorded their experiences. Dr. Brown described them as entrepreneurs because of the decisions they made in performing their tasks most efficiently. These women built a collective, which allowed them to survive on meager wages and to handle tremendous workloads. Collins posited that it is the primary responsibility of African American female intellectuals for defining reality within the people who live that reality. Because of their deep personal attachments, she surmised that these women intellectuals were less likely to walk away when the obstacles of bringing to light the struggles of African American females seemed overwhelming. By shedding light upon the costs, I sought to discover whether we handled the struggles differently and collectively and how we accepted the personal costs paid as African-American female central office executives.

Brush (1999) noted that between 1960 and 1975, African American females had very limited outlets in which to convey their oppression. The civil rights movement

focused on race while the women's liberation movement focused on gender, and therefore isolated Black females from discourse with either group (Brush, 1999). In order to bring African American females to the mainstream and when seeking to understand African American women's needs and the surrounding discourse, researchers should use theories related to cultural, personal, and social contexts (Howard-Hamilton, 2003) to give greater emphasis to their contributions. As time passes, more African American women scholars engage in projects that allow for their stories to be told and diverse voices to be heard. For example, as students of the 70s and 80s who were educated in more subtly oppressive environments, Cozart and Price's (2005) editing of a special issue of *The Urban Review,* was an effort to find work of scholars whose research included more stories of Black women's experience. They used Black feminist epistemology as their guiding framework. The very survival of Black women, according to Howard-Hamilton (2003) was contingent upon them having a way to express their experiences with people like themselves.

However, "Black feminism is dynamic and changing" and simply having the biological aspects does not preclude one for success in being an authority in this area. As a result, the necessity for dialogue and finding ways to handle dissention within the Black female community is critical (Collins, 2000, p. 39). She also recorded a researcher who found showing a united front for the White world as stifling. This researcher wanted her thinking to be challenged on a variety of fronts. Her openness was in contrast to advice we heard as youngsters that "we don't tell our secrets" especially related to our hair, our feelings of having to be better than White folks in

order to "get our foot in the door," etc. (p.41). The inclusion within historically White institutions has also influenced the thinking of Black female intellectuals (Brush, 2001; Williams et al., 2005). As opportunities to participate in environments once closed to us have become available, we must be careful to remain connected to Black women's collective experiences (Collins, 2000, p.41). Williams et al. (2005) reminded us to recall and reflect upon how our skills and education can be used to impact broader communities as we gain access as researchers.

Once access is gained, African American feminists must generate a collective standpoint because of changing conditions (Collins, 2000). Collins noted this collective standpoint is challenging because "society functions to suppress this [standpoint]" (Jackson, 1998). The aforementioned interpretation of experience was noted in her writing when Collins cited Barbara Omalade's 1994 analysis of the changing image of 'mammy work' (p. 40). Although Black domestic work has virtually disappeared and is now performed by undocumented immigrants, African American women have moved to other low paying jobs such as fast food establishments, nursing homes, and day care facilities. This "mammy work" has taken on new forms in middle class sectors such as teachers and administrators who continue the work of "emotional nurturing and cleaning up after people" (p.40). We must be aware of new contexts, Collins (2000) noted, not be blinded by our new opportunities for visibility and continue to promote our collective standpoint (Brush, 2000).

The final attribute of Black feminist thought that Collins discussed was "U.S. feminism and other social justice projects" (p.41). She noted that lessons of history

demonstrated that we must learn from others (feminist and civil rights movements) and be inclusive of all marginalized people or we will fail. We must commit to human solidarity. Our political action is a means of human empowerment. Collins (p. 43) quoted Ama Ata Aidoo, a former minister of education in Ghana, "We have our movement and we support yours." When looking at a context of intersecting oppressions, Collins supported Black feminism searching for justice not just for African American "women, but for everyone" (p.43). To illustrate this point, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) wrote of three African American female principals who work within impoverished school environments. They survived and thrived because of their support systems and feelings of empowerment [toward all of their students] resulting in the "struggle for social justice" (p.362).

Within her work on Black feminist thought, Collins (2000) defined a Black feminist epistemology. She noted, "Epistemology determines which questions merit investigation, which interpretive frameworks will be used to analyze findings and to what use any ensuing knowledge will be put" (p.252). Collins offered a contour of Black feminist epistemology, which includes six features. These provided a foundation for expressing the personal costs that African American female central office leaders negotiate. The six elements included lived experiences as a criterion of meaning, use of dialogue, ethic of caring, ethic of personal accountability, Black women as agents of knowledge and a movement toward universal truth. In subsequent pages, I address each one of these characteristics.

"Lived experiences as a criterion of meaning" (p. 257) was defined as knowledge versus wisdom. Credibility was afforded the retelling because the experience was lived not just hearsay. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) noted the gifts that Black women have to share through their experiences. However, the United States of America does not seem to value the wisdom of the women. The authors said, no matter how outstanding a Black woman is she cannot count on being embraced by mainstream White America.

Building on this belief, Jones and Shorter-Gooden delineated the importance of the "African American Women's Voices Project, which was a study of "African American women's perceptions and experiences of racism and sexism" in America. In focusing on the intersection of race and gender in these experiences, the authors employed a tenet of Black feminist epistemology. The women in the project expressed how deeply moving it was to be a member of the project. They noted due to their inclusion they felt important; that their lives were valuable, and their voices needed to be heard and understood (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Barbara Smith (2000a) agreed that the crux of Black feminist thought is the simultaneous view of multiple oppressions and the examination of this convergence in the context of African American women's lives.

Our lived experiences are frequently connected to the use of metaphors and quotes from people African American women admire. The principals in the Bloom and Erlandson (2003) study noted, "Giving back to the community," a phrase learned during their childhoods, as a motivator for facing the challenges of the schools they lead.

Likewise, Alston (2005) remarked on the servant leadership of Black female superintendents, who are part of a White dominate system and yet seek dramatic change for the many "Black and brown boys and girls" they serve. Similarly, Sarah, a woman who wanted to be an elementary teacher yet did not pass the state exam in the area of the arts by eight points and thus became a union mediator and organizer, worked for more than 15 years dedicated to helping "plantation-style plant" workers in Mississippi gain fair wages, work hours, benefits and a shred of dignity (Zook, 2006). In order to maintain her resolve for her difficult assignments, Sarah used her spiritual connection to Fannie Lou Hamer, a civil rights activist. "I feel your spirit so deeply and (admire) your work," she wrote to Mrs. Hamer (p. 178).

A way to create interconnectedness and relationships with family and the community was the use of dialogue (Collins, 2000), the next characteristic of Black feminist epistemology. When discussing her work, Dillard (2003) conveyed wanting the reader to feel connected. She wanted the connection to feel like a conversation that helps to "demystify African American females' ways of knowing." Dillard (2003, p.135) cited Bell-Scott's life notes as a form of "articulation used in the Black community but not widely utilized in the representation of research."

Similarly, Williams et al. (2005) encouraged each other to succeed as professor and graduate students at a predominantly White university while sharing their common experiences at Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Some of them also shared a background in math and they used those connections to forge a deeper relationship. Bloom (2003) also noted the connection between the researcher and the

subjects. The interview process, she explained, was a daunting experience because she felt she was prying into the female principals' lives. However, as the interviews went on, she sensed an "unwritten, unspoken, *Code of Understanding*," which she attributed to their common experiences of intertwined oppressions (p. 364). In addition, Dillard (2003) expressed this powerful process and extends with the responsibility of the researcher to give "merit to the unique expressions of life experiences."

Collins (2000) described the third aspect, "ethic of caring," as recognizing individual uniqueness, the appropriateness of emotions in dialogue and developing the capacity for empathy. Following are examples from several researchers who identified this characteristic within their work. The identification also acknowledged that African American women as educators and researchers have exemplified the ethic of caring through practice and research. The written work that Williams et al. (2005) presented exuded passion and caring. The researchers and the subjects connected as they shared experiences and stories. The words in the narratives of the students showed attitude, passion, and concern. One student described the change in her attitude when she decides "she is a good student." The negative perceptions others had about her based on their biases were not her problem, she realized. Another student displayed her attitude of wanting to do more with math than just theorizing. She wanted to teach students thus challenging the inequalities in schools as evidenced by the lack of opportunities she experienced as a student. Her caring for students' math success pushed her to teach.

One account in Zook's (2006, p.102) work was the story of Yvonne Sanders-Butler, a teacher who had numerous health issues related to her excessive and erratic

eating habits. She changed her life through facing her emotional and behavioral issues and then sets out to help others. Ms. Sanders-Butler became a principal and set the norm in her school as a sugar-free zone. She faced the wrath of some community members and through tenacity and an ethic of caring she helped them to understand her desire to give the children of her school "the best." Her work in healthful nutrition has impacted several other schools and school districts with her state.

Another expression of the ethic of caring presented itself in the work of Juanita Johnson-Bailey (1999). She discussed the tension that arose as she was interviewing African American women. While issues of race and gender seemed to unify the participant and the researcher, class and color were not as easily discussed. Johnson-Bailey (1999, p. 669) was cognizant of the balance of dialogue and valued the individual uniqueness of the participants. No matter how uncomfortable some pieces of the interviews made her feel, the bonds of commonality, race, and gender solidly linked her to the importance of her work and her audience.

The fourth structure was the "ethic of personal accountability" as noted in Collins' (2000) work. The researcher takes definite positions on issues and assumes the responsibility for arguing them. In similar fashion, b. hooks (1990) commented on colleagues who did not want to read certain authors' works because those authors were deemed to be misogynists. hooks argued that it is the responsibility of the researcher to know various sides of the argument in order to effectively know the standpoints. As Black feminists can attest, to ignore the work because one is opposed does not make it

invisible; look how we are working to make our voices heard in environments that seek to marginalize us.

The sense of personal accountability is evident through several generations of African American female educators. The first generation of educated Black women wanted to "lift the race," as they sought teaching positions in the South during reconstruction (Perkins, 1993). Mary Church Terrell, a graduate of Oberlin College was forced to leave her teaching post in 1891 when she married. A prominent educator in Washington, D. C., she continued teaching in an evening school. Her father, who was a wealthy mulatto businessman, was horrified that she would work after college. He wanted her to model her life after upper class White women. Mary disobeyed his wishes. Reflecting upon this incident, Mary reported that she had opportunities and wanted "to promote the welfare of (her) race." Her desire to work was not due to economic necessity.

Similarly, in the twenty-first century, Loder (2005), reported on Mrs. Alexander, an African American principal in the Chicago school system and an educator for more than forty years who encountered increasing problems with getting parental support for the school's decisions. Though parent/school relations had been much more positive in the 1960s and 70s, this was not the circumstance she faced now. The principal held herself accountable and went to talk with the parents. She asked them to trust the decisions that the school made because they were made in the best interest of the students. Additionally, she acknowledged that at times mistakes would be made but the adults should handle the issues. "…don't ever let the children know you don't support

us," (p. 313) she implored. Mrs. Alexander accepted the responsibility by holding herself accountable for earning the trust of the parents. As expressed in the aforementioned studies, African American female educators' actions across centuries have demonstrated personal accountability for the education of others, whether children or adults.

Collins (2000) highlighted the validation of ordinary Black women in the fifth aspect, "Black women as agents of knowledge." The validation was sought by the work of the community of Black women scholars and the approval by dominate groups that control graduate schools and institutions that legitimate knowledge. Several studies (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brush, 1999; Collins, 2000; Cozart & Price, 2005; Dillard, 2003; Johnson-Bailey, 1999) suggested that in order for Black women to be viewed as legitimate suppliers of knowledge, their experiences from a variety of stances must be recognized and validated through research. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) included Rose, a woman in their study who finds hope through the encouragement of her father that her voice will be heard. Her father's words provided her with validation of her worth and the power of her voice and actions. In addition, Brush (1999) using Black women's autobiographies published between 1960 and 1975, illuminated the effects of the experiences with the civil rights movement and with the women's liberation movement. The author noted that for the most part these two areas of discourse failed to recognize the intersection of race and gender oppressions. One exception was Hedgman, the leader of the Harlem YWCA in the 1950s, who expressed to Black males who separated the women at a meeting, "I hate all segregation" (p.131). Brush concluded that using

autobiographies of African American women was one way to articulate Black feminist thought and to make the discourse publicly available.

Cozart and Price (2005) acknowledged this public accessibility. They highlighted the research agendas of African American women in higher education. Their research agendas and subsequent publications minimized their isolation from other intellectuals. To carry out these research agendas, interviewing may be used to draw out the knowledge of African American women. Johnson-Bailey (1999, p. 669) identified the benefits of African American females interviewing one another as, "electrifying and intimate."

The final characteristic of Black feminist epistemology was "Toward Truth" (Collins 2000). This attribute according to Collins was comprised of knowledge from Black women's standpoint, knowledge that is situated in experience that is influenced by social constructs, and the convergence of multiple oppressions. Uncovering truth strengthened the resolve to fight injustice while connecting with other Black female intellectuals. Identifying unheralded and unrecognized work, according to Cozart and Price (2005), can occur by searching for truth in unexpected places. An example is Loder (2005a) whose work included African American female administrators who shared their experiences in negotiating work and family time. The intergenerational aspect of the work brings us closer to truth. Also, Brush (1999, p. 133) in her work reviewing the autobiographies of women illustrated that "without a discourse articulating multiple sources of oppression, significant aspects of African American women lives go unexplained and unexpressed." The author noted that this lack of discourse hides

knowledge that may be useful to African American women as they navigate through multiple oppressions. The intersection of these multiple oppressions is reviewed more thoroughly in the next section which highlights the social constructs of race and gender.

Intersection of Race and Gender

The study of the simultaneously experienced definitions of race and gender is intersectionality (Glenn, 2002; Schiller, 2000). Noteworthy is the impact of the intersection of race and gender (Jackson, 1998). This interaction shapes African American women's lives and is also referred to as "intersectionality" by Kimberle' Crenshaw, a professor of law at Columbia University (Schiller, 2000, p.121). In her work, Schiller highlighted many other African American female scholars such as Paula Giddings, Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Angela Davis who, like Crenshaw, viewed the intersection of race and gender as critical in scholarly productions throughout many disciplines.

Jackson (1998) described two different battles that African American women face, one battle related to race and the other to gender. However, b. hooks (1990) noted "the erroneous notion that racism and sexism are two radically different forms of oppression, that one can be eradicated while the other remained intact." In order to handle this "double jeopardy," Black women develop coping strategies. One strategy may be to ignore the stressors and another strategy is to confront the stressors. Regardless of the strategy employed the fact remains that African American women must negotiate race and gender simultaneously to maintain self-integrity (Jackson, 1998). Morris (1999, p.353) described one woman who was tired of being the only

Black female principal in her professional environments. Feeling the need to conform to gender and racial standards in the workplace that were incompatible with her personal standards, she experienced intense anxiety. As a coping strategy to manage stress levels and her self-integrity, she ultimately withdrew from attending conferences and trying to promote Black females into administrative roles. Looking at the complexities of race and gender oppression, Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p. 18) stated, "Black feminist thought is the intersection of race and gender and exists to explain the lived experiences of African American females."

In order to explain this intersection, Dr. Glenn (2002) offered a framework that used the integrated analysis of the synthesis of the racial and gender social constructions. In describing relationality, Glenn first pointed to the accepted construct of Western epistemology as studying the world in "terms of dichotomous oppositions or contrasts" (p.13). She defined this as suppressing the variability within groups and intensifying the differences between groups. The purpose she explained was to render the dominant category as "normal," while viewing the opposing category as deviant or problematic. "Normal," she noted, is "Whiteness and maleness." In furthering her explanation, Glenn said this oppositional standpoint hides the interdependence of the groups. Therefore, relationality is important for several reasons, Glenn (p. 15) pointed out. First it problematized dominant categories such as "Whiteness and maleness." These central groups rely on opposites or contrasts. As a result, they were dependent upon the "Other" categories. Their very existence required being complemented by "Others."

Race and gender viewed relationally allowed for standpoints (Collins, 2000; Glenn, 2002; Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Glenn (p.14) used relationality to address the critique that race and gender are free-flowing and each person may determine a definition. It is important, Glenn wrote to have "anchor points," and to realize that these points are not fixed but are dependent upon context. Race and gender are organizing principles of social institutions (p. 109) and can cause personal dysfunction (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). Social arrangements, such as "pink collar" and menial jobs, "residential segregation, and stratification of government benefits along race and gender lines, produce and reproduce real-life differences" (p. 14). Class is infused with race wrote Glenn (p.10). In times of economic downturn, Whites attributed their losses to Blacks on welfare or recipients of Affirmative Action benefits, not to corporations or capitalism.

Another reason for the benefits of relationality was that the lives of different groups are interconnected. Glenn (p.60) noted that the privileges Whites enjoy were due to the subordination of "Others." For example, Whites enjoy a higher standard of living because of the labor of people of color. For the most part, the low-wage jobs women of color are relegated to keep power out of their hands. Glenn expressed that even if it is not the individual White person who is exploiting the person of color, that White person still received benefits. However, Brunner (2000) pointed out that power over others is unsettling talk for White females.

Marginalized groups have sought relief from discriminatory practices in regards to labor roles. The struggles over exclusion, exploitation, and oppression of African

American women in predominately White educational organizations are evident. This domination by White males was practiced in several ways that are representational, micro-interactional and social structural (Glenn, 2002). Looking at representational domination, I discuss the use of language and images to oppress women of color.

"People who are truly oppressed know it," wrote Brush (1999) as she cited both hooks and Collins. She quoted hooks, "They [oppressed groups] may not be engaged in organized resistance or be able to articulate that oppression via written form" (p.122). Accordingly, the language of race and class grows out of political struggle (Glenn, 2002). Black feminist thought is an opportunity to articulate the standpoints of Black women in the ways of knowing and thinking about the world (Collins, 2000). Black feminist thought according to Collins (2000) was the intersection of race and gender oppression that produced a collective consciousness for African American females. With roots in Black feminist thought, Dillard (2003) purposefully selected strong language that gave power to African Americans and other marginalized people when defining her epistemology (p.132). Similarly, the work captured in an endarkened epistemology (p. 132) seeks to determine how reality is known through social constructions (Aguirre, 2000) rather than physical characteristics.

The image of African American women does not habitually portray them as agents of knowledge. Therefore, it is necessary for them to work twice as hard to be seen as capable. Williams et al. (2005) shared examples of African American female graduate students at a predominately White university whose work was minimized. One student described overcompensating in her studies because she felt she was viewed as

though her "acceptance might be on the basis of race and not qualifications" (p. 185). The condescending tones of some of the White professors and students as well as their dismissal of her comments during class discussions were surprising to her. Another example of the images that African American women must negotiate in predominately White environments from the Williams et al. (2005) study was the experience of one Black female math doctoral student. She was told by one of the professors that he saw a clear performance division by the doctoral students, with the males (all White) being at the top and the women (two Whites and her) at the bottom. Despite the fact that the males had stronger mathematical backgrounds (as undergraduates they participated in research projects and held master's degrees) than the women, all of the students were held to the same performance standards. Because this woman perceived her acceptance to the doctoral program with financial support to be related to her race and gender, she felt she had to prove her worth.

Describing micro-interactional as the application of race/gender norms, Glenn (2002, p.14) cited Barbara Fields, who expounded on race as a lens by which people make sense of the environment. She noted, however, social arrangements were impacted by race and gender. One of these arrangements included labor segmentation. In the early 1800s, labor was divided into categories "free" (White and male) and "not free" (non-White and women). The people in the free category profited from the work of others. They were White men who worked outside of the homes (Glenn, 2002). The others were women, indentured servants and slaves. The lines in the categories are blurred especially when looking at the difference of the indentured servant, who was

bound for a period of time and the slave who was bound for life and the inclusion of women. The power holders, therefore, were the free, higher-priced workers (White males).

As power holders, the men used political control to maintain their positions and to keep the "Others" (women and people of color) out of desirable jobs. Glenn (2002) wrote about the rules, which regulate the allocation of power along race/gender lines in her definition of social structural intersectionality. She referenced Antonio Gramsci and the "taken-for-granted practices and assumptions that make domination seem natural" (p.16). The proliferation of these practices and assumptions within the realm of predominately White educational organizations is noted in the relatively small number of African American females hired despite the greater number of African American females who are college graduates (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Again Glenn noted the constraint of Black women being only three to four percent of the skilled or professional labor force in the early 1900s. The largest group of professional women was teachers, she wrote. In 1910 there were 17,266 Black female teachers in the South. They outnumbered Black male teachers three to one. However, they were so poorly paid, far less than White teachers that they would work in the summers as laundresses and seamstresses (Glenn, 2002).

 Even today, Young and Skrla (2003) referred to the underrepresentation of women in high-power leadership positions such as superintendencies. Men entered administrative positions twenty times the rate of women (Skrla, 2003a) and the process for employment was not conducive to hiring more females (Norton et al., 1996). As a

result, historically, since 1910 about 10 percent of the nation's superintendents have been women. Although this mirrors the percentages of corporate female chief executive officers, it is important to note that corporations are not as heavily laden with women employees, as are schools. Women's exclusion from leadership positions is more entrenched in education than in any other field (Alston, 1999).

Glenn discussed power and domination that saturate social life that is private and personal. She described these areas as sexuality, family, love, dress, and art. I will highlight just two of these areas as associated with labor issues of Black women who work in predominately White managed educational institutions. The first area is dress as it relates to female superintendents. With such a small number of female superintendents, women are highly visible for their physical characteristics. Sixel (2005) reported that some people think that females [who are CEOs] draw additional scrutiny. In addition, African American women must be highly cognizant of their dress both outside and inside of the work environment so that they are not perceived as sexual temptresses (Jezebel), or Mammies (self-sacrificing domestics) according to Glenn (2002), and Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003).

The effects of social forces and the allocation of power and resources that Glenn discusses are evident in the following behaviors described. Glenn (2002) explained that this inequality stems from men being viewed as the breadwinners and from women's expected responsibility for the home. Therefore, the second area noted is the family and the gender expectations of women at home while being a full time employee outside of the home. Glenn (2002) observed that this expectation that women will fulfill traditional

gender roles in the division of labor categories at home. Collins (2000) associated her work as a scholar and a wife and mother when she writes in the preface that while she was writing her first book on "Black feminist thought," their house was messy and the family ate too much fast food, suggesting that those activities, cleaning and cooking, were her responsibilities. The gender division is clear but there is an economical interdependence to provide for the family that requires shared roles (Glenn, 2002). Frequently, this interdependence results in internal intensification of gender stereotypes. Clearly expectations for African American females' behaviors are locked in gender and race norms.

Glenn (2002) also noted that within social interactions regarding labor oppressed groups treat oppressors with deference, while oppressors treat those who are serving as invisible. Within predominately White educational organizations, African American females have encountered invisibility. The ways they utilize representations of scholarship have been minimized. Dillard cited Bell-Scott's (1994) definition of life notes. Life notes encompasses stories, letters, songs, reflections, journal entries and other personal writings as an expression of the lived experiences of African American women and as part of narrative research. An important assumption "in the use of life notes," wrote Dillard (2003, p. 132) is that "African American women's theory has not been utilized in mainstream educational research." The voices of African American women are made invisible by their exclusion as part of legitimate knowledge agents. Those institutions whether universities or publishers of scholarly journals have

systematically excluded different ways that texts have been displayed and discussed (Dillard, 2003).

Glenn (2002) commented that the breadth and depth of racial and gender inequality requires needed changes. She noted these changes needed in institutions and structures, local labor markets, and everyday practices. With recognition of oppression and the trappings utilized to continue oppression, our society may work to alleviate and ultimately eliminate the costs that African American women in predominately White educational organizations experience so we can work within and contribute to educational organizations.

African American females have distinctive experiences due to their experiences in an oppressive world (Brush, 1999). Some of this oppression comes from a marginalized position as female in a male-dominated society (Brunner, 2000; Glenn, 2002; Hochschild, 1989) and as Black in a White-dominated society (Brush, 1999; Collins, 2000; Glenn, 2002; hooks, 1990; Jones and Shorter-Gooden, 2003). The personal costs of labor associated with oppression for African American women manifests itself in employment that does not utilize all of their knowledge and skills, lower wages, diminished opportunities for advancement, devaluation of their position as agents of knowledge, and unrealistic expectations of their race and gender roles. The framework that Glenn (2002) discussed was used to examine how labor is constituted by race and gender. She focused on the *processes* rather than the characteristics of race and gender as I have illustrated. In navigating the processes, African American women use skills which allow them to interact in bicultural environs.

Biculturalism

One factor that African American women experience as we plot the course of our lives is the requirement of biculturalism. Biculturalism is described as the relationship of converging and diverging pathways and characteristics of two ethnic culture groups (Merriam-Webster, 2002). American biculturalism has traditionally existed between America and Mexico, or between America and its African American population. By using this definition, the connotation denotes that African American women travel through two cultures, an Anglo work culture and an African American personal or private culture. For the purposes of my study, African American females' perceptions of biculturalism, as they work and lead in predominately Anglo educational contexts and as they live their private lives are sought. Following are studies that confirm that in order to exist in the environment of the urban, public educational institutions as central office leaders and as members of their communities, women participated in various roles to demonstrate bicultural characteristics.

The literature surrounding the topic of biculturalism included the "African American Women's Voices Project" (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003). This project incorporated surveys from 333 Black women between the ages of 18 and 88 in urban, suburban and rural areas from 24 states. In addition to the surveys, seventy-one of these women participated in in-depth interviews. This study looked at the intersection and connection of discrimination based on race and gender. In developing their case for the importance of their work, the authors, Jones and Shorter-Gooden referenced existing research that uses small numbers of participants in highly specific contexts such as

geographical location, academia, or workplaces. Though the sample is neither random, nor representative of the Black women in the United States, the authors believed that the population was diverse. The book also included data from Dr. Shorter-Gooden's experience and clinical class (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003).

A way to cope with biculturalism, that the researchers Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) recorded, was described as shifting. In order to minimize the personal costs of being an African American female who works within predominately Anglo institutions, we often have to cultivate a bicultural approach to our lives. The bicultural approach has allowed us success such as promotions, financial rewards, and positions of leadership within the institutions while achieving marital or family stability, positions of friendship and influence within our homes and communities (Brush, 1999; Grogan, 1999; Loder, 2005a; Williams et al., 2005). Constant attention to ways of responding was demanded. The cost of survival, said Jones and Shorter-Gooden, required African American women to adopt different ways of speaking and of behaving to adjust to each situation and context. Black women systematically shifted to accommodate such differences as class, gender, and ethnicity.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) noted that over time, shifting by African American women has gone from a physical shift such as casting eyes down when in the presence of Anglos or moving to the back of the bus, to more subtle changes such as speaking one way while in the office and differently when socializing with girlfriends. Additionally, the authors commented about the physical attributes that African American women shift as they leave the "beauty parlor" with straight hair because dreadlocks are

not acceptable in the workplace or a woman changing outfits several times in the morning to make sure the one worn hides "her ample derriere," to give her more of a White woman look. The critical detail remained African American women must be sensitive and conforming to the expectations of the contexts in which we live. This expected sensitivity may create undue personal costs as we negotiate biculturalism to achieve acceptance in the workplace as well as in social settings.

Within dominate culture organizations, "African American women executives are more likely to suffer from the interactive effects of racial and gender discrimination" (Parker & ogilvie, 1996, p. 201). Authors, Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003), noted few examples of high achieving African American women who are not skilled in the craft of shifting. The need to constantly prove themselves or to adapt to others' ill-at-ease feelings has caused mental and physical health issues for some African American women (Aguirre, 2000). This negative impact on a woman's psyche was associated with the personal costs that African American women experience with shifting (Jones and Shorter, 2003). Many Black women seemed to break down with the pressure of varied performance expectations (Aguirre, 2000) in diverse arenas. The effects of these concerns may interfere with their purposeful work, which in the cases of the women in my study, is focusing on the education of urban children in public schools.

Statistics illuminated in the work of Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) endorsed that Black women seem less happy than Black men, and White men and women. Their rates of distress such as depression, listlessness, boredom, and loneliness were significantly greater than White men and women. The women in the study also

perceived most racial and gender discrimination occurring in the work environment.
Therefore in order to cope, the women masked their depression in behaviors such as
overeating, overspending, and busyness. Yvonne Sanders-Butler, a teacher in Georgia
recalls constantly dieting and being nervous and anxious all of the time. "I was always in
school with things to do" (Zook, 2006, p. 103) and therefore did not take the time to eat
appropriately. With the help of Overeaters Anonymous, Yvonne addressed her esteem
issues and lost weight. From the time she was a small child in rural Mississippi until
well into her adult years, she found peace and security in food. Now, in order to help
other African Americans, she wrote cookbooks, and as a principal she created a school
environment where healthful eating is a requirement. Her family reported a tremendous
difference in her mental state and her level of concentration since she received help for
depression and food addiction (Zook, 2006).

Myths That Justify Shifting

   To explain the need to engage in shifting behavior, the women in the "African
American Women's Voices Project" study noted five myths that they seem to
consistently face (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2005). These myths were that Black
women are inferior, that they are unshakeable; they are unfeminine, they are prone to
lawlessness and they are sexually promiscuous. The notion of African American
women's inferiority was exposed in the writings of Williams et al., (2005). The authors
conducting this research mentioned the challenges faced by Black female graduate
students in predominately White institutions. One of the authors relayed her experience
as a doctoral student in the math department. She was one of nine students (six White

males, two White females and her) in the incoming doctoral candidate group. Her

previous education was grounded in math and she had experienced success in this area.

To prove that she can "hang with the (White) boys," (p. 189) she took a full load of

three rigorous math classes. Even though that workload was not mandatory, she felt it

was required to substantiate that "a Black woman could be a successful part of their

community" (Williams et al., 2005, p. 189). Although this graduate student worked

hard, she felt she was unsupported because of the discrimination by her professors and

classmates. Despite her capabilities, ultimately she was discouraged by her treatment

and decided to change majors.

To illustrate the second myth that Black women are unshakeable (Jones &

Shorter-Gooden, 2003), the story of Sarah was selected (Zook, 2006). Zook described

Sarah's unfailing dedication in representing Mississippi union plant workers. Trying to

negotiate with the White owners of the companies while being treated unfairly by the

union officials and listening to the sad stories of the members Sarah represented, took a

toll on her physical and mental health. Her outward appearance changed over the years

with dark circles forming under her eyes and weight gain. In addition, her blood

pressure increased causing her to be hospitalized, and her moods swung to lows that

would cause her to cry as she tried to cope with the pressure of discrimination, not only

for herself but for those workers she served. She claimed, "The only reason I hang on

here is because of love of a dream. But you can't work a miracle when it's pressure on

you from all sides" (Zook, 2006, p.177). Sarah succumbed to the expectations of her

employers, the employees she represented, the workload and the stress. The myth of the superwoman caused her to pay hefty physical and emotional costs.

The third myth that African American women are unfeminine is linked to the notion that masculine and feminine are diametrically opposed (Glenn, 2002). Therefore, Black women who are perceived as strong are domineering, demanding (masculine qualities) and subsequently unfeminine (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). One woman, in the "African American Women's Voices Project," believed that in order to succeed in the professional arena, African American women must be strong to face the many obstacles they will encounter while showing the feminine side even in business situations (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003).

Similarly, statistics indicated that a large percentage of Black children are raised in households headed by single mothers (Collins, 2000). Considering this to be true, it may be expected that Black women will play both masculine and feminine roles at home. Loder (2005a) wrote that Black women frequently have intergenerational responsibilities and care for grandchildren or rely on mothers or grandmothers to care for their children. In addition, Loder warned of the waning support from Black grandmothers due to "economic hardships, marital difficulties and other stressors associated with multiple roles."   As a result, she noted, it is Black women who shift and play the masculine and feminine societal roles of both father and mother.

Another participant in the Jones and Shorter-Gooden study, Carmen, a 61-year old teacher, expressed an account of harassment, which highlights the "myth of criminality." She described driving her husband home from work at two o'clock in the

morning and being stopped by the police. Because she thought she was obeying all laws, she asks what she has done wrong and is chastised for questioning the officer. Subsequently, she was instructed to follow the officer to the precinct station. There, her car was searched and the seats removed. Later, the desk sergeant explained that officers were frequently assigned to inner-city neighborhoods as punishment. The anger at this assignment was "taken out on everyone" (p. 28), especially those who lived in the neighborhood.

The fifth myth discussed by Jones and Shorter-Gooden was the myth of promiscuity. The authors noted the nomination and achievement of an Academy Award for Best Actress by Halle Berry as a bittersweet moment. Many African American women, they reported, were proud of Ms. Berry's accomplishment but disappointed that her character had such graphic sex scenes, which promoted the myth that African American women are highly charged sexual beings. Addressing this myth within the corporate world, Candace Mathews, president of SoftSheen/Carson described mentoring young African American female employees (Zook, 2006). She told them that their attire was very important. No matter how unfair the young women think this might be, she let them know that they would be judged differently. Ms. Mathews cautioned them not to wear halter tops, short skirts or tight-fitting pants. If they wanted to be taken seriously, they must consider the presentation (p. 192). The message was that they will be scrutinized. These young African American women must shift to the standards of the corporate world and find a presentation that is acceptable. Otherwise, they may be seen as "oversexed vixens" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003, p. 29).

Costs for Coping with the Myths

In order to cope with these myths, African American women must spend an inordinate amount of time managing their feelings, thinking about their words and behavior, their hair, their dress and watching every step they make (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). Williams et al., (2005) shared an experience of this self-doubt and second-guessing. Because of this uncertainty, the noted graduate student overcompensated by preparing for class with extra supplemental readings, talking with professors, and never asking for an extension for any assignment for any reason. She spoke of the "condescending tones and rude ways of ignoring her comments" (p. 190) as she participated in class. Their actions caused her to wonder if White professors and students believed that "all minority students [were] Affirmative Action entries" (Williams et al., 2005, p.186). Fortunately the graduate student in the Williams et al. study realized that the problem was not her lack of worth, but the insecurities of some of the Whites within the institution who created the barriers. Yet, she was cognizant of and concerned with how her behavior was perceived. Other women have tried hard to fit into the cultures of their White colleagues and have expressed the emotional drain as they worried about losing their identities. The intercultural tensions in work environments were ever present (Zook, 2006).

Some African American women administrators wanted to dispel the myths (Loder, 2005). In response to the burden of shifting, some women expressed an outwardly opposing behavior. They became revved up and spoke out (Perkins, 1993). They may have constantly assessed their environments and considered what the best way

to respond was. Should they challenge the discrimination, let it go, work overtime to prove their worth, or myriad other questions related to their metacognition (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003)? According to the authors, this behavior represented another shifting strategy that African American women employed: combating the myths. What price do these women have to pay? Anticipating encounters may have consumed their thoughts and caused persistent prolonged effort that involved the use of considerable energy, (Gewertz, 2006; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and ultimately career death. In sum, women have to consider their overall presentation and realize that although the focus on them is unfair, it is real (Zook, 2006).

With high levels of scrutiny, some African American female superintendents shared that they constantly had to prove their capabilities for handling the job (Gewertz, 2006). Writing about principals, Bloom and Erlandson (2003) noted the actions of school boards and superintendents who offered African American women the leadership of troubled schools where a number of men have failed. With acceptance of such assignments, the hard work, and tough decisions that come along with such schools, the Black women principals may have become "scapegoats" or "sacrificial lambs" and been considered too controversial for higher positions (p. 354) such as central office leadership or superintendents. Politics and other forms of discrimination (p. 355) influenced African American female administrators' decisions to maintain status quo and forego their promotions despite their success. However, a growing number of African American women administrators seek the opportunity to lead such challenging

schools (p. 359), maybe because these are the only positions offered to them (Gewertz, 2006; Jackson, 2006).

Consequently, as African American women administrators take on these higher positions, they must also take on the challenges of being African American women in a largely Caucasian setting. Jackson (1998) described the daily struggles expressed by African American women on predominately White campus and defined these struggles as "working harder than others to be successful, fighting negative stereotypes, and fighting oppression while not being able to complain" (p. 177). The women shared the exhausting practice of trying to "reconstruct some of the notions (White) people have in their heads" about the negative stereotypes heaped upon African American women. Another woman from the study lamented not having the freedom to just be who she was but must constantly think about being Black and being female, and the work, struggle and issues associated with those characteristics. Likewise, 58 percent of the women in the African American Women's Voices Project study reported shifting their behavior to accommodate others (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003). To fit in society, the women reported changing their speaking patterns, toning down their mannerisms or avoiding controversial topics all together. Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2003) noted Black women's use of different language and expressions when talking with intimates. This was contrasted with their language when they were talking with White co-workers in the work place. If Black women were overheard using personal vernacular while in the work site, then questions related to their credibility were raised and disapproving glances were frequently noted.

The practice of shifting continues as mothers of African American daughters seek experiences that will allow them to be comfortable in many "worlds." These formal or informal experiences are meant to instruct with the purpose of assisting African American females to function successfully in society. Black mothers taught their daughters to work hard and to strive for an education in order to be self-sufficient (Collins, 2000). They also instruct their daughters to speak the language of commerce, which will increase their chances of success in the work world. Black daughters must learn how to survive the sexual politics of intersecting discrimination and yet learn how to transcend them (p.128). Collins (p. 116) continued that Black mothers have hope that their daughters will do better than they have and yet are pragmatic enough to teach them what it will take to get them there.

Chapter Summary

Acknowledgement of the distinct experiences of women was required to fully investigate the topic and to recognize the complexity of my investigation. The small number of African- American women in central office leadership positions and the varied consequences they face is highlighted in this chapter. Although the personal costs were defined differently for individual women, learning to manage the mental and physical demands was a consistent challenge. Personal considerations must be contemplated to advance and to achieve goals (Gewertz, 2006; Scott, 2003; Zook, 2006). Data gathered through the "African American Women's Voices Project" (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003) and other studies were clear that societal expectations (Glenn, 2002; Hochschild, 1989; Loder, 2005; Mendez-Morse, 2003) and our ways of

responding (Aguirre, 2000; Brush, 1999; Collins, 2000; Jackson, 1998) can have a devastating toll on African American women's time, energy, identity and health. These challenges securely exist in education during a time of women's social advancement. The aforementioned factors continue to endure, causing African American women distress and requiring them to attend to costs and consequences as they negotiate leadership positions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

My research was an examination of the personal costs that African American female urban school executives negotiate and, therefore, made use of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2003) as my guiding framework. This framework at first glance might seem to be a cross of feminist and critical race theories. However, the aim was to look at this unique group of African American women, and to give voice to their stories related to their work as urban central office executives utilizing the tenets of this epistemology through the simultaneously experienced attributes of race and gender. The study reflected an intersection of race and gender (Collins, 2000; Dillard, 2003; Glenn, 2002; Grogan, 1999; hooks, 1990) which, viewed relationally, allowed for standpoints that are not fixed but are dependent upon the context (Glenn, 2002, p.17).

In defining Black feminist epistemology, Patricia Hill Collins (2000) outlined six standards for assessing truth. These principles included lived experiences, the use of dialogue, ethics of caring, ethics of personal accountability, Black women as agents of knowledge, and toward universal truth. In her definition of "lived experience as a criterion of meaning," Collins (p.257), noted that distant statistics are not as meaningful as the experiences of a thoughtful person. She highlighted the wisdom that is derived from trying to make meaning from another person's experiences that is powerful. Researchers (Dillard, 2003; Loder, 2005; Smith, 2000; Williams et al., 2005; Zook, 2006) who use Black feminist epistemology frequently utilize a qualitative research methodology.

Therefore, some of the reasons that I chose to engage in a qualitative study was the nature of my work, my use of Black feminist epistemology, and the experiences of legitimate researchers who engage in similar research. Additionally, I thought that a quantitative inquiry would center too heavily on numbers, minimizing the individual and negating my reasoning that all statistics are 100% for each of us. For me, the work needed to feel personal as I tried to acquire meaning from the data. My investigation focused on the personal costs African American females negotiate as they perform their roles as central office executives. As these women executed their duties, they deal with issues based upon the combination of race and gender that others may never have to consider. Their personal stories were my concentration and the aspects of qualitative methodology were most appropriate for my topic.

Consequently, I used qualitative methodology (Creswell, 2003; Patton, 2002) techniques to conduct my research inquiry. Dictates of qualitative methodology require that I consciously reflect on strategies, which will allow for connections between lived experiences and historical and sociological constructs (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The focus of my inquiry was to seek to understand the personal experiences of three African American central office executive administrators within the context (Janesick, 2000) of three different urban public education systems. To understand the personal costs, I gathered data from African American women who were first-hand participants within the systems and who held leadership roles in the central office. Specifically, my focus was to answer the questions: What are the personal costs that African American female

central office executives in urban context perceive? What consequences do the personal

costs contribute to their

lives and roles as central office educational leaders? How do they cope with the

challenges borne by the costs?

Because I am an African American female central office executive, I believed my

neutrality as a researcher would be disputed. However, Dillard (2003) challenged the

educational community to "open our own lives to review" (p.132), and, therefore, being

neutral is not necessarily a mandatory aspect. If we are to really generate new

knowledge we must be willing to view research in new ways. Thus, I selected a group to

which I have allegiance and a community of women educational administrators in which

I am grounded. The novelty of my detachment occurred with my lack of acquaintance

with the individual participants and their lived experiences (Collins, 2000).

My association as a member of the limited community of African American

female central office administrators, as I conducted this investigation, was important to

note for several reasons. Dillard (2003) discussed the shifts in educational research that

required the reframing of research endeavors to include perspectives, viewpoints,

cultural understandings and discourse style of the researcher. Although our experiences

were uniquely different, our commonalities as members of a group of African American

female central office administrators bring about an understanding that may be clear only

to us (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). According to Howard-Hamilton (2003) in her work

on theoretical frames, it is incumbent upon "Black female intellectuals to produce facts

and theories" (p.21), which accurately clarify and represent the perspectives and cultural

understandings of their respondents. I consistently sought as I conducted my research to be ever mindful of these requirements, while acknowledging that place and context influence the telling and retelling of stories (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). I was cognizant of the current place and time, and realized as Bruner noted (as cited in Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, p. 156) that the story is only "true for now." My work, then, was to capture the women's stories and their time-sensitive truths.

However, even with a shift which allows the researcher's experiences and beliefs to be included in the study, the most pervasive style for representing research is that of "research as a recipe" (Dillard, 2003, p. 135) where the researcher deletes her voice from the text. The distant voice is not my style; the detachment is unnatural. Fortunately for me, qualitative methodology allows the researcher to be a tool for the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To eliminate my thoughts, questions, and opinions from the information I find in the research literature or the data would be a challenge that does not enhance my inquiry. Additionally, my credibility would be diminished knowing I have biases based on my beliefs and experiences related to the research topic to pretend to be totally neutral regarding the work. I am, however, cognizant of my close association and aware that my experiences are not *all* experiences. In this way, I maintained the complexity of the personal experiences of my participants while weaving my experiences into the narrative. By writing fieldnotes (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000) before, during, and immediately after the interviews on my opinions, questions, and observations I ensured that my perceptions were not misconstrued as my respondents' experiences. Therefore, as I searched for meaning from the perspectives of the participants in my study

(Janesick, 2000), I utilized these writings to record my reflexivity and to celebrate the richness of the women's personal experiences.

My examination should not perpetuate the feeling that something was wrong or odd with African American women central office administrators because this work was distinctive. Thus, I was careful about the questions that I asked and the work that I submitted (Tallerico, 1996) because I know it must withstand scrutiny and manifest value. Consequently, for the purposes of this investigation, qualitative data were useful for locating the meaning these women place on events, circumstances and frames of their lives (Denzin &Lincoln, 2000; Janesick, 2000; Thorne, 1997) as the participants considered the personal costs paid to be central office executives in urban school district settings.

Data Sources

The challenge of identifying contributors for the work took the form of contacting the limited number of women who were central office administrators whose responsibilities included supervising principals in Houston, Texas school public districts. These women have superintendent in their titles; however, they are not at the pinnacle of the organizational chart. Throughout my search, I was cognizant of the vulnerability of their positions due to the scarcity of eligible participants. Therefore in order to locate participants for my research study, I used several strategies. First I perused school districts' websites; viewing the organizational charts and photographs of the central office administration gave me possible candidates. In addition, I participated in conferences and seminars for various organizations of which I am a member to seek

additional respondents or leads. I sought nominations from my network of educational

colleagues. Those colleagues who offered suggestions were asked if I may use their

names as references in my introduction to the potential data source. If the contacted

person did not meet the specifications of my criterion, I inquired about recommendations

of those they thought would.

Another avenue for finding data sources included referrals from other central

office administrators with whom I am familiar. Should a possible data source be

inappropriate for my particular research agenda, I inquired about others she thought

might be acceptable and willing participants. These steps brought me to the women who

ultimately provided the data for my study.   Because of my close association in the

educational realm, and on the advice of my doctoral committee members, I was careful

to select women with whom I was unfamiliar, which resulted in the elimination of some

potential candidates because of our acquaintance. This planned distance allowed me to

appreciate the distinctiveness of each interview and to be open to the nuances I may have

taken for granted if I had a closer, more personal association with the individuals who

provided the data.

Data for my study were from the experiences and thoughts on the experiences of

three African American females who are currently central office level administrators in

urban school districts in Houston, Texas. All of the women were connected to school

campuses because they supervised principals or directly interacted with principals in an

administrative capacity. The location was selected because of proximity to where I live

and also because 55% of the United States' African American population lives in

southern states (Zook, 2006, p.xii). The women were asked to share their perspectives on the personal costs encountered due to the social environment during their time of service and their responses to the environment based upon their personal and professional frames of reference (Brush, 1999; Collins, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1985; Loder, 2005). The sharing of these lived experiences and their responses and reflections provided the data, as well as my fieldnotes, audiotapes, transcriptions, reflections and conversations. The work also allowed these women to provide the definition of personal costs and to identify the related defining moments associated with those costs.

African American women who achieved such positions of authority within their school districts may be guarded in their responses to such sensitive questions regarding the personal costs they experience in the work environment because of their high visibility and level of responsibility. Therefore, my duty was to get at "the truth" while protecting their anonymity. Zook (2006) noted, "Some stories don't turn out the way you planned" (p.74). She described meeting with the individuals from one town in her study. She explained the nature of her work and the participants signing informed consent with full disclosure agreements. When she published work related to her visits to this town, some citizens were outraged by the reports. Even though her writings won awards, the backlash from the community was tremendous and made it difficult for the women, who were the main subjects of her work, to do their jobs. In addition, trust was lost. Some of the most valuable data providers refused to talk with her during subsequent visits.

Similarly, I had a feeling of discomfort during my first interview with Shelly. In no way did I want to jeopardize her reputation or my work and certainly did not want to lose her as a data source. I kept thinking about Zook's experience. My intuition caused me a disquieted feeling, as well as noting that this first-round interview was completed in only about half the time of the others; even though I had conducted it using similar questions and extensions. Shelly seemed somewhat closed. She lowered her voice and gave short answers, even when I tried to prod or be more open to what she wanted to discuss. A sense to protect her washed over me, and as we concluded my time with her, I told her about other environments in which I met respondents in hopes that she would not dismiss my requests for further interviews. I was willing to meet with her in any secure place for her comfort and my data. At a subsequent interview, I discovered that she is a person who is reticent. During all of our interview times, I had to ask many probing questions to get her to share her thoughts. I asked several times if she was uncomfortable with the questions or the locations and she assured me that she was not.

In a way to protect the identities of my respondents in my study, I used pseudonyms and some of the data are aggregated. I chose this route so as not to harm the individuals. The numbers of African American women who met my criteria are few and thus may be easily identifiable. All of these women were central office administrators who worked closely with their school district's superintendent. If they did not report directly to their respective superintendents, they were in the next layer of the hierarchy making them highly visible and quite likely vulnerable to backlash.

Data Collection

I secured commitments and arranged meeting times and places by corresponding with my participants through electronic mail and phone calls. Likewise, in recognition of the gift of time that these women gave me, we met in places and at times for the interviews that were convenient for them. I met Donna for the first time in the evening at a church while her daughter was at choir rehearsal. Our second interview was in her office although it was after the office was closed down for the day and before her required evening work-related function. All of the interviews with Anne occurred at her office during normal business hours. In addition I met Shelly at her office during the work day and our final interview was at a restaurant between the lunch and dinner service.

My natural conversation style is to interject with my thoughts, opinions or questions as I am engaging in conversation. Consequently, I worried about being an active listener, one who would really hear what the women were saying and allowed them to speak freely. However, I realized that during the interviews I was concentrating so hard on not interrupting the interviewees while they talked and not extending their stories with my own experiences, that I would miss important bits of information. As time passed and I listened to the tape and reviewed my notes, I was more comfortable with the process and relaxed. Reflecting on what I thought I heard and what was actually said in the first couple of interviews, I learned to center on the women's responses and not let my thoughts concerning the process interfere, hence the importance of the audiotapes for me.

Every interview was audiotape recorded. As I listened to the tapes, read the transcriptions, and reviewed my notes, I learned so much more from the women's recollections and descriptions. During this time, I also learned that I did not actually hear all of the information as the interviews were being conducted and missed several important pieces of data. Having the tape recorder to capture the conversation was a valuable tool. The tapes offered me insight into my follow-up interviews. The subsequent transcribed tapes and my notes led me to the questions for the next round of interviews.

As each interview was completed and transcribed, I read through the transcriptions and developed clarifying questions or probing questions to delve deeper into the comments the women made. This process was repeated as each new interview occurred. I conducted two interviews with each of the three women. The interviews ranged from one and a half to three hours depending on how much information the women were willing to share and yielded an average of 40 pages of transcribed notes per woman. For the most part, all of the first round interview questions were essentially the same. The second round questions were developed more specifically for each respondent based on what they said or did not say during the first interview. I learned after the first interview with Donna, who told me "that was fun," and then asked, "That's it?" to ask the participants if they had final thoughts to share with me. I certainly did not want to extinguish their passion for sharing their stories with my limited questioning.

Data Analysis

In order to promote understanding of individual perceptions (Janesick, 2000), I collected narrative data. After each interview was transcribed, I coded the data by identifying the personal costs the women defined. Also, I looked for the ways they coped with those costs and noted those by highlighting the segments on the pages of the transcriptions (Miles and Huberman, 1994). As a result, I attended to the recurring themes arising from the interviews and sorted this information using other codes from the core themes of Black feminist epistemology. I determined these categories into which to sort the data, because "qualitative analysis requires on-going analysis of the data, and an authentic compelling narrative of what occurred" (Janesick, 2000 p. 386). Through narrative analysis, I utilized categories developed from a combination of codes emerging from the data collection (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and the core themes of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000) as I reviewed and reduced the data related to the women's individual experiences.

In coding the data I first reduced it to units by noting the various bits of information such as descriptive words or phrases which were contained in each sentence or paragraph of the transcribed interviews. These data were then labeled by the action or experience. Once that was completed for each interview, I arranged the topics into categories. I reread the transcripts several times to determine if new topics or categories arose. I compiled the data from all of the interviews into major categories, unique categories and other information (Roberts, 2004). The major categories included

defined personal costs, ways to cope, and the consequences of the costs. Within each major category I noted subcategories such as topics regarding families or work.

To accomplish the data analysis, I induced codes from the women's information; first individually, and then combining the list of codes I built (Miles and Huberman, 1994). In addition to allowing the data to generate categories and as I progressed through the task of analyzing my data (Schwandt, 2001), I utilized some of the standards highlighted in Black feminist epistemology. This organizational work reflected the personal costs reported, the women's responses to those costs, and the value in pursuing the analysis of these data. My research focus related to a specific group of women and is not meant to be a comparison to men or to other women. More importantly, the stories they had to share informed what we can learn from their experiences; and therefore careful analysis was required.

As a result, I attended to the recurring themes arising from the interviews and sorted this information using other codes from the core themes of Black feminist epistemology. I determined these categories into which to sort the data, because "qualitative analysis requires on-going analysis of the data, and an authentic compelling narrative of what occurred" (Janesick, 2000, p. 386). Through narrative analysis, I utilized categories developed from a combination of codes emerging from the data collection (Miles and Huberman, 1994) and the core themes of Black feminist epistemology (Collins, 2000) as I reviewed and reduced the data related to the women's individual experiences and worked to interpret and organize the data.

Listening to the words shared by African American women and viewing the research as important and meaningful (Collins, 2000), we can learn from the work and recognize the personal costs that the women express. Noteworthy is the struggle with language that b. hooks (1990) described. Her anguish is evident in her words "it is no easy task to find ways to include our multiple voices within the various texts we create" (p. 27). Each story was unique and must be valued for its distinctiveness. In order to enhance the level of trustworthiness, I sent the transcripts to the women for review. Therefore, transcripts were shared with the participants to confirm or amend the analysis (Hollingsworth & Dybdahl, 2007). In addition, I discussed the material with colleagues to support that the "study was trustworthy because of the methods used" (p. 156). These member checks and discussions with colleagues (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) were essential for accuracy in data interpretation of emergent findings. This constant scrutiny of my work process and the resulting products were critical (Laible, 2003) in my analysis.

Therefore, although as African American women we may be united by the biological constructs of race and gender, the nuances that exist due to our varied experiences may come to light as narratives are disclosed. I acknowledge that the contexts, although all related to public school education, vary because of our lived experiences (Collins, 2000) and our responses to those experiences. African American women are not victims of a White-privileged world. We are who we are with many stories, our individual stories (Bloom &Erlandson, 2003; Dillard, 2003; Zook, 2006) and

this inquiry afforded the opportunity to share three women's stories around a particular topic, the personal costs they negotiate to be central office administrators.

Chapter Summary

Qualitative methodology was utilized in designing this study. This record of study examined the perceived personal costs that African American females who are central office supervisory administrators negotiate in their positions. Three African American women who are district level executives in urban contexts were interviewed. During the interviews they were asked to identify or define the personal costs they negotiated to be leaders in their school districts and how they coped with these costs. The first rounds of individual interviews were semi-structured and occurred in environments of the women's choice. The interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and shared with the women. The transcriptions were analyzed and coded to determine emergent themes and by using pre-determined categories from core themes of Black feminist thought.

The transcripts were re-read. Then, clarifying and probing questions were formulated for the subsequent interviews from the information provided during the first-round interviews. Once again, the site of the participant's choice was used for the follow-up interviews. The second rounds of interviews were conducted and tape recorded. Again, the data were coded by patterns and themes. Some themes developed because the excerpts connected to literature I read and were related to my predisposed codes from research (Seidman, 1998) and some new themes emerged. Chapter IV presents the findings of this study through interpretation and exhibition of the data.

CHAPTER IV

THE WOMEN

The purpose of my investigation is to extend knowledge related to the perceived personal costs negotiated in the academic profession by focusing on the experiences of three African- American female central office executives. Each woman identified the personal costs associated with her current position and her journey to that position. In addition, each shared how she managed these costs. The women were selected because of their current positions and their knowledge related to my topic. Through this research I sought answers to the following questions based on their responses.

1. What are the personal costs the women perceive?

2. What consequences do these personal costs contribute to their lives and roles as African American female central office educational leaders?

3. In what ways do they negotiate the challenges borne by the personal costs?

To answer my questions, I interviewed each of the three women independently at locations of her choice. Hence, Chapter IV offers an opportunity for me to introduce the women who so generously agreed to provide the data for my study and to share their experiences. Each woman is employed by a different independent school district in Harris County, which encompasses the city of Houston, Texas. The districts range in size from 3,000 to over 100,000 students. These African American women work in the central offices of their school districts. None of them is the general superintendent for her employing school district, although each has superintendent in her title, such as

assistant superintendent or area superintendent. All of the women have served in their current positions for five or fewer years.

In order to give an understanding of the uniqueness of the women, in this chapter I give a brief description of each individual in the location in which we first met. Then, I use their words as they described their backgrounds. I do take the liberty to adjust the order of the sentences to create a coherent flow for the reader. However, the words are the women's and the descriptions of their backgrounds are their recollections and retelling.

Donna

Donna and I agreed to meet one Thursday evening at church. It was a convenient meeting place because her daughter's choir rehearsed that night. By meeting there, we would not interrupt her evening family time; and she would be busy while she waited for her fourteen year old. Earlier that day, we exchanged cell phone numbers to be sure to connect. I was excited about our impending meeting and arrived a few minutes earlier than our agreed-upon time so I would not miss her.

The church grounds contained several buildings. After parking my car, I walked toward the building that housed the church sanctuary. Several groups of people of various ages were gathered on the steps of this building. All of the people were African American. I said hello or they greeted me as I climbed the stairs and entered the church. I went inside to be sure that Donna was not already there. After asking a few people if they had seen her and receiving several negative responses, I went back outside to wait on the steps.

I noticed a woman and a teenager talking and laughing while exiting a SUV. The woman, with high heels, was carefully walking with the teenaged girl from the parking lot toward the church. As the pair walked toward me, the woman took the arm of the younger female as they crossed the parking lot. I guessed it was Donna. She wore a dark, classic though updated shark-skinned suit that in one light shown brown and when the light hit it at other times, it looked Black. The jewelry she sported was striking, dangling gold multi-looped earrings and a gold lapel pin on the left side.

Just then, my cell phone rang. As I dug through my purse to find it, it stopped ringing before I could answer. By this time, the woman and the young girl were close.

"Donna?" "Sue?" We inquired simultaneously.

"I thought that was you." Donna said. "When I was calling, I saw a woman looking in her purse and figured it was you." We both giggled at that comment, and then she introduced me to her daughter.

After escorting her daughter inside, we chatted for a few moments with her husband, who met us in the church foyer shortly afterward. As the three of us stood there, I noticed Donna's other features. When she was talking, she animatedly moved her hands, yet she had such a calm demeanor with an easy smile. Standing beside Donna I was surprised how short she is. I estimated that she stood maybe 5 feet tall even with her high heels. She ended the conversation with her husband and we headed off in search of a meeting place.

Donna and I walked to another building on the church grounds. Each room in this ancillary building was full. We continued looking into each room but alas, when

there was no vacant room we walked back to the main church building in search of a place to talk. It was a short walk but we walked at a leisurely pace and I chatted about the purpose of my work and the reason for the interview. She was rather energetic until we climbed the second set of stairs at the end of the interview. Breathing heavily, she slowed down noticeably, taking deliberate steps and held the handrail with her right hand.

Once we were back at the church, we went upstairs and turned to the right away from where the young people were practicing. We then walked down a hallway and down another set of stairs to the left. The vacant room we finally settled in was really warm. It was another choir room where the adults met on Sunday mornings. This room was long and narrow and had a row of floor-to-ceiling windows on the southwest wall. A line of about a hundred choir robes hung on the wall opposite the windows. There were rows of White plastic folding chairs with a center aisle. I followed Donna into the room and she took a seat on the last row in the chair closest to the robes. I placed my tape recorder on the chair between us and turned my chair slightly toward her. I thought she might turn the chair so we could face each other but she did not. She did, however, turn her body toward me as she sat somewhat sideways in the chair as we began the interview.

Donna's Background in Her Words

I'm a native Houstonian; I've always lived in Houston. I graduated from a predominately Black high school in 1975. I was actually a sixteen-year-old high school graduate. I attended a local HBCU [historically Black colleges and

universities] and I graduated in three and a half years; so I was a very young person starting [in my profession]. A lot of people are shocked by my age. I am 48, but I have been in [the same district] for 28 years.

I taught for eight years at a middle school. I was a middle school counselor for three years and then an assistant principal at a middle school for five years. Later I was a principal at the intermediate level [grades 5 and 6] for four years. After that, I was a principal for four years at the ninth grade level. I think the counseling coupled with administrative experience at the intermediate, middle, and high school levels sort of gave me a wealth of experience because the only level I've never worked with was K-4. But at the time when I became a principal, my daughter was 2 years old; so I got those experiences through just raising her and dealing with [her school and maturation issues]. I have been in my [current] position for four years.

I was raised in a [large family]. There are eight of us; I'm number seven. There are eight of us within eleven years. My oldest brother and my youngest brother are only eleven years apart. We were truly stair steps, so I am most comfortable around people. I have no problems dealing with people. Six of my siblings are brothers, and so, navigating the man's world is not a problem for me. We, [my sister and I], were raised more like boys than girls, and I think that really impacted a lot of what we do and how we do it. I have this "no fear" mentality and that goes for my sister as well.   We think that's a result of living in a home literally with seven males, including my father, because my father was

there the entire time. He passed away about five years ago. My mother [is still alive] but she had a stroke last June.

I really don't have a lot of girlfriends, but that's just because I had so many siblings. Even growing up I always had playmates available. My sister and I are very close. We talk once a day, maybe twice a day. I have one daughter and she has two daughters. [*Donna also reported that she was "older" when she married and has been married for 19 years*].

Anne

My first scheduled appointment with Anne was to be a lunchtime meeting at her office. On the way to the engagement, I purchased lunch for the two of us thinking that she would not have time to eat lunch after our meeting. When I arrived at the building which, based on the newly planted and young flora, the freshness of the paint, the sparkling flooring, and the architecture, was obviously built in the twenty-first century, I immediately was asked who I was there to see and for my driver's license. I handed my license to one person while another called Anne's secretary. The portion of the conversation I could hear gave me the impression that something was wrong. When the receptionist handed me the phone to talk with Anne's secretary, I had a very sinking, dreadful feeling. Visions of a secretary's ineptness invaded my brain. I just *knew* she had forgotten to record the scheduled appointment.

Anne's secretary was very apologetic while telling me that she left messages at my work number and on both of my cell phone numbers that Anne would not be able to meet with me today. Because of a scheduled training, I did not go to the office that

morning and therefore did not receive the message left at my work site. I discussed the urgency and importance of my work and Anne's secretary and I rescheduled for the next week. I doubted her attempts to reach me via cell phones because I had no calls or messages prior to my arrival at the office. However, I later received the messages [on my cell phones and at my office] and her words of missed attempts rang true. The lesson I learned was always to verify my appointments before making the drive to the sites. Although my work is urgent to me, I realized that my data sources are very busy women who are doing me a HUGE service by participating in my study. I had temporarily lost sight of their gifts of time with my doubts and aggravation in this situation. I felt very selfish. A week later, when I met with Anne at her office for our rescheduled morning appointment, her African American secretary was very friendly. She continued apologizing for my inconvenience due to my inability to retrieve my messages. In my eyes she certainly proved her competence. I felt ashamed that I ever doubted her capabilities because I was not accessible to her.

Anne's office was rather small and rectangular shaped. Posters and an African mask adorned the walls. A desk and a computer table with a hutch directly behind it constituted her work space. One side table was placed adjacent to the desk on the wall just to the left of the window. This table contained photographs of her family. A second side table in the corner was located on the wall opposite the door and windows. The window exposed the outer office area where her secretary and other clerks sat in cubicles. The window treatment consisted of a mini-blind which remained open during my visits. The door was closed during my interview but was open when I arrived and

remained open after the interview ended. Two chairs faced her desk. After greeting me with a hug, Anne sat at her desk. I sat in one of the chairs and I placed my tape recorder in the center of her desk.

Anne's Background in Her Words

I'm 45. I grew up in Detroit, and I grew up in a diverse school. It was about 50/50 White and Black. I went through school very skinny, very, very retiring, shy, [and] bright.   I found out later I was bright. I didn't even realize I was bright until I went to work in an elementary school as an aide when I was in high school.   I pulled my old report cards, and I went, "I didn't even know I got that many As." I [had] very little confidence. My mom had grown up with a critical parent so, she was quick to tell me about the things that I didn't do well, and didn't realize that my love language of course, was affirmation and encouragement. I developed a very low, low self-esteem which, in time I overcame, and all of that is part of the journey.

I went through a lot of bullying in junior high. My parents [are] very, very religious, and it was a "turn the other cheek" sort of a thing. They said, "Anne if you ever fight, you'll be in big trouble with us." I didn't have an option. I think not fighting back physically forced me to develop a relationship with God very early on. So I learned to maximize prayer, and I can say honestly that God responded to those prayers from the time I was little bitty and started asking for His help. It helped me develop a mental toughness that I knew sometimes physically, people can't do anything.   I had to depend on a higher

power. I'm a "PK:" preacher's kid; that also has informed me in terms of who I am. As the oldest of seven with a lot of responsibility, that really prepared me for twins [the boys are now seven years old] very well, because I know how to do anything. It gave me a real strong work ethic. [Anne also has an almost three year old daughter.]

[After high school, I] went to a [local Detroit university that was a] commuter sort of place. I felt like a number; lost totally in the system, so I transferred to a private Jesuit university a little farther from home. [I] had a wonderful experience there. Even though there were very few Blacks, they had the vision to see people; and they did see me. I had a chance to study at Oxford University because one particular university professor said, "You need to study at Oxford in the summer program with me." [In my family], there was no money for that. So that was one of those prayer journeys for me. I went to the dean and asked her for money and she said, "First of all, I don't think I have anything." I remember thinking in my mind saying, "God, I really want to go, I really want to go." And she turned around and said, "Actually, I think I *can* help you." So, I went to Oxford and I studied for a summer, and that was a wonderful, a wonderful [experience]. I have a travel theme now; that's the theme of my office.

I've gone through an unusual path during my professional career. Typically people in my position have been a principal for 10 years. And I just totally skipped that [position] twice; first, when they hired me in personnel, and

then when they hired me here. I have never been a principal of a campus; I have been an instructional principal, but not the principal running the whole campus, yet I've been able to do pretty well. And I remind myself of Rod Paige who was never a principal, and he became Secretary of Education. So people will say, "you can't do that unless you've done this," and I don't believe in can'ts.

I started off as an inner-city high school teacher in Detroit, and it was a very, very rough school. I call it a real education for me because I came from a middle-class background and I had no clue what I was walking into. Sort of the "Freedom Writers" experience in reverse in that I was African American as well. However my class issues were varied from my students' until I started understanding and entered their world; fully entered their worlds. I taught English, I taught theater, and radio and TV announcing to the students. And then I fell in love and I moved to Texas. I lived in a better community, high SES [socio-economic status], some diversity but not very much. The interesting thing is that, that journey informs me very well, now in this position. We [the current school district] have the two ends of the spectrum; we have lots of silver spoon families, and we have the children whose parents are just struggling to eke out an existence.

The reason I'm now an educator is because of my mother. My mother grew up in an extremely dysfunctional family: alcoholism. She was beaten and her mother was so damaged. My mother chose to educate herself. She read everything she could put her hands on about child rearing, so that she could raise

the seven of us with knowledge. That showed me how powerful knowledge is. She was able to break a generational cycle of horror because of her decision to become knowledgeable about what to do.

This is how big her vision was for us. She even did things like bought "Emily Post" and taught me about etiquette so that if I was at a dinner with very important people and had to know which fork to use, I was prepared for that. She came from *nothing*. My mother had many hungry days; days where there was one potato that she split with her brother, and her mother said, "Oh, I'm not hungry sweetie."

[I taught] five and a half years in Detroit, then two years in a suburban Houston district, before I had taken my LSAT. I was preparing to go to law school to become a law professor, because I always loved teaching and helping people grow. I thought, "Well, I could get a paid a lot more and I could do that." This gentleman [in her former school district] talked me out of it and told me to go into a Master's program. He said, "You really need to consider administration," and I did.

[The superintendent] opened up a position in central office for a recruiter and I was called and told about [the] position and asked to apply. There were 13 others who applied along with principals, lots of people with plenty of experience beyond my experience, and so I thought, "Oh what a great learning opportunity." I went into the interview without any fear or any nervousness; because I never thought in a billion years I would get the position. I was the 13th to interview, I

got a call the next day saying I had been selected as one of the three finalists, and then I got real nervous.

I was in central office for 5 years in [that school district] as a recruiter, and then I was promoted to coordinator of professional development. [Later] I did resign and came to an agreement with my husband that I would work on my doctorate, finish that, and rear my sons. I stayed home with the twins for four years. I got my doctorate and that definitely didn't hurt my chances of being where I am today. [When I returned to full time work outside of my home after staying home with the boys, I became a] curriculum and instruction administrator, and I accepted a position at a junior high school in the [suburban school district, I used to work in]. It was a transitioning school that was developing more and more diversity with an older staff that had very arcane ideas about instruction. I stayed in that position for two years when I got pregnant with my daughter.

Then I got a call from a former colleague who had been given a position a lot of influence in the [Anne's current school] district. She mentioned she had the opening [for an assistant superintendent] and she wanted me to consider applying. I said, "You know I have young children, I really don't think you want me." She said, "We could work those things out. I know how you are as a mom." [She knew my work ethic because] I did consulting work for her when I was doing my doctorate. I would bring the twins to the meetings, and we would play with the kids and plan together. She said, "I know how you operate; I know

we can work it out if you're the right person." I went through the process of interviewing. It was the same week that I was set to interview that my brother was tragically killed in a motorcycle accident. I had a decision to make. Was I going to flounder and step away from this [opportunity] and let the situation overcome and overwhelm me, or would I find meaning in it? I decided [for my brother] that I would find meaning. I was going to love doubly hard and live out my dreams.

[*Anne did get the job and has been in her current position for two years. She is married and her husband is an attorney.*]

Shelly

I first met Shelly at her office one perfect spring morning. The sun was shining and a slight breeze kept the temperature just right. The day was gorgeous. I had even driven to the site with my convertible top down. When I arrived at the location where several tall and shady trees rustled in the breeze, I was especially energized about the imminent interview. The previous interviews had been so uplifting and I felt such a connection with the women, like we were more than associated by our titles and jobs; we could be friends. As a result of these prior experiences and the ideal weather, my anticipation was elevated. Consequently during the interview, when Shelly's answers were short and her voice dropped so low that it was difficult to discern her words on my tape recorder, I felt alarm and wondered if I was injudicious by agreeing to meet at her office.

The administration building was a multipurpose building that was built in the early 1980s according to a posted sign. Its walls were composed of painted cinder blocks. As soon as I stepped through the threshold of the administration building, I was less than five feet from the receptionist's desk. I said hello and told her I had an appointment with [Shelly]. Thinking the receptionist would need to make a badge for me, I offered my driver's license for identification. She took it, looked at it, and handed it back to me. She told me to have a seat and she would contact Shelly's secretary. She did, and then stared off into space. No attempt at small talk occurred, although we sat less than five feet from one another with only a desk separating us.

The office was very quiet, almost boring. It felt isolated. There was not a buzz of conversation. In the meantime, an Anglo man came in. The receptionist greeted him and told both of us to follow her. She pointed me towards Shelly's secretary and continued down the hallway to the right with the other visitor. It was not until this point that I realized it was a straight visual from the administration building's front door to Shelly's office area.

Shelly's secretary, an Anglo woman in her forties sat quietly at her desk. No papers or apparent work was before her. The office felt slow, almost as if there was not enough work for the secretary to do. She acknowledged me and told me to go right into the office.

When I entered, I gave a slight tap on the door and said hello. Shelly was reviewing test data on her computer and had papers on her desk. She stopped what she was doing, got up and greeted me with a hug. As she approached, her outfit gave me an

Afro-centric feel. Her colorful patterned top had a square neckline and was paired with a full, dark brown skirt. The skirt was adorned with crocheted lace. In addition, she wore her hair in braids which were pulled into a low bun. As she sat down, her fully charmed bracelet rattled on the desk and then again as she moved her hands when she spoke.

During our time together, I perceived her to be somewhat guarded. Her voice would fall during the interview, her answers consisted of few words, and then she asked me to send the transcript of the interview to her home email address. Of course I was happy to comply, but this request was in contrast to her previous conduct of asking me to contact her at her office and having the interview at the office during work hours. I wondered now what was causing this tentative cautious behavior; if she was apprehensive being in her office with her secretary just on the other side of a very thin wall. Questions popped in my mind: had Shelly experienced betrayal, or was she introverted? What was causing this perceptible discomfort? My resolve to determine the cause for the ill-at-ease feeling was set. I struggled with these questions for a while, but I knew before we met the next time I would ask her if she wanted to change locations of the interview. In addition, when we met I would be certain to ask her if she was comfortable with the format. I wanted her to be relaxed but I wondered whether she thought a particular format was required and therefore she was trying to accommodate me.

Shelly's Background in Her Words

I'm 45. For as long as I can remember I've always wanted to do something in the field of education. Even as a little girl I remember playing school with my imaginary friends.   I'm an only child [and] a native Houstonian. I come from a set of parents who are educated. *Their* parents were fortunate enough to be educated [as well]. My dad comes from a family of educators. Ironically enough, my mom comes from a family who have predominately pursued careers in the medical field; pharmacists, doctors, and dentists. So that's been very fortunate.

One of the things that really kind of stays in my mind is as long as I can remember, I've never had to want for anything. I mean I've not had any struggles, I've been very, very fortunate in that aspect. So, it puts a little spin on my background. Up until 3rd or 4th grade we lived in Houston in [an African American, upper middle class neighborhood], then my dad was transferred to St. Louis. We lived in St. Louis for about 3 years and then he was transferred back to Houston which was very fortunate because all of our family is in Texas, Nacogdoches area and Houston. At that point, we moved to what was then a predominately White [upper middle class] neighborhood.

I can remember there being only four Black families in the entire subdivision. I remember going to school and maybe being the only Black in some of my classes. [I was the] first Black cheerleader at my junior high, [and the] second Black drill team person at my high school. I graduated from a

predominately White high school, and then went on to a predominately White [Texas state university]. Then, I did some course work at [another predominately White university] in Houston. [I] even did some coursework at [two predominately Black universities in Texas], because I really felt like I wanted to have a different spin, just a cultural difference in education. I absolutely loved it.

I was actually recruited by [a school district] my senior year [of college]. My major was really, really strange. [I had] a double-major in Marketing and Business Education. I graduated with a BBA. My parents always said, "You will not leave school without a teaching certificate," so I had my teacher's certificate and I actually was recruited by several entities [businesses and school districts]. [My current district] was a brand new school district at that time, and did not have a business department. They said they were looking at building one, [and] I thought, "well, sure." I took a job however at [a business outside of Texas] and worked there from June through November of '83. Then, I got a call saying, "We want to hire you for [the] school district. We want to start our business department, [and we'd] like for you to build the business department."

I worked at the high school as the vocational coordinator, [and] taught several business strand courses for seven years. I then moved to the middle school as the counselor. I was a counselor for maybe four or five years. And then [I] moved to the administrative capacity as the assistant principal at the middle school, and then principal. [I] was principal at the middle school for

seven years. A position became available here as the assistant superintendent and, I was asked to [apply for] that position. I was interested in that position, I interviewed for it, and I [have been in] this particular position for four years. I have been with the district for twenty-five years. [*Shelly is married and has two daughters; one is in her last year of high school and the other is in first grade.*]

Perceived Personal Costs, Consequences, and Ways of Coping

After sharing some of their personal and professional history which delineated their paths to their current positions as central office executives, each woman responded to the question, "How do you define the personal costs you negotiated as you traversed this path to the central office?" Donna, Anne, and Shelly expounded on the personal costs and consequences with which they contend. In addition, they explained the coping techniques they used to manage those costs and consequences. They each shared their definitions and provided descriptions of those costs. Their definitions, consequences and ways to cope were divided into categories which were related to their families and then to their work environments. The groupings were related to the costs encountered as central office executives and then the consequences of their roles as professional women, wives and mothers, and the ways they cope.

As a means of introduction and to assist the reader with delineating the costs, the consequences, and the ways of coping with the costs and consequences, the information is organized in a table format below. First, the related family issues are represented on page 117 (see table 1). The related work issues are presented in another table beginning

on page 118 (see table 2). Following the table representations, the emergent themes are

imparted in text on subsequent pages.

Table 1 Family Issues

Personal costs	Consequences	Ways of coping
Time	Feelings of negligence	Scheduled family time Giving up personal time to spend time with family
	Disconnected families	Placing children in schools close to their jobs
	Lack of balance between home and work	Rising early in the morning to complete work assignments Skipping lunch to accomplish tasks to avoid taking work home
Multiple roles: caretaker and worker	Child and home care responsibilities	Used hired and extended family assistance
	Lack of personal pampering	(none noted)
	Postponing educational pursuits	Wait until the children grow up

Table 2 Work Issues

Personal Cost	Consequences	Ways of Coping
Diminished physical and emotional well-being	Stress	Self- affirmations Physically separating work and family relationships and activities Distractions (books on tape, humorous ethnocentric reading material) Eating Venting with family members Focusing on student needs Prayer Outside clubs and organizations
	Weight management	Talk about it
	Poor eating habits	Talk about them
	Lack of exercise	Talk about it
	Teeth grinding	(unknown)
	Reflux, Graves' disease, high blood pressure	Medication

Table 2 (continued)

Personal Cost	Consequences	Ways of Coping
Being the only one: scrutiny	Standing up for marginalized groups	Focus on purpose Community connection Self- affirmations
	Frank conversations about race and gender issues	Limited number of confidants
	Racist jokes	Speaking out
	Prove worth	Prayer Spiritual beliefs
	Being labeled "articulate"	Bicultural "shifting"
Tokenism	High visibility	Cognizant of physical attire and hair
	Develop mental toughness	(none noted)
Performance pressures	Be overly prepared	Demonstrate ability to operate in "White" world
Social isolation	Few mentors	Worked to create a family atmosphere at work
Salary inequities	Less pay	Acceptance Negotiation attempts
Seeing too much	Questionable decisions	Focus on what can be controlled and release other issues
	Inequitable hiring practices and placement of principals	(none noted)
The politics	Diminished superintendent aspirations	Speak up Remain humble

The Personal Costs

Family

      Time. One of the most prominent personal costs noted by the women was a lack of time with their families, both immediate and extended, due to their professional roles. Anne reported grappling with the fact that she is at work outside of her home at all. She was a stay-at-home mom for a few years after the births of her children and described that time as "being in Camelot." "It was a sacrifice," she stated, when she decided to step away from being at home.

> I was able to give my sons 4 years at home, and with [my daughter], 7 months. I had to weigh if this is a path I need to travel, and I believe that when it's a path for me to travel, things start to order themselves in such a way that you can't even keep up with the momentum, and I saw that happen. From the nanny that I ended up with who is just a family member now, to, just the whole way it fell into place. I knew it was a direction I was supposed to move into. And so, weighing, impacting one child, influencing one child versus potentially creating a ripple-effect in thousands of lives, I decided it probably would be selfish for me to stay and not take the risk of stepping up to this challenge, and so I did.

The other two women returned to their professional work shortly after giving birth. Although their positions afforded them a sense of satisfaction and worth, being away from their families was an undesirable aspect of their roles as central office executives.

Cited also, were the demands of the job which required them to work long hours or to travel at times. For instance, Donna noted the responsibilities of her job caused her to have to spend long days at work. She would go to work before daylight and not return home until early the next morning.

> I had no idea that study sessions go on until 1 in the morning. *No clue* that I could literally leave home in the morning and the sun was not up and go home that same night, not the same night, it would be the next day…I left for work on Monday and now it's Tuesday. I have had 2 area superintendents, but they *never,* ever said anything to us at principals' meetings, [such as], "I'm so tired because I didn't get home 'til 1:30 in the morning. For me, just after those kinds of days and those kinds of nights, it's hard for me to wind down. I get home at 1:30 in the morning, I can't go to bed until 2:30 and then it's hard to sleep past five, [because] the expectation is that you're back there at 7:30 the next morning.

These long days were rare but nonetheless they occurred and were an expected part of her job as a central office administrator. Likewise, Shelly described her position as requiring her to travel for teacher recruiting trips. Coupled with this job-required travel was her three-hour daily commute which kept her from her daughters. All of the women lamented not being able to recapture the time lost with their families because of their job expectations. Thus, they were away from their families more than they liked to be. Shelly offered,

> When you are in administration your hours don't look like what they did as a teacher or counselor. What are required are some lengthy hours. When I first

got into the profession at the time I didn't have any children and didn't have a husband. It was just me and so I began moving into the counselor position. My oldest daughter was 2; and being a counselor it still wasn't difficult, but as an administrator [I] started getting ball games especially with secondary administration. [With the] ball games and different school events is when I started to see the time kind of overlap with my family time. [Now with] my 5 year old, [I see] history is repeating itself. But [I] look at things a little differently. [I] know family has to come first and there are sacrifices to be made.

Donna revealed part of her district's culture was an expectation to put the needs and goals of the district before family. To illustrate this point, she noted that during interviews candidates were asked about the time they are willing to give to the job. According to Donna, people answered "I'll do whatever is necessary." The interviewers would be delighted with these responses. However, she worried that is not a good practice; especially if the employee has a family. Donna reiterated,

One of the interview questions that I don't like is "what kind of time commitment are you willing to put into the job?" And then people because they want the job respond, "I'll give 110%, 24/7, I'm always on-call." That's not a good thing if you have a family. Or, and you know this is not legal; to look at what kind of family commitments a person has when they apply. "Oh, he's single; she's single. She only has one child." Why do we look at those things? [It is] because we want a person to give their mind, body, and soul to that position,

to the school district. This is an area where I'm very vocal... it is important that

we allow people opportunities to take care of their own children.

In a similar vein and as a leader, Anne described being concerned about her employees.

She conveyed not being impressed with those who reported directly to her and who

ignored their families by spending exorbitant hours at the job. She did not demand her

associates to place their families as a lower priority than their careers. Conversely,

Anne's expectation was that her people would work efficiently and effectively during

the time they were at work. Then, they could go home and spend time with their

families. She believed that this opportunity to devote to family time would generate "a

husband who would feel loved and children who were attended to," in the same manner

that she spent time with her family.   Anne pointed out,

I tell my people if you give 100% of yourself during the time you are suppose to

be here we have enough time to do things very well. I don't expect you to put

your family on the alter of your career. [If you take care of them] you are going

to be a better employee. And that's the way I operate. You are not going to see

me here at eight o'clock at night. I have a family and I love them and I am going

to invest in their lives. So you are not making brownie points with me if I see

that you have ignored your family and stayed here.

Multiple roles: caretaker and worker. Even though all of the women valued the

opportunity to lead the children and adults in their school districts, the conflict of

participating in two functions, as family caregiver and professional worker, plagued the

women as they supplied multiple roles as wives, mothers, and professionals. Because of

these various positions time demands were accentuated when Anne mentioned that it "just might be our culture that makes women feel like we are supposed to do everything." With that same sort of feminine mystique being brought to the job, the women described the cost of being a caretaker and an outside-of-the home worker.

Donna reported attending to her mother who had a stroke. She noted that moving her mother to a nursing facility was an option. However, her large family of adult offspring decided to alternate care of their mother in her home where she is most comfortable. When it is Donna's turn, she cares for her mother on weekends. She is responsible for the full supervision of her mother, including feeding and bathing her. Meanwhile the household responsibilities at her personal home have gone unfulfilled. As soon as her weekend commitment for her mother's care is relinquished to another family member it is Monday morning, and Donna returns to her professional duties and tasks. She shared,

> My father passed away about 5 years ago [and] my mother had a stroke last
> June… we are caring for her. I do every other weekend caring for my mother so,
> my weekends are not my own anymore. The time that perhaps other people
> could consider down time, I am up at the crack of dawn on Saturday because I
> have to go and relieve my brother who has spent the night, [and]who needs to
> leave at 6:00 in the morning because most of my brothers work on Saturdays. I
> get her breakfast, get her lunch, [and] get her bathed. When I've done my
> weekend with my mother, I may come here [to work] totally exhausted on a
> Monday morning. This may be a cultural thing because we *could* perhaps put her

in a home, but that's not what we care to do; as long as we are able to do it and, and thankfully there are several of us so that we could do that [care for the mother at home]. But the need to care for our mother is a top priority, and whatever sacrifice we have to do to take care of her, that's just what we have to do.

The schedule though, she declared, left her feeling drained and frazzled when dealing with her work responsibilities and meeting with the superintendent's cabinet on Mondays.

Similarly, Shelly reported juggling her schedule so she could attend her daughters' many activities. She expressed feeling compelled as a mother to be present at the events, while trying to meet her job's evening commitments, such as attending and presenting information at board meetings. Shelly had to be certain that her job obligations were covered so she could fulfill her parental responsibilities.

I have two girls. They are very, very involved, and a big sacrifice has been me knowing what I need to do as a [worker] and mother, and being there for them; being present for those activities, is so important for me. So, juggling my schedule, my meeting schedule, my board meetings … so that I can do what I need to do as a parent, as a mother.

Since her husband also travels extensively, she noted the stress of not having an in-home back-up to attend to the children's needs. When he was away it was a hardship for her family. Due to the job and family requirements, all of the women expressed

tension as they tried to maintain both environments. Therefore, some health costs were noted and will be expounded upon in subsequent pages.

Work

Diminished physical and emotional well-being. Health costs related to responsibilities were verbalized by all three of the women.   All of the women reported a great deal of responsibility for accomplishing job-related tasks with perfection. In so doing, they agreed tremendous pressure was bestowed upon them. This pressure would manifest itself as both external and internal strain. The diseases they described were stress-related.

Stress, related to overwhelming job assignments, was reported by Donna. Noting receiving massive numbers of new time-consuming assignments combined with her other required tasks, caused physical symptoms. She experienced anxiety and a tremendous amount of chest pressure, which she described as "someone standing on her chest," each Monday morning during the area superintendent's meeting.

We were in the meeting and got maybe four more new projects that we didn't anticipate getting along with all of the other things. It's May, so you know what May is about in a school system. All of a sudden, I really felt like something was standing on my chest because I just felt this pressure. I'm looking around the room and I'm wondering, "Where is this coming from?" The next morning I was talking to my colleague next door preparing for these projects that we have to do. They're all due next Monday; we have one-week turnaround, on top of everything else. She remarked that this was her 3rd time feeling it and

she thought about making a doctor's appointment but realized that it was only during that [meeting] time that she felt the pressure. I guess either there's perhaps a psychosomatic kind of thing because once [the meeting] ended I felt fine. I feel fine today, but perhaps sometimes the stress is starting to manifest itself in these physical-type feelings, which may just simply be, stress and anxiety. In my head I'm thinking, "When am I supposed to get this done?" I know I will get it done, but when am I supposed to do it on top of the other things that are occurring?

Donna finally confessed her symptoms to another minority, female cabinet member who also acknowledged similar occurrences. This cabinet member was on the verge of seeking medical assistance until she discovered, like Donna, that the symptoms only occurred during the meeting. Donna felt alone in this experience until she confided in her colleague and discovered that she, too, felt unbelievable stress. The stress manifested itself as shortness of breath and pressure. When deadlines are approaching or systems are in place to accomplish her tasks and then an unanticipated project occurs, Donna detailed other health-related symptoms.

Every now and then I do get anxiety issues. When I have anxiety and I'm talking to people and it drives me crazy and one of these days I'll be able to control it, but my voice goes up an octave. I think it affects my breathing a little bit. It's usually because a deadline is approaching or I've already mapped out this is what I have to do; I've managed to work out or develop a system for doing [my work]and then here come all these other [assignments] that I didn't

anticipate. All the while, I'm trying to carve out my family time too because

that's important.

Her desire was to control the physical manifestation of her thoughts but she reported that so far she has been unsuccessful. Donna offered that she controlled her breathing much better than she controlled her voice but that both were results of pressure she experienced during the meetings.

Additionally, other stress-related diseases were identified by the women. High blood pressure was reported by two of them. Because her blood pressure was out of control, Donna chose to forego having more children. She revealed that she was not willing to take the risk of becoming pregnant with her blood pressure issues. She was unclear as to whether her job requirements were responsible for the elevated blood pressure, but she identified the diagnosis of her condition once she became a principal and following the birth of her child. Likewise, Shelly expressed her battle with high blood pressure as an administrator. She tied this condition to job stress. Shelly enumerated several issues which she associated with her job pressure. She exclaimed,

Oh my God! Weight [gain]! I eat nervously and my blood pressure is high. I

didn't have issues with allergies and I do now. I'm not sure if that's having

something to do [with] mold or what, but I have been affected. I've never had

reflux and I do [now]; that's directly tied into stress.

Thus she experienced several health-related symptoms she identified with job-related strain.

Anne emphasized stress as a factor related to her physical and emotional wellbeing. "The consistent tension at work was immeasurable," she reported. In response to the constant worry about whether others at her job were judging her as competent, she shared,

It [the job] was hard; the most difficult thing I had ever been through. I started grinding my teeth at night. I was under a lot of stress. I developed Graves' disease during that 5 ½ year period. It was unbelievable but a lot of it [the stress] was not necessarily affected by outsiders some of it was self-inflected. Where I was consistently second guessing myself wondering about what they thought and really getting a sense of my work and value based on how I was defined by that White world. It wasn't until I made the transition which I am sure I am still shifting through but I think I have pretty much made a big leap that those people don't define my work and value I need to know how I am at my core and for me that is defined by my relationship with God...I don't look over my shoulder any more and when I do, I stop and give myself a pep talk about remember who you are.

Anne also communicated her diagnosis of Graves' disease and some of the symptoms of the disease included fatigue, irritability, trouble sleeping, bulging eyes, and rapid heart beat. Although the cause of Graves' disease is not known, one of the possible underlying factors is stress.

However, while discussing her health costs, Anne blamed herself for some of her stress. At the time of her diagnosis, Anne noted her pressure to perform, to set a positive

example and to pave the way for other African American females at work because she was the only African American female in the central office. This cumulative pressure was combined with stress at home. Mold was discovered in the house and caused the family to vacate their home until the mold was removed. Now, teaching her work colleagues to help them to understand Graves' disease has been an added burden for Anne. She conveyed that she has to allow them to work through their baggage regarding her disease to really see her as a capable woman.

Being the only one. All of the women stated that they were the only female African American central office leader in their capacity. As such, they talked about being viewed through a different lens, one that scrutinized their looks as well as all of their actions. Shelly voiced the concern that being the only one was the first strike against her. Like Shelly, all of the women reported that their race combined with their gender made them highly visible. Anne and Shelly were told by colleagues that "the only reason they got their jobs was because they are Black;" not because a capable professional was required, but because a racial token was needed. Rather than being characterized by their skills and abilities, the women exposed conversations where they were defined first as "that Black lady." Shelly noted, "I've actually witnessed conversations where instead of describing someone according to their skill ability it's, 'oh she's the…oh that's that Black lady', or 'she's that Black lady.' Before they say anything they describe... ethnicity."

The women acknowledged that their White colleagues were not told that they received a position rather than earning it, nor were they described first by race. The

scrutiny of being the only one was experienced as life in a "fishbowl" and identified as a "magnifying glass being used many, many times" to inspect them. Anne shared,

> I was the only African American in central office. There was one other person of color, a Hispanic female who I became friends with and she serviced the role of the psychologist for the district. We were the only [people of color] in the central office. Talk about a fist bowl experience and of course people's assumptions immediately was I was hired because I was Black and I couldn't possible be talented and a reasonable choice for this position.

The women commented that they were noticed primarily for their race, and then for their physical features related to dress and hair. Donna mentioned how she is distinguished for "dressing up everyday" and she hears remarks from her co-workers noting such. "How do you expect me to come?" she wondered and continued,

> Well, gosh, I'm a professional...and I say to them, "I'm just regular, okay?" I would bring back professionalism. I just think that you should be able to tell the teachers from the children. I want to make sure that the learning environment that we had that caused us to be successful... [is the kind]... we create... for this next generation of children.

She viewed dimly those teachers who were excited by "insignificant things such as 'no tie day,' 'no hose day' or 't-shirt day'." She expected her fourteen year old daughter to wear jeans with holes but not her teacher. She viewed her appearance as professional and believed her mode of dress should be a characteristic of the profession of which she is a

member. "Being taken seriously is important" to Donna, and her dress, she noted, "reflected her professionalism."

In addition to clothing, hair is a discerning attribute for the women. Shelly divulged that for a long time before she finally wore her hair in braids, and although the style was easy for her to maintain, she was not certain how the hairdo would be perceived by her White colleagues. Shelly reported,

> It took me a long time before I thought... [I could] go with the braids in my hair
> and let it grow back. Because [I thought], "all right, I don't want them to [have a
> problem with this], I don't want this to be [viewed as] an ethnic move, or an
> ethnicity *issue*." But [for me] it never has been. *Never.* I, typically at work, wear
> [my braids] in a ball. Never down. And it's never been an issue.

> Avoiding more undue attention from Whites was her desire. Her concern was

that her hair in braids would be judged as an ethnic issue and one with which she did not want to have to deal. Therefore, even though she proceeded with braiding her hair and her braids are long, she resolutely "wears them pulled in a bun and does not allow them to hang loose." In this way, she noted, less attention is drawn to the braids.

Like Shelly, Anne thought about her hair and the impact it had on her position. After one Anglo friend and co-worker cut her hair really short, she told Anne to have dreadlocks. Anne was doubtful, and told her friend she did not know what it would be like to have dreadlocks. Thinking about the conversation and the reality of the work surrounding maintaining dreadlocks, Anne gave herself permission to "emancipate herself" from the issues of hair. As a result, she cut her hair in a very short style.

The men, some of them, [commented] "you look good," but I could tell it was [doubtful], but [for] the women it was like they were freed. They said, "You are beautiful." ...I was just being who I am. Isn't that awesome? When I gave myself permission to be who I am... it [just] works for me. I'm free [a] good twenty minutes [earlier] in the morning. [Also], I started taking swimming lessons [because now] I didn't have to worry about my hair.

Anne detailed the commotion her new cut created in her work environment. She reported the men being polite by saying that it looked nice but she could tell they were disingenuous by their expressions or tones of voice. On the other hand, she stated the women in her building gushed over her change. Even though Anne had other experiences being highly visible due to her ethnicity and gender, she was amazed by the amount of attention that was generated from *her* haircut as opposed to her Anglo friend and co-worker.

Tokenism. Additionally, being the only African American female and particularly noticeable in such high ranking positions, produces several other issues such as performance pressures, social isolation, and stereotyping. These issues are defined and labeled as tokenism by Kanter and Stein (1980) and came to light as the women in my study shared their experiences. Tokenism is expressed through both race and gender stereotypes for the women. Shelly imparted that she felt like she had to overcome being a token. She pointed out,

The first strike, it's assumed that's against you is being from a [different] cultural background. There are a lot of assumptions that go along with that.

When I first came to the district, there were three African American employees. "Is this your token?" When I talk about a political standpoint, I had to get over certain things where it's assumed "she is female, she may not be able to do this...she may not be able to understand the maintenance and operation process" or even probably the funniest one to me is "dealing with the hiring."

All of the women noted that they had to work twice as hard as others in the organization to be seen as valuable and productive, that there was some isolation and that they were viewed as representing the entire group of African Americans. To convey their dilemmas of tokenism, the women shared examples of performance pressures they experienced, the isolation and the stereotyping they encountered.

Performance pressures. The women verbalized the importance of being knowledgeable and of accessing resources. Two of them said they had to "be better than good." Their expertise and credentials had to be outstanding to be considered for a central office position at all. Having to know what they were doing backwards and forwards was how they expressed the demands on them. Donna declared that it was important that she *always* did her homework and knew what she was talking about, because she knew she would be the only one in the superintendent's cabinet who would be questioned. In addition, she described her performance as being watched and judged consistently. "I was always expected to handle my own problems." She reported that she had to make sure that she was right and did not say anything until she was certain she knew what she was talking about in relationship to school topics. Donna emphasized,

I think it's extremely important to be knowledgeable and to access resources. If something comes at me and I don't know it today, by golly, in the morning, I'm going to be an expert. You have to always be on top of your game. If you have to call people and bring them in [do it], but always know what you're doing inside out, backwards and forwards... I *always* do my homework and I know what I'm talking about. And if I don't know what I'm talking about, I don't say anything until I do know what I'm talking about, because I would be the one that would be questioned. Or [I would hear] she didn't get that right, so I have to make sure.

One of the women conveyed that a White male or female would not necessarily have to have such a high-level of expertise in order to gain position or respect. Shelly pointed out that her White male superintendent has never been a teacher, a principal or an assistant superintendent and yet, he was selected to lead the school district. She said,

[The new superintendent] really relies on me because he doesn't know the district. I'm very valuable to him. He doesn't want to say that he appreciates what I know. He doesn't want anybody to know he doesn't know what he's doing, but it's almost comical to me.

Additionally, Donna reported knowing that she had to be better than the competition as she prepared for a superintendent's cabinet position. She commented,

You can't go in and try to do equal and, and then, it's not even a *little* bit more, *twice* as much. That's been my mantra, and that is what I do. I just know that that's the case. And is life fair? No, it's not.

She said that she could not be an equal or even a little bit better, she had to be *twice* as good as the others. Similarly, she expressed having to volunteer for more assignments and projects to prove her knowledge and commitment to the district. In this way, she positioned herself to be viewed as a viable candidate for central office. According to Donna,

> So it's not fair, but you can even the playing field by having the willingness to do what you can to make it as fair as possible for you. If it requires doing twice as much, then that's what you do. I always would look at my surroundings, whenever I tried to advance to the next level... I would check out the competition... because I knew I had to be better than my competitors. I would always find out, "who else is trying to get this, who else wants this? Okay, what does he have, what does she have, what do they have?" and then I would go out and show better. [I would ask], "Oh! You all need someone to do a district whatever? I'm the one!" I made sure that everybody knew who I was.

In addition, Donna reported,

> I think that was the "do more", because other people could just do their jobs and perhaps things could happen. But I knew that I had to put myself out there, I had to be willing to go wherever I needed to go. My reports or my presentations I always made sure [were perfect]. Before I would do anything that would be seen by a large group or that I thought may be displayed somewhere, I always make sure that another set of eyes [has looked at it]. My products are as flawless as

possible because I don't believe that I could say, "Oh! Just a typo," and it would

be accepted.

As the only African American female in central administration, Anne was

insecure about how she was perceived by her White counterparts in administration.   Her

second guessing herself, wondering what the folks at her job thought about her and how

she was "defined by that White world," kept her uneasy. She stated,

> We are generating consistently energy that our brains can actually register and
>
> what we put out there [into the universe] we are going to attract to ourselves.
>
> And I truly believe that. If I am projecting fear and self-doubt people are going
>
> to pick up on it. I worried about what I was sending out [therefore I] first of all
>
> [had to] recognize what I am thinking.

 At times she would offer suggestions and she would be ignored. "Then," she

said, "A White person would say the same thing and all of a sudden it was a great idea."

Anne noted that she did not purposefully draw attention to herself. Rather, she worked

hard and at the appropriate juncture asked for what she wanted. Therefore, when her

Anglo male supervisor recognized her talent and promoted her, she was stunned. Anne

shared,

> I basically had a conversation with my boss and I said, "These are the things that
>
> I've accomplished", and it was a long list. I said, "I think I need a promotion."
>
> He said, "I'm going to talk to the superintendent." And then, they promoted me
>
> to the same level as the other people who had been training me. It's so ironic
>
> because I think that the original man that hired thought I would be satisfied to sit

there [in the same lower position]. [My supervisor] recognized my talent, and he promoted me. As a Black person, and the only one, that was pretty significant, I'd say.

At first, she was hesitant about even applying for the higher-ranking position because she was the only African American in the central office.

Shelly voiced similar concerns and noted high expectations when she became an assistant superintendent and commented,

I knew that from a time standpoint the time would not look a lot like it looked as a campus administrator. I also knew that the expectations would be very, very high. I would be able to be up for the challenge and maintain the level of expectations was really an issue for me.

Not only was she held accountable for the test scores of the school district, but she discussed having to prove herself frequently related to other matters. She was scrutinized because there were no other African Americans in central office. If any rumors were raised in the community or by school board members, she was the one who had to defend the inaccurate or dishonest information. First, assumptions were made that the rumors were true. The benefit of the doubt was not given to her or to the district. Then, she was required to prove that the accusations were false. Also, she had to establish that she could handle the job and understand maintenance and operational processes. Assumptions were expressed by other district employees that because she was female and African American she did not have the knowledge base in areas outside of instruction and she had to prove otherwise.

Like Shelly, for Anne, being excellent is the greatest way to show the doubts were a lie. She continued to lead in a transparent manner so her Anglo counterparts would "see beyond color and start to see me." All of the women agreed being seen as a professional means "we cannot afford to make mistakes." Professionalism means according to Anne,

> We get to meetings on time, we can be the "King James" of English, we know how to finish projects and when they are done they are impeccably done and every "t" is crossed and every "i" is dotted. Our ice is colder. Our sugar is sweeter...

To be considered for a central office position, this professionalism must be well entrenched in the behavior; however, that does not mean automatic access. Shelly and Donna communicated frustration when they described not being judged on merit. Shelly highlighted task completion and innovation were secondary to "the good ol' boy system," when promotions were available. Shelly shared,

> I mean that's the whole thing, you [as an African American female] have to be better than good... a White male or female could come in and not have nearly your credentials and become the superintendent... but it's just about who *they* know, what *they* look like... we have actually had to go through the ranks... it's not just a piece of something minute that can be taken for granted.

Donna spoke about people being judged by the actions of their children or their husbands. She pointed out,

[There are] inequitable ways of selecting people for positions. It's this way today, that way tomorrow. The whole rumor thing ...and I see this happening more and more which also kind of adds to my aggravation that we don't just look at people on their merit. Somebody might say that this happened, ugly rumors about people... because I've just seen too many things happen with administrators, "Oh her husband's an alcoholic, and "I saw her husband at this restaurant with..., and it impacts people's *careers* because people making the decisions listen to those things. Instead of just looking at people by their merit, and what they're doing, and what they can contribute to children [they are judged by their families]. This is another reason why I keep my family as far away from my school district; they don't know anything about my husband. They know that my child attends [a high school in another district] that's about the extent of it.

Because of this scrutiny and the association with the work performance, Donna purposefully isolated her family from her work environment by living in a district distinct from the one in which she worked.

Social isolation. Donna described her behavior at work and her behavior at home to be dissimilar. She mentioned that her daughter commented on the difference in her conversation and her tone of voice when she was talking with family members versus co-workers. Donna stated,

First of all, and again it goes back to I'm not a social butterfly by nature with other people, with my family I am. I think, professionally, people may look at me as pretty stiff and ....I'm not a perfectionist, far from a perfectionist, but

maybe not as flexible as I really am personally... And viewed perhaps even as somebody who doesn't like to have a good time. But *I* do.

She was much more animated; she teased, joked and was loud with her immediate and extended family members. Uproarious laughter and friendly competition filled her home life. Donna admitted that people at work looked at her as being pretty stiff and unapproachable. She noticed her colleagues would take teasing jabs at one another, but never with her. Donna reported she preferred it that way. She informed,

> I think that some of them perhaps consider me not as approachable. They don't kid with me or joke with me. Nobody really tells me jokes. My closest cabinet member is the person ...because we started together and she was actually the middle school principal that fed into my 9th grade school. So we kind of go back, we have a history together and so she's the person that I may just talk to a little bit, just to have an ear to bounce things off. I think it's the combination of a lot of things that with me things are very professional. I can see them sometimes make little jabs at each other in certain instances, but people don't jab at me, that just doesn't happen and I like it that way.

 Yet she said she likes to have fun, to play games, and to joke, just not at work. Fun-loving is her behavior with her family and close friends, but never with her colleagues. She goes "to work to do a job. If her job was supposed to be fun, it would be called a sport," she informed.

Sharing an example of the variation of her behavioral responses, Donna described going to a multi-game complex with her family and then with her co-workers.

She reported thoroughly enjoying her experience with her family. They laughed and challenged one another to many games and contests. However, when her work took her to the same complex for a retreat, she was ill-at-ease and just waited for the time to pass. Her job is not a place where she comes to have fun, she noted,

> [My] work is to impact students and learning, and all of the other things to create a situation so that the children will have a better life. That is what I do here. So, when I work, I *work*. Now, when it's time to play... I *play*. Again, it goes back to family versus work. I don't want the two of those to cross.

Therefore she was conflicted in this environment that promoted fun and games combined with her professional responsibilities. Although her isolation was purposeful, she nevertheless demonstrated a need for expressing this self-imposed isolation and thus, was secluded from the group's bonding adventure.

For Shelly, being isolated as the only African American female assistant superintendent in her district created some tension. She reported being treated differently. Sometimes co-workers or community members were overly concerned about her in a disingenuous way. She declared that she could tell when people did not necessarily mean the positive things that they were saying. They did not want her in that position of authority but they had to accept her as the assistant superintendent.

One of the ways that Shelly noticed that she was circumvented was through periodic secret meetings to which she was never invited. She called it a "secret society." However, she was not supposed to be aware of these meetings. Shelly conveyed that these meetings were held with three White men, the superintendent and two men he

brought to the district. Although two of the men were lower on the organizational chart than she, they made decisions about her authority. Entities that used to be her responsibility were shifted to the men without any consultation with or notification given to her. Shelly stated,

> For example, periodically there are meetings that occur that maybe the three
> White males are privy to... my rank in terms of positions [is] actually higher than
> two of those people in there. Yet I am not invited to those meetings. Now I've
> seen that occur several times. I'm seeing things occurring... where I've made
> decisions about particular entities and now that's being shifted ...to the two White
> men that are lower on the totem pole than me.

Likewise, Anne recalled a similar form of isolation. She described,

> being invisible ...where people purposely look through you as if you don't exist,
> and marginalize you… and… are just plain old mean. For example, someone
> comes in to me and says, "You know, the reason you got the job is because
> you're Black." Real straightforward, as if that is acceptable.

They would tell her that because of the politics of the district, the reason that she was hired was because she is Black and the district needed a Black face in a high-ranking position. Anne recounted feeling invisible, as if the work that she had done in the past and the accomplishments she attained were worthless. Being viewed as a token and being marginalized as a person by others as a way to isolate her were labeled as personal costs she had to negotiate.

Shelly noted that when she became employed, the district had only three African American employees. Now in her role as a central office executive, she believes she is viewed as a token because after twenty-five years as an employee, she is the first and only African American assistant superintendent. She expressed pressure in having to overcome a negative image that "a Black female" could not handle the job. Because she is the only one in the office who is African American, she must prove that she "deserved" this position. In addition, she lamented not having another African American female at the same level on the organizational chart with her to discuss ideas and share challenges. She was uncertain whether her experiences were because she is female, Black or a combination of the two and she had no one to share her feelings with who she felt "would really understand." According to Shelly,

> Being the only one...has certain disadvantages... other things that you think about such as, "who do I talk with?"...and there are few African Americans in principal and assistant principal positions, and directors' positions. I feel like I really have to go to bat for them a lot.

In her role as a district leader, Shelly detailed that it was her responsibility to protect the handful of African American administrators since their voices were often ignored by central office leadership. Therefore, when she expressed an opinion which differed from the rest of the superintendent's cabinet, she was viewed as oppositional in a stereotypic manner, not because of her concern for helping these leaders to "see those who were made invisible."

Stereotypes. Shelly reported that protecting the marginalized was viewed as her responsibility and expected behavior for her. She labeled it as a disadvantage because she had to keep this expectation in the forefront of her thoughts. Likewise when decisions required her to stand up for children of color, Donna spoke about,

> I have no problem with being the only person who votes 'no' when 12 other people said yes. "That's my vote and I'm sticking to it, and when we walk out of this room I'm a part of the team."

Anne also commented that she had the responsibility to be properly assertive and speak up for those children and staff who were frequently overlooked.

Because of her passion, coupled with her being the only African American female in the superintendent's cabinet, Donna reported being perceived as very emotional. She pointed out that she loses patience when Whites neither realize the privileges they have nor share for the benefit of all. Donna quite clearly stated,

> The barometer goes up high but when it goes up, it can come down as quickly. I'm just going to give an example. I had a meeting with my principals, and there's a principal that I've managed to get $300,000 dollars for because of some different circumstances in her building. I was telling them about a workshop that was going to cost $5,000 dollars. I needed each one of them to pull $5,000 out of their budget because it's a project that I think is worthwhile and we're going to go forth with it next year. She exclaims, "$5000 dollars!!!" And immediately I countered, "I know you didn't say that! As a matter of fact, I believe that you're going to pay ten and we're going to lessen the price for the other people in the

room." That's what I'll do, and I have to watch that sometimes. There used to

be a time that I could calmly say, "Well, we'll talk about that later. We'll discuss

it."

Reflecting on her intense emotions, Donna stated," I am emotional because the children

are so important to me; they are our present and our future," and that belief will never be

compromised. However she noted being seen as emotional is not a positive

characteristic as an African American. She did not want her colleagues to think that *all*

[italics added] African Americans are highly emotional, but she wanted to be certain that

she was recognized. She asserted,

> I am the only African American female. I think sometimes I'm perceived by the
>
> group as a hothead... just because I know I've gone in a direction really, really
>
> fast. I'll [reflect] and just personally to myself think, "Well, that was wrong."
>
> But I don't really ever say anything to anybody else. [I'll think] "You've got to
>
> do better next time," because... "I don't want them to think that all African
>
> Americans are just [snaps her fingers] highly emotional, [snaps again] fly off the
>
> handle, and just go berserk." I'm still going to make sure that my voice is heard,
>
> that my vote is counted.

When you are the only example they have, Shelly reported, every action becomes

a reflection of all African American females. She expressed, "it represents that whole

token thing. I mean, I'm the only example they have. I often say it's very lonely at the

top."

Therefore, Anne cautioned, "Avoid the appearance of evil." To illustrate her concern, she recounted,

> First of all, I would say make sure you know who you are at your moral core and don't compromise that. I'm going to fine this to women of color, people of color. Typically what gets us in trouble is money; so make sure you don't mess with the money. Avoid the appearance of evil is the principle I live by. I'll give you an example. Someone was having a meeting and they asked… well, it wasn't even a meeting it was a little get-together. They said, "Could we get some sodas?" And I said, "It's not instructionally focused...so the answer's a no." My first response was a yes... I stopped myself, I thought, "Wait a minute." I said, "Avoid the appearance of evil."

 When she said it was not an appropriate expense related to instruction, she noticed some frowns. Anne admitted that it seemed a bit rigid. However, she stood by her decision because she needed to be safe. The stereotype that Blacks "don't know how to handle finances" is a negative one that could be associated with her, and she did not want to take any risks.

Additionally, the topic of money as related to the personal costs the women defined, took the form of a discussion of salaries. The women divulged inequities. Shelly and Donna spoke specifically about their personal experiences with imbalanced salaries. They questioned the practice but did not receive additional compensation.

Salary inequities. Donna recalled a time as a principal when her first year assistant principal was compensated more highly than she. Therefore, she inquired

about this fact. Donna was told that because he was a former coach, his salary was already higher and he would not be required to accept a lesser salary as he moved into an administrative position.

> When I was a principal at the 9th grade school I hired an assistant principal. We
> got the salary statements and he was making more money than me. I was his
> supervisor. The reason that was explained to me was that he was a coach and
> coaches are paid so highly that when a person goes from a coaching position to
> an administrative position, they can't very well say, "We're going to… [give you
> less pay]," so that was the explanation.

However, no attempt to raise her salary was made. She tried to negotiate her salary but was informed that the district did not negotiate salaries. Later, she discovered that a White male was successful in his negotiated salary bid. Donna described,

> Another time, I went to try to negotiate my salary and I was told that we don't
> negotiate, and I found out that there was a male who had negotiated a salary. I
> was told that there was no such thing as negotiation and [yet, his] was negotiated.
> When I came into this position and I laid out the salary statement for my
> principals, there it was again. I had a principal who happened to be a male
> principal, who was making more than me as a superintendent, an area
> superintendent. And I went in to discuss it in HR again and I was told that uh,
> pretty much, the district's philosophy was to put the money into the campuses
> and the people that were in the trenches [directly] impacting [student learning]. I
> was not told this, but it was implied, "you could always go and apply for that

position if that salary is [what you want]…. In those two instances where I have

supervised people making more money than me, it has never happened with a

female. I have supervised two males whose salaries were higher than mine.

She was informed that the district philosophy was to expend its monetary resources on

the campus level. Therefore, she was not eligible for a salary increase. Donna

mentioned however, that she never experienced a female who was compensated more

favorably than she, nor was she aware of a female ever making more money than her

male or female supervisor.

Similarly, Shelly divulged,

Our young, White male businessman has no experience in education. He's new;

he just came in January. He's probably making 35-40,000 dollars more than I

am. He's friends with the superintendent. They don't want to let that out of the

bag, but I'm positive. Well, you know that's public record. And it's kind of

funny to me that people think that you can't find this information out ...or, that I

would never [expose] it.

His salary is supposed to be a secret, she noted. Therefore, she was amused that the

superintendent would think that she would not find out this information. Although the

superintendent has yet to admit it, Shelly knows how valuable she is to him because of

her longevity in the district and her knowledge base, contrasted with his inexperience in

education and his need for her expertise. In the meantime, however, her value is not

translated into increased salary.

All of the women reported a variety of personal costs that they encountered as they fulfilled their roles of central office executive administrators. Some of these costs were highlighted in the previous pages and denoted with italicized headings. Noteworthy is Shelly's confusion whether to attribute the negative attention to race, gender or the combination of race and gender. She commented, "The first strike, it's assumed that's against you…is being from a different cultural background and …then, where it's assumed as a female, you may not be able to understand [such as] maintenance and operations." When asked to reflect upon their personal costs and to consider the consequences of those costs they identified, the women shared their viewpoints. Their perceptions are delineated in the following pages.

The Consequences of Their Costs

Family

The consequences of their costs as related to their families are noted in the following topics. Caring for their families was a concern for the women; they did not like having to be away from them for long periods of time during the day. Spending time with their families was important to them. The children's care was especially noted as a concern. In addition, their individual personal care was desired but limited due to time and required activities.

Time. When asked about the consequences of their costs, the women first highlighted the toll on their families. Time with them was valued and they did not spend the amount of time that they would like with their families. Donna asserted her unwillingness to take any more time away from her family because her family was very

important to her. She noted watching colleagues' children disconnect from their families

and families experience divorce because her co-workers gave exorbitant attention to the

job. Donna shared,

> My family is very important to me. My husband [and] my daughter are extremely
>
> important, and I was not willing to take anymore time [away from them]... I
>
> watched all of my colleagues around me lose their children, lose their families
>
> because they were so tied to the job, and I didn't want to be a part of those
>
> statistics.

 Similarly, Anne noted the tragedy of workers neglecting their families because

of their job responsibilities. She accounted reminding her co-workers that they had

families and "to go home." Her reasoning was to help them to take care of the many

facets of their lives and to have families that knew they were loved and cherished. Anne

offered,

> There's a principle that the Chinese culture reflects, and it's that, "Life is like a
>
> chair: it has 4 legs." There's your emotional, spiritual, intellectual, and physical.
>
> But the principle really means that if any of those legs is unstable, if you sit on
>
> that chair what's going to happen? It's going to fall over. Family is one of those
>
> legs for me, and as a leader, I don't believe that people should sacrifice their lives
>
> for their job. I believe people who are plugged into their families are going to be
>
> more effective employees, and I'm so thankful for my boss because she
>
> understands that, and she respects that... when I'm here, I might work through
>
> lunch hour sometimes (which I really shouldn't do because that's one of the legs

of the chair), but I'm going to give 100% sweat, blood, and tears. If people do

that, that's enough time to do a lot of great things. I think sometimes people play

the game of feeling important by staying late. If they had just maximized and

been a good steward of the time that they're assigned to be here, they would

accomplish even more probably. They could pour themselves into their families

so that they don't lose their personal life and end up with a divorce or children

who are off the chart … you go through all these things for the people at work

and then at home it's falling apart, what's the point of that? These people are not

going to be at your bedside when you're gasping your last breath most likely. So,

that balance is extremely important to me, and my employees know it.

The women recognized the amount of time which could be expended at work and did not

want to reflect the data which symbolized broken families and broken homes because of

it.

Like Anne, Donna also reported being vocal with her colleagues to recognize the

value of families and allow people the opportunity to take care of their own children.

She was especially concerned when teachers and principals had to be at their job sites for

activities and therefore missed the programs and other school experiences for their

children. "Teachers' children and preachers' children are the worst children," she

recalled hearing in her youth. Now she attributed that adage to "both groups out trying

to save everybody else," that they lost sight of what is occurring or not occurring in their

own homes and surroundings.

Donna continued,

> So for me it has been a conscious [decision]; it could be because I only have one child and because I had the child at an older age that I am not going to sacrifice her for *anything*. You will find me going to the school for the parent conference, doing whatever I need to do...letting people know that she has a performance at 5:00, so I have to leave [work] at 4 because I have to be in my seat before the performance begins. But a lot of people don't have that confidence to do that and so, what I hear people say is, "I had an open house last night [at my school] and my daughter's open house was last night ...so I haven't had a chance to meet her teachers." [Hearing statements like that] bothers me.

Taking more time away from her family was something Shelly was not willing to do. With her husband's travel schedule, her daughters' requiring transportation to their activities, and her own work schedule, Shelly had little time left for anything else. She noted, "I started on my doctorate and stopped because I just did not have the time...that's been a big thing, but I am going to start back next fall. " Therefore, she was loathed giving up her educational desires. Shelly entered a doctoral program but after a short period of time exited the program. The time required for her work and family obligations did not allow her participation in additional study. She postponed her professional goals to care for her family. However, Shelly has committed to returning to her postgraduate work as her oldest daughter begins college.

Multiple roles: caretaker and worker. When Anne's daughter started pre-school, the nanny was let go. Due to the lack of in-home childcare, Anne admitted to being

home from work more. She also divulged that her husband was not a person who would take on more of the childcare or household responsibilities.

> My daughter started a preschool program because she needed to. She's two; she is infinitely curious [and] she had to be challenged... She is loving it...doing great. So [having a nanny] is no longer in place. [Therefore], I am more at home these days. I don't have family [in town]...and my husband is not a person who does anything like that really. So, it's challenging.

For Anne, who does not have extended family present who can assist her childcare needs, she is the primary caretaker. In the same way, Shelly was the primary caretaker. She revealed that her husband frequently being out of town created a hardship for her, and she mentioned the pressure of caring for her two children while he was away. She felt alone in "having to juggle" the schedule during his absence.

 In contrast, Donna asserted her satisfaction with her husband's decision to accept a severance package from his former employer. He started his own company to have a more flexible work schedule. Donna stated,

> [My work as an administrator] was very, very difficult for us to coordinate schedules … having to call people at the last minute, asking my sister, 'Will you go pick [Donna's daughter] up from the daycare because I have to go here or there [for the job]?' So, we had a talk, and decided that [Donna's husband] would… take this package to leave [his employer], and they would give [him] this big severance. So, he took that, and opened his own business... which means his schedule is very flexible. All I have to do is call and he works the schedule

any way he can. That helps, because if he was still trying to work a job, with me

working, it would never, ever, ever work. I never know from day to day...

[when] I'm able to leave at 5:00. [Now] all I have to do is call him or text him,

and he's there [to attend to their daughter]. Or in the morning I have to be at

work at 7:30, [and he can] take her to school. He's always available.

Although Donna did not spend as much time with her daughter as she used to do, she

believed this arrangement was in her daughter's best interest. Donna detailed her

husband's closer relationship with their daughter because he assumed greater

responsibility for her care. Even though Donna "had raised a Mommy's girl," she

believed that spending less time with her daughter as a result of her work and school

schedule, "forged a stronger father-daughter bond," which she proclaimed would later

profit her daughter.

Even though the women detailed caring for others, both at home and the work

site, their gift of time for themselves was rarely reported. In fact, Shelly pined for some

"me" time. She tried to give herself that time during her vacation but found that it was

more important to reconnect with her daughters. Therefore, she spent her vacation time

bonding with them and participating in their desired activities. Likewise, opportunities

for pampering pleased Anne as she proudly displayed her nails. She smiled as she

described having a manicure and pedicure. "It's difficult for me [to] get my toenails

done...at least they are done today," Anne shared. This was a rare occurrence she

informed me, as she gushed over having the opportunity for a bit of luxury.

Work

The consequences of the cost as related to work are noted. Factors included as consequences were related to the women's physical and emotional health. They also reported being the only one, seeing too much because of their high level positions, the politics and having few mentors as consequences of their costs. Their experiences were categorized under these headings in a way to illuminate the consequences they encountered.

Diminished physical and emotional well-being. Each woman discussed reduced health as a consequence of the lives they lead as central office educational executives. They noted managing appropriate weight as an issue. For two of the women, the concern was gaining too much weight. For one woman, it was maintaining enough weight. All lamented unhealthy eating habits as a reason for their weight management issues. One culprit was eating fast foods. A second was compulsive eating, and a third was skipping meals entirely. The women all confessed to these poor eating habits being due to stress and time pressures they felt at work and at home.

The people in Donna's office knew that they would spend tremendous amounts of time in the office and therefore they had bins filled with snacks which were available in a kitchenette area. The bins were filled with "unhealthy items" but food that would not spoil quickly, she noted. Donna revealed having "Cracker Jacks for dinner" the previous night because she had an evening meeting and did not take the time to leave the office to eat something more nourishing.

Even when she did go out to eat, her choices may not have been the best. Donna detailed her husband's joking yet accurate admonishment,

> I'm on the cell phone talking to him and I say, "Hold on... Okay, I'd like a Route 44 cranberry-lime plus"… [laughs]...He goes, "Doris you're always in a fast food line when you're talking to me on the phone"... "You have to stop that." But I'm constantly on the go and moving around...Just not even the time in my opinion, to sit down and eat, so I eat in my car on the way to a meeting, to a school, or wherever. I've gotten addicted to "Route 44" I drink one of those every day. I get it at 10:00 in the morning and I sip on it until 3:00 in the afternoon … But, I guess it's become my stress reliever that I'm sipping on this cold drink and getting brain freeze all through the day.

However, because of the job requirements to monitor instruction and systems at the schools for which she is responsible, Donna found it easier to multi-task by eating in the car as she traveled from school to school. She recalled eating more healthy foods and eating at fewer fast food establishments before she became an administrator.

Similarly, Shelly and Anne reported less than desirable eating habits. Shelly acknowledged, "I may cook twice a week, and the rest of the time we're eating out." In addition, she noted eating compulsively because she felt stressed, "I just pick up a chocolate bar just because I'm eating nervously." While for Anne simply skipping meals was a consequence as she worked to maximize her time at the office and make more time available at home.

Other health consequences related to a lack of exercise. Donna reported relinquishing her rarely used gym membership because her home and work demands did not allow time to exercise.

> I tried to do a little working out and walking. We've been members of the Y for years and years, and finally, last year I just figured I was wasting my money. I canceled my membership [chuckles].

Similarly, Anne noted a need for more exercise. Although she did not exercise at home, her desire was to figure out a way to incorporate exercise in the work day. She spoke of having an exercise group at work as a way to combat the lack of exercise.

> I want to do something with exercise where we maybe take a ten minute walk. The research shows if you do three segments of ten minutes that you really taking care of your body. So if we build an assignment where we take a ten-minute walk together we can multi-task and just talk about the kids....but we still love ourselves in a way. We talk about the whole child; we need to talk about the whole employee and if we do, they are going to be happier.

Being the only one. The women noted that "being the only one" who was female and African American brought about perceived roles and responsibilities to stand-up for marginalized groups. One of the consequences was being the conscience and speaking out against injustices. Anne had frank conversations with colleagues when required. She talked about an experience that was related specifically to being a Black female that she felt compelled to address. A colleague told her and others a racist joke about Hispanics. Anne spoke up and let him know "as soon as I walk away from you, you're

going to be telling them jokes about me." The person she was talking to was her boss's best friend. However, Anne stated that it was worth the risk to make sure he understood that his behavior was not acceptable, at least to her.

Donna spoke about being the opposing viewpoint during meetings and planning sessions. Somebody needed to have that role and she accepted it. Donna commented,

They need to have somebody that perhaps, doesn't mind being the opposing view. Does it cause people to perhaps, turn me off and say, "There she is again with the same old song, different verse"? Maybe, but I don't see it. I think that still my viewpoint is valued because many times it's a different viewpoint. People will call me; other people who are—at my level will call me, one-on-one on the phone or come in, and bounce things off me because they know I'm going to be honest and truthful. I'm not going to try to hurt their feelings, but I'm going to tell them how I think…So they can take it or, or not. …. But I do believe I have a role to play in being the only person that represents my ethnicity, coupled with the gender.

Although she shared a different point of view, she felt that it was valued. Donna concluded this because of her longevity in the district and her colleagues would seek her advice in quieter ways outside of the meetings.

Shelly reported having frank conversations with colleagues, as well.

I had to be straight forward and honest. I really deal with it by not pushing it under the rug...a lot of open conversation. I don't mix or choose words but say

what is on my mind. I don't come at it from a negative aspect...but always very,

very positive.

She shared the example of her new superintendent telling her that her daughter could no longer work in the district for the summer because of nepotism. Shelly had to point out that it was not only her daughter but many other employees whose children worked. Their children were being allowed to remain on the payroll.   She did not understand why she was being singled out. Yet in order to avoid additional scrutiny, she accepted the situation and her daughter sought employment elsewhere.

Anne pointed out that she was cautious about what she said to co-workers.

I don't believe based on who I am that I ever had permission to just sort of cast off everything and say what I want to say, anyway I want to say it. I understand my words are powerful and they are like hands and they shape the reality that is coming towards me... I don't allow myself the luxury of idle talk. I need to make sure what I say is appropriate, correct and honorable and so I prefer to operate in that mode.

In addition, she revealed that she was "not sure when you get the golden ticket where you can say things with permission that White people can say without penalty." If, as an African American woman, that line is crossed, there is the possibility of being negatively labeled and "it is very difficult, almost impossible to recover."   Anne noted that it is a burden to be so actively conscious about how she is perceived. However, this "extra weight made her a stronger leader and person," she explained.

In handling such situations, Anne illuminated cultivating a mental toughness. No matter whether the district served mostly African American and Hispanic students or majority students, predominately Anglo workers comprised the central office. Therefore, she articulated having a developed mental toughness was a consequence of her experiences being the only African American female on her plane in the organizational hierarchy.

> Because there were no African Americans in central office in [her previous district]... that it was a real experience. And so I had to prove myself and go through the gauntlet of being in that fishbowl. It was very stressful; I developed Graves' disease. And I don't blame it on that; there were other stressors within my life personally as well as within that job situation. I had no real place of peace to rest my head, and it took its toll on me but I don't regret it because I did learn a lot; I developed a lot of mental toughness in that situation that again, serves me well in my position currently.

This mental toughness included overcoming the need to prove her worth and capabilities to White colleagues by "not letting those people define my work and value." In a similar vein, Shelly described Anglo colleagues talking about a lone African American principal. The conversation included that she did "not understand how to communicate with a more diverse population" because her last environment encompassed a totally African American clientele. Shelly worked with the principal to focus on her abilities and not become discouraged. In addition, she worked with her colleagues to accept the principal for the quality work that she was doing. Mental

toughness, by not losing faith in oneself and one's ability, was a consequence of the cost of being the only one for both Shelly and the principal.

When considering some consequences of being the only African American female central office executive, the women noted a couple of other examples. Shelly, for instance, conveyed finding it humorous whenever a Black person applied to or was hired in her district. Frequently, she was questioned as to whether this person was related to her. She was amused by the fact that she was asked or it was inferred that every Black person in the district was her relative.

Another exploration during the consideration of consequences which caused the women to chuckle was the mention of the word "articulate." All of the women agreed that when the word was used by White people to describe a person's characteristic, it was only used in reference to African Americans. Donna chuckled while retelling this story.

When ... we're hiring people and we throw out names, the whole thing with "articulate" comes up. "Is she articulate? Is he articulate?" For example, we have this group of student teachers who were at our banquet ...from [an area HBCU]. These kids ... get up and they are beautiful! Obviously, we have the students from other universities and they've worn whatever. It's the evening time, [and they are wearing] whatever they felt like wearing. [The area HBCU] must've said, "You know, you better dress up." The girls were beautiful, the guys all had suits, and I what I really loved was they all had their [area HBCU] pins in their lapels. One particular guy gets up, and he is just eloquent, and the people at my

table, and I don't have to describe them to you [these are White people] said

[whispers], "Oh my goodness! He was so *articulate* and handsome too!" *Only*

African American people [are described as such].   And when we throw out

names for principalship, I have never heard them ask if a Hispanic person is

articulate, and some of them... you can *barely* understand what they're saying,

and they are principals.

Donna highlighted the word was "never used with any other candidate or employee"

unless that person was Black. Also, Anne reported being viewed as "an honorary White

person." People would say to her, "You're different because you [speak eloquently]."

Anne remarked that the statement meant Black people have fewer skills because of their

diction or dialect and were less "articulate."

Anne and the other study participants were judged by the standards of the

majority culture and had to demonstrate their understanding of that culture. Anne shared

this insight,

Oprah is a great example of that. First of all she established a very firm sense of

creditability that she is a smart woman. That she thoroughly understands the

White culture, the majority culture and that she can navigate it.

Therefore, this demonstration frequently required as Shelly and Donna noted, that "you

have to be better qualified. You have to be better than good."   Donna claimed "drilling

that [same] expectation in [my daughter], because I know my experiences." Her belief

was consistent for her daughter as well as those African American professionals she

mentored. She offered that same advice to other African American professionals who

wanted to advance. Her mantra was "you can't go in and try to do equal or even a little bit more, [you have to do] *twice* as much.

Although, Anne described being a "transparent leader," one who was very clear and consistent in her ways of behaving whether at home or at the office, she also discussed the requirement of "shifting," (Jones and Shorter- Gooden, 2003) as a consequence of being the only one. Anne asserts,

> I have come to accept and embrace that shifting is sort of dual because we do
>
> live in a racist society. Frankly and I can either allow it to be something that
>
> strengthens me it makes me better, more able, or ...that I look over my shoulder
>
> consistently and work with a foundation of fear... that is not the right foundation.

Shifting is a compromise of oneself to fit into society. "First people must see us as professional," Anne shared. Once that is very clear, then we may have the chance to be more relaxed. However, "until people understand that we can operate in either [Black or White] world, we don't have the freedom to shift publicly," she proclaimed.

In describing her ways of shifting Donna declared,

> Oh, I shift, switch, whatever you call it. My daughter always brings it to my
>
> attention especially when I'm talking to my sister because she says she doesn't
>
> recognize me... even my dialect. She says, 'When you are talking to [your
>
> sister], oh my goodness you should just hear yourself. I'm going to record you
>
> one day!' When I am just with my family, I do believe that I assert a certain
>
> amount of shifting because ... I guess I just get comfortable. I let my guard
>
> down. Maybe to a certain extent I have my guard up when I'm here at work.

When I let my guard down and I'm just really having a good time, and that

occurs when I'm with my brothers and my sister, and my mom, or when I'm with

my husband, or our friends. I think, even to a certain extent I do some shifting at

church because I do have *good* friends at church that I just enjoy the company.

Besides the necessity of shifting, other consequences were noted. Being the only one created a tremendous amount of visibility for the women. They shared their experiences and the experiences of others that they witnessed.

High visibility. Not only was Shelly highly visible in her district, but her family was as well. She brought her daughters to her school district to be close to her. However, this closeness carried unexpected consequences. Shelly detailed her oldest daughter's experience with the cheerleading squad. Therefore in order to give her daughter some anonymity, Shelly sent her to school in their home school district.

My oldest who went through my district until she was in, going to high school,

really had to deal a lot with "you're just, made head cheerleader because your

mom is the [administrator]". I did not want her to have to go through that. I feel

the same way about my youngest one. ..All of their instructors know I'm really

not your typical parent. I'm not the type to just pop in repeatedly to check up or

check in; I don't do that.

In addition, she cited teachers in the district wondering if they should give her daughters special privilege. She had to make it clear that she expected that her children be treated like anyone else's. Shelly expected all teachers to do their jobs and if they did not she would "bring it to their attention. I don't care whose child it is." Similarly,

Donna spoke of watching colleagues being judged harshly because of what their families did or did not do. If the child was superior, then the employee was criticized. Likewise if the child did not perform, then ugly rumors are circulated about the employee's skill. For Donna the scrutiny was not worth the closeness and therefore she kept her "family as far away from [her] school district [as she could]."

"Seeing too much." As a consequence of being so close to district level decision-making, the women reported that they were exposed to the district politics. At times the practices and behaviors they witnessed caused conflict for them. Anne noted the barriers of politics diminished the strides that could be made in teaching students. She pointed out that the beliefs of some people kept the masses from achieving. Specifically, she commented on the behaviors of members of the "previous regime being mired in thinking of all the reasons why we can't." At times, these people overshadowed those who are passionate about educating students no matter what the circumstance.

Donna relayed the time when she applied for the area superintendent position. She was very confident that she would get the position. So confident that she told her husband to clear his calendar and purchased a new dress for her daughter to wear to the board meeting when the announcement was made. Donna was convinced that she was the better choice because of her superior wealth of experience with data analysis, presentations, and providing professional development related to instruction. In the end, another candidate was selected. When Donna asked for feedback from the superintendent, she was told that she did not have a doctorate and therefore did not get the position. The other candidate did not hold this degree either. She did however earn

it a semester before Donna completed hers. Donna had aspirations to be a member of the superintendent's cabinet so she applied again when the next opening came available, and this time she was selected.

Another time Donna accounted the inequities of the hiring practices was when she talked about "fit." This word was used to describe hiring the best person for the position, so she thought. As time passed, Donna expressed her concern that "fit" was used when it was convenient and that frustrated her. She found that the way people were selected and then placed varied from day to day. She recalled,

> I remember participating in an interview panel to find a person to
>
> replace a departing principal. After interviewing all day, the
>
> decision was between two candidates. We had an applicant who
>
> was awesome and another one who the exiting principal wanted as
>
> the replacement. At the end of the day, qualifications, skills, and
>
> potential did not matter. What mattered was the departing
>
> principal wanted a specific person to replace her and that is all
>
> that counted. I remember being really frustrated and wondering
>
> why we wasted so much time.

Other questions arose from Donna and Shelly about *where* principal candidates were placed. African American females, they both noted, were placed at the toughest schools and the lowest performing schools. Donna commented on highly successful elementary principals who were moved to struggling middle schools with difficult communities. Then when the schools were not turned around quickly, the principals

were labeled as "in need of assistance." The assistance is not viewed as helping a clientele that is fraught with challenges but because the principal is lacking. "*Every single* one of the struggling schools has an African American principal," Donna revealed.

She also shared an example of the superintendent planning a training session for the district's principals to help raise test scores.

Everybody's looked at equally with the TAKS [Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills]... Some campuses are going to be in the 90s all the way across, but then if you look at their demographics they have 7 African American children in the entire school. Our district is really set up with pockets. We have some schools that are 98% Hispanic, we have some schools that are 65% Black, and those are the schools that are struggling; *every single* one of them has an African American principal...[chuckles], one time we had this meeting. The superintendent targeted principals that were considered really good principals to talk about what they did at their schools and how they did it… [Chuckles], and they were all White and only the Black people noticed. I truly think that the superintendent never even thought of that. I think ...she went in and said, "These are the people that had good scores, these are the people that are doing great"...and came up with 6 people. We're going to have a meeting to talk about what you do. One of my colleagues, who is now retired, an African American male said, "Donna, did you notice the group of presenters? We [African Americans] weren't represented."

Similarly, Shelly reported seeing some thoughtless behaviors of the leaders in her school district that baffled her. Once she achieved her leadership position, she was exposed to facets and uniqueness of the school board to which she was previously unaware. Because she was now "on the inside," she was privy to practices that take place and comments made that she called "interesting." Shelly noted, "you often read about [issues], but just to see the hiring practices [where people are placed] and the budget setting practices" is not at all what she expected and was disappointing to see occur.

Aspirations to be a superintendent. Another example of the consequence of seeing too much was being so close to the superintendent. Two of the women reported no aspirations to be a superintendent who leads a school system, although one's husband encouraged her to seek the position. Her goal however, is to impact education without having limits on income or opportunity and having to do someone else's will. The third would like to be a superintendent, but realized there are very few African American female role models. As a result, she was concerned about the costs of being a Black woman and a superintendent and expressed some doubts.

"I just don't see how anybody could literally have a life [as a superintendent]," Donna noted. The demands of having to entertain the school board and trying to please them all of the time were not attractive to her.

First of all, I'm not a social butterfly by nature with other people, with my family I am. Just the entertaining of the school board, the trying to please them all the time, and taking coffee to them, or "are you okay, is this okay?" [My current

superintendent] usually has to have several events at her home...which is opened

to all these people...an unbelievably full calendar... In May I've got three nights

per week and I'm dying. [My current superintendent] literally has five nights per

week plus two or three events on Saturdays. Trying to make every single football

game and the basketball games, all of the community events… I know the

volume of work that I do with 12 schools. I'm not willing to make all those

sacrifices.

The games and the community activities as well as the volume of work and

responsibility in managing five times the schools she managed currently made the

superintendent position unappealing to Donna.

Shelly on the other hand had been thinking about what it would be like to be a

superintendent but had some trepidation. Having gone "through the ranks," Shelly

believed she had the skills for the job. She exclaimed, "I've just been thinking about

superintendent positions...there are what, three or four Black female superintendents in

[the state]?" However, she did not know if she would be considered for the position

since her current role model had no experience in the instructional side of a district.

Shelly attributed his hiring to being a White male. Consequently, she cited the lack of

mentors who have similar experiences as she as a deficit. Shelly spoke of wanting to

talk with an African American female superintendent to learn about the job. She

mentioned, "It would've been really interesting to talk with one of the Black, female

superintendents to get their perspective."   Shelly noted it would be enlightening and

motivational for her as she considered such a position.

Few mentors. A lack of mentors somewhat contributed to the women saying they had no clue about some aspects of their current positions. When asked how her reality matched her expectations of the personal costs, Anne compared it to getting married. She truly had not anticipated her actual experiences. Most surprising to her was the "painful process of being an outsider, coming to an organization that is very tightly knit," although the organization served tens of thousands of children. No one prepared her for "having to earn her stripes over time."

In addition, Donna noted her mismatch of knowledge and expectations and reality. She reported that she was sheltered by those who preceded her in the central office executive position, when she was a principal. Neither one of her two previous area superintendents ever said anything at principals' meetings that they were so tired "because I did not get home until 1:30 in the morning because of a work session with the school board." Therefore, she had no clue about the amount of time and long days she would have to expend in her position. Sometimes, people Donna encountered said that her job was easy and that "she has escaped the principalship." However, being a central office executive "is a tremendous job," Donna declared, and "until you have experienced it, you really do not know the impact that it has."

The experience can contribute to some African American women's bitterness, Anne pointed out. She attended a highly-regarded educational conference in which the topic was dealing with the effects of race when working with and educating students. During the conference she met a couple of women of color who had been in administrative roles, both campus and central office, for a number of years.

I went to a wonderful conference and at the heart of the conference was how we deal with this White element in working with Black children. There were a couple of women there of color; Black women who had been in administrative roles at high levels for years. [However they were], so bitter, that they could not even have a conversation without [expressing that] they were poisoned. At one point I raised the question about *our* level of accountability. When I asked that they treated me like I was the greatest traitor... and I knew I had to stay away from those ladies. They were just rehashing the past and the pain ... they were stuck. It was more painful receiving that from them than any discrimination I ever received in my life. They were unwilling to look at the challenge in any way other than what they have experienced. They had no sense of hope and no answers for me. These are women that should have been in a position to mentor me and share their wisdom. They're the problem. They're giving all their power away. I cannot operate that way.

Anne looked to these women as role models who were potential mentors but instead they rebuked her. In terms of her own behavior as a leader and mentor, Anne shared,

I want my employees to be self-actualized. That is my goal. When people walk away from me, I want to feel like they really are better having been impacted by the type of leader I am. It will impact how they function as leaders too. [Therefore], mentoring is very important to me.

Likewise, Donna talked about being a mentor and confidant to African American principals especially those who were given the toughest schools in the district. Some

principals asked her to mentor and talk with them about how they could be successful

principals and how they could advance in their careers. Donna happily worked with

them and noted that she "had crossed over" and was in a position to guide aspiring

administrators rather than receiving advice.

Coping with the Costs and Consequences

In order to cope with the costs and consequences, the women made sacrifices and

utilized various skills to achieve their goals. Their ways of coping were divided into two

categories: those related to their families and those related to their work as

administrators. The women spoke of the importance of family. Although they worked

diligently at their positions they were not willing to sacrifice their children or their

families. Some of the ways the women would cope with making sure their children had

appropriate attention while they managed their work responsibilities are following.

Family

Time. Donna reported being an early riser. To complete work assignments, she

will awaken early in the morning to do her work while her family is sleeping. In this

way, she will not take time from them. Donna explained,

> I'm an early bird. I would get up at 4:00 in the morning, so I still had the evening
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> time with my family; unless I was in class or I'm working. While working on the
>
> doctorate, or doing some of the leftover things I have to do for [my school
>
> district], I get up at 4:00. I turn on the computer... my daughter gets up around
>
> 5:30, and my husband it just depends on what he has to do that day. He may still
>
> be asleep when we both leave home. I do a lot of things when they're both

snoring. I work best in the wee hours of the morning. There were some times, just depending on what the project is; I set my alarm for 3:00 in the morning. Even when I don't have anything to do, I may read the paper online [or] I read a book. When I say that I'm going to sleep late on a Saturday, that's 7:30; that's just a lifestyle I've had. Again, it goes back to upbringing. My mom always had us up early, early, early in the morning to do whatever we needed to do during the day before it got too warm.

Another way that Donna described coping with the diminished time that she has with her family is to designate every Sunday as family day. By protecting this time, she spends at least one day a week focused on family activities.

To minimize the time away from the children, Donna and Shelly placed their children in schools close to their jobs. As a result, both Donna and Shelly had time with their children while commuting to their places of employment. Donna's daughter attended a Christian school about ten minutes from her worksite. Donna, in order to spend more time with her daughter, made worksite like home. Donna said,

[My daughter] was raised in schools. When I became a principal, I always had her in a daycare that was very near work. There was a wonderful Christian school, which was 10 minutes maybe even less than that, from my workplace. I would go and get her...and come back. She learned how to ride her tricycle; she learned to rollerblade, she had her bicycle with training wheels. The [school district] campuses have the pods with [a protected courtyard]. They're wonderful for riding tricycles and bicycles. When I became a principal at [another

campus]... had these long hallways and the big gym... she used to do a lot of

rollerblading there. She actually had a master key and her I.D. There were

certain places that she would go with her master key, for example to work on the

computer. She has been raised in schools, working with textbooks. The good

news is, she enjoyed it, and always wanted to be there with me. With a lot of late

hours, it was a challenge to be away.

Because she has only one child, Donna expressed that it was easy to have her with her.

This arrangement allowed Donna to be close and to spend time with her daughter.

Shelly, too, mentioned the ease of having her daughters attend school in her

district, which is not the family's home school district. Although she reported some

challenges, she believed the convenience and the opportunity to be with the girls was

worth the hurdles. Shelly relayed a time when her eldest daughter was accused of not

earning her spot on the cheerleading squad. A connection between Shelly's position in

the district and her daughter's success was made by some people in the district. Even

though the association was false, it was hurtful to her eldest daughter. Yet Shelly

believed the challenges of having her daughter in the same district were overshadowed

by the benefits of having her close, by being able to attend her activities, and in

participating in her academic pursuits; later, though she moved her to another school

away from the district.

Shelly asserted that her time with her daughters is precious. When she took

vacation, she would spend the time with them. Even when she was off from work and in

town and thought about all of the work in the office she had to do, she purposefully

spent time bonding with the girls by participating in the activities they enjoyed. If she had appointments, they were included too. Above all, Shelly reported, she spent all of the time she could giving her daughters attention.

To have time with their families, Anne believed that workers should have balance. Anne shared that her direct supervisor honors her family focus and that is the way she operates as a leader. She believed that when her employees were at work they should give one hundred percent. Likewise, when they are at home, they should "pour themselves into their families so that they don't lose their personal life and end up with a divorce or children" who have such issues because they have been neglected emotionally. Anne was discouraged by people who spent all of their time at work and then had a "home which is falling apart." Therefore, balance is extremely important to her. She shares that same expectation with her employees by asking them when they are spending too many hours at work, "Don't you have a family; don't you need to go home?" Anne reported,

I tell my people if you give 100% of yourself during the time you are suppose to be here we have enough time to do things very well. I don't expect you to put your family on the alter of your career if you have a husband who feels loved and children that have been attended to you are going to be a better employee. And that's the way I operate; you are not going to see me here at eight o'clock at night. I have a family and I love them and I am going to invest in their lives. So you are not making brownie points with me if I see that you have ignored your family and stayed here. I think if I am whipping them for more, more, more and

to come in on Saturday [laughing] they're not going to have a balanced life. We were not designed to live that way. We need sleep; we need to stop and eat.

When Donna's schedule demanded more time at the office and in working on her doctoral degree which was deemed necessary for further promotions, her husband rearranged his work schedule to assume more responsibility for their daughter's day-to-day activities. To gain more control over his time, Donna's complementary partner left his corporate job and started a business. As a result of this decision, the family income was reduced and Donna became responsible for the cost of health care coverage for the family that her husband previously managed. The cost of carrying her family on her health plan was another expense which further reduced the family's income. However, Donna and her husband determined this sacrifice to be worth the cost and a way to cope with her desire to assure her daughter's supervision and well-being. With her husband taking on more childcare responsibilities, Donna believed that her daughter benefitted from a closer relationship with her father. This father-daughter bond was viewed as beneficial and was "hoped to serve her well in later years."

Multiple roles: caretaker and worker. To fulfill childcare needs, the women required assistance. Therefore, they employed outside help.   When Anne and her husband decided that she could impact more lives by working outside of her home, they hired a nanny to be with their young daughter and school-aged boys. None of the other women utilized the services of a nanny. Nevertheless, all of the women were required at some point to hire someone to provide childcare. Donna placed her daughter in the care of a Christian school during the day, near her place of employment.

Outside assistance extended to home care as well. All three women reported hiring weekly domestic assistance. Even though it was uncomfortable having someone come in and see their personal belongings, the women divulged that they could not manage the household chores and their professional responsibilities without help. Having a "cleaning lady" was awkward because these women were raised in families in which domestic tasks were relegated to those who were residents. Donna reported feeling like a lazy person. Although Anne asserted the order being short-lived because of her three small children, she found pleasure in having the house organized and the clothes laundered for even a brief time. Similarly, according to Shelly, the option to have a housekeeper was imperative and practical to keep her home tidy. She said,

> [My housekeeper] comes in once a week. I've got to do it. Otherwise I have that feeling I have to do it, or I'm supposed to do it...and I just don't have time for the cleaning...so I hire someone.

Meeting the demands of their personal and professional responsibilities compelled the women to seek assistance from extended family members to accommodate the needs of their immediate families. Donna relied on the availability of her only sister to provide rides and care for her daughter. When Donna's husband had a conflict and she had pressing work duties help was sought from her sister, a stay-at-home mom, to provide transportation or supervision for their daughter. In addition to her siblings, Donna noted her mother-in-law's willingness to help with childcare. Likewise, Shelly reported being thankful for the proximity of her parents. They were

available to stay with her daughters when both she and her husband were required to be out of town due to job responsibilities. For example, she shared,

> My husband's travel has put another little strain on us...but, my parents are here and they don't live far from us…so that is a *huge* help when I travel. When I'm out of town and if my husband is out of town, which is most of the time; they come over and stay with the girls. I don't know what I'd do without them.

In addition, Donna noted her reliance on her family to help her cope with her work. Although she expressed that she did not like to take work home because doing so is a disservice to her family, she confessed to seeking the opinions of her husband or her sister on work-related matters. At times she sought their unbiased opinions on issues that frustrated her or had her perplexed. She appreciated her husband's willingness to listen; "I think I'd be in a straightjacket or insane if he didn't listen to me." In addition, Donna spoke about the tremendous job she has and the emotions she feels while pursuing her responsibilities. She voiced appreciation for her sister who alleviates her annoyance with job concerns and who helps her "hold it together" by allowing her to "bounce ideas off" of her. Donna stated,

> I really don't have like a lot of girlfriends, even growing up...but that's just because I had so many siblings. I always had playmates available. My sister and I are very close. We talk once a day, maybe twice a day...and I will vent with her a lot. [In addition], my husband actually acts like he enjoys hearing this stuff. Because my job involves going from place to place I spend a lot of time in my car. [Since] my husband is around and about [and accessible], I will call my

husband, too. My sister is actually a housewife. She doesn't work, so she's always available; my husband's always available. If I leave a meeting and I am just frustrated, I can call either one of them, or both of them. By the time I've recanted the story and they've listened and given me their point of view, and once I've talked about it, I can cope.

Work

The women utilized a variety of strategies to cope with the costs generated from the work environment. Some of the mechanisms employed were making connections with community members and colleagues because they were committed to the work they were doing. In addition, they practiced their beliefs and guiding principles which included doing what is best for children. Their desire to offer students the kind of success they experienced as students and now as adults was a motivating factor as they endured the costs and consequences of their positions as central office executives. Prayer coupled with hard work and the lessons they learned growing up helped them to cope.

Emotional and physical well-being. Trying not to take the dilemmas of the job personally, proved to be a challenge for Donna. She worked to eliminate the emotional cost by not letting the political issues of the job disturb her by turning her mind off to them and doing what she needed to do for children. Detaching herself emotionally was a way for her to cope with the stressors of the job and proving that the issues are a piece of her life and not her whole life. Donna shared her struggle.

And as much as you say, "I'm just not going to let this get under my skin. I'm just not going to let this bother me. I'm going to just turn my mind off to this and do what I need to do." 'Cause I'll say [chuckles], "I'm going in there and I'm just going to do what I need to do", and try to emotionally detach myself from it.

She worked to separate her work and personal relationships by focusing what she needed to do to impact the lives of the children. However, she noted, the reason she continued to "do the job day after day is for the children."

I am emotionally attached to it because ...our children are so important to me. *That* part I haven't lost. The babies are so important. The adults need some help [laughs]. But the babies continue to be precious, and important, and they are our present, they are our future, and I just love them. That was the best part about doing those interviews today. We were actually on the campus all day... so I got a chance to look at the babies a little bit when we had breaks in between [candidates]. I got a chance to talk to the babies ...they continue to be the reason that I continue to do this day after day because they need us; they need the same thing that we got. We grew up in a nurturing environment, nurturing, not just from the home, but the school. And actually, we grew up where my first grade teacher, my 3rd grade teacher, and my 5th grade teacher were members of our church, so my mom knew them. We grew up knowing we were beautiful; we were smart... there was nothing we couldn't do.

She cared about the children and talked about their dependence and her responsibility; therefore she expressed her emotional attachment.   Thus she was not

completely emotionally detached, just when it came to the politics, which sidetracked her energy in making a difference. Creating a nurturing environment like the one she was raised in is the impetus for her desire to cope with the challenges she faces in her position. Donna described being loved by her teachers because they constantly told the other students and her that they were important. These teachers, she explained, would not accept mediocrity; and those high expectations for achievement impacted her personal belief and behavior. Donna works to ascertain that the same kind of learning environment that fostered her success be created for this next generation of students.

Similarly, despite the challenges of her job Anne reported waking every morning and going to "work with passion and vigor and power." She noted students who "overcome incredible obstacles and barriers just to come to school." In spite of those ordeals they really wanted an education, Anne remarked. Therefore she expressed owing children her best. Their desire to learn influenced her behavior and allowed her to meet the challenges. She used this passion to help others to help students, to fuel her will to cope with the personal costs she paid. Anne shared,

> I went in [to a new district] with energy, passion, and transparency about who I am as a leader... in time they got beyond the color and started to see me. I treated them as professionals. We had three professional development sessions that were very meaningful, that my colleagues pooh-poohed and said, "They [the teachers] are not going to want to do those sessions." [All of the teachers] responded, every single one with deep commitment to their path of being instructors of children, and wanting to be better at what they did.

Because of their hard work and dedication to the students, the women sought balance in their lives. Two of the three women expressed their faith in God and the use of prayer to assist them in dealing with the costs and consequences of their positions. Anne spoke of her connection with God from an early age and how that connection continued to bring her peace as she attended to the costs of being an African American central office executive. She illuminated controlling her thoughts and beginning each day by appreciating and reflecting on her blessings. Anne continued by noting that she expects while she is at work to give one hundred percent during the time that she is supposed to be there. Then, when she went home she focused completely on her family.

Donna utilized distractions to create balance and cope with job demands. One of those calming techniques to divert her mind from work was listening to books on tape. She commented that she frequented about eight libraries in the city between work and home to borrow the recorded books. Being engrossed in the books on tape, while in her car, helped her to manage her stress. The selected topics of the recorded books varied, however the books Donna read at home were purely for pleasure. She reported purchasing books exclusively by African American authors because they caused her to laugh out loud. The release she experienced from this laughter and light-hearted reading material is very calming, she explained.

The women's health consequences, such as hypertension and Graves' disease, which were deemed to be related to stress, required medical attention. Managing the effects of stress also required ingesting prescribed medication as a way for the women to cope with the consequences of their personal costs. As a result, all of the women

reported taking prescribed medication regularly. The drug treatment for Shelly and Donna helped control blood pressure, and in the case of Anne, her overactive thyroid.

Anne also mentioned promoting healthy eating habits at work as a way to cope with the pressures of work. She believed in leading her workers to demonstrate a balanced lifestyle. One of the ways is through healthful eating. Food in the office often consisted of highly-sugared, highly-processed items. Therefore, she organized a healthy food challenge. Each person in the office participated in the potluck by contributing a healthy food item. Anne reported that the event was delicious and fun. In addition, people shared tips on eating healthier and were energized by the benefits of the activity.

Being the only one. Skills and reliance upon a power greater than themselves were required to cope with this stress of being the only one. In order to cope with being the only African American central office leader, Shelly turned to prayer and focused on her religious beliefs. She declared without prayer she would not be able to make it. "Prayer, a great deal of prayer" is how she succinctly phrased her main coping strategy. Shelly continued, "Most of my staff members that work directly under me, know my spiritual being is very important. I don't judge them based on theirs, but they do know that about me."

Her support system in the district included a woman on one of the campuses who she described as "a prayer warrior." This "wonderful lady" was inspirational and encouraged Shelly through her "lonely times." Shelly viewed her current "position as a calling and a favor of God." Because of this belief, Shelly mustered the courage to cope with being perceived as a token. Her conviction related to the value of her work helped

her to focus on maintaining balance. She and Anne reported that their faith in God helped them to keep their peace in the midst of the storms as well as to recognize their worth is not defined by the opinions of others but by who they are as people.

Shelly mentioned in addition to prayer, she recognized her worth in the community. Because of her stability in the district, she has a long-standing relationship with many people in the neighborhood. She has either taught, or was an administrator at a school where members of the school district attended, or their children attended. She reported being appreciated by her staff and community stakeholders.

> Yeah, they know I'm a very strong leader. They just know that. It's kind of funny because they'll tell me that they can tell when I'm really disturbed about something based on my facial expressions. But they know I would go right back into the whole nurturing thing, which is caring about them… they know, I lead with care.

Shelly focused on her "very positive rapport with the community." Her strong connection with the area stakeholders has an unspoken power that her supervising administrator knows he "can't touch her." The "genuine support from" the local residents helped her to cope with the fact that she is "the only one at her level in the organization."

Likewise, Anne coped with her personal costs because she is grounded in her faith in God and learned to maximize prayer. She defined her work by the value she placed on herself. Anne spoke of knowing who she is at her core and called herself a champion because she believed that "our thought life is the first step to who we become

as leaders." She noted that the real battlefield as leaders is to be confident in self first and believe in one's capabilities due to past experiences and to welcome the new challenges. Anne shared,

> Perseverance helps you develop a level of patience and character that informs your journey for the next leg of the trip. That it's all about the journey, it's not about arriving; and so, being able to sit in that pain, and the discomfort, and surrender to it [helps one to cope].

Therefore, when coping with being the only one Anne focused on her relationship with God and reflected on her gifts.

Continuing, Anne spoke more of her spiritual attributes. She highlighted experiencing success when she was relaxed and focused. Even though the attention may be on her because of her race and gender, she believed that if she was conscious of her breathing [something she said administrators forget to do] and controlled her thoughts through prayer; her brain activity could affect the reality outside of her. She believed that what she projects through her thoughts as a leader will be what she attracts. Anne described this concept as unfathomable and one she needed to master but believed to be real. She also pointed out this practice should be incorporated in the many facets of life. To express the power of thoughts, Anne shared this episode,

> The best example is an activity that I tried as a museum board member. This band you wore around your head with electrodes that would pick up on your brain activity. [You sat at a] long table chair at each end in the middle a metal ball that you could with your mental activity push down the table one way or the

other. It would end up being a little tug of war between the two participates about which way the ball would roll. The object was to get the ball to end up in front of your opponent. What you do is the more relaxed you are and focused at the same time the more you can push the ball. So my experiment was I going to pray and see what happens ... just going to connect with my Creator, talk to Him positively about some thing I am thinking, and just see what happens...by doing this with the person who beat everybody on the board. [The others who were beat] were just like, 'we want someone to beat him.' Then [he] said, 'come on little teacher girl,' [Anne laughing] 'let me take you on'. I said, 'sure,' but I had a plan. So I closed my eyes. I was consciously breathing; just something we forget to do as administrators and started to pray. I peeked at some point and you know what the ball was doing? It was rolling towards him and they [the other members] were starting to surround him because they saw for the first time he was being beaten by somebody else. I thought let me just try to switch this a little. I am going to try to make it move; I'm going to move it with my power. I started pushing consciously and you know what started happening? The ball started rolling quickly back toward me. Again I closed my eyes, didn't even focus on him. [I] focused on where my thought line needed to go and I heard a sound. It was shriek of delight and that's when I opened my eyes because he had been beaten for the first time and his month was wide open.

Anne described this activity as evidence of the power of prayer and her thoughts. She connected to her spiritual being as a way to cope with her pressures.

In addition to spiritual mechanisms to cope with being the only African American female central office executive in their respective districts, Anne, Shelly, and Donna spoke of talking with people who they trust. Admittedly they shared, not many people were in that category. Each named only one person who was a colleague. However, those they did let into that inner circle "helped them to refocus and overcome barriers and challenges."

Outside of the confidants, the women commented on a more global protection of being the only one by practicing what is known as shifting (Jones and Shorter- Gooden, 2003) or switching as Donna prefers to label the acts, to maintain acceptance by White colleagues. Shifting or switching is utilized when double standards are noted in judging and categorizing African Americans based on White standards. Anne noted that in order to shift publicly, for instance using Ebonics or non-standard English, one must well establish first that she can operate successfully in White society. Anne used the example of Oprah Winfrey. Not everyone will be indulged with the opportunity to enjoy an authentic life in all environments because all have not achieved what Oprah has achieved. Without this proof of being highly skilled as well as admired, she could not speak using slang or dialect and then shift right back into mainstream language so smoothly and be accepted. However Anne pointed out, "Oprah has laid the framework for us as African American women to do that in public."

Donna is uncomfortable switching publicly. She does not "want [her] personal life to bleed into [her] professional life. She prefers to maintain a very professional appearance at all times when in the work environment and does not show another side.

Her professional standard means she is accepted by the majority culture and is superior to its expectations. However, when she is with her family and close friends she is free to behave differently, "to just enjoy and to laugh." Donna explained,

> I would say at work I don't laugh a lot. But, when I am with my family and my friends sometimes I get choked up, I laugh so much ...I have so much fun. I like to play cards, I like to play dominoes; I'm very competitive. I like to win at whatever game it is. I enjoy the trash talking; I can talk trash like the next person *would not* think of doing.

The people at work would never see her behaving like that. She does not feel that closeness to share that behavior with them.

Friends at work. Donna created balance by purposefully separating her home and work lives as much as possible. She discussed leaving the problems of work at work and not taking them home. In addition, she physically separated her family by many miles from her work site. Donna reported her work is on the north side of town and her family is on the south side. Therefore her home was her respite.

Donna desired a home life which was distinguishable from her work world. To get away from work, she chose not to have friends at her place of employment. Donna did not want to be close to the people at her job because she did not want people calling her at home to gossip about office matters. In addition she expressed maintaining professional relationships in case she had to reprimand an employee. Should that circumstance arise, she would not hesitate to perform her duty because of some established personal relationship.

Shelly, on the other hand, had many friends at work. She spoke of growing up in her professional life in her district, where she developed very strong relationships as friends. As she progressed through the administrative ranks, she "began to supervise people who were friends."   She did not want to risk damaging either her professional or private relationships. Therefore, she made it very clear,

I wanted to keep our business very professional and our friendship separate. I've been in that district and know how it goes so I haven't really had to build a lot of new friendships. I wasn't worried about losing any friendships, because my friends who were there when I was a principal have really been very supportive. I mean *very* supportive.

For the most part, Shelly reported, those friendships remain intact, because she was purposeful in setting the professional and personal boundaries.

Anne's desire was to create a family atmosphere at work. She believed that life is so short and so much of life is spent at work that she wanted to make the people at the work site another family. Her "philosophy," she expounded, was for work to be a "safe place for employees; so they are empowered and grow and their true gifts come forth." Anne described activities at special meetings which allow her to demonstrate her "recognition of their value and uniqueness."   Anne shared this story as evidence of her taking time to appreciate her employees.

I gave them each this beautiful little plant. It was in a gold vase, which is symbolic of character. I wrote them each a personal note about what I valued about them. Then I gave them all, each a hug, and handed it to them. The reason

I do it that way is people have a love language, and there's a book called <u>The 5</u>

<u>Love Languages</u>: physical touch, words of affirmation, access service, time

spent... each person is unique. And when you learn to speak in *their* language,

even though it might not be fluent for you at first, they feel a sense of worth and

value that informs their behavior and actions. And so, I gave them a gift, for

some people it's gifts. I put something in writing that they could read over again,

I hugged them when I delivered the gift, I spent time with them in that meeting,

so I could touch any love language that was in that group; everyone should have

been touched. It was so funny because afterwards, over the weeks that followed,

they would show me their plants and exclaim, "Look! My plant's taller than---!"

It was hilarious! They had this little contest going about whose plant was

growing. But again, it was all symbolic about this means your work.

She believed practicing the aspects of the five love languages developed a culture of

friendship.

"Seeing too much." Even though, Anne is close to the decisions that are made in

the district and may not always agree with them. Her role is to assist people in keeping

hope alive. Anne reported we "don't have time to be mired in fear and what ifs. There is

too much at stake." What is at stake, she notes, "is the education of the students." Her

responsibility, as a leader, is to empower those who work for her by removing obstacles

to their success and by building their capacity so they know how to do that for

themselves. In addition, she helped them to understand what decisions they control and

then also how to let go. She encouraged her staff to provide information and

recommendations to the decision makers, to know what the team's responsibility is and what is "out of their hands." Anne told them to focus on what each of them can impact, what each will have to account for and otherwise releasing to their district leaders the other issues.

> Because there's decisions made about me I don't agree with but there's certain battles I don't need to pick because it's their district call not mine. And I have that struggle with my employees as well sometime. "She's not right," they'll say. And I'll say, "did you provide all this information; did I share it? Did they make the call? Let it go; you focus on what you can impact and what is your call and what you will be responsible for.

Anne continued,

> I let them deal with that and I give example of Enron. Because of Enron there were ethical things done and there were very unethical things done. The people who were in a position to inform those above them did so, and some of them very wisely in writing.

In addition to being so close to many organizational decisions being made, the women noted the politics within their school districts with which they had to cope.

The politics. To cope with the politics of the district, Donna spoke her mind. She said she was not looking to advance to the superintendency in her district. As a result, she felt a certain level of freedom to express an opinion about those circumstances which aggravated her. If she was interested in becoming the superintendent she would

probably control her words. However without the pressure to be politically correct, if she saw an injustice or an inequity, she declared that her voice was going to be heard. Donna was passionate about her self-described mission to be the conscience of the district.   "I never think about what [other leaders in the district] will think or what will they say," Donna asserted. If she makes a mistake or thinks that she was too harsh, she does not admit it to anyone although she may reflect and think, "Well that was wrong." Nevertheless she proclaimed, "I am going to make sure that my vote is counted."

Anne, on the other hand, thought about her mistakes and about being correct. She noted, "If we are too important to admit we are wrong then we have lost our humility." She believed that people respond to humility especially in a leader.

Her comments included,

Don't forget where you came from and who you really are. Because I think sometimes we start breaking the rules because "I'm important." And that level of deep humility, and realizing our tendency to stumble if not careful, must always be present. If we lose that, if we think we're too important to speak to certain people, if we think we're too important to apologize and admit we're wrong, we've lost our humility, and there's a lot of power in humility. People respond to that, particularly if you're a leader and you admit, 'I blew it, and I hope you forgive me.' I learned that from my children. They don't see me as 'less-than' when I apologize. 'I'm, Mommy was impatient with you, and that was *not* the right response. Please forgive Mommy.' 'I forgive you Mommy.' It just gives me even more validation in their eyes.

Therefore, a level of power was attained when one admitted to making a mistake and asked for forgiveness.

Chapter Summary

Donna, Anne, and Shelly are executive central office African American women who shared some of their experiences as they gained and maintained their positions of influence in their districts. All of the women are well educated and captured the attention of their supervisors who encouraged them to seek leadership positions outside of the classroom. Each woman made the decision to impact more lives by seeking and sustaining in administrative positions. As they continued their journeys through the educational system they chose or were informed that a doctoral degree was necessary for advancement. Two have secured that terminal degree and the other is in the process of earning it. In all cases, they have proven to be highly capable and knowledgeable women within the professional arena.

For the purpose of my study the three women defined and described the personal costs they negotiate to be central office executives. They noted the costs that are associated with their work as professionals as well as those costs that are associated with their families and home life. Some of the costs they identified are the reduced time with their families, their health concerns, the scrutiny and burden of being the only African American female on their level in the organizational chart and the salary inequities. In addition, the women expounded on the consequences those costs cultivate such as little time for personal pampering because of time demands and few mentors because they represent the small number of African American female central office executives.

To manage the costs and consequences, the women discussed how they cope. From hiring outside assistance to care for their homes, utilizing family and friends as confidants in solving problems or just listening to the issues, to being prayerful, the women employed a variety of resources to maintain some balance within their lives. Their attitudes and commitments were centered on the vocation of educating children, especially children whose hope for a quality lifestyle depended on receiving a solid public education. Although the women encountered experiences which caused them deep frustration or disappointment, they persevered in their beliefs that they were contributing to the education of not only the students in their districts, but the teachers and administrators who were influenced by their decisions and tutelage. As Donna remarked and the others echoed, despite the obstacles and challenges to be overcome, "my job has purpose, responsibility and variety. I impact many lives and therefore, I am fortunate. I really enjoy [the work] I do."

Following the disclosure of the experiences of the women who participated in the study is an explanation of the findings. The reflections on the findings are highlighted in the next chapter. Chapter V, based upon the information the women provided and the available topical literature, clarifies conclusions and recommendations. The purpose of the fifth chapter is to share some practical implications for professional practice intertwined with private lives. Therefore, the opportunity to share interpretations of the findings noted in this chapter, is situated in the following pages.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Four and a half years ago, when I began this doctoral journey, I was advised to select a topic about which I was passionate. I struggled with narrowing the focus: I labored over determining a topic which would cause my mind to wonder and would energize the flow of discussion and conversation. My career path crossed, after at least a decade, with the female administrator who first told me that holding school administrative positions affected either health or relationships for women. Seeing her again reminded me of the many conversations regarding personal job challenges with female friends who are administrators and executives. Mindful of these discussions and the passion that they radiated, my path was launched. The passion was present. Now, courage was required to take the first step in examining the personal costs of African American females who are central office executives in urban school districts and to share their experiences.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter is to provide a summary of the study, findings, revelations and conclusions drawn from the data presented in Chapter IV. In addition, the chapter includes implications for action related to the personal costs that African American female educational executives encounter as they lead in their school districts. In the end, recommendations for further study and concluding thoughts are offered.

Summary of the Study

The focus of my study is the perceived personal costs negotiated by African American women central office leaders. Therefore, I sought the definition of personal costs as well as the recollections and experiences of three women who worked closely with principals, and who met the criteria of African American, female, and central office executive whose title included "superintendent" such as assistant superintendent, area superintendent, or deputy superintendent. I also sought to hear the ways they coped as they performed their professional and personal roles. In order to reveal this information, I interviewed the women to answer my three major research questions. The research questions, the women's responses, and my interpretations follow.

1. What are the personal costs the women perceived?

The personal costs included costs associated with their families as well as costs related to their work. Relating to their families, the women noted time away from them as a salient cost. Even though one of the women, Anne, reported one strategy of maintaining balance in her life (Clark, Caffarella & Ingram, 1999) by considering staying late at the office an inappropriate, all of the women shared that they were away from their families more often than they cared to be. Each one spoke of her desire to spend more time with her children and families, in general. In addition, their multiple roles as caretaker and worker proved to be challenging (Hochschild, 1989; Johnson-Bailey, 1999). Schedules were juggled and sacrifices made to fulfill these roles. For example, Shelly, another respondent, noted that it was a struggle to raise two daughters

and to be an assistant superintendent because of the time and attention required for both

her personal and professional responsibilities.

The women were scrutinized for their actions and their looks (Aguirre, 2000;

Beekley, 1999; Jackson, 1998). At work, they were required to complete many tasks

with precision. Therefore, the responsibility caused them stress. The stress ultimately

manifested itself in health related symptoms (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Scott,

2003; Zook, 2006). Health changes, such as allergies, hypertension, anxiety, and reflux,

as well as Graves' disease, and weight management issues, were shared. Additionally,

being the only African American female central office executive created another burden.

Other issues, related to being the only one, included performance pressures, isolation and

stereotyping (Kanter & Stein, 1980; Sixel, 2005). Salary inequities were discussed by

two of the women, Shelly and Donna. Both acknowledged instances in which White

males, who they supervised or who had less experience earned significantly more

money. Each of these costs included consequences. The consequences related to family

were mentioned first and was then followed by the ones associated with work. The

women highlighted the consequences in the following ways.

2. What consequences do these personal costs contribute to their lives and roles

as African American female central office educational executives?

Being away from family was a concern. The women struggled to give enough

time to their families so their husbands and children were not neglected (Collins, 2000;

Myers & Ginsberg, 1994). They were worried that their families would suffer

irreparable harm if they did not devote enough time to them. In addition, the childcare

responsibilities required attention. As primary caretakers (Loder, 2005; Ramsey, 1997), Anne and Shelly, discussed the pressure of caring appropriately for their children. Because time was divided between family needs and work demands, not much was allowed for personal pampering (DeFelice, 2002). The women also contended that they experienced diminished physical and emotional wellbeing. Lack of exercise, poor eating habits and stress were cited as consequences of the time pressures (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Zook, 2006).

 At work being the only one required consideration for roles and responsibilities. One of the roles they discussed assuming was that of being the conscience of the district and championing marginalized people (Brunner, 2000; Perkins, 1993). Two of the women, Anne and Shelly, also reported being cautious about how they presented their frank conversations to be sure that they were perceived very positively (Brunner, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Scott, 2003). One woman mentioned mental toughness being required so she did not let White people define her value and worth.

Another concern the women encountered was high visibility. Furthermore, their positional level caused them to experience first hand the district politics. They noted inconsistent hiring practices which were not always based on merit, placement of principals of color in the most challenging schools were also highlighted, as well as questionable budget practices. As a result of their up-close encounters with politics, two of the three women claimed no aspirations to become a superintendent (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

To compound the consequences they faced, the women reported having few mentors. They were asked to mentor others but colleagues who were in position to mentor them were not readily available (Bjork & Keedy, 2001; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Young & Skrla, 2003). Therefore, the women utilized strategies to cope with the costs and consequences they encountered. Some of their coping mechanisms required the women to make sacrifices and to be creative.

3. In what ways do they cope with the challenges borne by the personal costs?

Passion gave the women the courage to sustain through their personal costs. The women were problem-solvers. They had a way of turning costs around and finding ways to cope. To maximize time with her family Donna devoted one day a week to them. She also awakened early to complete tasks or to have some quiet time. Donna as well as Shelly kept their daughters close to them; Donna by having her daughter there after school and Shelly by having her daughters attend school in her district. An example of coping was Anne's organization of time. She reported that she would skip lunch to maximize her time at work and then go home relatively early in the evening to be with her family. Another way the women spent more time with their families was by hiring outside assistance to care for their domestic chores (Hochschild, 1989). They utilized other support systems (Blount, 2004) as well. Extended family members or hired nannies assisted with child care.

In order to cope with the work environment challenges, the women's family members provided support (Blount, 2004; Denton, 1999). They would provide a listening ear when the workload or circumstances became unbearable. Coping with

emotional costs also included focusing on the children they served. Working to create nurturing environments and supportive atmospheres to foster children's learning were ways the women invigorated themselves. Being dedicated to the children in their districts and enjoying the work that they did for the children's educational benefit were two more reasons the women gave as ways to cope. Additionally, two of the women reported having close friends at work who lifted them up in prayer. Prayer and dedication to a power greater than themselves also gave strength to the women. Sometimes distractions such as books on tape, ice cold drinks, food and medication, were used as coping mechanisms.

As I searched for answers to my research questions, which were based on my personal experiences as well as comments I heard from colleagues and friends, I used qualitative methodology to conduct my study. The data sources were three African American women who worked in their school districts' central offices. All of these school districts are located in Houston, Texas. The women are highly ranked on their districts' organizational chart, although they are not the general superintendent. In addition, all of these women have close connections to schools by such attributes as supervising building principals and influencing the instructional goals of the district as well as others who impact student learning.

To execute the study, individual interviews were conducted with each of the women in a variety of locations. However, all of the locations were selected by the interviewed individual. Some of the interviews occurred in the women's offices, one took place at a restaurant, and one interview was conducted at a church. Interviews were

helpful in making a private connection with each of the women and in capturing their stories. With two of the women the connection was instant; the third required a little time to build rapport but the relationship was very strong in the end. All of the participants were incredibly interested in my work. They wanted me to do well by achieving the terminal degree; and they shared their appreciation for the research and for being included in the study. One woman described the interviews as "fun," as well as helpful in reducing isolation. "I know, now, I am not alone," another woman commented.

The use of constant comparative analysis (Brunner, 2000; Miles and Huberman, 1994) was applied for analyzing the collected data. I read through the transcripts and reduced the information to units. Then, the units gathered were coded into emergent themes. The data were constantly revisited and regrouped after the initial coding until it was evident that no new themes were emerging. As the themes became clearer, I grouped them into two larger headings and then labeled the headings as related to family issues or to work issues.

Cox and Nkomo (1990) noted in their review of research related to race as a variable in organizational literature that African Americans were comparatively invisible. "Relatively few studies," they offered, are specifically associated with "minority management personnel." When a management respondent group is isolated by the intersection of gender and race, even fewer candidates are available. Because of the paucity of research inquiry, they recommended that more in-depth study occur. More attention should be given to the intersection of race and gender as linked to

leadership, these authors suggested. For that reason, research regarding the personal costs that three female African American education executives negotiate adds to the educational leadership field, especially for African American women.

Findings

With so few women who are African American central office educational executives in the Houston area, the opportunity to connect with women who shared similar positions as well as race was inspiring. The recognition of multiple group identity (Collins, 2000; Glenn, 2002; Simien & Clawson, 2004a) is a lens by which to view the costs that African American female central office leaders navigate. The costs they face are not isolated, but as they struggle to overcome one, it is engulfed by others (Simien, 2004). As a result, the women shared their experiences based upon race and gender as they went about their lives and work.

During the interview process of my study and the "off-the-record" conversations, a sense of sisterhood prevailed. Our relationships were forged by our similar experiences (Bloom, 2003; Collins, 2000; Denton, 1990; Dillard, 2003; Williams et al., 2005). Kinship, exchange and reciprocity were noted as the interviews were conducted. We were not islands, and we wanted to interact and to share our experiences with each other as African American women situated in majority work environments serving children of color. Seeing the world from our personal views and hearing the experiences of others in our similar capacities, our connections were strengthened. Therefore, encouraging each other to reflect on the experiences to gain insight proved valuable. In addition, suggestions, such as transcribing my tapes personally and talking with African

American female superintendents for other data, as well as encouragement that I definitely would complete the degree, impressed me as their investment in my work as a "sister."

As I reviewed the data, findings were revealed to me in two major areas: the first related to their families and the second related to the work environment. The task of raising children is a monumental one which requires time and attention. Because of their profession, the women recognized the critical attributes of providing security and educational opportunities for their children. The comfort was met in the form of time they spent together. Shelly, one of the participants in my study, informed, "The two weeks vacation has been spent just bonding with [her daughters.]" Any time she could squeeze that allowed her to give them her full attention was what she practiced. Anne, another data source, asserted the importance of family members knowing that they were cared for and loved. She divulged leaving the office in a timelier manner and spending more time at home since she no longer had a nanny.

Shelly provided educational opportunities for her children and provided physical proximity by bringing her daughters to her district. She reported that even though her eldest daughter had to endure additional scrutiny because of her position, she wanted to know that her daughter was receiving a quality education. By having her daughter with her, Shelly could participate in her school activities. However, teachers would be concerned that they were under additional scrutiny because of Shelly's position in the district. Although Shelly admitted she held high expectations for the teachers' performance, she quickly pointed out that these standards were no different than the type

of education she expected for any person's child. Therefore, she was comfortable in bringing her children to her district.

The women noted the challenges of being caretakers as well as employees. They worked hard to maintain a balance but acknowledged the strain of their multiple roles. Each mentioned working to sustain their marriages; the evidence suggested that they were seeking more time with their families. In addition, they looked for others to recognize the importance of their home responsibilities. Support was needed from their spouses, as well as their school district leaders, in order for them to balance the work required at home and their jobs.

The other major finding area was related to their work. The isolation the women felt at their jobs because they were the only African American female central office executives was astounding. Anne highlighted her efforts to value the work accomplished by those at her job. She recognized them with praise and symbols. However, the number of people she actually opened up to and shared her trials with was extremely small, as she noted just a couple. Similarly, Shelly and Donna, the third contributor, shared that they trusted only one person at their places of employment with whom to talk. Outside of work, Donna mentioned seeking her husband's non-judgmental opinion, while Shelly used prayer.

Learning from Their Examples

As I reviewed the data, I documented women who want to be heard and valued. For example, Donna remarked, "I will make sure that my voice is heard and my vote is counted."   Not only are they speaking, but they were performing as well. The women's

behavior was grounded in ethics of caring and personal accountability (Collins, 2000).

Therefore, their lived experiences (p. 257) provided merit for their knowledge bases.

They wanted the work that they do to be valued (Dillard, 2003) because they believed

they have to "be better than good," just to attain and then to keep their jobs. Anne

commented that she was not sure when you "get the 'golden ticket' to say what Whites

can express without penalty," but she believed that, "if you faint not, you will reap the

harvest."   This metaphor is associated with the women's lived experiences,

characteristic of Black feminist epistemology.   The women were courageous and

passionate as they endured the personal costs they encountered as central office leaders.

　　　The women are motivated to do the work they do because they want to lead those

who educate children.   They cared about the people who worked for them and

recognized that their colleagues wanted to be valued and respected.   Behaviors similar

to these were noted in the literature by several researchers (Barton, 2005; Collins, 2000;

Morris, 1999; Parker and ogilvie, 1999) as women's ways of responding. Shelly

described her leadership as "nurturing and leading with care." She continued that she is

"spiritual and that is important [to her]." In addition, she is a member of service

organizations through her church and the community.

　　　Anne expressed having "bigger muscles" and greater empathy for a variety of

people, especially those marginalized because of her experiences with race and gender

oppression. Donna reported being empathetic to men in elementary schools for complex

to simple reasons. They were afraid to touch the students for fear of accusations and the

anguish surrounding those issues; or simply the fact that no restrooms were designated

specifically for men on some campuses. Furthermore, Donna recalled an incident with a young girl who thought men did not teach because she never had a male teacher until junior high school. Donna noted the lack of gender diversity as well as other multiple identities as detrimental to students and other teachers. The women reflected upon their experiences and the experiences of others to guide their actions and therefore, they were successful in working with others.

All three of the women expressed the desire to make life better for the children they serve and champion. The concept of "race uplift" noted in the work of Perkins (1993, p. 270), has extended to the human race because of the environments in which these women work. In addition, they held high expectations for the teachers who taught the children because in order for the students to have a chance they believed that "education is the key to escaping poverty." Therefore, they believed that principals and other leaders must equip the teachers and the teachers must equip the students. They believe that they must ensure that learning is achieved. The ultimate responsibilities lie with them. As Shelly said, "The buck stops with me; and we *will* be successful."

Similarly, Donna expects a teacher to be so skilled and so interested in children's success that Donna would place her precious daughter in the classroom with that teacher. If the teacher is deficient, however, she will help her to get better because she cared about the teacher's success in influencing the lives of students. Donna commented,

> I want to make this school [district and its schools], a place that I would want my
> child to attend. I want for every child here what I want for my own child and
> every teacher. I use that as my gauge. And when I would meet with teachers [for

a conference], I would tell them, 'Take it personally, because I do. I wouldn't want my child in your class.' That's the greatest insult I could give, but then the greatest compliment that I could give you is that I would select you as a teacher for my child. [However, Donna noted,] 'Okay, I wouldn't want her in your classroom but let's see what we could do to make it better.'

Donna shared another example from her life as a student regarding her expectations of teachers. When she was in college, her professor spoke to her about her behavior and her resulting grades and then called her mother to report that she was not performing as she should. Donna was floored that her parent was called and then arrived for a conference with the professor. After the shock, however, she recognized the caring and accountability this teacher demonstrated. Therefore, she holds all teachers to such standards and expects high levels of responsibility for students' educational success to be the norm.

Being Accountable

Likewise, caring and accountability have assisted Shelly as she has experienced life as a central office leader. After teaching and leading in her school district, the support she received from the community was reciprocated. Shelly divulged this example. She noticed her superintendent trying to minimize her authority by having clandestine meetings with other employees. However, her longevity in the district as well as her standing in the community attributable to her compassionate and responsible behaviors spoke volumes. She had a reliable information network and a high level of respect which made her "untouchable." Her power and authority remained intact,

despite the superintendent's behavior because others in the community recognized her service to the children and others who influenced their educations.

In addition, Donna commented on her level of accountability. Even though she knew she had to be overly qualified in everything she did, she met the expectation because she knew the students would benefit in the long run because of her position of leadership. She "played a role of representing her race and gender" because she was the only one in that capacity in the central office. She can and did stand up for marginalized people and worked to be the conscience of the school district.

The roles the women played at home have added to the costs they negotiate. As wives and mothers, they were responsible for managing their households. Shelly described the strain of raising her two daughters and working while her husband was out of town most of the time. She found challenges in trying to meet her family's needs while accomplishing the demands of her employer. Likewise, Donna noted the pressure of caring for her mother every other weekend while still being committed to her immediate family and her job responsibilities. Anne also expressed the challenge of handling the housework and caring for her three young children while working as an educational executive.

In addition, based on their personally-described backgrounds, these women are highly intelligent. Their early graduations, good grades and varied paths to the central office are evidence that these individuals are gifted. They are agents of knowledge (Collins, 2000) who deserve recognition for, if nothing else, their level of success as demonstrated by their positions of influence. Meanwhile, all of the women described

being isolated because they were the only African American female at their level on the organizational chart. Therefore, by sharing their wisdom and understandings, they may help to reduce the isolation experienced by other African American women who hold or desire to attain similar positions.

Reflecting on the women's experiences, I noted a call for diversity. Even though they worked in districts comprised mainly of African American and Hispanic children, the isolation they described and the lack of diversity in the central office was inconsistent with the student and community population. The city in which they lived was so much more diverse than the offices they worked in and this contradiction seemed to conflict the women. Donna implored school districts "not to have diversity for diversity's sake," but that efforts are made to have a variety of people in various roles. The women seemed to desire opportunities to share concerns and seek advice with others who shared their similar experiences.

Revelations

Revelations in the data included several aspects related to their family circumstances. For instance, all three were raised in two parent households. They all professed belief in God and Christ, and the major role religion and prayer contributed to their lives. The three women were married. One named a personal cost as marrying at the age of 29. She perceived that she married at a late age because she had focused on employment over the nine years while most of her acquaintances were already married. Two of the women's spouses rarely shared the household and childcare responsibilities. Donna's spouse had skills in cooking and other household chores. She believed that her

husband being raised by his mother and sisters contributed to his domestic success. She commented that he was a good compliment to her because she was raised in a family dominated by males and her skills were in sports and scouting. Donna proudly highlighted that in order to support her in her desire to earn a terminal degree while she continued at her job full time, and to care for their daughter, he relinquished his career to be more accessible to his family.

Anne noted staying home full time to raise her sons. During this time, she earned her doctoral degree. She wanted to stay home longer with her children but she was recruited to a district central office position by a former colleague. Anne returned to her career outside of her home because she believed her impact on many more children's lives was worth the sacrifice.

The following surprises were noted relative to their work environments. Two of the women had deaths in their families at the time of promotional interviews. Both women revealed that the interview schedules were changed to accommodate their personal tragedies. Therefore, they were appreciative of the consideration. Anne was so inspired to honor her brother's life that she associated her new position with this motivating factor.

In addition, the career pathways of the women were remarkable. Shelly and Donna were classroom teachers, counselors, assistant principals, and then principals at two different campuses before moving to central office positions. Shelly and Donna remained in their same districts for twenty-five years or more. Anne was a classroom teacher, worked in the Human Resources Department as a recruiter, became an assistant

principal for curriculum, and then returned to the central office in an executive leadership capacity. She has been in several school districts, including one out of state, and has been employed by her current district for approximately two years.

Another surprising detail was the overt racial statements. Anne reported racist jokes being shared openly in the office and how offensive the behavior was to her. She highlighted that the offending person was her boss's best friend. In addition, Anne and Shelly reported hearing that the only reason they were in their positions was because of their race. Oddly, colleagues shared this information with both of the women.

Their lack of mentors and the ways the women had to compensate was somewhat predictable (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Each woman mentioned that she was clueless about the job and noted the time taken to learn it. Donna reported not having a job description and many aspects of her central office leadership job were unfamiliar to her. None of her previous area superintendents informed her of the position's responsibilities.

Donna said,

I was encouraged by my principal to become an administrator. And I've always had people who have felt, along with my personal feelings, that I could do more, I could impact more people, and I've always thought of administration as noble in the ability to impact more lives.

Despite this encouragement and subsequent training, the women were without mentors for their current positions. Although, they agreed to mentor others, they did not say that they purposely sought mentors for themselves. Neither mentioned a succession plan; therefore, the quality of the future candidates is diminished or negated.

These women make others feel comfortable but at times they feel isolated and alone. Shelly commented,

I was sure it was just me. [However, due to her participation in this study], it's refreshing to know that I'm on target. It's helpful to know that others are going through these same issues. It makes a big difference to know I am not alone in ...struggles and experiences. [Being a part of the study] has provided a venue for me to actually think about what I have experienced as a Black woman in this environment.

Another similar experience that connected the women's stories was the mention of the word, "articulate." The use of the word seemed to be universal; it is understood when White people refer to someone as articulate, then that person is African American. All three of the women noted this phenomenon. I chuckled during the interviews as each woman mentioned the term and its use because my personal experience had been the same. Apparently it is noteworthy for White people when a Black person is articulate.

A common thread throughout all of the interviews was the women's invocation of church and God. Reflecting on the data brought forth during this work, I noticed that each of the women expressed belief and value in spirituality. I met Donna at a church, although she did not mention very much about praying. In her descriptions, Anne was very spiritual, noting both western and eastern religions and yet, she never mentioned attending church. Shelly spoke of her church and prayer during our conversations. Prayer was cited more often when coping with work issues than with family ones. It led

me to believe the women had feelings of more control related to family issues than to job concerns. I wondered if they had more training on how to behave and solve issues at home than on the job and thus had to turn more frequently to prayer to cope with the job-related costs.

Implications for Individuals

Jobs as central office executives are challenging for African American women but can be managed as evidenced by the coping mechanisms identified by the women in my study. Advice from the women included encouragement to follow her dreams for any African American female who was interested in an executive position in an urban school district central office. As Shelly said, "Be courageous and go for it!" Therefore, in order to accomplish the dream, the women offered the following recommendations related to countering the personal costs which may be encountered. They noted that even though there are small numbers of African American women who are central office executives, we must use opportunities to inform and to support one another and to make sure that our voices are heard. Due to the small numbers as well, "surplus visibility" is likely. As a result, we must be sure to be known by the quality of the work performance because as an African American woman in a leadership position we will be scrutinized. Work and projects will require collaboration; therefore, know how to be both a team leader and a team member. Acquiring a doctorate is important to demonstrate knowledge and capability. The African American woman central office leader will be required to be overly prepared and to stay ahead of the competition. In addition, come to

terms with the notion that an African American female will have to "work twice as hard and be better than good," according to the women in my study.

The advice from the women continued and incorporated such suggestions as seek mentors. They suggested that women interested in central office executive positions talk with someone who has the job or the experience that they seek. Although a scant number of African American women are in such positions, seek them out and ask questions about their experiences. Ask them for referrals to others who have held the desired position. Seek information and insight from mentors prior to and once the job has been attained and ask for guidance and suggestions. The women also offered that once the position is attained, being a role model is imperative.

Donna, Shelly, and Anne expressed, being a knowledge-gatherer, accessing resources and knowing your moral core are also essential characteristics for African-American females who are district level leaders. They noted that having a diverse group of co-workers was vital to creating the most effective team to lead those who directly educated the children. Diversity just for the numbers was not the answer but being purposeful in considering and in selecting people of varied races and gender for positions was the expectation. Having a diversity plan and carefully looking at skills and job completion and success as mitigating factors for hiring decisions was recommended. The women also suggested, "be wise about money," both the salary you earn and the money for which you are responsible.

In discussing the negotiation of home and work responsibilities, the women in my study offered, "Utilize a variety of support systems." They noted that holding a job

outside of the home as well as caring for families required support from within and outside of the family. Each woman shared the benefit of having family members or employed assistance to help manage their homes to allow more time for their children's school or play activities. Without this support, their children would suffer some neglect. Therefore, they noted as an educational leader to be sure to 'walk the talk' and give employees time to participate in their families lives.

The women contend that the personal basis of support is to be cognizant of emotional and physical health. They recognized the importance of taking care of themselves emotionally and physically when they discussed disappointment in not taking "me" time, not having time to exercise or not eating properly. Although they did not always practice what they knew to be good habits, nevertheless, they supported finding ways to incorporate healthy eating and exercise at the work place and at home.

Conclusions

Given the amount of effort expended and the costs and consequences noted, African American female central office leaders require assistance to negotiate the costs. Both professional and personal networks must be developed to manage the tasks and issues they face on the job and at home. When asked if I was surprised by what the women reported, I had to admit for most of the information, I really was not. Upon reflection though, what really surprised me were the kinds of recommendations I first considered based on the data I gathered, and some of the recommendations the women offered.

Initial Recommendations

All of my early recommendations -- build personal and professional networks, join organizations that focus on women's issues, read and participate in research, mentor others, and raise sons to be partners in their future relationships -- put the onerous work on the very women who were already stretched. Due to a combination of race and gender expectations, clearly, the women are overburdened and cannot and should not be expected to manage tasks, issues, and expectations alone. Yet, my preliminary thinking was encouraging women to tackle all of this single-handedly.

Historical Collective Response

The women in my study do not have the "benefit of complexion," or White privilege, and certainly gender is another strike against them. What they do have though is intellect, a passion for education as a key for "uplifting" children of color and children of poverty and an attitude of controlled equilibrium which is evident by their successful negotiation in both Black and White realms—their home and work worlds. Therefore, as I reflect on the women's words, my life experiences and literature of African Americans and women's histories and tying all of these pieces together, I realize that White sponsorship through collaboration or more accurately stated, courageous sponsorship is required. I can just "feel" readers asking, "From where is this idea coming?" Spending some time reflecting and during a conversation with a colleague, I am reminded of history and thus the recollection of sponsorship. My examples come from historical events regarding civil rights -- one from baseball and the other from Alabama.

When I think of the accomplishments of Jackie Robinson ,who is credited with "crossing the color line" in baseball; the success of the Montgomery bus boycott, or the many other gender or racially historical milestones, I recognize that they did not come without the work of those marginalized people coupled with collective and White (male) sponsorship.   Jackie Robinson may not have been the most skilled African American baseball player of the time but he was phenomenal and he had the ability to negotiate in both Black and White worlds as evidenced by his success in the Negro Baseball League and at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) and his ability to maintain his equilibrium, despite emotional and physical abuse. Branch Rickey and Walter O'Malley, White males from the Dodgers' organization, provided the sponsorship and thus the opportunity for Mr. Robinson and other African American ballplayers to participate in mainstream society. Similarly, it was Jo Ann Gibson Robinson (no relation to Jackie), a professor of English at Alabama State College and other members of Montgomery's Women's Political Council who were motivated to pursue the issue of the bus seating condition (Robinson, 1987). Their work was assisted by the collective sponsorship of White Americans and many others from around the world (p.94). The notion of sponsorship is identified in both examples. Common threads in these examples and the women in my study include the above-average skills in their crafts, their education, their abilities to negotiate in multiple environments, and their skill in maintaining composure under enormous pressure are possessed by Jackie Robinson, Jo Ann Gibson Robinson, Shelly, Donna, and Anne. Even with all of these skills, the women in my study reported feeling alone.

The Lesson of Community

Isolation was noted as a major characteristic that the women negotiated. Isolation and aloneness do not enhance success (Aguirre, 2000; Alston, 1999; Skrla, 2003). Therefore, I believe that the numbers of African American women central office executives should be increased. An increase in numbers is too simplistic. Both numbers of African American female central office leaders and numbers of people who are givers, like the women in this study, who take intellect, accountability, and caring for others very personally. This increase can happen if we learn from the behaviors and the lessons of these women.

Again, I am ashamed that I would suggest through my initial recommendations that the women were responsible for fixing the problem and that they were involved in a profession or circumstance that did not bring them satisfaction despite the labeled costs. The work of these women is remarkable and valuable; thus merits support. Clearly women in leadership require family support (Brunner, 2000a; Dahl, 2000; DeFelice, 2002; Hemel, 2005; Hochschild, 1989; Loder, 2005a; Myers & Ginsburg, 1994; Phelps, 2002; Ramsey, 1997; Zook, 2006) and they require professional support (Hemel, 2005; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Morris, 1999; Pavan, 1999; Sixel, 2005) in order to lead and serve. Recognizing these requirements, I was unrealistic to expect these women to address the issues alone. As previously noted, history and research have indicated a collective response will yield tremendous solutions.

Creating an Alliance for Courageous Sponsorship

Therefore to truly give voice to the women via their stories I appeal to the sensibilities of the gatekeepers (Tallerico, 2000) and expect that we all will learn from the lessons the women shared. For the purposes of this work, the gatekeepers include superintendents, school boards, and others influential in the educational community, who must purposefully and thoughtfully create diverse work environments by seeking the skills and experiences of people, such as the women in my study, and not simply "one of these" and "one of those." Like the people of Montgomery, who received money and vehicles to support them in their bus boycott (Robinson, 1987), African American female central office executives need the gatekeepers to demonstrate courageous sponsorship by seeing the needs and championing marginalized folks and the positive work that they are accomplishing. People of all races, the various combinations, and gender must be willing to be courageous and passionate in the ways of these women. I know I can only control one person, myself, but I can seek to influence the thinking and behaviors of others and encourage an alliance which will utilize the skills and capital of all the stakeholders. Therefore through this study, I work and challenge all to provide courageous sponsorship for the benefit of so many. We, in the educational community, must lead the way. We have the intelligence, wisdom, skills, and capital to be certain that these costs are not paid solely by those who may be least able to afford them. As an alliance, we can insure that these costs are not expenses but are turned into investments in our children's future and in caring for the people who serve them.

Recommendations for Further Study

Therefore, another means of investing in African American female central office executives is research that is for them. Not necessarily a continuation of the body of research about women, but work that allows them to be open, to speak frankly, about the unique challenges and role expectations of female school district executives as well as work that allows others to develop ways to support them. Researchers have an obligation to delve into the study of the issues that impact these school district leaders. Furthermore higher education through its course work requirements will have to reflect this research for women and the distinctive simultaneously experienced gender and racial issues they face and to seek to develop others who will provide courageous sponsorship.

The significance of this study is threefold: first is to advance the study with African American females in central office leadership positions, next is to overcome some deficiencies and limitations of existing research by focusing on the simultaneous effects of race and gender, and third is a legitimate investigation of the personal costs African American women negotiate to hold executive leadership positions. Although this study did not measure the depth of isolation, further study should include seeking ways to reduce isolation and providing direction for mentors of African American females especially when they are the only ones in their capacity. Connecting a colleague who shares the same race and gender [African American female] with a similar position on the organizational chart in the work place is recommended for helping to reduce isolation. Another benefit would be to investigate different work environments. The

women in my study worked in environments in which they were the only African American females; therefore, exploring the personal costs of African American women central office leaders who are employed in environments which are predominantly African American or ones that are more racially and gender diverse [if they are even available] may provide insight in reducing the costs . As a result, further study should include utilizing as data sources retired central office executives who are African American females. Their insight into the personal costs associated with performing in such capacity would be beneficial.

Additionally, all of the women in my study are married to their first and only spouse. Based on other studies related to African American women (Denton, 1990; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Loder, 2005a; Zook, 2006), their circumstances are rare. Therefore, a study related to the personal costs of African American central office executive women who are single, divorced, single parents or parents of blended families may be warranted. In addition, studying the consequences of their costs and their ways of coping may produce different findings.

Concluding Remarks

The time has come for African American female central office educational executives to be recognized for their skills in leading and serving while negotiating multiple identities. In relative terms and for the most part, they have been ignored far too long in the literature. Not only should these women as a group be validated and valued for the work they do in educating America's children who are generally children of poverty, but the women's personal and professional job-related concerns and costs

must also be addressed. The stories shared in this study are only a small portion of the ones available and untold. Yet, the depth of their loneliness as women who are frequently the only one in their position was evident in the words of each woman. How many other African American female central office leaders want to know that they are not alone and that others share similar experiences? The answer may lie in further research and in opportunities for discussion of current applicable research to occur. It is in the best interest of us all to have more leaders like these women.

As a member of the group of African American women who are central office executives and based on this study, I am acutely aware that race and gender affect how others see us, respond to us and judge us. Yet, based on the dearth of research, it is also clear that as an educational community, discussions surrounding race and the factors of race in combination with gender when it comes to African American women leaders are engaged in reluctantly. However, through equitable and challenging research agendas, we will promote serious study that directly addresses the personal costs and issues that African American female central office leaders encounter. Therefore, the educational community must be brave enough and passionate enough to embrace courageous sponsorship and to deal with the issues which challenge our colleagues and thus affect us all.

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APPENDIX

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Talk about your path to your current position as a central office leader.

2. How do you define the personal costs that you negotiated as you traversed this path?

3. In what ways did these costs match your expectations?

4. Describe your strategies to cope with the personal costs that you defined.

5. What advice would you share with others who are pursuing central office positions?

6. What suggestions would you offer to create environments in which these costs would be reduced?

7. How does the lack of females at the top relate to (affect) personal costs?

8. Concluding thoughts?

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