

AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY: AN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMAN'S
PERCEPTION OF HER JOURNEY TO THE PRINCIPALSHIP

A Record of Study

by

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative autoethnographic study was to add to the research of African American female secondary principals. Most research in the field of education concerning women reflects women in general and is not specific to African American women. More research is needed for and by African American women as it pertains to the study of female leadership on secondary public school campuses. The traditional high school principal is White, male, married, and middle income. With the inception of President Obama's Race to the Top and the age of accountability, the traditional building principal motif is changing. Accountability and higher standards have changed just about every aspect of education.

This autoethnography represents my professional journey as it pertains to obtaining a principalship in a high school. As the story was written, it became apparent though my writings in order to explain the journey, it was evident I needed to share my life experiences about who I am to further bring understanding and clarity to the study. Being Black and female, compounded by the attainment of a high level of education, predictably creates problems on both a professional and personal level. The research is shared through traditional research methods as well as vignettes or anecdotes to tell the story. Storytelling is important because it adds context to the situation and allows the reader not only to comprehend but to also become part of the experience.

The review of the literature for this autoethnographic journey signified African American women as a renewed prototype for effective school leadership, especially as it

pertained to schools with placed at-risk children. Theoretical framework included Womanism, Critical Race Theory, Female Leadership, Cultural Identity, Principal Leadership and the history of African Americans as educational leaders.

My findings, based on research presented, although scarcity exists among African American female high school principals; we are now believed to possess the qualities necessary for a school to be successful. This scarcity is caused by lack of African American mentors and sexism and/or racism in hiring practices.

DEDICATION

“No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall condemn.” Isaiah 54:17

Giving all glory and honor to God. Thank you. He believed in me. He tugged at me. He woke me up in the middle of the night to encourage me. He carried me. Thank you Lord, for without you nothing is possible.

To my mother: Thank you Mom for believing in all your children. From the oldest to the youngest, you always made a way out of no way. With the grace of God and with my entire being, this is for you. You now can introduce me as “the doctor.”

To my father: Thank you Daddy for providing for us and for making me a strong person. Even though you have left this world, I feel your presence often. I do hope I made you proud.

To my children: Chelsea and Drew, Christmas vacation 2012 will forever be with us in the pages of this work. Thank you for understanding that “Shirls” needed to “get r done!” I appreciate your patience and support. I love the two of you more than life itself. Be blessed and live life to serve others.

To my husband: Kevin, even in the hardest of times you have managed to begin each day with a smile. I do hope one day, I can be the smile that begins your day the same way. Thank you for your support and I love you.

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“If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes.” Mark 9:23

To God be the glory. This work would not be possible had it not been for my faith in the Almighty. My sleepless nights or times when I thought I had nothing to say, He held me in His arms and gave me everything I needed.

Heavy sigh. Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan. What would I have done without this magnificent lady? I must give her due justice. Dr. Hasan agreed to be my chair in the 23rd hour. I began my quest for the doctorate degree in June, 2002. It was now fall semester of 2012 and I needed to complete my dissertation. Three of my committee members exited TAMU and I had one remaining committee member. Everything was completed; however, I was in need of a committee chair and two committee members. Dr. Hasan and I connected (thank you Dr. Torres) by email. She merely asked for my introduction and by the end of the day she agreed to chair my committee. Our first meeting was in small church in Bryan, Texas. We discussed my work as the choir began the opening hymn of service on September 17, 2012. Approximately, 120 days later I successfully defended my record of study, January 15, 2013 (Martin Luther King’s Birthday). Thank you Dr. Webb-Hasan!

Many thanks to Dr. Norvella Carter, Dr. Terah Venzant-Chambers and Dr. Mary Alfred. Thank you for agreeing to be on my committee and thank you for your guidance and support. It was truly an honor to be in your presence and I look forward to working with you in the near future.

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Sunday and Strove I am glad the Lord allowed our paths to cross. I feel the two of you gave me the push I needed to complete this project. Continue to strive and make it happen for students. Brenda, I will be forever grateful for your time and assistance. You were truly the angel the Lord sent to give me the last dose of confidence needed to persevere.

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classes and for being there for Chelsea and Drew. To Katrina, I have always worked to make you proud, but to give you and all of my nieces and nephews a role model as it relates to excellence in education. As my years wind up I hope to pass the torch to the next generation of Guillorys. Excellence and Believe through Him all things are possible! To Patricia, Patrick and Michael, thank you for your support through the years, even when I did not return the phone calls or seemed like it didn't matter. It did. I always appreciated your support and I always felt your prayers. Thank you.

To Drew and Chelsea. I have missed games, awards programs, and open houses. I am sorry and if I had to do it all again, I would have been there. I have attended more than I missed, but I do hope and pray you understand. I love you and I appreciate you. At a young age both of you dealt with a professional educator who happened to be your mom. You have both grown to be wonderful young adults and I am very proud. This work is for Grandma and for the two of you.

Finally, Kevin Gilliam, my husband, we have really been through changes. Through it all you always supported my completing this degree and I appreciate your kindness and gentle spirit. The Lord has blessed me with many people who care and pray for me. Please forgive me if I did not list, for I feel you are my silent angels forever lifting me up in prayer. You forever have a place in my heart and I again thank Him for allowing you in my life. May the Lord keep you and bless you. I love you.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Why are African American female administrators underrepresented in the principalship of suburban high schools? According to Milner (2010), public school teachers were predominantly White, non-Hispanic (84%) and of the remaining proportion, (7.8%) were African American, (5.7%) Hispanic, (1.6%) Asian American and (0.8%) Native American (Milner, 2010). There is also a void of African American school leaders according to Evans (2007) and diversity in the principalship is virtually nonexistent, as approximately 88% of this nation's principals are White. Previous research has not contributed to answering this question and the problem is that we, as researchers, are not digging deep enough into why this is happening.

If our knowledge of White women principals and superintendents is only partial, even more scant is our knowledge of women of color who are administrators (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). African American women are represented in the classrooms of America, but why not in administration and especially in secondary administration? The traditional high school principal is a White male, married, and middle income. With the inception of President Obama's Race to the Top and the age of accountability, the traditional building principal motif is changing. Accountability and higher standards have changed just about every aspect of education. Legislation has established an exigency to improve student achievement in an education system that supports a culture of status quo and results in the failure of too many students (Schargel, Thacker, Bell,

2007). Our challenge in meeting the needs of the diverse children and youth in general and special education settings is monumental (Webb-Johnson, 2002).

This era of higher standards, greater accountability, and more placed at-risk students requires a new kind of campus leader who can inspire teachers, parents, and the community to coalesce and provide better opportunities for all students to achieve at high levels (Schargel, et al, 2007). African American women are now being hired into these positions. But why is it that when African American women do achieve principalships the school is usually predominantly African American, has low test scores, and has a significant student populations qualifying for free and reduced lunch? Basically, the high achieving African American female secures the school that is in “the hood.” African American women, typically emerge as the leaders of urban schools that are under supported and economically deplete (Murtadha & Larson, 1999).

Marzano’s 21 Leadership Principals

The need to educate and develop a new generation of school leadership that reflects gender and ethnic diversity is the greatest challenge facing American education. Drawing from 35 years of study, Robert J. Marzano (2005) explains that there are 21 leadership principles that every administrator needs to know. He further explains that knowing and having these skills have a significant effect on student learning and the correlation of each responsibility to academic achievement gains. The 21 responsibilities are affirmation, change agent, contingent, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideal/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, involvement/knowledge in

curriculum, instruction, and assessment, monitoring and evaluation, optimizer, order, outreach, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility.

The 21 leadership principals, referred to as responsibilities, are not new to leadership. Throughout my readings and research, the attributes are consistently mentioned as being the fundamentals of leadership in education and industry alike. The leadership principles are referred to as responsibilities because they are, or at least should be, standard operating procedures for effective principals (Marzano, 2005). As I reviewed the principals, I think of examples of how I may have used them in my daily environment. The scope is rather wide and could explain why it is difficult to be an effective leader. The responsibilities are listed in alphabetical order in an effort not to “rank” which one is more important. The 21 leadership principles will be discussed further in the literature review in the next chapter.

Not only is there is a gap in the research about African American women principals, but there is also virtually no research as it pertains to what happens when all of the following factors come together: a) being human; b) being an African American; c) being a female; d) being an assistant principal placed in a predominantly White culture; e) being an instructional leader; f) being a community leader; g) being held accountable for student success. Women have the power of collective leadership. Since women are essentially outsiders in the realm of leadership, and women of color are even more powerless than White women, we realized that this approach to leadership was embedded primarily in the value of diverse perspectives (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

This dissertation explores my life of as an African American female administrator and my struggle to find a voice in the field of education as it pertains to upper level management and my quest to the principalship. During the writing of this dissertation, I obtain the position of a principal of a 5-A high school in the state of Texas.

Prelude

All through my public education, teachers told me that I could be anything I wanted to be. As I matured and continued my studies, those words echoed in my consciousness becoming the defense I needed in trying times – times when my best was not good enough or hard work just somehow did not pay off. I remembered, “I can be anything I want to be.” Fortunately, those words were enough for me to believe in my abilities and persevere. As a teacher myself, I said the exact words to my students, but added “you can be anything you want to be as long as you work hard, study hard, and do the right thing.” By the time I became an administrator, I understood race matters. Still, I believe all those past intentions were sincere. However, after stating those facts, I should have added a disclaimer, “you can be anything you want to be as long as you work hard, study hard, do the right thing, and understand others’ perceptions of one’s ‘perceived’ place in society.” My journey from childhood to adulthood has been dynamic. As a child, I was supported by teachers, and I learned creative ways to believe in myself educationally. However, at the same time, I have learned who I am as an African American administrator and what that means contextually, as I became an adult,

a woman, a teacher, a wife, a parent, an administrator, and a servant leader committed to transforming the educational lives of children and families I serve.

My Family

My father was in the construction business and we moved at least twice a year; once at Christmas and then again at the end of June. From kindergarten through fourth grade, I attended 11 different elementary schools in the states of California, Washington and Texas. What I find intriguing now, is that every school I attended, teachers recognized my academic ability and placed me in the “smart group.” My exposure to education was strictly from school; home support was exceptionally shallow. Dad was a carpenter with a third grade education and Mom was a housewife with a ninth grade education. I had five siblings, and our home was especially dysfunctional. (Daddy was an alcoholic and an abusive husband).

Homework was a foreign word. I only knew what it was because the children on the sitcoms did it. At that time we had one television in the living room. We all liked the same programs. I grew up watching the reruns of Leave It to Beaver and I Love Lucy. Prime time programs we viewed were The Brady Bunch, and, later, as we grew up, All in the Family. I remember watching The Brady Bunch and wondered why our house was not like theirs. We had six children and so did they. I noticed the family seemed to get along with each other much better than we. I grew up thinking to myself that when I marry and have a family, I want it to be just like Carol and Mike Brady.

Finally, when we moved to Texas, homework was assigned to us. I remember skipping home excited to have something to do other than watching television and doing

chores. I recall sitting at the table and proudly doing my work until my brothers and sisters came in from playing outside. They chastised me for not doing the work at school. I remember my brother, David, calling me stupid for even having homework. It really did not intimidate me, because I knew I was not stupid. They really had a problem with it because Mom questioned them. She said, "Look at Shirley; y'all need to be like her. See how smart she is. Y'all just want to be little dummies and play outside. Leave her alone." With pride, I sat, smiled and wallowed in the positive feedback I received from my mother. Being the fourth child of six, I really did not have much of a voice at home. At school, I excelled because teachers were attentive to me and rewarded my hard work. I received hugs, praise, and gold stars when my work was exceptional. I learned early in life that being good in school meant being noticed and I liked the feeling. I started Kindergarten in Seattle, Washington in 1968 and grew up during the seventies.

Sign of the Times

The seventies was a time when Jesse Jackson proclaimed, "I am somebody." Black became beautiful. James Brown shouted out, "Say it loud, I'm Black and I'm proud!" Teachers in California, of all races, taught us (students) that we could be anything we wanted to be. We were taught that race did not matter, and it did not matter what color we were, we were all destined to succeed. Teachers shared the accomplishments of Martin Luther King, Jr., Barbara Jordan, Andrew Jackson, and Leontyne Price. Icons like these individuals became our (Black children) role models, and we were told of how they succeeded, so we, too, could succeed.

I honestly did not experience racism until the fourth grade when we moved to the Great State of Texas. Suddenly people were identified as “Black or White.” My teacher spoke with a Southern drawl, and my classmates described others as Black or White. In California, we described others as “the girl in the yellow dress” or “the girl with long braids.” In Texas, I heard one of my White friends say “do not play with that Black girl because she smells.” It was not what she said, it was the *way* she said it. I heard the “n” word being spoken by someone White. It was not the first time I heard the word, because Daddy used it all the time; however, it was the first time I heard someone White use it, and it did not sound the same. It sounded like the man was cursing. I really did not understand why Texas was so different from California until Daddy started talking about the South. When I was in the seventh grade, the television show “Roots” aired, and I began to realize that people were different, and that I was different simply because I was Black.

Life Today

Today, Blacks are referred to as African Americans. Being comfortable with both terms, I will use them interchangeably throughout this dissertation. I want to share my experiences as an educated African American woman in today’s public education system. As a young girl, I had a dream and truly believed that I could be anything I wanted to be. Even after I learned of racism, affirmative action, and the haves and have nots, I wanted to believe I was the exception. I wanted to believe when (White) people met and saw me, they did not see Black. They saw a person. As I write, I reflect on my naiveté. Throughout my life, I always had strong African American women mentors

informing me of the road blocks I would encounter, telling me that I had to be better than my White counterparts, warning me to be careful and to prepare. I had absolutely no idea of the trials and tribulations I would battle in my struggle to become what I wanted to be, an Educator.

First Teaching Assignment-Old School High School 1989

I began my career in education in a traditional manner. I attended college and earned my teaching certificate. I taught at Old School High School (OSHS) in Green Valley Independent School District. The student population of OSHS was 87% African American, 0% White, 13% Hispanic, and 0% Asian/Pacific Islander. However, the demographics of the District were quite different. The student population in 1988 was 27% African American, 51% White, 14% Hispanic, and 8% Asian/Pacific Islander. While at OSHS, I developed a special style with children and much of my “style” was ability “talk their talk.” We define cultural sensitivity as being respectful of other cultures and being aware of cultural differences (Natesan, Webb-Hasan, Carter, & Walter, 2011). It could be referred to as an “Ebonic” type language I would use every now and then with students. I knew their music, familiarized myself with their culture and made it a point to identify with who they were. Yes, “their,” please keep in mind, I was raised in the European White dominant culture, and as I matured, I found that I did not know enough about Black history or patterned African American culture other than the limited information discussed at school. I knew what some of the White children knew and I had little experience connecting with African American children, other than

my siblings. So, my experience was limited, and I had to learn how to connect to Black children.

I used this style because the students were receptive to it and identified with me. It was successful for me in developing relationships with children. The shortage of African American educators in suburban school districts created a void for African American students with whom they could identify. Empirical and theoretical literature supports the contention that African American teachers are often more successful than middleclass White teachers in connecting the cultural lives of African American students to school knowledge and in reducing discipline problems (Wilder, 2000).

My teaching assignment at OSHS was Typewriting for five periods out of six each day and I remained employed there for ten years. During my tenure at OSHS, I became a worker bee. I was the teacher who did everything: cheerleader sponsor, student council, campus based leadership team, coronation, homecoming, Future Business Leaders of America, and the list continued. Through my experiences working with students other than in my classroom, I found myself in the principal's office on occasion. When I was in the principal's office, I observed his position and decided I could be an administrator and enrolled at a local university and began a Master's degree, with focus in mid-management.

Sidebar: As I write this, I cannot remember any administrator (and all the administrators at OSHS were African American women and men), who encouraged me to become an administrator. In fact, even after I shared

my aspirations with the administrators on campus, they did not offer assistance, conversation, words of advice or even a good luck!

Process Teacher to Administrator

During my ninth year of teaching, I obtained my Master's of Education and became certified in mid-management (principal certification K-12). I aspired to be an assistant principal and eventually a principal of a 5-A high school. Green Valley ISD boasted of growth by approximately 3000-5000 students per year, so opportunity for advancement was immense. However, there was an underlying theme present in the way administrators in the district were selected. A perception of the "Eastside" and "Westside" existed. The Eastside was the poorer side of the district and consisted of a student population that was predominantly African American and Hispanic. The Westside of the district was economically affluent, and the majority of the students were White or Asian.

There was a perception among African American assistant principal candidates that the only place "we" could be administrators was on the Eastside. Of course, we had representatives on the Westside but they were limited to one African American per campus. As the district grew, our (African American) representation grew.

Assistant Principal – First Assignment New School High School (NSHS)

I was fortunate to be in the "right place at the right time." I was one of the few African Americans hired to be in a high school on the Westside of the district. At the time, I really did not know I was an exception, my fellow African American counterparts told me I was an anomaly. My first year as an assistant principal at NSHS was a trying,

but enjoyable experience. NSHS was the most diverse campus in our district with a student population 35% White, 26% African American, 20% Hispanic, 18% Asian, and 1% other. The building principal was not originally from our district and was very liberal in his hiring of staff. Our administrative staff also consisted of a diverse group that (in my opinion) represented the student population well. The principal of the school was a White male, and the associate principal was a White female. The assistant principals represented an array of diversity. We had an: African American male, an African American female, a Hispanic female, a White male, and a White female.

However, when I was promoted to an assistant principal at NSHS, I held back. I did not want to be perceived as the “Black” administrator who “got down” on the level with students. I wanted very much to be accepted as a professional educator who knew her job and did it well. Lewis (2003) found that parents, teachers, and administrators in a predominantly White suburban school maintained a “color-blind” orientation despite mounting contrary evidence from students of color in the school. So, I struggled and began to negotiate my identity. Having a cultural identity different from that of the majority in an organization can impact every aspect of the career experience for people of color (Madsen & Mabokela, 2005).

In an effort not to be stereotyped, I became a chameleon and adapted to each situation. I did not want any staff member, student or parent to perceive my style (and me) as being “too Black.” It was my experience that “too Black” was not good and could result in my having a reputation such as the other Black administrators in Green Valley ISD.

Too Black

Sidebar: Too Black? In 1990, Black administrators in GVISD were stereotyped as being “tokens.” If we were placed on committees, it had to do with multicultural education or the diversity committee. The majority of African American administrators were older, seasoned educators; however, they did not rock the boat. The men were usually coaches that were promoted through the system because they knew how to discipline students. The majority of women taught at least 20 years before being hired as administrators and all were considered to be master teachers.

There were two African American middle school principals; one female, one male, and an African American male high school principal; all three individuals were on the Eastside of the district. The high school principal (who hired me) was tough, mean, and a force to be reckoned with; however, he was also known to do things “his way” and not the district way. In turn, it became the “Black way.” My reference to this term is from hear se and gossip from other African Americans. The stereotype became a part of the school’s culture for years.

In the early 80’s, it was common for administrators (White and Black) in GVISD to be promoted by “the good old boy system” meaning, “it was who you know, not what you know” type of promotion system, which resulted in many administrators awarded these positions, but did not service children. To be quite honest, I did not witness White administrators being any better than Black administrators, but it was obvious when

Black administrators were disciplined, everyone in the District knew it and it “seemed” like it was a direct result of “being Black” and not knowing the “right” way of handling situation.

My first two years as an assistant principal at NSHS were a series of trials and errors, while just keeping my head above water. I really did not know anything and looking back and reflecting now, I really was not a threat to anyone. I did what I was told. I listened, and only asked questions to clarify things I did not understand. However, when I began my third year as an assistant principal, I shared my goal of moving up into the principalship with my principal. I also began working on my doctorate at Texas A&M. This is when my world, as I knew it, changed.

Quest for the Degree and my Perceived Personality

I was questioned heavily about my goals and aspirations. The principal of NSHS, Mr. Billman wanted to know what I would do with a doctorate. At first, I did not mind the inquisitions because I really did like him and respected his opinions. But, the more I shared with him, the more uncomfortable I felt. He would discuss my personality freely with me and his “perception” of who “I” was and where “I” was going. Mr. Billman suggested that I take my time and learn more, he said “Don’t rush.” He stated “he heard” when he hired me that I was a “loose cannon.” I was taken aback and asked him if he thought I was. He stated, he could understand why people thought I was, but he just felt they needed to “get to know me.” He also informed me that my personality was very assertive and people were intimidated by my actions. I decided I was not going to have these conversations with him anymore. He explained further I was a “people

person” very friendly and social; however, when people met me they thought I was more task oriented; “a bullet list person without a personality,” he told me I “needed” to be more careful about how I spoke to people because people’s perception of me was not favorable.” When I spoke with him, I felt like he was “putting me in my place.”

Mr. Billman was in his tenth year of defending his Doctorate of Education and my perception of his questioning was he did not think I was smart enough or even worthy enough to work on my doctorate. Additionally, I learned rather quickly that many of my supervisors and colleagues (who were also White) felt not only compelled, but extremely comfortable in sharing and pointing out my shortcomings. Many of these stories are in my journal entries in Chapter VI (Uppity High School). The conversations I had with each of these individuals, as well as my experiences of the way administrators conducted business on a daily basis, will be discussed in this study. This discussion will be in the form of an autoethnography.

Autoethnography

Autoethnographer Carolyn Ellis (2004) defines autoethnography as “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political.” I am an African American woman. I serve as a public school administrator; I am a mother of two and a wife. I decided to write an autoethnography about my life as an African American female administrator and the various positions I held on my journey to the principalship. This study includes more than just the story of my professional journey; it also details thick description of my personal life as an African American in my cultural setting which includes my family. Autoethnography is

an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, et.al, 2012).

I decided to explore perceived struggles in reaching my goal of becoming a high school principal. It was Dr. Linda Skrla who first told me in writing this autoethnography, I had to tell what happens when all of the following factors come together: a) being human; b) being an African American; c) being a female; d) being an assistant principal placed in a predominantly White culture; e) being an instructional leader; f) being a community leader; g) being held accountable for student success. Then after these items all come together, Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan, shared with me that in order to explain getting the job and the journey, it was evident I needed to share my life experiences about who I am to further bring understanding and clarity to the study.

But in reaching my goal, my experience may be different from other African American females because of my upbringing, age, cultural heritage, and situation. Because people do not accumulate their experience in a social vacuum, autoethnography is not limited to just the study of one individual (Stanley, 1993). This study will take into account the benefits and challenges of studying a culture through the lens of a researcher as the primary instrument. According to Maréchal (2010), “autoethnography is a form or method of research that involves self-observation and reflexive investigation in the context of ethnographic field work and writing.” I want readers to experience my life by taking a walk in my shoes. Autoethnography allows the person writing to share information through feelings and situations. I want women of all backgrounds to understand the plight of an African American female from not only a professional

stance, but also from a personal perspective. I (feel a) need to add my research to the literature as well as share my story with other African American females in the field of education because most of the research about principals have focused on the experiences of White males.

Statement of Problem

In the field of educational administration, leadership has been the central focus of research with most studies focusing on the experiences of White males (Glazer, 1991). Over the past years, the leadership profile in our nation has become more inclusive with women and people of color in positions previously occupied by whites, but the overall picture does not reflect the new demographics (Brown, 2005). Research strongly suggests that principals make a significant difference in shaping teaching and learning, and are now being asked more stringently to be accountable for school performance (Lashway, 2001).

We really do not know why African American women are not traditionally placed in secondary public education as principals. My autoethnography will provide a thick description and an intense investigation of the identity and the perception of an African American female administrator and how racism and/or sexism have contributed to a perceived sense of captivity.

Purpose

The purpose of this study will be to unveil my life experiences, both personal and professional in order to add to the research about the African American female educator. Most of the research about African American female principals is limited and does not

reflect the process of promotion. i.e. “moving up the ladder.” Could it be the process of getting there discourages qualified intelligent applicants into choosing another career or higher education; thus limiting the pool of applicants who could step into these positions?

This research will hopefully identify and allow professionals in education to be more aware of cultural bias in employment practices as it pertains to hiring African American female administrators at the secondary level of public education. It may also provide an explanation as to why this practice is consistent in hiring procedures as it relates to placing African American women in administrative positions in higher education. Previous research has not contributed to defining the problem as to why more African American women are not interviewed and hired for principalships at the secondary level in “other” schools, schools that are not diverse campuses. We, researchers, are not digging deep enough into how racism and sexism are major players in restraining African American women in acquiring higher level secondary administrative positions in the field of education.

Research Questions

My ethnographical analysis of the journey of the principalship will examine the following questions:

1. How can African American high school principals encourage African American female teachers to become administrators?
2. How has racism and sexism influenced the African American female’s opportunities for advancement in a secondary public school setting?

3. How does an African American female administrator's presence at a culturally diverse campus affect the climate and culture of the facility?

Operational Definitions

For the purpose of this study, the following definitions apply:

Achievement Gap

The United States Department of Education (2005) defines the achievement gap as the difference in academic achievement between different ethnic groups. This dissertation primarily refers to the achievement gap between White and African American students.

African American

African American, sometimes referred to Afro-American or Black, is defined as people having origins in any of the black racial groups in Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000).

Age of Accountability

The implementation network of state mandated, high-stakes testing in Texas to determine school ratings based on Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS), Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) scores, End of Course exams (EOC) and Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) reports in the early 1990s and the impact of the No Child Left Behind legislation as well as Race to the Top legislation that has added increased federal guidelines to state accountability.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural (Ellis & Bochner, 1999). Autobiography provides us with the means to bring personal lived experiences into dialogue with theoretical perspectives (Raudenbush, 1994).

Autoethnography is a useful way to examine the principalship and administration in a self-reflective manner.

Culture

The set of shared beliefs, symbols, values, activities or knowledge of a group of individuals influenced by a wide of variety of factors (McEwan, 2003). Can be defined as all the ways of life, including arts, beliefs, and institutions of a population that are passed from generation to generation.

Elitism

According to Webster's online dictionary (2012), elitism is consciousness of or pride in belonging to a select or favored group.

Elitist

According to the Webster's Online Dictionary (2012), an elitist is a person who believes that they are superior to others (and thus deserve favored status) because of their intellect, social status, wealth, or other factors.

Majority-Minority

Majority-Minority, as defined in Encarta's Online Dictionary (2006), is a majority of people in an area who belong to a minority group overall. GVISD boasts and advertises for being a majority-minority school district.

Student of Color

A student of color is defined as Hispanic or African American students, and non European Americans (Mabokela & Madsen 2003). The term student of color will be primarily utilized to reference people of African American or Hispanic descent.

Sidebar

A sidebar, as defined in Oxford Online Dictionary (2012), is a short article in a newspaper or magazine placed alongside a main article and containing additional or explanatory material, gives a historical background.

Method

Various methodological strategies have been developed in connection with autoethnographic projects, although they may be applied to other forms of qualitative research as well (Ellis & Bochner, 1999). My strategy was to use personal experiences in the form of narratives. Narrative analysis methodology dictates that the story remains the central focus (Johnson-Bailey, 2002). Throughout this dissertation, I incorporated short personal stories to provide an avenue for the reader to become a part of my life, to empathize with my situation and to bring validity to the research.

The reader becomes active in the life of the researcher. As I, the researcher, write, I find myself becoming more absorbed with myself and the world in which I

dwell. A person writing an autoethnography also needs to be absorbed with the world she inhabits and the processes of which she finds herself a part, which also work their way into one's identity (Ellis, 1997). First person accounts of experience through the use of researcher's journals, reflections, past stories, and letters, were used because those collected materials "compose a person's life." I shared many reminiscent narratives to give personal accounts of my experiences of being an African American female administrator.

Usually the author of an evocative narrative writes in the first person, making herself the object of research and thus breaching the conventional separation of researcher and subjects (Jackson, 1989). Citations were also used to reinforce and support the research; social science autoethnographies usually contain citations to other academics and use an academic, disciplinary vocabulary (Ellis & Bochner, 1999).

Procedures

The procedure to begin this dissertation was merely to speak with my committee chairperson and brainstorm of how I can accomplish explaining to all who read this the purpose of this research. I knew I wanted to write an autoethnography but was unsure of "how" to write it. I first began my journals. Daily, I reflected and remembered stories from when I first began working in administration. I decided to write in the form of vignettes and saved each under a name I would remember for future reference. However, as I wrote, I found myself not having to go back to the archives. I had a new story every day. Why did I think the issues would stop simply because I began writing? I reviewed my literature about cultural identity, critical race theory and womanism, African

American female administrators and qualitative study. I found I was lacking in my knowledge of autoethnography. After studying the concept, I realize it is a legitimate form of representation and ideal for this type of study. I also engaged in many conversations with friends and fellow African American female administrators not only to discuss my views, but to also get a “feel” for how credible my story would be to other African American women.

Credibility

The first and foremost strength of this research is that it is my viewpoint of life as an African American female administrator. My experiences may or may not mirror that of other African American women in the same position. This research is a snapshot of my experiences as a researcher at a certain place and time in my life. Factors such as my age, educational background, work history, appearance, childhood experiences and personality impact the results of the research. Also, I am probably “bias” in the analysis of my experiences. I am aware when other African American women read my research they may or may not recognize or accept its premise (Collins, 1991). All findings are subjective.

Significance

All women experience barriers; however, when African American women enter educational administration, there are internal and external barriers to overcome (Gregory, 1999). This research will hopefully identify and allow professionals in education to be more aware of cultural bias as it pertains to being an African American female administrator in the profession of education. By writing my story, I have a forum

to tell how it affected me and as a result it may or may not tell the story of other African American women in my position. This study is important because we must dig deeper into why only a limited number of African American women actually are interviewed and hired by public school districts, as well as higher institutions of education, for upper level administrative positions. It could possibly assist higher administration in understanding the importance of more training in diversity and sensitivity as it pertains to racial issues in hiring practice for administrative positions.

It is also significant because of the lack of scholarly work dedicated to the African American woman in secondary public education. Bringing awareness to the issues we face will provide an opportunity for the topic to be discussed. This study could also bring awareness to the issues of the African American child attending predominantly White institutions and the racism that they may or may not encounter when working with White administrators.

Organization of Dissertation

This dissertation will be presented in nine chapters. The first chapter introduces the study and explains autoethnography as a significant means of research. It gives important background information on my life and what lead me to write an autoethnography. The review of literature in Chapter Two explains the theoretical framework in which this dissertation is written, and, as well, it explains the significance of leadership, women of color in leadership, and experiences that have impacted the role of females of color, particularly African American females. The purpose of this research as well as the research questions will be discussed in the method of research in the third

chapter. Chapter Four references the analysis of my family story taken from journal entries, history accounts, and noted conversations and interactions. Chapter Five provides further background information as it relates to my professional career in industry and to my career change to education. Chapter Six consists of anecdotes and actual journal entries of my experiences as the only African American administrator on a predominantly White campus. Chapter Seven and Eight highlight my position as the campus principal of two high schools in Green Valley Independent School District. The final chapter will explain the findings and draw conclusions and share implications for future research.

Summary

As an African American female administrator, I am in a vicarious position. I am expected to first identify and conform to the cultural norm of society. Administrators of color are expected to carry themselves as if they were without ethnicity, gender, and class (Grogan, 1999). Many times this has resulted in silencing myself about issues that pertain to children of color and social injustices. Delpit (1988) argues one of the tragedies of the field of education is how the dialogue of people of color has been silenced. Second, in the expectation to conform, I must understand the history of racism and prejudice and learn to disregard the stereotypes that are ever present in my daily life. Lastly, I must assert, affirm, and share myself in several facets; first as an educator, second as an African American, third as a woman, and fourth as an African American female administrator in a public institution.

In May, 2005 I wrote: *I want to be a secondary principal in my school district. Presently, I am an associate principal with six years administrative experience. I am ripe and ready for a principalship. I am told on a daily basis “you are a smart lady.” I know my name is in conversation among the district heavyweights, but I also know being an African American woman, I cannot be a principal just anywhere. I have been told. I am limited to campuses in which I can be placed. Even the “Black” schools are not necessarily an open door for me because African American male candidates traditionally are screened first. Why? Hopefully this research will provide an answer to this question.*

Today, October, 2012, I am principal of Eastside HS. The campus is culturally, linguistically, ethnically, economically, and exceptionally diverse (CLEED). Test scores are low and discipline is an issue. Uppity HS, the campus in which I was an associate principal, (predominantly White) had a principalship available at the time I was hired for Butterfly High School. I was not a candidate for Uppity High School. The former principal who became the area superintendent told the superintendent that I was not the “right fit” for Uppity. So, I was not considered for the job. The District did select a middle school principal who resigned by the end of the first year. The current principal is a White female with less administrative experience and less high school experience than I.

I saw nothing wrong with being who I was, but apparently many others did. My world grew larger, but I felt I was growing smaller. I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults

designed to teach me that being an African American, working-class woman made me lesser than those who were not. And as I felt smaller, I became quieter and eventually was virtually silenced (Collins, 1991). I refuse to be silenced. Shirley Rose

CHAPTER II

THE REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

“Providing a high-quality education to every young American is vital to the health of our nation’s democracy and the strength of our nation’s economy. In a 21st century world, education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity and success – it is a prerequisite.”

President Barack Obama, July 24, 2009

The primary purpose of this study was to share my experiences of being an African American woman in public education and my quest to become a high school principal. My theoretical framework began with Autoethnography, Critical Race Theory, Cultural Identity, and Educational leadership/principalship with focus on female leadership. While these theories guided the study, other themes emerged as I continued to write. It was apparent in order to understand the African American female and the many dimensions in our lives, the literature review had to include the history of the African American female as well as Womanism. Topics by and about African American women are not easily categorized within the disciplines of ethnic studies, African American studies, feminism, gender studies, or critical theory (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

Introduction

This chapter examines the educational literature relating to the study of African American female principals in the age of accountability as it relates to leadership, change, and culture. The primary goal of this research is to provide a highly personalized

description of the principalship of an African American female. In order to provide organization and clarity, the literature review will be presented in two parts. Part I will focus on accountability, educational leadership, and the principalship. Part II will provide a deeper description of the African American female beginning with history, Critical Race Theory, cultural identity, and womanism. The last section of the literature review will bring all forces together to discuss the African American female as an effective leader in the age of accountability. The body of supporting literature for this autoethnography of the principalship, in which I, the author, am both the subject and the researcher, is significant and diverse.

Age of Accountability

The term “achievement gap” refers to students of color, i.e. Hispanic, African American, and economically disadvantaged. Teachers have been found to have different expectations and perceptions for African American students than for European American students (Schargel, Thacker & Bell, 2007). The achievement gap can be evaluated by different measures, including test scores, dropout rate, grade points and completion statistics. Conversations about disparities in achievement between Black and White students, however, are hardly new; publication of the Coleman Report in 1966 jumpstarted the opportunity to discuss gaps in performance (Chambers, 2009).

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2002 (NCLB) focused on standards and school accountability to ensure that all students had the same educational opportunities. As written, the legislation requires that all students in all groups eventually perform at grade level in all tests, and that schools show continuous

improvement toward this goal (otherwise known as "Adequate Yearly Progress," or AYP) or face sanctions. Schools with the highest proportion of poor and minority students generally face the greatest challenges to meeting these goals, primarily because of the achievement gap.

More recently, in 2009, the Obama Administration instituted the Race to the Top (RTTT) program which provided monetary incentives to states to increase student improvement. RTTT's primary goals were to improve student achievement, close achievement gaps, and improve high school graduation rates. The program was similar to the No Child Left Behind Act in that, it had many of the same objectives, though there was a more focus on closing the achievement gap as it pertained to schools as opposed to students.

The major difference between the two educational reform programs was the NCLB Act mandated changes in state and local education systems and RTTT, enacted as part of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, was a competitive grant program that provided incentives for schools to change. On June 1, 2010, Rick Perry, Governor of the state of Texas announced, "Washington can keep its money and the bureaucratic strings that come with it" (Hamilton, 2010). Texas was one out of four states (Alaska, North Dakota, and Vermont) that did not submit an application for the additional funds. Accountability in the state of Texas, as well as the United States, has resulted in praise for principals that met the expectations and unemployment for those who did not. Unfortunately, accountability is one single, however huge, facet of the principal's job responsibilities (Hamilton, 2010).

The Principalship

The job of the school principal has become increasingly complex. According to Grubb and Flessa (2006) he or she is responsible for hiring and perhaps firing teachers, coordinating bus schedules, mollifying angry parents, disciplining children, overseeing the cafeteria, supervising special education and other categorical programs, and responding to all the “stuff that walks in the door.” In addition to the managerial and political tasks that have historically engaged principals, reformers have demanded that principals become instructional leaders as well (Tillman, 2004).

The role of the principal is complex. The traditional role of the principal has undergone a major makeover in the past ten years. Prior to 2001, managerial and communication skills were all one needed to be a building principal (Grubb & Flessa, 2006). Daily activities such as juggling schedules, attending meetings, leading meetings, parent conferences, dealing with students and taking care potential “storms”, were all the “duties” of the principal. The No Child Left Behind Act signed into law on January 8, 2002, changed the role of the principal in the United States. We have entered into our second decade of the age of accountability, and the face of the principal is consistently changing both figuratively and literally. The current shortage of principals and qualified individuals to serve in this capacity is adding to the predicament.

Scarcity of Qualified Leaders

Forty percent of the principals in the United States are nearing retirement and qualified applicants are becoming harder to find. Given the complexity of schools, principals cannot simply order their teachers to teach better. Instead, they must work

indirectly by creating a culture of internal accountability in which teachers improve their teaching in concert with others” (Grubb & Flessa, 2006).

Gene Bottoms, senior vice president of The Southern Regional Education Board, states (in a board publication entitled *Good Principals are the Key to Successful Schools*) the following:

“If you want high-performing schools, hire principals who can lead them to success. The obvious answer is that states don’t have enough high-quality principals to go around.” He further states, “It makes no sense for policymakers to create high-stakes systems for school accountability and then gamble that every struggling school will find a high-performing principal who: understands what practices improve students achievement; knows how to work with teachers to promote positive change; supports teachers in instructional practices that help students succeed; and can prepare accomplished teachers to become principals. In today’s hit or miss leadership development environment, principals of this caliber are scarce. They constitute our real principal shortage (Bottoms, 2003).

The problem of scarcity really is not the lack of certified principals but rather a lack of qualified principals. In the last four years, Texas has certified more than 7,000 school administrators; enough to replace every school principal in the state; however, certification, as it exists today, is not proof of quality (Bottoms, 2003).

Educational Leadership

Educational leadership should focus on curriculum and instruction and provide pedagogy for teachers in order to promote and provide a better education for students. According to Marzano (2005), given the perceived importance of leadership, it is no wonder that an effective principal is thought to be a necessary precondition for an effective school. The following excerpt from the 1977 U.S. Senate Committee Report on Equal Educational Opportunity:

In many ways the school principal is the most important and influential individual in any school. He or she is the person responsible for all activities that occur in and around the school building. It is the principal's leadership that sets the tone of the school, the climate for teaching, the level of professionalism and morale of teachers, and the degree of concern for what students may or may not become. (Marzano, 2005).

The 21 Responsibilities of the School Leader

The 21 responsibilities identified are not new to the literature on leadership. Each of the responsibilities have been documented and accepted by a variety of researchers. These are standard operating procedures for effective principals. The variety of skills may lead to a possible explanation as to why effective principals are scarce (Marzano, 2005).

In *School Leadership that Works*, Marzano discusses that the 21 responsibilities of effective school leaders are not new findings to research or the literature. They are listed here in alphabetical order and each trait will be discussed individually. They

include: affirmation, change agent, contingent, communication, culture, discipline, flexibility, focus, ideal/beliefs, input, intellectual stimulation, involvement/knowledge in curriculum, instruction, and assessment, monitoring and evaluation, optimizer, order, outreach, relationships, resources, situational awareness, and visibility.

Affirmation is the communication of accountability. Accountability is more than sharing data; it is being proactive with data and taking action to affect a positive change. The school leader has the responsibility to celebrate school accomplishments as well as share and acknowledge failures. For instance, in a high school there are several different categories teachers may fall. They may be super stars, shooting stars, falling stars or they may be a star whose light has diminished. It is up to the building principal to celebrate as well as redirect. Marzano suggests “systematically and fairly recognizing and celebrating the accomplishments” individually or as a whole.

Change Agent. It is the responsibility of the school leader to challenge the status quo, to challenge the practices that are in place and to push towards new practices. It is the leader’s responsibility to move the staff out of their comfort zone in an effort to implement new and better practices. This is considered the leader’s willingness to temporarily upset a school’s equilibrium.

Fullan (2001) explains that an effective leader has the ability “to disturb staff in a manner that approximates the desired outcome change agents don’t live more peacefully, but ...they can handle more uncertainty – and – conflict – and are better at working through complex issues in ways that energize rather than deplete the commitment of the organizational members.”

A change agent consciously challenges the status quo and is willing to lead change initiatives with uncertain outcomes.

Contingent rewards. This responsibility is reflective of Transactional Leadership. It is common to compliment groups, but isolated when recognizing individuals and the leader needs to understand that not everyone should be treated equally. Contingent rewards should be used to compliment specific behavior which results in a specific outcome; for example, a teacher who stays after school for an extended period of time to work with a group of struggling students. When assessment results are reviewed all of the students she worked with made significant improvement as a direct result of her effort should be rewarded.

Communication may be the most important responsibility of the 21 because it is integrated into almost every facet of leadership. Effective communication is an implicit or explicit feature of most aspects of leadership including, developing effective means for teachers to communicate with one another; being easily accessible to teachers, and maintaining open and effective lines of communication with staff (Marzano, 2005).

Culture by definition, every school has a culture. Fostering a school culture that indirectly affects student achievement is a strong theme within the literature on principal leadership. As Hanson (2001) explains:

Schools also have their own unique cultures that are shaped around a particular combination of values, beliefs, and feelings. These school cultures emphasize what is of paramount importance to them as they strive to develop their knowledge base in a particular direction, such as

producing outstanding football teams, high SAT scores, disciplined classrooms, or sending students to college who come from inner-city urban schools. Although culture of a school is not visible to the human eye, its artifacts and symbols reflect specific cultural priorities.

An effective school culture is the primary tool which can cultivate change. It promotes cohesion, and a sense of well-being among staff members. It also develops an understanding of purpose and a shared vision of how the school could develop.

Discipline refers to protecting teachers from issues and influences that would detract from their instructional time or focus (Marzano, 2005). Instructional time is vital to teaching; more time on task means more learning. The principal has the responsibility to decrease the amount of distractions that impact instructional time. During a regular school day field trips, assemblies, public service announcements, college visits, and now EOC testing, can be huge distracters from instructional time. It is the principal's responsibility to manage the calendar and maximize instructional time.

Flexibility is about realizing or creating confusion, and then adjusting to it. Leaders often allow certain situations and adapt their behaviors to address. Lashway (2001) emphasizes the acceptance of diverse opinions. Effective leaders "encourage and nurture individual initiative . . . leaders must protect and encourage the voices of participants who offer differing points of view."

Focus is comparable to discipline in that it also associates with decreasing distractions to instructional time. Focus is the leader's ability to communicate and reinforce the goals and vision, and to minimize the distractions. Leithwood and Riehl

(2003), state leadership involves purpose and direction. Leaders know the ends toward which they are striving. They pursue goals with clarity and tenacity, and are accountable for their accomplishment.

Ideals/Beliefs shape the culture of the school and create people who will follow. Bennis (2003) places well-articulated ideals and beliefs at the core of effective leadership. Young and King (2002) view beliefs as a subtle but powerful force used by a principal to effect change. They explain that one prominent way in which principals shape school conditions and teaching practices is through their beliefs.

Input refers to the extent to which the school leader allows teachers and staff members a role in the decision making process. Principals do this through the use of campus based leadership teams, department leader team meetings, data team meetings, faculty meetings, and informal casual conversation. De Pree (1989) refers to this responsibility as “participative management”:

Everyone has the right and the duty to influence decision making and to understand the results. Participative management guarantees that decision will not be arbitrary, secret, or closed to questioning. Participative management is not democratic. Having a say differs from having a vote.

Intellectual Stimulation refers to the extent to which the school leader ensures that faculty and staff are aware of the most current theories and practices regarding effective schooling and makes discussions of those theories and practices a regular aspect of the school’s culture (Marzano, 2005). Behaviors and characteristics associated

with this responsibility include continually exposing staff to current research and theory about effective practices.

Involvement in Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment is critical to the concept of instructional leadership (Marzano, 2005). The leadership should be hands on with curriculum and instruction so that knowledge of strategies and resources can be shared. Assessment practices are also important because maintaining consistent and focused assessment allows for adjustment of instruction for the content for greater student achievement. An example of involvement is attendance of the principal at data team meetings. During these meetings the principal discusses assessments and instructional strategies to better meet the needs of students.

Knowledge of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment allows the leader to provide specific, research-based strategies to teachers for improved instruction. While the involvement responsibility is “hands on,” the knowledge responsibility involves maintaining current research and theories about those areas. This also allows the leader to prescribe specific professional development opportunities for staff to increase areas of need, i.e. the principal leads a book study supporting research concerning best practices in the classroom.

Monitoring/Evaluating. Feedback is the most powerful single modification that enhances achievement (Marzano, 2005). The feedback provided should be specific and focused to aid in student success. Monitoring and evaluating is more than just reviewing report cards or walking through classes. It includes reviewing lesson plans, grade books, assessments, assignments, etc.

Optimizer. As a result of their study involving more than 1,200 K-12 teachers, Blasé and Kirby (2000) identified optimism as a critical characteristic of an effective school leader. They note that the principal commonly sets the emotional tone in a school for better or for worse.

Order is the set of processes established for the school to be operational, safe, effective and secure. Efficient procedures allows for more time to be spent on educating students. Establishing routines for the smooth running of the school that staff understands and follows is paramount for utilization of time. Clear rules and established structures aid in student learning and sets expectations for students to be successful.

Outreach involves the principal being the spokesperson for the school. Responsibilities for the principal include ensuring the school complies with all district and state mandates; being an advocate of the school with parents, the central office, and the community as a whole.

Relationship building is central to the achievement of many other responsibilities. Relationship building is huge on a high school campus. People need to know the principal. It is the face to face relationship building that assists in times of uncertainty. Responsibilities include being informed about significant issues within the lives of staff member; being aware of personal needs of teachers; acknowledging significant events in the lives of staff members; maintaining personal relationships with teachers.

Resources are the responsibility of the leader to ensure that the tools are available, and provide training to utilize the tools effectively and efficiently. Resources

include tangible items, such as paper, printer, computer, calculator; monetary resources to attend staff developments and pay for travel when necessary; and human resources to assist with hiring and training.

Situational Awareness addresses leaders' awareness of the details and the undercurrents regarding the functioning of the school and their use of this information to address current and potential problems (Marzano, 2005). Lashway (2001) describes situational awareness as "Deep change requires knowing what is happening, distancing the ego from daily events, and honestly appraising the state of the organization."

Visibility is the extent to which the leader is in classrooms and available throughout the school. By being available, leaders show that they are interested in what goes on in the school on any given day. The leader is available to address concerns expeditiously and provide a sense of security. Principals exemplify this responsibility by attending extracurricular activities such as football games, basketball games, volleyball games, and club banquets.

Marzano's 21 responsibilities are necessary for effective operation of a school. As a seasoned principal, I can relate to each of the twenty-one listed. Marzano lists situational awareness as being possibly the most important. I disagree. Communication is the utmost responsibility and is necessary in every characteristic listed. Even with situational awareness, someone has to share with the principal or the principal must ask a stakeholder to relinquish information pertaining to whatever the issue may be. Communication is key and essential to culture and daily procedures inside the facility.

Schools today require varied forms of leadership. What is the diagnosis of the literature presented thus far? The symptoms are state accountability and the pressure to raise achievement for all students, especially African American, Hispanic, and low socio-economic. There is a scarcity of qualified leaders that are equipped with leadership essentials to successfully manage and lead low performing schools. The diagnosis? It is now time for education to venture out and look for a different type of leader.

A Different Leader

There is a myth that lingers that the ideal leader for most secondary schools conforms to a White masculine stereotype (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). This pattern of White male dominance is also consistent in predominantly White universities where few African American women have been able to attain high administrative posts (King, 1998). As more high school campuses across the nation promote female African Americans to principalships, these stereotypes may or may not affect the role of the African American female administrator.

The majority of the high schools in America have White male principals (NCES, 2008). As more African American women break through the historically European American, masculine domain of educational administration, researchers are becoming increasingly interested in studying the leadership of marginalized groups, describing and understanding the differing logics and practices of leadership (Murtadha & Watts, 2005).

Schools with large minority populations tend to be located in inner cities. Leadership style exhibited by African American leaders is connected to achievement (Lomotey, 1989). Given that principal positions of inner-city schools often go to African

Americans, there is a need to examine the leadership styles of African American principals of secondary schools (Gooden, 2005). Research has over the years increased in the area of White women principals and superintendents, but unfortunately, more research is needed as it pertains to women of color who are administrators (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

There is a gap in the research as it pertains to the African American female administrator and her place in a system that has been predominantly staffed by White males (Brunner, 2000; Murtadha & Larson, 1999, Shakeshaft, 1989; Capper, 1993). The current research on African American women versus White women in educational administration is considered a topic subsumed under the larger population of women's studies (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Therefore, research is needed in this area. Moreover, research about African American women conducted by African American women is scarce and deemed unremarkable in mainstream academia (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

In order to properly research the African American administrator the literature review will now focus on the history of the African American woman, cultural identity, critical race theory, and womanism.

History of the African American Educator

Historically, Black women have shared with Black men the discrimination and deprivation that characterized their sojourn from slavery to freedom. They have shared with White women some legal prescriptions that have limited their access to public institutions.

However, despite the common problems, their historical experiences in every area of American life have been in very specific ways different from that of Black males and White females (Collier-Thomas, 1982).

The culmination of the Civil War marked a new beginning for education and employment for African American women (Littlefield, 1997). Prior to the Civil War African American women were not permitted to attend colleges or universities. Women first gained entry to institutions of higher education when Oberlin College in Ohio admitted female students in 1837 (Chamberlain, 1991). In 1850, Lucy Session earned a literary degree from Oberlin College, making her the first black woman to earn a bachelor's degree in the United States (Littlefield, 1997). In 1869, Fanny Jackson Coppin was named principal of the Institute for Colored Youth in Philadelphia, making her the first black woman to lead an institution of higher learning in the United States (Littlefield, 1997).

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Black college woman was the exception of the exceptions in that neither black nor white colleges wanted her (Perkins, 1993). By 1890, only 30 Black women in the United States had earned baccalaureate degrees, as compared with 300 Black men and 2500 White women (Perkins, 1993). Educated African women also played exemplary roles in the education of Blacks in the pre-*Brown* era (Karpinski, 2006). They opened schools in the North and the South and served dual roles as teachers and principals.

Jeanes Supervisors were females who served as teachers and principals from 1907 to 1967, and many of these women served in various capacities in education,

including building principals (Tillman, 2004). Sarah Smith, Fannie Jackson Coppin, Mary MacLeod Bethune and Anna Julia Cooper are a few of the female pioneers of female educational leadership. According to Franklin (1999), African American female educators participated in similar types of professional and social activities as African American men in the 19th century; however, they experienced gender discrimination.

Effects of Brown vs. Board of Education

Recent focus has been given to the legacy of the *Brown vs. Board of Education* decision and its impact on education today (McCray, 2007; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Karpinski, 2006). In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Brown* that the practice of “Separate but Equal” schooling was unconstitutional. During this time, African Americans were the largest visible minority group in the United States (Echols, 2006).

Brown had a tragic consequence: the displacement, dismissal, and demotion of thousands of African American educators, in particular principals in the South. Although the lack of diversity in today’s teaching force has multiple origins, a reexamination of one of its roots deepens our understanding of the past, illuminates the present, and bears the future (Karpinski, 2006).

Prior to *Brown vs. Board of Education* African American males (and some females) were principals of African American schools. Most of the Pre-*Brown* principals were men. While contributions of Black female principals are acknowledged in the research, it was expected that the principal would be a man (Tillman, 2004). Black women who aspired to the principalship faced a sexist environment; however, post-

Brown period witnessed a gradual shift including women in the workforce (Tillman, 2004). After the decision in 1954, the number of community African American schools decreased and few principals survived the transition (Tillman, 2004). Overnight, thousands of Black educators, teachers as well as principals, were without a job. According to Echols (2006) in 1954, about 82,000 Black teachers were responsible for teaching 2 million Black children. In the 11 years following *Brown*, more than 38,000 Black teachers and administrators in 17 Southern states lost their jobs (Echols, 2006). The National Education Association's figures from this period show that 85% of minority teachers had college degrees compared to 75% of White teachers.

In this light, there is a scarcity of research available that considers how these Black administrators coped during the existence of Jim Crow Laws. However, research indicates that a disparity still exists at various levels of the academic ladder when African Americans are compared to their White counterparts (Echols, 2006).

With Black children now forced into integration, African American principals and teachers were not welcomed or allowed in White schools to lead White children. In fact, during the period immediately after the *Brown* decision, Whites believed that Black principals had been ineffective in educating Black children (Tillman, 2004). School desegregation contributed to the decreased number of African American principals (Karpinski, 2006). The African American principals that were allowed to remain were given positions as coaches, teachers, central office staff, or assistant principals (Karpinski, 2006). During 1963-1970, after the 1954 court decision, statistics show a

drastic decrease in the number of African American principals throughout the South (McCray, 2007, Karpinski, 2006).

Brown v. Board of Education was to “remedy educational inequities” in schools (Tillman, 2004), its unfortunate side effect was to eliminate thousands of jobs for African Americans. Another result, although some progress toward integration has occurred since *Brown*, particularly in the South, across the nation K-12 schools are still significantly segregated by race. More than 70% of the nation’s Black students now attend predominantly minority schools. *Brown* did not address the idea of neighborhood schools. According to Telfer and Strickland (2004), segregation due to the neighborhood school movement has continued to increase in the United States since 1974.

After *Brown*, African American principals became a rare sight in many Southern states as a result of desegregation. According to Telfer and Strickland (2004), some of the earliest research on the displacement of Black principals was conducted by Hooker in 1971. Hooker surveyed 11 southern states and revealed between 1967 and 1971, the number of Black principals in North Carolina dropped from 620 to 40. Abney in 1980 studied Black principals in Florida during the school years 1964-1965 and 1975-1976 and found that Black principals were employed in each of the 67 school districts in Florida in 1964-1965; however 10 years later, 27 of those school districts had no Black principals, even with the addition of 165 more schools than in the 1960’s. While there have been modest increases in the number of African American principals since the 1970’s, they are still underrepresented relative to the number of African American

students in the population (Karpinski, 2006; McCray, 2007). African American principals represented only 10.6% of all principals nationally (NCES, 2008).

Tillman (2004) indicated that the African American principals were “transformers, translators, and cultivators.” Black principals were idols and were called professor, a sign of reverence and respect (Brown & Beckett, 2007). Black educational leaders created schools where none existed, struggled against the perpetuation of unequal educational environments, or built viable alternative schools (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). The African American principal was one of the most powerful influences in both the schools and the community (Echols, 2006).

Black schools served as mini community centers where professional educators could service all stakeholders within the boundaries. Black school principals were honored by the African American community for service in education, civic, and religious affairs. Although Black schools did lack funds and facilities, evidence suggests the environment of the segregated schools had affective traits that helped Black children learn “in spite of;” in spite of building conditions, monetary needs, or support from the White school boards governing the schools (Echols, 2006).

Post-Brown

Fultz cited a 1971 U.S. Senate Select Committee on Equal Educational Opportunity:

Black principals were being eliminated with “avalanche-like force and tempo.” Demotions and firings of Black principals proceeded by four primary means: demoting Black principals to teaching or nonteaching positions; downgrading

their schools to lower grade levels; allowing them to retain titles with no real power; and giving them paper promotions to central office positions.

The above practices forced many Black principals to work in elementary schools and junior high schools. Basically, Black principals were removed as authority figures at the school-site level. The displacement of Black principals also negatively affected the pool of Black teachers who could be mentored for the principalship, effectively eliminating advocates for the recruitment, hiring, and promotion of Black teachers to principal positions (Karpinski, 2006). The Black principal was a cultural symbol of leadership in the Black community. Not only did desegregation of schools cause a loss of Black educators, it also resulted in the disruption of the education of Black children and a reduction of the expertise of educators who were committed to the education of Black children.

From the 1800's to the Present

From as early at the 1800's to the present, despite opposition and barriers, African American women pushed forward and made a place in educating the African American youth of this country. I would like to end this history with a recent story about an African American female principal named Gertrude Wade. I first hear Ms. Wade's story on a popular radio show on my way to work one morning. I was editing my paper and heard about the first African American female principal of school. When I arrived to work, I went to the internet to learn more about Gertrude Wade. Below is the news article from the Pittsburgh Post Gazette on November 9, 2012.

Gertrude Wade, the first black female principal of a Pittsburgh school, died November 9, 2012 at her home on Race Street in Homewood, where she had lived for more than six decades.

Ms. Wade spent her career in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, teaching for 15 years at A. Leo Weil Elementary School in the Hill District until becoming assistant principal there in 1961. A year later, she was named principal of Vann Elementary School in the Hill, becoming the first black female principal in the city at the height of the civil rights movement. She received threats and nasty letters but endured them and pressed on; according to an account she gave the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette in 2007. After five years at Vann, she spent two years at troubled Larimer Elementary before the district tapped her to lead the new East Hills Elementary, an integrated magnet program with innovative, open classrooms. Ms. Wade always presented herself professionally, dressing crisply and conducting herself with dignity.

"I knew, when I was appointed, that I'd have to represent myself, black folks and women," she said in recalling the goals she set for herself when she first became a teacher. "So, I just set out to do a good job." She made an impression on many. Long after she had retired, former students remembered her. "We would be out and people would see her and say, 'Mrs. Wade!' "Her cousin recalled." They would approach her everywhere." Ms. Wade wanted to be doctor, but her parents didn't have the money to send her to medical school. So she decided to be a teacher, graduating in 1944 from the University of Pittsburgh with a degree in elementary education. She was irritated that she couldn't find a job at first in Pittsburgh. "I wanted to stay here," she said. "All of my white classmates were being hired, and I was a little irritated that I couldn't get a job."

But she soon landed a teaching job at Weil Elementary and then attended night school at Pitt, earning a master's degree in education administration in 1946. Ms. Wade was recruited in 1969 to lead the new East Hills Elementary. It was a magnet school, with some 200 white students bused in from various parts of the city mixing with black children mostly from the nearby East Hills housing project.

Press accounts from that time indicate that reading and math scores were low, at least in the early years, and the job of principal proved challenging. "There were some who cooperated and also some who were negative," her cousin said. "She had to deal with difficult things." Ms. Wade stayed there for 12 years, retiring in 1981 to care for her father (Ove, 2012).

In the above excerpt, the author states: “Ms. Wade always presented herself professionally, dressing crisply and conducting herself with dignity.” Ms. Wade commented, "I knew, when I was appointed, that I'd have to represent myself, black folks and women.” Her comments will lead into the next phase of who the African American woman is and what she represents. Ms. Wade grew up in a certain culture and adapted to her surroundings. She also stated she had issues at first in obtaining employment because she was a Black woman. Nearly 70 years later, I write this dissertation as a means to tell my story which (unfortunately) mirrors Ms. Wade. In 1946 she achieved her master’s degree and 15 years later became an administrator. She wanted the same privilege of being in “the group.” Cultural identity is the feeling of being included in a group or culture. Culture is defined by attitudes and beliefs and what a person from each culture believes is normal for that group.

Cultural Identity

An African American woman’s identity is a confluence of the several cultures in which she lives, and the development of her identity may involve the resolution of conflicting views from each aspect of her life (Burgess & Brown, 2000). These women experience problems when their values and ethnic group cultural orientations are not recognized as significant and when they are forced to deny their own culture and adopt the majority culture (Alfred, 2001).

She knows who she is because she knows who she is not– Nikki Giovanni

Most of us are from rather meek backgrounds, we were the smartest in our class, we were considered the “chosen ones,” we were often told how articulate we are/were

(as if we are not supposed to know how to speak), and many of us are told how we are a credit to our race. So, in order to understand who an African American female is, it is important to establish where she possibly came.

Most African American families teach two cultures to their children; their culture and the Euro-American culture. An African American adolescent who lives in a predominantly White suburb has to negotiate two cultures (Banks, 1989). The result of this learning of two cultures causes an “identity imbalance” (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). The imbalance is weighted more heavily on the “Europeanized” or “White” side of the scale unless there are sufficient deterrents in the child’s scope of influence (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Schools are driven by middle class, White, heterosexual norms that determine definitions of success (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Lisa Delpit (1988) terms this dominant culture the *culture of power*. Students who are more familiar or aligned with this dominant culture are more likely to be seen as academically successful as the school environment caters to this orientation.

Chelsea my Daughter

My daughter, Chelsea, attended a predominantly White suburban elementary and middle school. At a very early age, Chelsea identified with the Euro-American culture more than she did the African American culture. Since I was raised in the Euro-American world, I chose to raise my child in the Euro-American world. I did not expose Chelsea to African American literature, arts, or holidays. A girl’s relationship with her mother influences the psycho-physiological aspect of her identity and is also the setting

for the transmission of racial socialization (Burgess & Brown, 2000). I gave her what I thought was best for her to be able to excel in this society.

The African American adolescent female, who values highly close relationships with her peers, would be very vulnerable in a predominantly White environment. Not only may she find fewer friends with whom to bond, but she may find herself in a peer group that has antipathy toward her ethnic group. Because adolescents tend to compare themselves to others (especially to their peers), she may constantly find herself not measuring up (Burgess & Brown, 2000).

As Chelsea grew up, I noticed that she had issues with her identity. Her friends were extremely diverse, but she did not have one African American that she called “friend.” On or about Chelsea’s 11th birthday, we discussed racism and her being an African American in this society. A mother’s early and direct discussion of racism may be very helpful and may offset a disproportionate influence of society’s stereotypes on the daughter’s perceptions (Burgess & Brown, 2000).

I noticed in her seventh grade year, age 12, she started to change. She started identifying her friends by race. This was also the age where she started liking boys. Her first boyfriend was African American and my husband and I were very surprised by her choice, because she normally did not befriend other African Americans. Later, I asked her why she chose an African American boy when she never even had a girlfriend who was African American. She told me that she did not think any of the other boys would want her. I asked why. She said because she was Black. She said, “Why would they

want to date a Black girl?” I was afraid of hurting her feelings so I declined any further discussion.

Another landmark conversation with Chelsea about identity happened when she transitioned from middle school to high school. We had several discussions about the appropriate high school for her. Her requirements were that the Honors/GT program had to be exceptional and the band (she played the flute) had to be better than mediocre. My requirement was a strong academic program and a more diverse student population than what she was accustomed. We decided on a high school in the community with a racial mix of 59% African American, 28% Hispanic, 13% White and other. I felt it was time for Chelsea to learn a little more about “our people” and “our culture.” As a high school administrator, my observation of high school students has been that this is the age group the students begin to racially separate themselves. Beverly Tatum (1997) speaks of this separation in *Why Are All the Black Children Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?*

Chelsea’s Transition

African American students truly begin identifying with each other, and other races begin not to identify with African Americans. I knew Chelsea was uneasy about the placement, but I felt it was the right thing to do, not only for her education, but also for her development as an African American woman. The night before ninth grade orientation, Chelsea was exceptionally nervous. She paced back and forth from my room to her room. Finally, I asked her what was wrong. She told me she was nervous about the orientation on the next day. Of course, being her Mom, I assured her that her feelings were perfectly normal and to calm down and relax. She then explained that there was

something else bothering her. She was worried about the “children” that would be there. I asked, rather naively, what about the children? She said she was not used to “those kinds of children.” I asked, “What kind of children?” She said, “You know, Black children!” I laughed out loud and screamed, “Chelsea you are Black!” She, of course, had to laugh too and said she knew that but she had never been around just Black children before.

Identification

Researchers cannot assume automatically that if one is Black one identifies with Blacks or Black culture (Carter & Helms, 1988). We had another discussion about how to just be you. I shared this story because Chelsea was confused. She had been raised in two worlds. She identified with the White world because this is the world of which she was exposed. If the dominant group’s attitude is internalized, the adolescent may reject her own group and she may choose to have less ethnic involvement; or if she can “pass” (present herself to others as belonging to the dominant culture), she may choose to do so. In addition, in order to maintain self-esteem, she may find ways to separate herself from her ethnic group and feel less of a sense of belonging to her own culture (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990; Burgess & Brown, 2000). As I think back, Chelsea did separate herself from her culture. I chose clubs and organizations for her to join that were predominantly African American so she could be with “our people.” However, I noticed she continued to be apprehensive about participating.

Unfortunately, some of the leaders of these organizations fit one of the many stereotypes of African Americans, such as not starting on time, not organized, etc. So,

when she opted not to participate, I agreed because I did not want her to believe that some African Americans conducted business in this way. Basically, I did not like the examples that were set for the children, so I allowed her to join other organizations that were more diverse; more White. I believe Chelsea arrived at this point because of my influence in her life and possibly how she perceived how society viewed African Americans and she did not want to be identified with being in the ethnic group.

Identification as a part of the ethnic group could possibly result in negative consequences. African Americans often are represented in the media negatively (Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990). Children grow up seeing others like them, robbing banks, being rappers in the music industry, taking advantage of women, etc. There are very few African American heroes portrayed on television outside the sports arena. Most regular series portray African Americans as victims, villains or one-dimensional comedians (Spencer & Dornbusch, 1990). Many African American children choose to identify with the norm – the Euro-American culture – the White society because life in the media for the White society is portrayed to be better and happier in their world. Color consciousness frequently begins within the family unit (Burgess & Brown, 2000). The issue of skin color, hair texture, and facial features among African Americans becomes even more complex as the female child ventures into the African American community, and then into mainstream culture, encountering either reinforcing or opposing social attitudes in comparison with what occurs at home (Burgess & Brown, 2000).

When one belongs to an ethnic group, identity with the ethnic group will become a major personality trait for the individual. A young girl's self-identification is her first

realization of ethnic identity (Burgess & Brown, 2000). This includes the language, behavior, values and knowledge of relevant history including society's attitudes toward the group (Phinney, 1990; Spencer & Markstrom-Adams, 1990; Burgess & Brown, 2000). For African American women, that knowledge of history must include the legacies of slavery, bondage, sexual exploitation and compulsory labor (hooks, 1990). Their treatment, in historical and contemporary times, attests to the fact that they have never been afforded their full rights as citizens of the country (Delgado, 2000).

Stereotypes

What is generally known about African American women and their families is usually so negative that we rarely recognize ourselves in the data analysis (Burgess & Brown, 2000). African American women are seen by some as dominating, destructive and powerful and out of fear that they will be seen through that vicious lens, some women attempt to assimilate to prevailing standards of White, middle-class femininity (hooks, 1989). Degraded cultural images of Black women have made it difficult for African American women to bond with each other and love themselves (Stone, 2002). The stereotype of African American women is unfair and promotes bias and segregation among themselves.

Stereotypical images become driving forces in predicting how African American females think, act, and behave. Stereotyping is a difficult barrier to overcome and adds to the development of prejudice (Feagin, 1989). Prejudice is a preconceived judgment or opinion, usually based on limited information. Unfortunately, prejudice is unavoidable in a racist society. Cultural racism is defined as the cultural images and messages that

affirm the assumed superiority of people of color; it is like smog in the air. Sometimes it is so thick it is visible, other times it is less apparent (Tatum, 1997). For many African American women professionals, Cose (1993) states that these are not so much isolated incidents as insistent and galling reminders that whatever they, as African American women, may accomplish in life, race remains their most salient feature as far as much of America is concerned. African American women in the field of education seeking administrative positions, such as principalships, consistently encounter these barriers.

I find myself battling people of color especially other African American women about this issue. I have friends that have said things like, “I just hope they do not put another Black woman here” or comments such as “. . .the school just needs a man to be principal, a woman can not run this place, especially a Black woman!” (And these things were actually said by African American women).

Because of these stereotypes and prejudices that African American women believe of themselves, may cause society to view African American women as being the same. A person of color who exhibits problems immediately becomes a representation of her cultural group (Delpit, 1995). In addition, racism has victimized African American women in education by denying them a chance to advance to high level positions (Hall, Everett & Hamilton-Mason, 2012). Because of this social attitude, women have been reluctant to pursue educational administrative leadership positions (Epp, 1993).

At an early age, African Americans are taught to be successful in today’s society, they (African Americans) must be “better” than their White counterparts in order to compete for the same job, position, opportunity, etc. (Hall et al, 2012). In addition,

people of color learn early in life that they are seen by others as members of a group and, and unfortunately, are stereotyped (Tatum, 1997). The danger of stereotypes is that they are not based on logic or experience, yet they may, and often times do, affect other people's perception of African Americans (Obiakor, 2001). Moreover, misconceptions brought about as a result of stereotypes have in many cases immobilized the careers of African American women. Black women experience problems in White institutions because institutional leaders and other members do not recognize and acknowledge the cultural evolution that is taking place with the inclusion of Black professionals in their White institutions (Alfred, 2001).

Womanism

“Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” – Alice Walker

The term womanism was first used by author Alice Walker in her book *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) to describe “black feminist or feminist of colour” (Collins, 2000). Tamara Beauboeuf-Lafontant (2005) describes womanism as:

A theoretical perspective focused on the experiences and knowledge bases of Black women which recognizes and interrogates the social realities of slavery, segregation, sexism, and economic exploitation this group has experienced during its history in the United States. Furthermore, womanism examines these realities and Black women's responses without viewing them as a variation on or derivation of Black male or White female behaviour and social circumstances.

Womanism is feminism that is strong in color and is nearly identical to Black Feminism. However, Womanism does not need to be preceded by “Black” the word Womanism alone says it all. It says, “I am Black, I am a woman, and I support my Black man.”

Black women have unconsciously formed an alliance by together taking pride in being referred to as a “strong Black woman.” In my opinion, many African American women take on the stance of being the strong Black woman as opposed to other negative stereotypes, such as if we are not strong Black women, we must be the *welfare queen*.

The dominant society has never viewed Black women as sympathetic or normatively feminine figures. Instead, it has created several “controlling images” (Collins, 2000) or unidimensional representations of Black womanhood to naturalize their social subordination. Stereotypes of sharp-tongued, easily dismissed Sapphires; large, asexual, all-giving Mammies; or lazy fertile welfare queens, among others, have sought to undermine the humanity of this group and thereby minimize attention to the inequalities it experiences (Gillespie, 1984; Collins, 2000; hooks, 1989).

Many of us take on the role of the strong Black woman and show our strength, endurance, and resilience, regardless of cost. Unfortunately, we have become stoic in our lived experiences and learn(ed) to accept situations and circumstances other human beings would not dream of enduring. The idea of strength is viewed as a viable substitute to the demeaning images generated by society.

To question strength as a social construct is to investigate whose interests it serves, to ask what other qualities may co-exist with it, and to be open to commonalities among as well as differences between Black women and women from other ethnic groups (Beaubeouf-Lafontant, 2007).

We take pride in the battle and the fight. When we win we celebrate and move on. When we lose, we analyze why we lost, take note, reorganize and move on. Strong black women ‘do it all’ and without complaint, Beaubeouf-Lafontant (2005) states, strong black women typically take on a social script that acknowledges them primarily when they tolerate the intolerable. Black women have long been the provider and head of the household in the African American community. The “traditional” family has been virtually nonexistent in the African American Community (Collins, 2000). In general, everything the imagined traditional family ideal is thought to be, African American families are not.

If one assumes that real men work and real women take care of families, then African Americans suffer from deficient ideas concerning gender. In particular, Black women become less “feminine,” because they work outside the home, work for pay and thus compete with men, and their work takes them away from their children (Collins, 2000).

According to Andrews (1993):

The double whammy of race and gender, being Black and female, compounded by the attainment of a high level of education, predictably creates problems on both a professional and personal level. Black women must contend with the

professional pressures associated with working in a historically White, middle-and-upper-middle class, male-dominated profession, as well as attempt to balance the demands of life outside the professional domain.

Womanist theory encompasses and celebrates the African American woman. It recognizes that women are survivors in a world in which they have been suppressed.

Racism

The history of overt racism has visions of the Ku Klux Klan with White hoods, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King. Overt racism is defined as “a public, conscious, and intended act by a person from one race with the intent of doing damage to a person of another race” (Scheurich & Young, 1997). Racism is not only about negative outcomes; it is also about the hidden benefits to be gained from maintaining a system of racial inequalities (Lopez, 2003).

Race controls how schools operate because racism is a permanent fixture of American life (Bloom, 1999). Many institutions in the United States are controlled by Whites: from local governments to the national government, from small banks to major hospitals. Despite the fact that the United States is a multicultural society, all of the institutions function to render greater benefits to White people (Scheurich & Young, 1997). These benefits are not intentionally given to Whites in order to hurt people of color (Delpit, 1995; Hacker, 1992; Bloom, 1999). Rains (1998) explores and speaks of the issue of “Whiteness within our society.” Whites are not even conscious of their status and privilege. When racism is looked at in terms of individualization, it makes it easier to digest.

African American women in higher positions have denied being discriminated against for many years. From the mid 1960's until the early 1970's, African American women were in difficult situations. Between the civil right and feminist movements, they really did not have a place. They were the backbone of the civil rights movement but African American men rose as leaders (hooks, 1990). When African American women moved toward feminism, they were discriminated against by White women. Collins, (2000) refers to this as "double jeopardy" because African American women experience both race and sex discrimination.

Double jeopardy is a term generally used to characterize the position of African American women and other women of color, because they fall into two oppressed categories. African American women share common experiences due to the intersection of both race and gender. The two cannot be separated. If only race or gender is used to define an African American woman's experiences, a true representation cannot be depicted (Collins, 2000).

Critical Race Theory

Society fails to see racism because it is such a common/everyday experience that it is often taken for granted and functions at a level that is often invisible to most individuals (Lopez, 2003). Racism is a part of our everyday life. It is part of our social fabric and embedded in our organizations, practices, and structures (Scheurich & Young, 1997).

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a theoretical framework and an intellectual movement that focuses on the participation of society in supporting cultural dominance,

and upholding similar social structures within gender and class (Delgado, 2000). CRT contains an activist “dimension.” The discipline tries to change social situation in addition to understanding the why. By understanding why it works, then works to transform the situation in order to better society (Delgado & Stephancic, 2012).

Critical race theory seeks to reduce discrimination through the recognition and promotion of historically disenfranchised peoples. Solorzano (1997) defines critical race theory:

A framework or set of basic perspectives, methods, and pedagogy that seeks to identify, analyze, and transform those structural and cultural aspects of society that maintain the subordination and marginalization of People of Color.

CRT is important in regards to both social and intellectual issues. It starts with the idea that racism is common and because it is so embedded in the core of our social order, racism appears both normal and natural to people in our society. The educational system in our White-European culture tends to ignore facts that are apparent to the struggle people of color endure. One example is how there is limited data documented that reflects how many Black teachers and administrators actually lost jobs after *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954. In addition, materials in education often ignore the existence of racism, exploitation, discrimination, prejudice, and oppression which denies people information needed to understand, recognize, and overcome the problems of society as we know it (Delgado, 2000). Critical race theory addresses these issues in order to bring more awareness and understanding to social differences in order to better society.

Themes of CRT

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) states that CRT has four major themes. The first theme is that racism is ordinary, the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experiences of most people of color in this country. Secondly, our system of White over color serves important purposes for the dominant group; for example such as hiring the less experienced White female with a Bachelor's degree as opposed to hiring the African American female with stellar credentials and a Master's degree. Racism is difficult to address or alleviate because it is not acknowledged. "Color-blindness" is necessary to deter blatant forms of discrimination such as hiring White less qualified applicants as opposed to people of color with the same or better qualifications. Critical race theory has the ultimate objective to bring about change that supports a greater level of social justice (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005).

The third theme of CRT is social construction. Race and races are products of social thought and relations. Races are categories that society invents and manipulates (or retires) when convenient; however, these traits have nothing to do with personality, intelligence or higher order thinking skills. That society frequently chooses to ignore these scientific truths, creates races and endows them with pseudo-permanent characteristics is of great interest to critical race theory (Delgado, 2000).

The fourth and final theme of CRT, according to Delgado, is the "voice of color" thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Latino writers think they may be able to communicate to their White counterparts matters that the Whites are unlikely to know.

Critical race theory focuses directly on race and racism and allows scholars to identify personal and universal injustices and inequities within a recognized White privileged society (Williams & Evans-Winters, 2005). Critical race theory will be used to first deconstruct the beliefs of the dominant western culture, and then reconstruct a new way of thinking, a new outlook. Brown (2005), states that the paradigm of CRT provides a lens that allows for an emphasis on the social, political, and racial context of schooling and how these factors can affect the leadership of African Americans and the education of African American students to be viewed.

As an educator, it is important for me to reveal my experiences of being an African American female administrator with other educators, especially aspiring African American women wanting to become principals in public schools. Williams & Evans-Winters (2005) relate to CRT and Black Feminism because they both provide voices for the marginalized and oppressed to be heard through the use of personal narratives and counter storytelling. I feel sharing my daily encounters through the use of storytelling will somehow explain our role in public education as well as provide support for young women seeking the position of secondary principal. Ladson-Billings states, storytelling is a part of critical race theory (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

Storytelling is important because it adds context to the situation and allows the reader not only to comprehend but to also become part of the experience. Storytelling in an autoethnography is essential. For the writer, storytelling has been a prescription for the ill it has caused. Race continues to be a powerful social construct and signifier (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The use of narrative in critical race theory adds to the racial

dimension and purpose of qualitative inquiry and ethnographic research in education (Parker, 1998). The narrative approach allows us to witness the individual in his/her complexity and recognize that although some phenomena will be common to all, some will remain unique (Josselson, 1995).

Critical race theorists believe that CRT focuses on systemic, cultural, and structural inequalities. It deals with research that is labeled by some as ignored (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The majority of critical race theorists are people of color (Delgado, 2000). Its main goal is to end oppression of people of color, to empower people, and to help people understand the situation they are in so they can get out of it. Critical theory primarily deals with issues surrounding social justice and problems that plague the structures of society.

Both critical theory and feminist theory share concerns about the relationship between the individual subject and an oppressive social structure. Critical and feminist theories also subscribe to the view that social structures and knowledge, as well as our experience and selves are socially constructed, and are, therefore, open to contestation and change (Delgado, 2000).

African American Female Principals

Women who aspire to become principals must be conscious of how they are perceived by others and the organization. They must know who they are and be comfortable with themselves. A woman's perception of herself is a direct link to her success (Lynch, 1990). The following sidebar is a story about an African American woman who was unapologetically assertive, and logistically on her way to being great

administrator; however, in the process she listened to advice of her White superiors and changed who she was.

Sidebar: The male principal of the high school where I was employed was diagnosed with a terminal disease. The person in line for the job was the African American female associate principal; therefore, there was much talk about whether or not a female principal could effectively run the school. The school was predominantly African American. Standardized test scores were low, very low, with a placed at risk population of 66% (that was reported). There were discipline issues and the community questioned whether or not she could handle it – primarily because she was a woman. The job was given to her, but she unfortunately, after four years was asked to resign.

This was a very well put together professional African American woman. She was tough, knew her job, knew the parents, and was exceptionally smart and knew how to run a school. But as soon as she put her “principal’s hat” on she became a different person. She was caring. She smiled all the time. She became a social butterfly. She looked like the same person – but was she? Well, immediately her credibility fell because her staff began to see her as “getting soft” and “not being real” I am sure someone (from administration) shared with her some of the feelings of the community. The perception was that she was too hard, too cold, and too untouchable. She was probably coached to become more “socially accepted.” Unfortunately, they did not tell

her how to do it. Her staff saw right through her new personality. Eventually, she dropped the show, but so much damage had been done that she just could not recover.

Unfortunately, African American women are grouped together and often treated as the same. An assumption persists that African American women, as a group, will share commonalities (Collins, 1991; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003). Because African American women embody two status roles, related to gender and race, research has tended to ignore this group (Becks-Moody, 2004). Research on women has often ignored women of color and research on people of color has not focused significantly on women of color (Edson, 1988). Black women have been doubly victimized by scholarly neglect and racist assumptions (Echols, 2006). This tendency ignores women of color as integrated whole and presents them as fragments (Banks, 1995).

In Green Valley ISD, there are several African American women seeking the position of secondary school principal and are at a standstill. Green Valley Independent School District has 94 secondary campus administrator positions; 52 of the 94 positions are considered “top level” campus positions, consisting of 26 campus principals and 26 associate principal positions. Presently, Green Valley ISD has 6 African American female principals, 3 at the high schools and 3 at the middle schools. The associate principal classification (considered to be the stepping stone for principal) totals 5 African American women; 3 at the high school level and 2 at the middle school level.

So, out of the top 52 “lead” positions, we, African American females in GVISD, hold 11 positions or 21%. African American men are much lower with only two (2) positions or 3.8% out of the 52. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the top administrators in

GVISD are White compared to our White student population of 19.48%. We have two Hispanic middle school principals; one female and one male, but no Hispanic representation exists at the high schools. Odds are stacked against the African Americans and Hispanic applicants. The district student demographics are 30% African American, 19% White, 26% Hispanic, 24% Asian, and 1% American Indian. Data also shows in the executive level of leadership for GVISD, there is no African American representation female or male. The highest position an African American holds is principalship. There is one Hispanic male serving in an Executive level/Cabinet position for GVISD. The school board consists of seven members and one is African American, the remaining six are White.

According to Sanchez, Thornton and Usinger (2008), unfortunately, the problem facing African American female principals is a long term issue and is a result from the very thing we are fighting for education for diverse children. Barriers have inhibited the placement of men and women of color. They include:

1. Fewer minorities graduate from high school in general;
2. Recruitment of minorities into other fields once they get to college;
3. Barriers within the education pathways, i.e. testing and being passed over for promotions;
4. Inadequate salaries;
5. Traditional leadership programs that do not teach prospective principals about their ethnic influence as leaders;

6. A lack of multicultural perspectives within a leadership program's curriculum (Sanchez, Thornton, & Usinger, 2008).

In addition, the demographics of U.S. schools have changed. The percentage of students in public schools who belong to a racial or ethnic minority group increased from 32 % in 1990 to 42 % in 2010, with a corresponding decrease from 67 % to 54 % in the percentage of White students enrolled (NCES). However, the demographics of school principals have not changed. In the 2007-2008 school year, only 17.1 % of principals of all U.S. schools were from minority backgrounds. Demographics of secondary school principals show even more scarcity for the African American female. From 1999-2000, secondary public school principals in the U.S. consisted of 78.2% males and 21.8% females; however, in 2007-2008 female representation grew to 28.5% with male principals reflecting 71.5% of secondary public school principals. However, out of the 28.5% female representation in 2007-2008, White females occupied 84.1% of the positions. African Americans females were at a mere 9.8% of the 84.1% and even more scant were Hispanic females with only 4.5%

Legacy of Struggle

According to Collins (2000), there is a constant struggle for African American women to survive in the workplace. Smith (2008) expounded on the legacy of struggle in her study entitled *Race and Gender in the Leadership Experiences of Three Female African American High School Principals: A Multiple Case Study*.

Female African American high school principals encountered significant challenges in their leadership experiences that hindered, but did not prevent the

attainment of a principalship. Each of the informants encountered inequitable selection processes that favored their male colleagues. These women were either not considered for leadership positions while their male counterparts were being groomed for the role of principal, or were unsuccessful with interview committees.

These filtering methods are often viewed as a means to reinforce the myths that women and people of color are unsuitable for the high school principalship (Simmons, 2007). The literature relating to female leadership suggests that it is common for women to encounter resistance from teachers and parents who view them as easy to manipulate or intimidate (Harris, Smith, & Hale, 2002).

However, each of the women were determined to prevent these negative images by portraying themselves as caring, confident, competent leaders which is a key to empowerment. While all of the women cited challenges in their leadership experience, two were hesitant to refer to the challenges as barriers. Rather, they viewed these instances as temporary setbacks to their success. This resilient spirit allowed them to “bounce back” from these negative experiences (Gostnell, 1996). Collins (2000) acknowledged that resiliency is often a quality associated with the leadership of African American women as a survival mechanism for difficult situations (Smith, 2008).

We, as African American women, also deal with the invisible quotas of how many of us should be hired. In reviewing another aspect of GVISD, I counted the number of African American women administrators on each of the 11 high school campus. Each campus has 5 to 8 administrators including the building principal. Even I

was surprised when the count was complete. Each campus has only one African American female with the exception of Eastside and Butterfly High Schools; both campuses where I serve (d) as building principal and responsible for recommending assistant principals for hire.

African American women administrators working in diverse populations of students are emerging as effective leaders of schools. Women have become a viable force in providing educational leadership to secondary schools throughout the education system in the United States (Eby, 2004). Research has shown the importance of race in leadership styles (Asante, 1991). Researchers challenge that the influence of someone who has been exposed to similar cultural and racial experiences as the minority is more likely to be effective in communicating with minority children. Dillard (1995) states, “all schools in the United States and the leaders in those schools exist for the overarching purpose of the educational, social, and cultural development and growth of our increasingly diverse children, such a caring ethic most not solely be a vision but also and integral task of school leadership.”

Writing Autoethnography

I have provided pseudonyms for friends, family and colleagues. In sharing experiences of my relationships and upbringing it is important to respect the people involved and to only tell how they affected my life through a narrative analysis where I will be involved with the story (Ellis, 2004). When researchers write autoethnographies, they collect field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describe patterns using

components of storytelling. Being an African American female principal and telling my story requires a different venue in which to do so.

Autoethnography provides me as the researcher the opportunity to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010). Chapters IV through VII provide a thick description of a culture in order to provide the ethnographic focus. This study will be presented in the form of an Autoethnography. Autoethnography refers to the process as well as what is produced from this process (Ellis, 2004). This qualitative research consists of sharing narratives which examines how a story is constructed and the cultural context of the story (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Using a first person voice I will “showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality and self-consciousness” as I have lived it (Ellis, 2004).

As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography. An autobiography is a story about the author’s past experiences. The author retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences using hindsight (Denzin, 1989). Autobiographers write about epiphanies or other events in their lives which they interpret as a pivotal moment.

When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture’s relational practices, common values and beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders (cultural members) and outsiders (cultural strangers) better understand the culture. Ethnographers do this by becoming participant observers in the culture (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010).

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. However, in addition to telling about experiences, autoethnographers often are required by social science publishing conventions to analyze these experiences.

Summary

Through my readings, experiences, and discussions in doctoral classes, I became fascinated as I learned, not so much about the bureaucracy of education and different ways to be a leader, but I learned about me. The more I learned about me, the more open and accepting I became of others. I was entrenched with new ideas and thirsted for more knowledge. I began to engage in “scholarly” conversations with anyone who would listen. The more I read, the thirstier I became. I truly believed the knowledge I would receive post-master’s degree would basically be more of what I already knew. I had no idea through classes such as epistemology; I would inherit an awareness of people and perceptions that would forever change my outlook. When I began work on this degree, my desire was to become a superintendent; through the research I became an educator who lives life on purpose.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The job of a principal has become exceptionally complex as school improvement efforts are continuously increasing and standards are mandated. African American women are being hired to lead placed at-risk students at predominantly African American schools, but are not chosen at the same percentage to lead White high performing schools (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Purpose

The purpose of this research is to provide a study of the African American female administrator and her role in secondary education as it pertains to the process of becoming a high school principal and providing a quality education to students. I am the object of research in this dissertation. At the completion of this dissertation, I will have 24 years in public education all in the same school district.

There is research about student accountability. There is research about administrators. There is research about female administrators. There is research about African American administrators. There is limited research about African American female administrators. However, research is even more scarce when it relates to all of the above coming together and factoring in student accountability.

This study is based on my reality of being an African American woman administrator as I lived it. It allowed me to reflect on self, family, society, and the traditional values and norms for the position I held. The information obtained from this study will help to increase awareness of the challenges faced by my African American

female colleagues. As an educator, it is important for me to reveal my experiences of being an African American female administrator with other educators, especially aspiring African American women wanting to become principals in secondary public schools.

This research represents a personal journey into my life. I will share my struggles and celebrations of being an African American female principal of a diverse Texas 5A high school in the age of accountability. By examining my own path and taking the time to process my everyday life and occurrences, this study will provide me the opportunity to reflect and to grow professionally. It will also add to the research of African American female administrators regarding their role as the leader of the campus. This information may include, but is not limited to interviews (self stories), observations, documents and records, and “personal experience materials” (Ellis, 2004).

McKay (1989) states:

Black women use the personal narrative to document their differences in self perception as well as their concerns for themselves and others, their sense of themselves as part of a distinct women’s and racial community, and the complexities of the combined forces of race and gender for the only group beleaguered by both.

Methodology

Qualitative research methodology is appropriate for this dissertation because it allows for the expression and interpretations of one’s own life (Ellis, 1997). These characteristics are well matched for this study, which explores the challenges that

African American women experience as professionals in secondary public education. The challenges that African American women come across and the survival methods they use to manage the conflicts as professionals in secondary education, have not been studied to the fullest. Primarily, there is a high cost in revealing such personal struggles and pain connected to the challenges of African American women administrators face as they seek advancement opportunities.

Given the powerful influence that self-identity and cultural consciousness are believed to have on the lives of African Americans as whole, researchers must explore methodologies that will permit increasingly sophisticated studies of the meanings and interpretive effects of racism and sexism in the identity and cultural development of the African American (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

In reality, the perceptions that Black women do attain top positions within educational leadership are dismantled when one examines the actual positions held by Black women leaders (Banks, 1995). Unfortunately, many of the administrative positions held by African American women are administrative staff, such as specialists and diversity leaders, rather than actual administrators on a campus (Banks, 1995; Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Research states that because qualitative methods come more easily to the human-as-instrument, qualitative methods are stressed within the naturalistic paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Primarily for me, the researcher, one of the greatest values was the time to reflect about the process and journey that brought me to the principalship of a 5A high school in Texas. I was able to research and understand that the struggles were real not

only for me, but for many African American females. Well, one may ask, or criticize what I meant when I say they were real?

While I was in the day to day fight, there were actually times I thought “this can not be real, it must just be me.” I so desperately wanted to talk to someone, wanted to read something pertaining to what it was I was experiencing, wanted a witness to testify on my behalf that I was not alone. So, again, my hope is that by writing this particular dissertation it will help someone who is in need of validation. Validation of who we, as African American women, are; to represent and to be proud. An autoethnography is not just an autobiography of a person’s life.

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from, or are made possible by, being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. Autoethnographers are also required to analyze these experiences (Ellis & Bochner, 1999).

History of Autoethnography

There has been discussion regarding the methodology of autoethnography as to whether or not it constitutes true scientific research. According to Ellis (1995), a story could be considered scholarly if it makes the reader believe the experience is authentic, believable, and possible. This story will contain essential elements of storytelling (Ellis, 2004). “Stories are the way humans make sense of their worlds. Stories are essential to human understanding, and (they) are not unique to autoethnography” (Ellis, 2004). The intended purpose of autoethnography is to provide the opportunity for the reader and author to become co-participants in the recorded experience (Ellis & Bochner, 1999).

When researchers write autoethnographies, they collect field notes, interviews, and/or artifacts, and then describe patterns using components of storytelling.

Autoethnographers also consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and in doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders. Autoethnography provides me, as the researcher, the opportunity to produce aesthetic and evocative thick descriptions of personal and interpersonal experience (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010).

Autoethnography refers to the process as well as what is produced from this process (Ellis, 2004). This qualitative research consists of sharing narratives which examines how a story is constructed and the cultural context of the story (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Personal narratives are stories about authors who view themselves as the phenomenon and write evocative narrative specifically focus on their academic, research, and personal lives (Goodall, 2006; Tillman, 2004). Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own live (Ellis, 2004).

Telling the Story

How do I tell my story? It depends on what I am ready to learn about myself and the world around me, what is my purpose, and who I think my audience will be. (Ellis, 1997). Tony Adams (2006) describes telling:

“Telling” is a writing strategy that works with “showing” in that it provides readers some distance from the events described so that they might think about the events in a more abstract way. Adding some “telling” to a story that “shows” is an efficient way to convey information needed to appreciate what is going on. The telling of the story is also affected by the kind of week I experienced, the frame of mind I may be in, if the flowers are blooming, or if my family is being cooperative (Ellis, 1997). Autoethnography should be self-absorbed. If one is not absorbed with the topic of one’s research, how can one write well about it? A person writing autoethnography needs to be absorbed with the world she inhabits and the processes she finds herself a part of, which also work their way into one’s identity. (Ellis, 1997).

In this study, many names and proper nouns have been altered to secure anonymity. This is important because I presently work for the district and the school I am referencing in this paper. I recognize that my personal analogies and descriptions of the events at the campus are subjective and possibly biased and may not reflect what other African American females in the district or perhaps at the campus experienced. The data gathered was not inclusive of every experience that happened during the writing of this dissertation. The objective of the writing was to recognize my experiences being an African American female going through the process of attaining the number one position on a high school campus. This included district perception in meetings, conferences, and staff developments. The experiences will hopefully show a difference or another side to the story of promotion in secondary education as it pertains to

administration. It is also my goal for the reader to experience and witness my growth as I matured in the job and in my thought process.

Student accountability has brought more emphasis to the position of the school leader, making it a necessity for the school leader's role to be expanded. Individuals who do not fit the traditional "White male" stereotype of school leader have often been excluded from leadership positions, such as school principals and superintendents. However, with No Child Left Behind, President Obama's Race to the Top, and state accountability measures, the face of the principalship is changing in order to accommodate these growing demands. Chapters V through VIII include my personal experiences in not only attaining the principalship, but also the day to day struggles of being who I am, an African American female, in a European American world.

Research and Design Methods

As an educator, it is important for me to reveal my experiences of being an African American female administrator with other educators, especially aspiring African American women wanting to become principals in public schools. I feel sharing my daily encounters through the use of storytelling will somehow explain our role in public education as well as provide support for young women seeking the position of secondary principal. Ladson-Billings states, "Storytelling is a part of critical race theory" (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Storytelling is important because it adds context to the situation and allows the reader not only to comprehend but to also become part of the experience. Storytelling in an autoethnography is essential.

Sidebar: My parents are from a little town in Louisiana called Church Point. My culture is Creole which is rich in customs, traditions, and food. Even though we were a low-income family (six children) I was brought up learning how to live life to the fullest. Our entertainment was family gatherings including food, drink, dancing, and at the end of the night story telling. I grew up among story tellers and have been told by many of my girlfriends that when I tell a story, I tell it in color; so just the thought of telling my professional and personal story and sharing while adding to the research, posed to be an exciting adventure to say the least.

The narrative approach allows the reader to witness my complexity and recognize that although some phenomena will be common to all, some will remain unique (Josselson, 1995). The use of narrative in critical race theory adds to the racial dimension and purpose of qualitative inquiry and ethnographic research in education (Parker, 1998).

Learning how principals view themselves in their role is somewhat overlooked in the research of administrators. There is an abundance of research for administrators explaining the position and how to become better; however, many of the writings are not first person on the job accounts of what is actually happening. Josselson (1995) states that culture cannot be replicated or tested because it is observed not “lived.” Due to the nature of autoethnography, the researcher is always engaged as a part of the culture.

Data Collection

Data gathering began during my course work. I was enrolled in a literature review class in the spring semester of 2004 with Dr. McKenzie. The class met on Wednesday evenings and at the end of each class we were required to write a reflection about whatever was on our mind as a result of the discussion from class that evening. Every Wednesday night I came to class with another story from my day in education. It always seemed the narrative was filled with racism and I always managed to get my story into the class discussion for the night. Dr. McKenzie was not only receptive to the discussion, but gave me a different insight to the issues I faced daily as an African American female administrator at a predominantly White campus.

Many of my reflections were about getting started on my dissertation and the feeling of being overwhelmed; however, one night, I had an exceptionally hard day and wrote about an issue I was involved with at work. At the end of the reflection, I wrote Dr. McKenzie a note saying something like, “My next dissertation will be the life and times of a Black female assistant principal at a predominantly White high school with a perceived atmosphere of Elitism.” I knew she would get a laugh out of it, but never thought she would take me seriously. When I received my reflection back the following Wednesday, she wrote, and I quote, “This would be a powerful study, you could do an autoethnography about your experiences as an African American female administrator.”

I liked the idea and truly wanted the opportunity to tell the story of what I was experiencing on the job. After I spoke with Dr. Skrla, my committee chair at the time, she agreed it would definitely be something worth researching, I began my journaling.

Time was set aside at first three times a week, but I found myself writing so much at one sitting that I decided that I would take a day once a week and write about a specific encounter or issue. I used day to day interactions, meetings, experiences, phone calls, and conferences to supplement the collection of data.

Time was a major factor in keeping up with “telling the story.” I invested in a handheld recorder in 2004 so I could talk on my way back and forth to work. This was actually great therapy for me while in the process of trying to understand why certain things were as they were. The actual written journal spans from the fall of 2004 through the spring of 2005. I began voice recordings the summer of 2005, the same year I became a building principal. My work day consisted of 12 to 14 hour days including Saturdays. As a result, my journaling took a backseat to the demands of a new job.

I applied my insider status collected data from observations, actual meetings, and journals. Of course, a limitation of this study was possible bias on my part may not allow me to take another point of view. This happened in some of my journaling. However, when I reviewed my words there were times I saw another viewpoint. The primary goal of research is to generate literary descriptions that add value to our research.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data begins the moment the researcher perceives the information. In an autoethnography, the analysis of data is an ongoing occurrence which develops over time. Every time I reread, I also reevaluate my purpose and the process of telling the story. With more time and thought, the clarity of the research is enriched; a sample of this is the “Changing Focus” (below) of how this dissertation began. These processes

form the analysis of data in a qualitative study. The gathering and analysis of data go hand-in-hand as theories and themes emerge during the study (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

Ellis and Bochner (2000) assert that the analysis of data in a personal narrative involves a process where the researcher emotionally recalls the events of the past. The researcher looks back on specific, memorable episodes and experiences paying particular attention to the emotions and physical surroundings during the recollection. Thoughts, events, dialogue, and physical details of particular events are expressed through emotional recall.

In my opinion, the most difficult element of writing an autoethnography is the disclosure of my life. In writing an autoethnography, I became very emotional at times and had to actually walk away from the study and refocus. Reliving some of the drama in my family, as well as, the overt racism in the workplace, caused me pain and some days, depression. An attribute of qualitative study is the ability of the researcher to let the data emerge as the research and writing is progressing. In the initial segments of my research it was not always clear what themes would emerge.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that data analysis in a naturalistic inquiry is open-ended and inductive. Hence, data analysis begins during the data collection process, and continues after the collection is complete. The data in my study was derived primarily from my journals and audio tapes. I realized there was no one way to categorize or code data, but that it is ever changing. The more I attempted to categorize themes, the easier it became to decipher and my understanding excelled. This greater

understanding can be attributed to Guba and Lincoln's (1985) reference of ontological authenticity – an understanding derived about the researcher's own point of view. As I wrote and rewrote, I kept the above questions in my thoughts so the writings would support the work. However, personal biases I have and how I may or may not have dealt with certain situations, also made an impression when selecting the final information to be used in the research.

Member checking, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. It is a process which involves participants verifying data and interpretations collected through the interviews. One of its many benefits was its provision of assessing intentionality. Member checking in a self study serves to help the researcher rethink, clarify, add or delete comments, and to include any details that could further develop the researchers own interpretations. The African American female associate principal at Butterfly HS, the African American female principal at Valley View MS, and my secretary all served as member checks for this research. My family story, Chapter IV, became the major topic of discussion during the holidays. I actually read stories to my nieces and nephews and discussed our family's history. The member checks came from my brothers and sisters eavesdropping, and then joining the conversations to correct details or add information that they deemed pertinent.

Coding the Data

Categorizing the information collected was important to the research to provide a stable structure that facilitated the interpretation of data and the writing of the narrative.

As stated, previously, it was not clear at the beginning stages of writing what themes would emerge. Coding and categorizing the journal data proved to be beneficial in keeping the validity of the research. Attempts were made to categorize the data, but depending on the day and my disposition, the task proved difficult.

In order to decide where to begin, I thoroughly read my journal entries as well as adding a few from recent experiences. I worked with my secretary (she has been with me at three of the high schools, UPS, BHS and EHS) to assemble schedules, emails, and my calendar to bring everything together. My associate principal reminded me of different events that were not included but could be beneficial to include in the research. My concern was making sure the timeline of events were correct and flowed properly.

Changing Focus

Between work and duties of a mother and wife, the dissertation writing began to suffer. I had less and less time until I eventually ceased all work and time devoted to completion. In 2007, I attempted to get back on track and presented my proposal and began journaling once again. As I read through my previous journal entries, I noticed my purpose for writing the dissertation changed. When I began in 2005 my dissertation was entitled "*An African American Woman's Perception of her Experience as an Administrator in a Predominantly White Middle Class Suburban High School*"; however, when I began reading over my material and preparing the proposal for my committee, I felt differently about what I wanted the research to entail. A theme emerged that possibly it was not about my perception that would be the foundation of the research

but the actual process of navigating through the system and promotion opportunities for the African American female.

While beginning my coursework, I was the associate principal at an affluent high school in the district. I began working at this predominantly White suburban high school and at the same time began my epistemology classes. My outlook on the situations may have been magnified by the mere fact that I was studying critical race theory simultaneously.

I arrived at Uppity High School in 2003 and was promoted to a high school principal two years later. Uppity High School was very different from the two previous campuses in which I was employed, the first as a teacher for ten years and the second as an assistant principal for four years. I suddenly found myself in a web of racism, understand, I know that sounds strong and one might possibly think that I am exaggerating. But, unfortunately, I am not. I had experienced racism prior to arriving at Uppity High School, but this was different. It was very overt racism (Scheurich & Young, 1997). I consistently found myself in predicaments and was placed in uncomfortable situations where I had to defend my methods of daily work routines, as well as, myself as an experienced administrator. These stories and journal entries can be found in Chapter VI Uppity High School. As stated earlier, each night in class I absorbed the different epistemologies and developed a fascination with Critical Race Theory. Fascination? Yes, fascination.

When reading about CRT or discussing it, it gave me a reason or some type of explanation as to why the situations in my work life were as they were. It provided (for

me) reasoning. I felt liberated and I remembered thinking, “Aw, okay, now I understand....this all makes sense.” During my time in class, I was actually experiencing the issues/situations we discussed weekly; not only in my work environment, but also with my son, Drew, age 5 in a predominantly White elementary school in 2003.

My life was literally juxtaposition: what I was going through with my African American son and what I was dealing with at work with African American male students was exactly the same. While at work, I dealt daily with conferences of African American children and their parents complaining about White teachers. The complaints from parents were these teachers (of course not all) were not returning phone calls, they were writing up their sons, and they were putting them out of class and the boys were allowed to linger in the hallways and received zeroes for not doing their work.

Needless to say, I was struggling with the same situation with my kindergarten African American son. The difference was the parents I spoke to were parents of seniors in high school. The irony of it all made me angry and I wanted to fight back. In my head a little voice was crying for me to tell parents, “stand up for your children, these teachers are wrong, can’t you see what they are doing!” But my outward appearance was a silenced African American female administrator being the mediator and working with both sides to come to a compromise.

Naturally when we discussed CRT and dissected the readings, I was immediately drawn to the research about my own being. As time passed and I moved onto the next job, my fascination or now “interest” was more with the struggles of my journey to the

principalship. I did not want my purpose in writing a dissertation to be a series of complaints about racism, but more for an understanding of the intricate details of an African American female administrator and what she has to conquer in order to be deemed successful. I met with my committee chair and asked advice for getting started and working. We agreed on a title and focus as well as noting how different the principalship is today in the age of accountability. Hence the title, “An African American Woman’s Perception of her Journey to the Principalship”

When I began to write my dissertation, I felt constrained by the detached and abstract social science prose and the authoritative and uninvolved voice in which I was asked to write (Ellis, 2004). My story needed to be told in a certain way. When I first began to write my focus was primarily about “the” African American principalship. It was only my intention to share my professional story.

Sidebar: Dr. Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan graciously accepted to be my committee chairperson during my tenth year of completion. Our first meeting was in the choir room of the church where she was a member. I was excited to meet her and even more excited when she spoke. Of course, she introduced herself and in turn asked me to tell her about my research and my study. As I spoke, she smiled, and smiled, and nodded in agreement, and I was joyous inside. I could not stop talking about my work and who I was, but noticed she was ready to talk. She gingerly interjected, “This will be a powerful study, and how can I help you complete this project?” I shared with her my dilemma in working the autoethnography in the correct manner. I told her I had issues with switching

voices and with literary style. I also shared that I when I write, I tend to go in circles. I share a story and take a detour and the detour leads to a bridge and eventually I get back to the story, but to the reader it was confusing and I needed help. Once again, she smiled. She grabbed my hand and said, “My dear, that is how “we” write. It is your story and autoethnographies are different. Write “your” story. We will work on putting it together!” I had tears in my eyes; I could not believe the load she lifted off of my shoulders. I thought to myself, “this monkey that has been on my back” is finally going to be released. I thanked Dr. Webb-Hasan for assisting me and I told her I was again motivated. She shouted quietly (remember we are in church), “I am so excited!”

And so was I. Finally, someone who understood what I was going through. Someone who understood me. On my drive back to Houston, I listened to Yolanda Adams’ Believe CD, and thanked the Lord for Dr. Webb-Hasan. When I arrived home, I went straight to my laptop and wrote 22 pages of Chapter IV which is now Chapter V. The next time we met, Dr. Webb-Hasan asked me about family and my experiences. I spoke for about 30 minutes and she whispered, “Is that in there (pointing to my hard copy of the dissertation)?” and I said no. She said still whispering, “That needs to be in there. Write about your family, write about who you are. In order for you to tell this story about being an African American female administrator, we need to know about you. Tell us!” and I did.

Again, it was only my intention to tell my professional story until I met with Dr. Webb-Hasan. I always wanted to write my mother's story and I embraced the opportunity to be able to tell everyone about this wonderful lady I call Mom. We both agreed if this autoethnography was going to be written, it was going to be written with thick description and lots of story telling. From our many conversations we agreed on a non-traditional 7-9 chapter dissertation. In order to provide organization, I divided the chapters by family and professional career assignments.

Summary

The following chapters (IV through VIII) provide a thick description of a culture in order to provide the ethnographic focus. Using a first person voice I will "showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality and self-consciousness" as I have lived it (Ellis, 2004). Hopefully, an autoethnographic account will produce an approximation of the truth or a more detailed description of the principalship and draw readers into the story where the experience can be actually felt (Schwandt, 2001).

CHAPTER IV

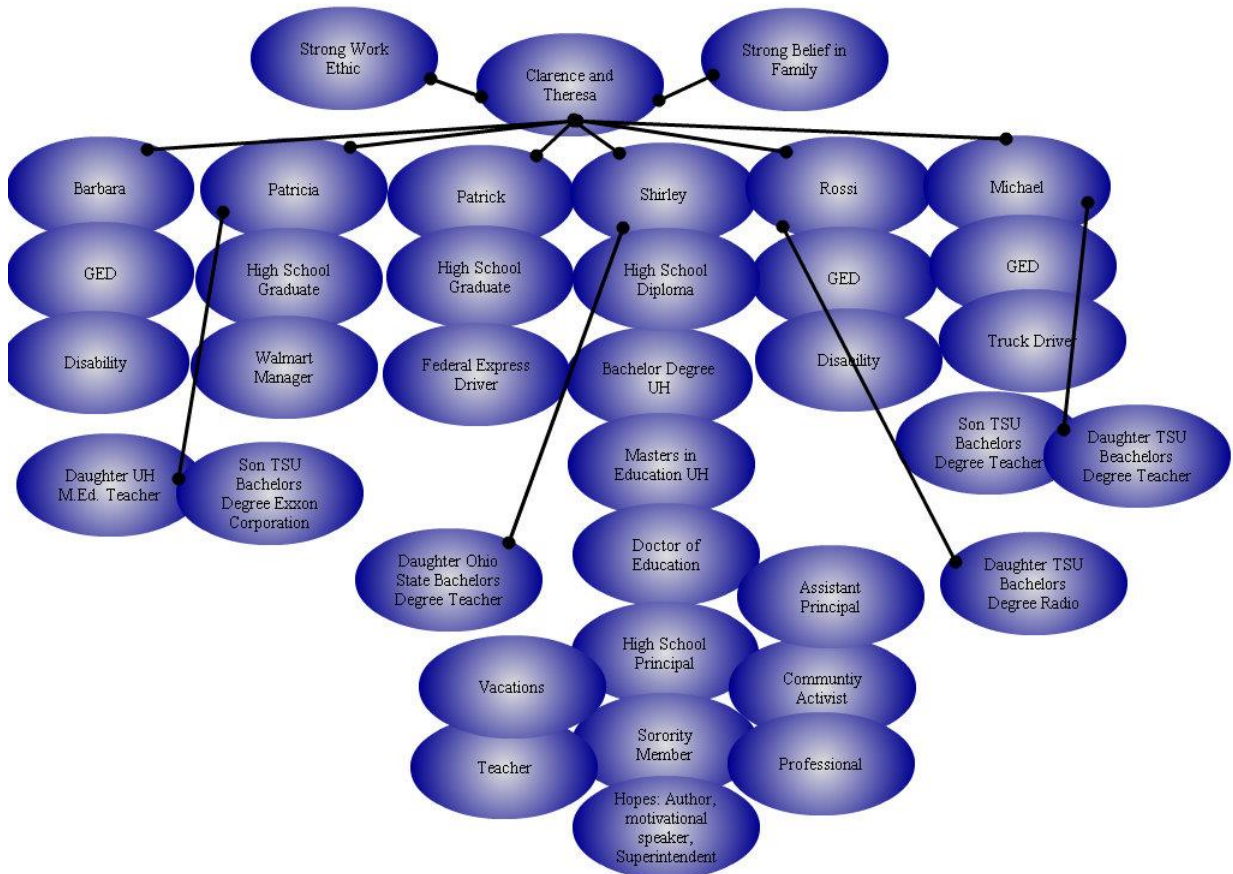
MY FAMILY STORY

I was born in San Francisco, California. However, my parents, Theresa and Clarence, are originally from Church Point, Louisiana. No, Daddy was not in the army or navy, he just stayed in trouble. The story goes that he cheated a White man out of money and had to get out of town. The White man was a share cropper and Daddy agreed to do some work for him. The sharecropper paid Daddy up front. Daddy spent the money and never did the work. Well, the year was 1959 and they lived in “backwoods” Louisiana. Mom and Dad had been married for four years and had three children, Marcia, Jan and Linda. Linda died about a month earlier at the age of six months of congestive heart failure. Word had it there was a group of White men looking for Daddy, and they had every intention to lynch him. So, Daddy sent one of his cousins to tell Mom to pack and meet him at the train station in Lafayette. Mom and Dad got on the train with Marcia and Jan and “high-tailed” it to California.

Soon after they arrived in California, Mom was with child again. David was born in late 1960. David, like Linda, was born with a heart defect. He had open heart surgery at the age of three. However, had they not been in California, Mom says David would have died also. Technology was much more advanced on the West coast as opposed to rural Louisiana. Needless to say, David was a sickly child. I was born in 1963; I, too, had heart issues, but nothing in comparison to David and Linda. I was born with a heart murmur which went away by age five. My younger sister, Cindi was born in 1965. We lived in San Francisco until Mom found herself with child again. Daddy “got in trouble”

again and he moved the family to Seattle, Washington. Bobby, my brother and the baby of the family was born there.

Figure 1. The Guillory Family – Concept Map



My Daddy – Clarence Guillory

Hell on wheels, when the Temptations performed, “Pappa was a rolling stone” yes they were talking about Clarence Guillory. “Tee Clan” was his nickname; it is to be said with a heavy French accent. Both Mom and Dad are of Creole descent, when he

first went to school he had to learn English. When he spoke French, the teacher would swat him with a ruler.

Sidebar: Louisiana Creole is now commonly applied to individuals of mixed race heritage. As a group, Creoles rapidly began to acquire education, skills, businesses and property. They were overwhelmingly Catholic, spoke Colonial French (although some also spoke Louisiana Creole French), and kept up many French social customs, modified by other parts of their ancestry and Louisiana culture. The free people of color married among themselves to maintain their class and social culture. The French-speaking mixed-race population came to be called "Creoles of color" (Caver & Williams, 2009).

Daddy's mother died when he was very young and he stopped attending school when he was in the third grade. The only stories he would tell about his upbringing was his step mother was mean and ugly to him, and she treated her children better than the others (he and his siblings) and that the house they lived in was haunted. He loved to tell stories about how they would go to sleep at night and hear dishes being broken in the kitchen. He talked about "lost souls" in the night and how they would come for you with a lantern light, so it was not wise to look out into the country night because if he was spotted, he would come to your house and take your soul! Those stories were wild and we often went to bed scared from Daddy's tales. Trouble found him often, even in his youth, the old folks called him "rascal" defined as mischievous, mean, and dishonest. Yes, he was all three of those. But he was also a person people loved to be around. He

was a storyteller, a “mess” talker, and the life of the party. He loved to dance and “Zydeco” music was his and Mom’s favorite music.

Daddy’s Troubled Work History

He was a good provider. We were not a middle class family; however, at times we had enough money to last for a month. Being self-employed, Daddy was paid sporadically and did not like working a regular 9-5 job. Mom wanted him to find a company to work for desperately, just for the benefits, six children and no insurance meaning no savings account, lights being turned off, bills were always stacked up, and we did not like answering the phone (the good old days of landlines) because it was always a bill collector.

Daddy was a self made man. He learned the craft of carpentry at a very young age. He was an apprentice before he left Louisiana but soon became very skilled in the area. He was a people person and business man. He made his money by “getting jobs. He built houses from the ground up, added rooms to homes, garages, roofing, etc. His saying was, “I do it all except water (plumbing) and lights (electricity).” His work was exceptional and he never had a problem getting a job. His problem was keeping the job, doing the work and staying focused. Unfortunately, we never knew when disaster would strike. He would be employed and doing right for weeks or even months. But, one drink and the bottom would fall out; most of the time it would happen after a big job.

He would get his pay, stop at the local bar, get drunk, and I suppose with the bipolar condition (that we did not know he had) he would just crater. He landed in jail several times because he would contract with someone, accept thousands of dollars in

cash to buy materials, but would not return to do the work. This did not happen when he was sober. He also was a “hot check” writer. We moved around so much that it was hard to follow us and find him (reminder this is early 1970’s –little technology). There were times he would take an alias to hide from police. Sober Daddy was good Daddy. Drunk Daddy was mean, cheated on his wife, beat his wife, beat his children, got in bar fights, and spent all the rent money, grocery money, and bill money.

Nevertheless, he was a rolling stone and a play maker. Daddy’s greatest contribution to my life was his ability to make things happen. Many people would tell him what he could not do because he was an ex-convict. He proved them wrong every time. He had this innate ability to coax people into doing things his way. He was not pushy, just persistent. On the day of his funeral, we laughed about how we all knew he probably belonged in hell. But, when he got there he talked Satan into going to heaven and is probably subbing for St. Peter at the Pearlie Gates.

Considering the roadblocks in Daddy’s way, he should not have made it as far as he did. He was a provider for his family, a husband, even though in providing for his family he ended up in trouble, he did not stop fighting to make things better. Daddy made money the way he knew how. As stated earlier, we did not have much, but you would not know that just by looking at us. Both Mom and Dad were very proud people (strong trait of Creole); proud of their six children.

We were always neat, clean clothed and hair brushed and combed (very important to Mom, we went nowhere, and I mean nowhere if our hair was not brushed). We always lived in a diverse, nice neighborhood. We always went to integrated schools

and the education we received was top quality. Daddy moved us around a lot primarily because he was running from police. But the process of moving around provided us (the children) with a variety of different experiences in life.

Mom and Daddy were a striking couple. They were both attractive people. Daddy loved it when people said he favored Burt Reynolds. He had wavy hair and would wear it longer than most men. He was an established carpenter, so he had a nice build and was very strong, a “Paul Bunyan” type character. Whenever we were all together, people commented how pretty we were and how Mom kept us so clean and neat. Pretty and “fine-looking” were words used by other African Americans to describe us or comment on our looks.

My Mom – Theresa Malbrough Guillory

Wow. Just writing her name and the thought of putting her life in words is bringing tears to my eyes this very moment. Lord, please let me do homage to this wonderful Lady, my Mom, in my writing. Please give me the strength to tell her story in a way she will be proud and readers get to know her. Before I begin, I ask her forgiveness for telling her story in my words without her permission. She is a woman of privacy and distinction and I am sure I will get a “talking to” about putting our business “on the street”; however, this Ed.D. is for her. In a few months she will be able to introduce me “as my daughter, the doctor in education.”

My Mom was an exceptional lady then and now. In 1971, she was 33 years old, had six children lived 3000 miles from her family (San Francisco, California and family in Church Point, Louisiana), and had an abusive, alcoholic husband. Yet she held it all

together. With a ninth grade education, she secured employment and maintained a job anytime she needed one and she never left a job until she was ready to resign.

Sidebar: My Mom did not work until all of us were in school.

Monetarily, we could not afford the daycare costs and Daddy was VERY particular about who took care of his children and was VERY jealous of Mom. Daycares were out of the question. If the person was not someone he knew and trusted, Mom took us with her. So she always had her children with her everywhere she went. Mom was a beautiful young mother. She had long, black hair and weighed 135 pounds after having seven children. Mom was stylish and dressed in the latest fashions. Daddy would often get mad when she would buy things so we laughed when she would hide things in our closets.

Mom was a battered wife, but she fought back each and every time. Mom would not allow Daddy to hit any of the children when he was drunk; she would get right in the middle. However, Marcia and Jan acted as Mom's body guards when Daddy got too rough. They would wait in the wings when Mom and Dad were arguing. We could tell by Mom's screams when Daddy had her pinned down and Marcia and Jan would run to her rescue.

Mom did not cry often, and, when we heard her cry, we knew she was hurt physically, so we would get up and try to help. Sometimes just seeing us made him stop. Many times we would just cover our head with the pillows as to muffle the sound of the arguing.

Mom loved Daddy and Daddy loved Mom. Every battered wife case I ever read about or movie I watched, I could identify. Daddy would abuse Mom, and the next day he was cooking dinner, buying flowers, clothes, or even furniture. He knew how to get her back on his side, and she did each and every time.

My favorite memory of Mom was she loved to dance and still dances the “Zydeco” to this day! We grew up with music and on Saturdays while Mom made us clean up the house she played Ike and Tina Turner’s 45 “*It is Gonna Work out Fine.*” It played over and over again. She was Tina Turner, and Marcia and Jan (my sisters) were her back-up singers, the Ikettes. It was fun watching her. She and Daddy also loved to entertain. Our culture is one of good food, gumbo, BarBQs, drinking, and music. They danced the Zydeco, and we danced with them.

A Family of Laborers

Mom loved when we helped around the house, and we always received accolades from her when we cleaned up. I hated to clean up, so I was not one who my mother continuously praised, that was Jan. However, if we wanted something, we knew the best way to convince Mom to purchase it was to clean something. This put her in a good mood. She was not afraid of work and taught us to go to work no matter what. She did not believe in staying home when she was ill. She worked everyday she was scheduled. Mom really was not a mother who would tell long stories or have words of wisdom. She was a “get her done” lady. She taught us by doing, and we followed her example.

We saw her and Daddy work, so we became a family of workers. We saw pride in her eyes when we went to work and showed her our first paycheck. The paycheck was

more impressive to her than a report card. Now, I do not want to describe her as a mother who did not think an education was important, but she did not know anything about a high school diploma, let alone a college degree. We were a blue collar family and considered successful when we found a job (highly successful if it was a “good” paying job with benefits) and maintained it for a period of time. It was expected we find a job and make money. Marcia’s first place of employment was Bonus Burger followed by Jan - Jack in the Box; David - Gerland’s Food Fair, sacking groceries; I (at 15, lied on my application) -McDonald’s; Cindi (14, did the same) – Dairy Queen; Bobby (13, did the same) – Pyburn’s Food Market, sacking groceries.

Dysfunctional Home – Living with an Alcoholic

Mom cooked all the time. We always had dinner waiting on us when we arrived home from school. Being from Louisiana, every meal consisted of meat and rice. Mom really was not a great cook. Her version of gravy was the grease from the meat produced by Crisco oil she put in the pot, so the meat would not stick and the droppings from the meat along with the oil produced the gravy (chuckling to myself right now). Not knowing any better, we did not complain of cholesterol or “greasy rice,” and we dined with a smile. Mom cooked for a family of eight, when dinner was ready, she always “made a plate” for Daddy. Daddy often arrived home after seven each night. Mom would have his plate in the oven wrapped in foil. On a good night (when he did not stop at the local bar), he would come home in a good mood. He worked construction, and he would be dirty from head to toe.

When he arrived home, he kicked the dirt off his boots at the front door, walked in, sat in the recliner and called David to come take his boots off. When he was in this mood, we all flocked to the living room to greet him. It was going to be a happy night. We laughed as David tried and tried to pull his boots off and would fly clear across the room when they finally broke free from Daddy's foot. Mom would smile and turn the oven on to warm his food that was waiting. Daddy took a shower and when he sat at the table we were all in ear shot so we could hear what he did that day. That was a good day. *On a not so Good Day.*

Daddy was an awful, mean drunk. We found out later in life he was bipolar. So take bipolar and an alcoholic mix the two together, and what do you have? Clarence, trouble to the tenth power. He was unforgiving. But, I must add right here when Daddy was good, he was REALLY good. But, when he was bad... my, my. Daddy arrived home on a Saturday when we were dancing with Mom in the living area. He was supposed to receive a payoff from a job; apparently, someone did not pay him what he felt they should have. On his way home, he stopped at the neighborhood bar, got drunk and came home to raise hell. (Stopping and drinking was the way he coped in life).

He walked into the house, and we were dancing, Speedy, our Chihuahua, took off and ran to the other room. (When the dog ran, we knew it was not going to be a good night.) The music stopped. We began straightening up the living room and proceeded to our bedrooms to get out of his way. Funny, I did not feel bad for Mom until much later when I understood that he should not be yelling and cursing at her.

However, when I was five, I really thought parents argued (like they did), and it was normal. So, when he would start yelling and screaming, Mom was ready. Mom's face would immediately change. She was sour and ready to argue. Mom sat on the edge of the sofa, with legs apart, right hand on her right knee and ready to fight. If Daddy was coming at her, she was going to be ready. If it was a rainy day, which meant no construction work, Daddy, along with Autwaine, his brother, and Kooz, his buddy stopped at the local bar and drink until intoxicated.

He would walk in have a seat in the recliner and call David to pull off his boots. We did not all come and sit around him when he was drunk. We stayed in our rooms. David would have to deal with him alone. He did not shower; he would go directly to the table to eat. Mom would take the plate out of the oven and place it on the table. Daddy would take one look at it, and it was instant wallpaper. (He took the plate with food and threw it up against the wall). Jan and Marcia would run to the mess and pick up the glass off the floor and clean the wall. As soon as Jan and Marcia finished cleaning the mess, he would call "*Chicken Delight*" a home delivery service and order eight (one for each of us) full dinners. Even if we were asleep, Daddy would make us get up out of bed and come to the table to eat *Chicken Delight*. Mom would be furious.

From as early as I remember, we were always on the move – "literally." I attended *Ruby Payne* training later in life as a teacher, "A Framework for Understanding Poverty," and one of the questions posed by her about a child of poverty referred to moving. The question from a social class quiz, "I know how to move in half a day" as well as many others, brought me back to my childhood.

Sidebar: I thought to myself, “Who doesn’t know how to move in half a day?” All one has to do is back up two pick up trucks, load them up, make about 3 or 4 trips of furniture, take the bed sheets, toss the clothes in the sheets, and wrap it up throw them in the trucks. Mom would always comment it was a blessing if it rained the day we moved. When we arrived at the new house, she would make a big pot of gumbo, and we were home once again.

We were common day nomads. We rented houses and bought furniture constantly because many times we left items in the house. Daddy would say leave it and Mom did. I attended two schools per year from Kindergarten through the fourth grade. Jan and Marcia, the two eldest siblings, attended two schools per year from Kindergarten through 10th and 11th grade respectively. When we arrived to Houston in 1973, the moving from house to house slowly declined. Mom kept us in one attendance zone, and we were able to make friends and participate in extracurricular activities.

The remaining story of my family will be in chronological order. It begins with my memories of Seattle, Washington in 1967. Bobby was born in Seattle, and I began school there. We moved back to the San Francisco/Daly City area in January, 1968-1970. In 1970-71 we were in Hayward, California located across the San Francisco Bay. The last place of residence before we migrated to Houston (January 1973) was 551 Evergreen Avenue in Daly City, California, December 1972.

Seattle, Washington 1967-68

I started school in Seattle. We had a two story house, big living room, big kitchen and the bedrooms were upstairs. Memories include: walking to school in the snow, a Fourth of July celebration where Marcia, my oldest sister demanded we all dressed in red, white, and blue and sang “America the Beautiful” on the front steps of our home while Daddy popped and lit the fireworks. We had a swing set, and all the children in the neighborhood would come over to play. David gave me a Black eye. We were fighting when my parents were at the store and his head came up and hit my eye. We tried hard to come up with a story, but it did not work. We both received a few swings from the belt when Daddy found out we were fighting.

There were many trees around the house, including a pear tree. Often we picked pears and were grossed out when we found worms inside of them. Other memories include, picking raspberries and blueberries behind the house and bringing them home and Mom made pies. I remember itching like crazy when we would pick.

Daddy bought a new color television while we were still in Seattle. The delivery men brought it over and we all surrounded it with amazement! The console was equipped with a record player on one side and a radio on the other. And, did I say it was color? I was five while we were in Seattle and do not really remember them fighting until later when we moved back to San Francisco.

While we were in Seattle, Daddy had an alias; he was Joe Gomez. I did not understand why people were calling him a different name and dared not ask. I recently asked Mom about what type of trouble he was in back then, but she declined to answer

the question. Her declination is in the form of having amnesia. Maybe it is her way of coping; she does not (or will not) admit to remembering anything that we (the siblings) talk about. She will say something like, “What? I do not remember that;” “When? I think you are making that up;” or “You’re crazy.” What I do know is she wants to forget, so we only talk about the good times with her not to upset her.

Mom Leaves Daddy Summer of 1968

I had to call my sister, because for some reason I did not remember the details of why we left. Jan did not remember either, other than saying Mom was just tired of being with him. We arrived to the airport, and Daddy came with us and told us good-bye at the gate. Tears were dropping from his eyes, and Mom’s face was all red. He was really nice, and I knew we were leaving him. I was wearing my Easter dress (of course, Mom had us all in our Sunday best). It was White with a pink cummerbund around the waist. All six of us boarded the plane with Mom. She held Bobby (my baby brother) on her lap. I had to sit near the back of the plane, and I kept getting up because the plane kept rocking. I was scared and wanted to be with Mom, but a seat was not available near her, so the stewardess strapped me in by her. I looked out of the window and saw lightning in the clouds. It was an eerie experience for me. The pilot told us we would be landing in Houston. At the time, I just remembered the word “Houston” was foreign, and I had no idea where we were. I knew our destination was Louisiana. I was five years old and it was in the summer.

Sidebar: I called my sister Jan and asked her about this flight for lack of memory. She told me the turbulence we went through was so bad we had

to land in Dallas. From Dallas the airline put us on a Greyhound bus to Houston. Uncle Joseph, Mom's brother, arrived in Houston to pick us up from the Greyhound bus depot and brought us to Louisiana.

We arrived at Aunt Lois' house in Lake Charles, Louisiana. Believe it or not, Daddy was already in Louisiana waiting for us. I remember people laughing and saying "Clarence got here faster than the plane!" Mom, however, was not impressed and held firm. She had enough of the abuse, and she wanted it to stop.

She did not talk to Daddy and Daddy began *courting* her. He bought her flowers, a bracelet, a ring, and all of "Mom's people" were impressed and start telling her to give Daddy another chance. We stayed in Louisiana for a couple of weeks, I think. It was enough time for Daddy to work with someone to make some money in order to return to California. While we were at Aunt Lois' house, David, my brother, was cutting grass barefooted. Somehow, the blade under the motor caught his foot, and there was blood everywhere. Mom and Aunt Lois rushed him to emergency, and he left the hospital on crutches. When Daddy found out, he blamed Mom and convinced her that we needed him, and we all should return back to California. She, reluctantly, put the children back in the car and returned to California with him.

Hayward, California 1970-71

Hayward was much warmer than San Francisco; we actually had summertime there. David and I learned how to swim at Coronado High School. While in Hayward, we moved twice to a little white house and then the big kitchen house. When we first arrived, we lived in the little house. I call it the little house because Daddy hated it, and

he often said it was a match box. We were used to living in larger houses in San Francisco, and this was a small three bedroom standard home. It was on a street with lots of children, and we played kick ball every night in the summer.

The Little House-Hayward Fall 1970

This house was not good for the family. This was the house Marcia ran away from and Daddy's father died. And, he drove back to Louisiana by himself, so it seemed we were always unhappy there. I remember the lights being turned off, water being turned off, someone broke in and stole some things, and Daddy and Mom had several fights in this house. One night it turned fierce. I am sure they start arguing because of something Marcia did. Daddy came home drunk and started screaming at her.

She got tired of it and took her wedding ring set off (he just bought it for her because he pawned the original set and did not go back to retrieve it) and threw it across the room. Daddy reacted and picked the rings up off the floor and placed them on the table. He took one boot off and began to smash the rings with the heel of the boot. When he was finished, he called me over and handed me the rings. He told me to go and flush them down the toilet. I was scared and went to the bathroom. I held the rings in my hand but could not do what he told me to do. Mom started screaming and cursed him. In the background, Charlie Pride was playing "*Is Anyone Going to San Antone.*" I cried. He yelled again for me to drop them, and I did and ran to Mom. He got up and went to the bathroom and flushed the toilet. Mom cried and I cried.

This was the house where we took our last family photo. Marcia was released to come home from juvenile hall for running away, and it was Christmas time. Daddy

bought an expensive white flocked Christmas tree. We all still talk about that tree being the prettiest tree we ever had. All eight of us stood in front of the tree. I wrote a poem about it when I was taking a poetry class. Daddy was drinking that night, but he was not drunk when he took the picture. We were all dressed very nice because we were going to Marain's and Parain's house across the bay.

Marcia runs away – February 1971

Marcia rebelled and start running away from home at the age of 14. I hated Marcia for running away because Mom received beatings almost every night from Daddy the first week she was gone. I remember the police came to the house (which was unusual for us because police were not welcome in our home – Daddy stayed in too much trouble). She went to school one day and did not return. She packed a bag. She told Jan what she was going to do. Jan was scared, so she did not even tell Mom. I remember Mom crying all night for Marcia. When Daddy took the truck to go find her, Jan went in the room to tell Mom what happened. She told Mom Marcia took three changes of clothes and went to a friend's house.

Sidebar: The year was 1971, and we lived in a White neighborhood; however, everyone (White or Black) during this time period received physical punishment by the use of a belt or some type of strap, so it was not unusual. However, Marcia went on to tell about Mom being abused, so a different spin was placed on the dysfunction of the household.

Marcia was gone for three days before my parents heard from her. She was staying with a friend, and she and the friend ended up running away again. Marcia found

out Daddy knew where she was, so she and the girl she was staying with left again by jumping over a fence. I remember Daddy saying he found a piece of her nightgown on the fence. It apparently tore when she jumped it. Mom cried again.

Mom finally caught up with Marcia when the police picked them up and brought them to juvenile hall. Daddy had a restraining order against him and could not come around Marcia. So, all of us got in the car with Mom and went to see Marcia in juvenile hall. She seemed happy and had the nerve to laugh and talk with us. Yes, the nerve. I could not understand how she was happy when she made all of us so miserable. She knew Daddy was going to take this all out on Mom. He even started pushing Jan around because he was mad at Marcia. We left and Mom asked me on the way to the car if I was angry with Marcia. I asked why? She told me Marcia asked her why I was not speaking to her. I did not say anything to Mom about my feelings. I felt she had enough to deal with.

Sidebar: To this day, I do not share my feelings with my Mom. Every one of my brothers and sisters has issues, not that I do not, but I do not want Mom worried about me. When writing these words, I realized at the ripe old age of eight, I start protecting my mother by not allowing her to worry about me.

The Big Kitchen House Hayward, California Spring 1972

We moved into the big kitchen house shortly after; it was literally right around the corner – again fond memories and one horror story. One Saturday afternoon after a rainstorm, David and I ventured out to kill all the slugs on the ground. We retrieved a box of salt out of the pantry and proceeded down the street. While we exterminated the

slugs, we noticed red lobster looking things crawling by the ditch. David grabbed one of them and brought it home to show Mom.

Mom laughed and told us they were crawdads and gave us two big coffee cans and said to go get more. She instructed us to fill the coffee cans with crawdads. We complied and headed out. We returned with two big coffee cans full of crawdads. Mom had the water already boiling by the time we returned back home. She rinsed them off and dumped them in the boiling water. David and I looked at each other in amazement and asked Mom what was she doing? She smiled and said, "Just wait." In a few minutes, she pulled them out of the water and demonstrated how to eat crawfish. My first time! I do not know where my other brother and sisters were, but I enjoyed having the experience with just me, David and her. I love to tell the story that we brought pets home and Mom boiled them and ate them right in front of us! I received my first bike while we were in this house. Mom and Daddy had their worst fight in this house.

Daddy did major remodeling on this house when we arrived. I remember he remodeled the master bedroom with something called grass cloth wallpaper it was really popular at the time. He also painted and knocked down one of the walls to make the living room larger. One night Daddy came home highly irritated. He was drunk and started arguing with Mom. I cannot even remember what the argument was about, but it got physical, really physical. We witnessed Daddy hit Mom before but nothing to this magnitude. They went in the room to argue, and we heard Mom screaming.

We opened the door and Daddy had Mom on the floor, his cowboy boot was on her neck and she was having trouble breathing. Marcia and Jan started pushing Daddy

off Mom, and I grabbed his foot. He lost his balance and fell. When Mom got up, she went after him and began punching him in the back and face. Daddy returned with similar blows. Somehow, Mom ended up getting cut with an object. I am not sure if it was a knife; I remember it looking like some type of tool Daddy used to install the wallpaper. She was cut down her forearm. We all looked in shock, and Daddy immediately got a towel and wrapped it up to stop the bleeding. Daddy put all of us in the car, and we went to the emergency room at a nearby hospital.

When we arrived to the hospital, someone took me into a room and questioned me. They asked me what happened to my Mom, and I told them I did not know. I believe the only thing I admitted to them was they were arguing. I would not tell them Daddy did it. We left the hospital, and Mom had several stitches. I do not remember how many. The next day Daddy made dinner, bought flowers, and went to Levitz and “bought” an entire house of furniture. The furniture was delivered the following week.

San Francisco Area –Mom’s Reaction to Daddy in Jail 1972

This was her life. Three occasions I remember when he was “picked up” (that was our term for it). We were living on Evergreen Street in Daly City, California. Daddy was getting paid that day, and we were all excited, because we knew that meant we were going to McDonald’s for Big Macs and Fries. Mom did not cook because Daddy called and said he was paid. I answered the phone, and, when I heard Daddy’s voice, I could tell he was sober. I was excited for him to come home. It was a two story house; I heard a car pull up, and I jetted to the window to see if it was Daddy.

As I looked down, I saw Daddy and another car pull up right behind him. It blocked the driveway, and two men got out and both had guns drawn on Daddy. I screamed and ran back to tell Mom what happened. She did not seem surprised or anxious. She got up and walked to the window to observe. As we both looked out of the window, I realized they were police officers because they were now handcuffing him. Mom never went downstairs or attempted to find out what was wrong. She turned around and went to the kitchen and put some fish sticks and French fries in the oven, went to the living room, sat on the couch and continued to watch television.

Without saying a word, I joined her by snuggling up against her. Daddy called Mom the next morning. She called Parain, my Dad's brother, and they went to try to get him out of jail. He did not get out; he had to do nine months. As usual, she started working again. Marcia had not calmed down. With Daddy gone, she became even more delinquent. She began staying out late and not coming home. Mom said she dressed like a prostitute, and Mom could not stand it. She decided to send her to Los Angeles to live with her (my mother's) brother.

Jan became the lady of the house while Mom was at work. She is a year younger than Marcia. She cooked and cleaned for Mom and became a quasi matriarch for the family. I did not like Jan back then because she would always tell Mom when we did something wrong. She was the "goodie two shoes" in the family. Jan was not very smart (in comparison to Marcia), so she developed a complex of being dumb and not being able to make good grades. In reality, Jan is the most successful out of all six of us – she

is happily married to the same man of 30+ years, has two children and both are college graduates, she owns her home, has a good job, and has a real savings account.

Sidebar: Daddy's brother was Autwaine, (French for Anthony). We called him Parain (godfather in French). Daddy always talked about how Parain did not know the craft as well as he, and he did not. Daddy's work was clearly outstanding, and Parain did not hold a candle to it. Parain and Marain (his wife) moved to California soon after we arrived. Daddy was very close to his older brother, and Parain wanted to be with him. When we were growing up, they really were the only family we knew.

Daddy arrested again

I was in the third grade. The night before they argued about money and some woman that was calling the house. Daddy was promiscuous and often had affairs with other women. There was even one time when Daddy brought us to a woman's house with us in the car. The next day Daddy did not come home. Mom called Parain and asked if he had seen him. Parain had not seen him. Later the next morning, Daddy called that he was in jail. Mom immediately went into action. The first thing she always did was call Parain to try to make bail to get him out. But, since this was such a frequent occurrence, bail was not an option this time. I heard Mom saying something like, "He is going to have to do his time on this one." Mom left and went back to work. Daddy did not like Mom working, primarily because he was so jealous. When she worked, he often would go up to the job and nose around to see who she was working with. Anyway, Mom's jobs consisted of factory work, nursing homes, and cafeterias. She worked on

first shift or third shift, would always be home in the evening to cook dinner, feed us, bathe us, and put us to bed.

Actually, when Daddy went to jail, it was a relief. It is like we had a break from the madness. Mom took good care of us, but we could tell she was not happy without Daddy. She worked and we received government assistance. Yes, we had food stamps and a welfare check. Mom would have us stand in line when they were issuing out the government cheese. We laughed at the can goods that were silver and the only writing would be “green beans” or “peanut butter.” We thought we were too good to eat any of the stuff from the cans. Little did we know, Mom did prepared meals using the products. She got mad at me when she found I took five cans to school for the can drive at Thanksgiving. (I did not know any better, the teacher simply said to go into the pantry and pick out some can goods and bring them to school). Mom yelled at me and said, “How you bring that to school, all the people are going to know our business.” I was sad, because I did not like my Mom mad at me.

Mom played “bingo.” This was her extra money to buy us clothes and take us to the drive-in. One night she won, and one of her girlfriends told us she yelled out, “Bingo! Me and the kids can go see *Nigger Charlie* (popular movie in the 70’s starring Fred Williamson) tomorrow!” I say that story because here she is in the middle of a crisis, Daddy’s in jail, Marcia’s off the chain, working two jobs and scraping to get by. Yet, she finds joy in winning a few dollars in order to make her children happy. Life was pleasant without Daddy and Marcia. The winter of 1972 Daddy is out of jail and Marcia returned home.

Christmas Trip to Louisiana 1972

A Christmas trip was planned to go “back home” to Louisiana. The day before we left San Francisco, it snowed. It had not snowed in years. San Francisco was cold all the time, but it never snowed. Daddy brought us to a new store called The Gap to purchase some clothes for the trip. He decided to go there because he knew he had to write a “hot check,” and he knew he could get them to take it. Daddy bought each of us three new outfits for the trip to Louisiana. We left San Francisco, and I never returned. The road trip was actually fun. We were all together and seemed happy. When we crossed the Louisiana state line, it was late at night, and Daddy immediately found a radio station that played Zydeco music. He was very happy and excited, so was Mom. Daddy pulled over to call Aunt Olivia to tell her to get out of bed because we would be there in an hour.

We arrived at Aunt Olivia’s house in Lake Charles at midnight. She was up and the gumbo was warming on the stove. She had pies sitting on the table and kept pulling more and more food out for us to eat. Daddy was so happy. Mom kept telling her we were not hungry, but she would not relinquish. She prepared each of us a bowl of gumbo and required each of us sit down and eat, and we did. As soon as we were done eating, she lined all six of us up and we had to take a dose of “castor oil.” I did not know what it was, but David took his dose before me and nearly vomited. Aunt Olivia took a piece of potato pie and shoved it in his mouth, and Mom and Dad laughed hilariously. Daddy pulled the suitcases out, and we stayed the night.

The next day we traveled to my maternal grandmother's house, Momme. She lived only 15 miles away from the city of Mamou, Louisiana. To get to her house, we traveled down a dirt road. I always thought they named the town after her. It was country – there was an outhouse, cows, chickens, and no central heat, (we covered with quilts at night). We stayed for two weeks visiting a host of family and relatives. At the end of the trip, we were told we were not going back to California. Listening to an adult conversation, I heard Daddy was in trouble again. So, we were moving because had we returned the police were looking for him.

Daddy refused to stay in Louisiana. Mom had a sister, Grace, in Houston, and he was okay with moving to Houston. Marcia, David, Bobby, and I stayed with Aunt Grace while Mom, Daddy, Cindi, and Jan went back to California to retrieve our belongings. I was sad about not returning because I never told my friends good-bye. We just disappeared. Jan was able to go with Mom because she was a worker bee and would help mom better than Marcia. Marcia and Daddy did not get along, so it was better for her to stay. Also, they were concerned had Marcia went back to California, she would run away as soon as she had the chance. Cindi was able to go because they felt she was the spoiled baby girl and would give Aunt Grace trouble. So, Mom and Daddy rented a U-Haul, gave Aunt Grace her food stamps and money, and headed back to California.

We were at Aunt Grace's house for a few days, and it snowed. Yes, in Houston, 1973, it snowed for three days, and we thought this was great! Little did we know it was an anomaly. I missed Mom and realized I had never been away from her that long. They were gone about ten days, and when they came back, we settled in Houston.

Houston, Texas Our New Home 1973

We were in the Great State of Texas, Southern drawl and y'all instead of you guys was said. We started school late January of 1973. Mom and Daddy continued to argue, but the physical abuse slowed down until eventually it was non-existent. I think it had a lot to do with Mom's arrival back to Houston around her people, and Daddy was a little intimidated and knew she now had a place to go if he began hitting her again. Parain, Daddy's brother, eventually followed him back to Houston and rented a house right across the street from us. Life seemed to be better, and Daddy settled down and actually found a job at S&B Construction. He was a laborer and within months he was promoted to foreman. He was very proud of his new position and so was Mom. Since we all were in school now, Mom had a full-time job at the nearby nursing home. Yes, it seemed we were on our way to the American dream.

Marcia and Jan were now 16 and 15 respectively and both start working at local fast food restaurants. Daddy bought two brand new cars, a Chevrolet Vega for Marcia and a Ford Pinto for Jan. Mom was happy and life seemed to be good. Winter time came, and the rain started. Daddy began drinking again. One afternoon, Mom and Daddy received a call from the Madison High School. The Dean of Instruction explains to Mom Marcia fainted and was rushed to the hospital with severe stomach cramps. Jan came to pick us up from home, and we went to the hospital and met Mom and Dad. The doctor came out and gave two scenarios of what was wrong with her. One of the scenarios was she was pregnant. As soon as Daddy heard pregnant, he left the hospital; He did not even

wait for the final diagnosis. Mom was nervous and started to cry. Jan took us home, and, before we knew it, Mom and Marcia walked into the house.

Marcia is Pregnant at age 16

Daddy immediately started screaming, cursing, and slapped her a couple of times. He then yelled at us to go in the room and watch television. He told David to turn the television up as loud as it would go. The television was so loud; we could not even understand the words. So, we sat and waited for the yelling to stop. That was day one. Day two – Marcia stayed home from school and Mom and Daddy went to work. When Daddy got home, he was drunk and walked into the house.

As soon as he spotted Marcia, he started cursing her again. Marcia cursed back and threatened she would call the police if he touched her. He became outraged and pushed her out the front door. Mom interceded and tried to stop him, but she could not get in between them. Jan ran to help. Everyone (all six kids) was outside, and the neighbors were crowding. Daddy went to a tree and pulled a branch off and started to beat Marcia with the switch. Mom had enough, and, for the first time in her life, called the police on Daddy. Daddy left before they arrived, and, as he was leaving, Mom told him not to come back. Mom called her mother, Momee, and asked her if Marcia could go and stay with her in Louisiana.

Mom told Momee that she was afraid Daddy was going to kill Marcia. Aunt Lois, Mom's sister, and Momee came the on the third day to pick up Marcia. The car they were driving was a jalopy, and they could not stop it for fear the engine would not

start again. So, they waited outside until Marcia packed her things. Marcia got in the car, drove off, and we went inside. Daddy came back home that night, and it was over.

Louisiana stay

Marcia eventually ran away from Momee's house because she was too strict. She made her way back to Houston, and was actually living around the corner with some folks she hardly knew. After Marcia had the baby (May, 1974), we all loved her, and she became our new little sister. Daddy loved her too and allowed both of them to come home and stay with us.

Daddy and the Law

Daddy was always in and out of jail, so it is hard to remember the first time it happened. All I remember is getting up on Sunday morning and dressing nice, not to go to church, but to go and see Daddy in jail. Sometimes, we would just ride with Mom because we were too little to go in or only two people at a time would be permitted to visit. We (all six of us) would wait in the car for hours while Mom would go and see him. Marcia and Jan would babysit us in the car while Mom and his brother would visit. When I was allowed to visit, Daddy always looked well and was happy and remorseful. He wore all white and his hair would be cut. Yes, it was strange and uncomfortable. There was a glass between us and a hole in the window for a speaker. It was hard to hear because everyone seemed to be shouting. He talked mostly to Mom. He always slimmed down when he was locked up, and he always talked about religion and doing the right thing. He was an angel when he was in jail.

Mom's Interpretation of her Relationship with Daddy

Neither one of my parents quit on life. They always worked hard and the most important thing in their life was to take care of family. Mom never put herself first for anything. If we needed it, she did not “try” to get it – she got it. Even when making meals, she only fed herself a small portion in a bowl to make sure her family had enough to eat. Her weight remained an attractive 135 pounds.

Sidebar: Mom's Louisiana country mama did not like my Mom thin she said, “Theresa was going through trouble” Momee, my grandmother hated to see anyone thin. Her belief was a married woman should be fat and happy and if a wife was too thin, that meant she was going through trouble. Mom was thin, with six kids and Clarence for a husband.

Yes, she lived a troubled life; however, when I asked Mom about her life she chooses to remember the good times. She admits having it hard and shared with me not to ever go through what she went through. She told me she did not have a choice. She stated, “What was I going to do alone with six children in California without your Daddy?” I was confused at first and told her Daddy was not really the provider, she was. It seemed (to me) when Daddy was in jail, we actually seemed to be happier; she seemed to be happier.

She denied the statement and corrected me. She went on further to tell me Daddy was a provider, and, even though he did things unethically, he did what he was taught and what he knew to do to take care of his family. She reminded me the only time she really did work was when Daddy was in jail. When he was released, he would demand

her to quit and stay home. (He did not trust anyone to take care of his children, and he did not trust any man Mom worked with. He always accused her of looking at other men and vice versa). While we were in California, she did not hold a steady job; therefore, the mere thought of leaving Daddy while we were there was a pipe dream. And, the one time she did, he came after her, and she ended up right back where she left off.

Religion

The story goes on and on, memory after memory. However, something omitted from this chapter was our upbringing in the church. Mom and Daddy were raised in the Catholic Church, and likewise this is our faith. Daddy only ‘got religion’ when he went to jail. Mom always brought us to mass and was adamant we all received our sacraments of baptism, penance, Holy Communion, and confirmation. Growing up, we went to Catechism and were taught by nuns. Prayer happened every night before we went to bed. Mom carried a Rosary with her and I often would see her with it while relaxing.

On Sunday mornings, we would all get up and dress, but it was not for church, it was to visit Daddy in jail. So, we attended mass on Saturday evenings. My faith in God comes from Mom consistently repeating “Thank God” or “Thank you Lord” anytime something came her way. I know many people do this, but

My Brothers and Sisters and Our Lives Today

Mom boasts of 6 children; ages 55-45 (one college graduate), 13 grand children ages 37-14 (6 college graduates, thus far) and 5 great-grandchildren ages 19-5 (19-year old a sophomore at the University of Texas). We all live in the vicinity of Houston and understand our idiosyncrasies. First and foremost, I believe Mom and Daddy did a great

job raising us with the tools in their “toolkit.” To say we were dysfunctional is an understatement; however, we are okay today. Yes, some issues, but (some) generational curses ceased with us. I am proud to say the physical abuse my brothers witnessed against my mother did not carry into this generation. Both of my brothers work very hard and are good providers for their family, and there is no evidence or talk of spousal abuse. However, they both blame some of their shortcomings in their personality on Daddy and how he was not there for them. Alcoholism is known to pass from one generation to another. I, again, am proud to say not one of us (six children) have an issue with alcoholism. Neither is physically abusing our children present.

Unfortunately, we have resorted to other issues, such as emotional abuse, bulimia, hypochondria, and depression; some of the demons my brothers and sisters deal (t) with. In my opinion, four of us, David, Jan, Bobby, and I, overcompensate for our children. We consistently talk about what we did not have and sometimes provide for our children when they can do for themselves. I do worry about my oldest sister, Marcia (2 daughters) and my youngest sister, Cindi (3 daughters). Marcia and Cindi both receive disability checks and seem to be wayward at times. Mom steps in and has constant contact with both of my sisters. Sometimes they come around family gatherings, but most often not.

Marcia

Marcia was the oldest. She was born with blond hair and green eyes. Her skin was fair and the “old” people said she was a “fine” baby. She grew up being called the pretty and smart one. She loved to sing and perform for people. Mom says Marcia was

her first love. Marcia lived a hard life. Runaway at 14, pregnant at 16, and forever trying to find love. She has been divorced three times and has two children, and three grandchildren.

She is presently unemployed and receives a disability check for various ailments and health issues. Mom consistently checks on her and makes sure she has everything she needs.

Jan

Jan was the second oldest child and was always in the shadow on Marcia. Jan was darker in skin tone and her hair and eyes were not as pretty as Marcia's either. Marcia was considered the "smart" child; she was a performer and a little doll. Jan was the tattler, the "goody two shoes," the one we all hated as we grew up. If there was something to tell, she would tell it! However, she always took care of us and Mom could always depend on her. She began working at 16 years of age at Jack-in-the-Box. She drove a Ford Pinto Daddy bought for her, but she paid the car note. She grew up being told she was not as smart as Marcia and (in my opinion) listened to what people told her. She graduated in the summer of 1977. She went to the graduation ceremony in May with her boyfriend (now husband), and I tagged along. Since she failed a class, she was not really graduating, but back then they allowed everyone to participate in the commencement ceremony.

Thinking back now, it really was a shame that no one in the family thought it was important enough to go and since Marcia got pregnant and dropped out of school, Jan was the first child in the family to graduate from high school. We left graduation and

went to Jack-in- the-Box to eat. That was it. Jan did go to summer school to retrieve the credit, and she obtained her high school diploma. She is married to Carrie (35 years) and has proven to be the most successful and stable child of all six of us. Jan has two children, both college graduates and one grandchild.

David

David is the third oldest and the first boy. Since he had open heart surgery at a young age, he was very feeble much of his life. He always tried to prove himself in sports and with the ladies. He was cute, I guess for my brother, but he always seemed to me to try too hard to obtain things that came easy for other boys his age. He worked hard (of course). His first job was at a supermarket as a sacker, and he eventually moved to cashier, stock clerk, and then produce manager. He graduated from high school and decided not to go to commencement. He said it was boring, and he did not care about the ceremony. We did not have a party or dinner for his graduation either. On his nineteenth birthday, he moved into his own apartment. As we grew up, Daddy's abuse moved from Mom to us. He always tried to control us, and he did not like anyone we brought home and introduced as a boyfriend or girlfriend. David had a good job with benefits so elected to leave. Daddy was not happy but realized he could not do anything about his departure.

David is married and has one son. He has had many good paying jobs, but seems to job hop continuously looking for a managerial spot. But, at the age of 52 without a degree, he is having difficulty. David worked hard all of his life; however, church became more important than work.

Shirley

David and I are three years apart. While we were growing up, we consistently fought and argued. However, when I was a sophomore in high school, he was a senior with a car. I learned very quickly getting along with him meant I would be able to go places and do things. So, we both worked on being compatible. I began working at the same grocery store with him. We made very good money for our ages, and Mom was proud.

Cindi

Cindi is two years younger than me. When we were little, Cindi, like Marcia, was always the star of the show when it came to beauty. She had hazel eyes, fair skin, and long brown braids. There was a time when we were in church and a Hispanic lady asked my mother to touch her. The lady caressed Cindi's face and sighed, "What a beautiful child." Yes, I remember vividly, I wanted the same attention and wondered why she did not think I was just as pretty as Cindi. However, Cindi now struggles with manic depression, bulimia, and very seldom comes around the family for anything. Mom continues to communicate with her and provides her everything she needs for her and her three girls (yes, a little sibling rivalry and slight hint of jealousy).

Cindi began working at age 15 and dropped out of school. Money became more important, and she just decided not to do school anymore. At one time, she had three jobs, Dairy Queen, a grocery store, and a dance studio. She later obtained her GED. Because of her mental issues, she has not worked in 23 years. She receives disability and writes occasionally. Cindi has three girls, has been married twice, no grandchildren.

Bobby

Bobby is the baby. Lighthearted, kind and a provider like Daddy. He started working at age 13. Yes, 13. He lied about his age on the application and the grocery manager hired him as a sacker. They really did like him, and Mom was very proud he had a job. School was not important to Bobby or Cindi, just working. Bobby followed Cindi and decided to get another job while he was in high school. He worked both jobs while he was in the 10th grade. He dropped out from high school because of the jobs. He was late getting to school one morning because he over slept. He arrived to his geometry class, and the teacher looked at him and said, “Why do you even bother coming?” Bobby looked at him and said, “You know, I do not know” and walked out never to return. He later obtained his GED.

Bobby worked odd jobs and decided to go to truck driving school. Today he is a successful truck driver, has benefits, and makes a respectable salary. Success. Bobby met Debra, age 36, and married her when he was 19. He has three children and one grandchild.

Out of the six children, Jan and I are the only two who have accepted our past as being “our past.” It is done. Move on. Our other brothers and sisters have decided to blame our upbringing on different issues they have in life today. They linger and talk about the stories, but their stories are their stories, and as much as I do not agree in wallowing, I respect their opinion and must understand “their” story. However, Jan and I focus on the positives we received. I believe all of my experiences made me who I am today. Daddy taught us to live life. Yes, at times, he was held down, but he always

fought to get back up. Jan and I are the two children who will talk about “big cars and big houses” so what? Anyone can have a car and anyone can purchase a big house, because Daddy always did. But, is there love in the house? Is there understanding? And, is the house a home? That is what is important.

Summary -An African American Family with Both Parents

While speaking with Dr. Webb-Hasan, my committee chair, about this chapter, she probed my intellect to dig deeper into my psyche about what all this means. Yes, I am Black; yes, I was raised in a household of dysfunction and confusion. How was it different? We were an African American family with both parents. Mom and Daddy loved each other, and they made a life together.

What did I get from my Dad? Persistence, regardless how many times he was sent to jail, he always went right back to a job and continued life as if there were no break in time. He continued to live life to the fullest and dared anyone to get in his way. I also learned how I wanted to live my home life. I adopted Daddy’s love for cooking and making people feel at home. On any given Sunday, he would wake up and begin cooking stew, gumbo, or outside grilling meat. He made his own barbeque sauce and loved to smother rabbit! One afternoon as he was driving home from work, a snapper turtle crossed his path on the road. Well, my Daddy pulled the truck over, captured the turtle, and brought him home. The next morning, he prepared the turtle for cooking and cooked him outside in a big black pot. He then called friends and family, “To come eat, the foods ready.” He loved to entertain and loved music and loved people.

What did I get from Mom? Resilience. I do not know how she did it. Mom had Bobby in 1967 which meant she was 29 years old with six children, an abusive/alcoholic husband, and 2561 miles away from her family.

Resilience is the capacity to bounce back from misfortune, disruptive change, and failure. Being resilient is driven by our intrinsic qualities, attitudes, and behaviors. Everyone experiences disappointments and setbacks in life. When these occur, the resilience factor is what gets us back in the game and keeps us pursuing our goals instead of becoming discouraged and giving up (Shambaugh, 2010).

Mom had faith in her religion and had faith in God. She believed in prayer and would often say the Rosary when she needed help. She was silent in her struggle and prayer and did not complain out loud. What would upset her is when she could not provide her children with the things we wanted. Our needs were always addressed, but she wanted more for us. Her spirit was one of making things happen. Daddy persevered and Mom was the glue who kept us all together.

Daddy Dies

Daddy was placed in a nursing home in 2004. As he aged, he developed dementia. Prior to him being placed in a nursing home, all of my brothers and sisters allowed him to stay with them for periods of time, but found him to be too difficult to handle. He continued to drink and would often leave in the middle of the night. I was the only child Daddy did not stay with during this time. I would not allow him to drink in my home around my children. Alcohol was permitted in my home, Daddy just could not

indulge. I did not want my children's memory of their grandfather to be a drunk. During this time period, Jan was Daddy's major caregiver and summoned all of us together to make a decision about Daddy. He had a full medical evaluation and this is when we found out he was bipolar. The doctor also told us he was in the first stage of Alzheimer's. We decided to put Daddy in the nursing home, and I hated the thought. Mom worked as a nurse's aide in a nursing home most of her life and this is how she took care of us when Daddy was in jail. What was ironic was when Daddy got drunk he constantly mocked her working there and always told her, "That's where you are going to end up, in a nursing home."

I visited Daddy twice in the nursing home. The first time, I went with Jan and Daddy did not remember who I was. I had lost a great deal of weight and he kept pointing to the picture on the wall of me. He told me, "That's Shirley, you're not Shirley" tears dropped. The smell of the place was awful. I hated him being there but knew I could not take care of him. I left and went back about a year later. It was his birthday, October 12th. Daddy was in a bed in the hall. I saw a body in the bed but did not realize it was him until the nurse told me it was.

My Daddy was lying in the bed, all of 90 pounds from his original 225 pound frame. He was shaking and I took his hand. He had a helmet on his head for protection. He could not understand me and the nurse asked if we were Hispanic, and I said no. She stated that he was speaking in a different language, and she thought it was Spanish. I said no, it was probably French. Wow. After all that hell raising, this is how it ends? I stayed about ten minutes and simply could not take it anymore. I exited the building and

began to cry. I cried so hard, I pulled over and called one of my girlfriends. I did not return to the nursing home again until the day he died.

It was Saturday, September 27, 2008, and I was at my son's Drew's game. It was my turn to work the concession stand. I receive a call from Jan that Daddy was not doing well, and the doctor said to call the family because he was dying. I rushed to the nursing home, but received the call from my niece on the way there that Daddy died. I pulled the car over and cried. I did not regret not being there. My tears were for him; he had to die there.

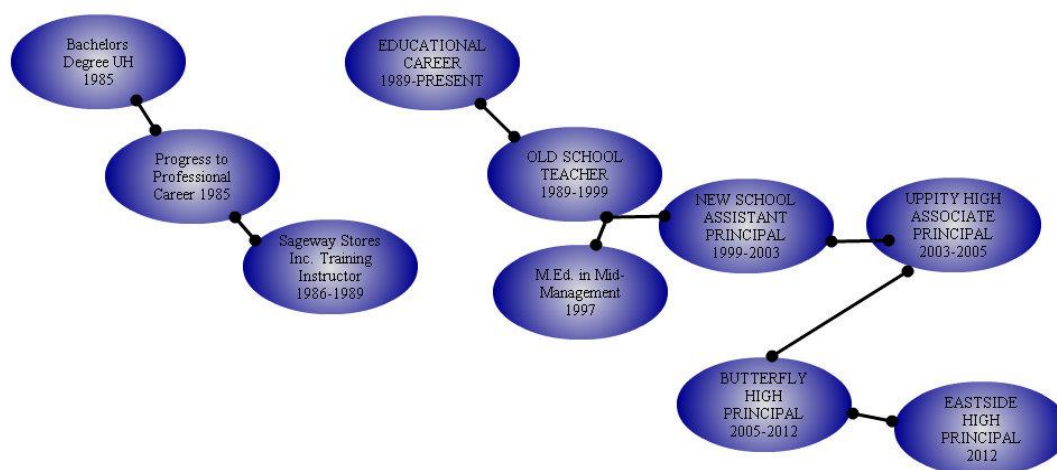
I arrived at the nursing home, and Daddy was still in the bed. Everyone had arrived except Cindi, and she was on her way. Funny, this was the first time in years all six children were in the same room with Mom and Daddy. We reminisced and tears dropped. No one really broke down; it was all surreal, however, peaceful. I approached the bed and said, "This is how it ends, all you went through in your life, all the hell you raised, and this is it?" All my brothers and sisters chimed in and we gave my father credit for being who he was. Our Daddy.

CHAPTER V

MY PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

To study women's learning and development, adult educators must incorporate women's career development for a more comprehensive understanding of women's lives (Alfred, 2001).

Figure 2. Concept Map Career Progression



Safeway Stores first Professional Position, 1985

I always wanted to teach school because it was a place where I felt safe. Of course, the salary was not appealing, so I decided to stay in industry. When I received my Bachelor's degree, I was employed with Safeway Stores, Inc. I had been a booth teller for a number of years and was earning a better salary at Safeway than if I started teaching. So, I decided to learn and excel in the grocery industry, be patient and wait for the opportunity for advancement. Promotion was granted expeditiously; however, through the process of promotion, I had my first experience with "it is not what you

know, it is who you know” reality of human resources. It was a culture shock and an emotional experience.

All the years I was in school, I was always told by teachers to do my best and the rewards would come and they always did, until Safeway upper level positions. A position was open for a training instructor for the Houston area. Requirements for the position were a bachelor’s degree in business, along with six years experience in the store as a checker and booth teller. I was confident the job was mine; unfortunately that did not happen. The person the human resource manager selected for the position was a young White female, graduate of a local university. She never worked a day in her life. She and the human resource manager had a special bond; both of his children were graduates of the same university. I was taken aback for a week or so, but continued to look for opportunities for advancement.

Safeway Training Instructor

I kept working to improve my skills and six months later, she resigned from the position and I was hired to replace her as a training instructor. I received a raise in salary and waited for the opportunity to move into upper level management in human resources. However, something happened to me every August when school started. I felt in my heart I wanted to be in the classroom teaching children. My undergraduate degree was business education; however, when I graduated from the university with my bachelors I elected not to student teach because of my work schedule at the time.

I petitioned with the university to complete my student teaching and it was approved. I was working evenings and nights, so the timing was perfect, or so I assumed.

I obtained permission from Mr. Peabody, my White male supervisor who was the district manager, to attend classes because there were times I would have to work during the day, i.e. meetings, store openings, etc. Mr. Peabody approved and congratulated me on “going back to school.” I did not understand, so I shared with him I did have a bachelor’s degree (from an accredited university), and I was merely returning to obtain a teaching certificate. He appeared bewildered and stated that he was not aware I had a bachelor’s degree. Student teaching and working nights was a chore, but it worked itself out until one day when my schedules clashed.

Work, School, and Conflict, Spring 1989

One Thursday morning, I was rescheduled for a classroom observation by my college supervisor to exit the program. She was actually supposed to come the day before, but had an emergency, so she rescheduled for Thursday. The day she rescheduled was the same morning of our monthly staff meeting at work. I attempted to calendar another day for my college supervisor to observe. I called her and explained my situation. She was not impressed nor did she empathize with my predicament. She told me and I quote, “If you care to exit this program, you will be at Merry High School in the morning.” I complied and kept quiet. I phoned Mr. Peabody, but was unable to speak with him personally. I left several messages with his secretary.

That evening when I arrived at work, I had a message from Mr. Peabody to call him immediately. I did. He asked me why I was not at the meeting. I explained why and further explained I left several messages. He yelled over the phone, “When I gave you permission to go to school, it was NOT to interfere with your job!” He went on a

rampage about “things” he heard about me not being at work and not keeping up with the job. *Again, to myself, “What? That’s not true!”*

I calmly explained to him that I personally clocked in and out daily as a precaution (I was a salaried employee, so this was not necessary, however, another African American female in the position suggested I cover myself, so I listened and did what she told me to do). I also told him I had a daily log of my activities signed by the night manager. After my explanation, he calmed down; however, he continued to chastise me over the phone and then he stopped talking. I asked him, in a very contemptuous voice, if he was through. He just hung up. Yes, this White man just hung up in my face.

Appalled is an understatement. I was hurt, embarrassed, crumbled, ashamed, and humiliated. That particular event happened nearly 24 years ago, and I remember it like it was yesterday. Anger set in the next day. I was determined not to continue to work for him or the company. The phrase, *“when I gave you permission to go back to school”* rang in my ears for days. The nerve of him, who did he think he was? When he gave me permission? Racism?

This was a pivotal point in my life, the fork in the road. The fighter in me emerged. I thought to myself, “I can show you, better than I can tell you!” I put all effort into leaving the company in April of 1989. My student teaching assignment was complete and I already passed the ExCet test required for teacher certification in the state of Texas. I prepared my resume, applied for teaching positions, and purchased the perfect black suit for my interview for a new job . . . wherever it would be.

Interview for Teacher

The first interview was at the university recruiting center. Representatives were there from all of the surrounding school districts in Houston. The Green Valley Independent School District was interviewing. I signed up to interview and was elated there were openings for business teachers. I waited and Mr. Cool (White male human resource representative) came out and called my name. He was immediately impressed because I was the only applicant dressed in a suit. The university advisors told all of us to wear our Sunday best, so there were applicants wearing church dresses with sandals which (in my opinion) was not professional attire. He asked me what I did for a living and I told him.

He immediately told me there were two openings one at Old School High School and one at New School High School. I gasped in excitement and told him I exercised at Old School every night and I would love to interview for the position. He smiled and smoothly said well NSHS is a “new” school and you might be happier there. My smile faded as another representative from GVISD approached me, she was African American. She heard Mr. Cool ask me about the other school and she stated, “Yes, NSHS is new but we would love to send you to OSHS, it sounds like you are interested is that correct?” I replied, “Yes, very interested!” This conversation all happened before I walked into the office to interview.

When I completed the interview with Mr. Cool, he shook my hand and told me to go charm Mr. Mean the principal at OSHS. He also complimented my attire and told me “you know how to dress for an interview!” As I exited, the African American female

signaled for me. I approached her and she hugged me, I was a little uncomfortable as she whispered in my ear, “Yeah he was trying to get you over to the White school, but we need you with us!” She let me go and continued to share, “They do this all the time, take the best qualified Black candidates and send them over to the White schools, and leave us with inexperience, unqualified folks!” My thoughts? “Okay.... What did I step into here?” I just left industry with an irrational high-tempered man and walked into a “race war,” not sure if I am going to like this!”

Old School High School as Business Teacher, fall 1989

I was offered the position to be a business teacher at Old School High School in the fall of 1989. I loved every aspect of teaching and thought it was hilarious when teachers complained in the faculty lounge about working long hours. I was used to working anywhere from 12 to 14 hours a day 5 to 6 days a week which always included weekends. So, the teaching schedule and work hours was a breath of fresh air in my opinion. A lunch break AND a conference period AND one could really leave at 3:00 p.m., and, if work was not complete, it could be brought home to finish or just could be finished the next day. Yes, teaching was a great job!

Teacher First Year

My first year as a teacher was not necessarily memorable only for the two life long friends that became my sisters: Joan Landon and Sharon Green. I first met Sharon on our first day at OSHS. She was a 13-year veteran and came from an inner city school district in Houston. I was from the business world, so my first day I was dressed in a business suit complete with stockings and high heel closed toe shoes. The suit was a

little tight because I was pregnant with my first child, Chelsea. As we assembled in a classroom, the associate principal of OSHS called Sharon Green and she pranced up to the front.

Sharon Green

Sharon pranced to the front of the room wearing a fantailed, tight (on purpose) dress with high heeled sandals. It immediately caught my eye because she was very fashionable, but I thought to myself, why would she wear that to school? Somehow, we ended up sitting together and went to lunch later that day. Sharon took me under her wing and taught me the ropes. She supplied my brain with thirteen years of what it was like to be a teacher. I listened to her stories and formulated an action plan for the first week of school.

Sharon became my big sister at work, and I mocked and imitated everything she did. I liked her style of working and building relationships with students and adopted and adapted it to fit my personality. Sharon was right next door to me, she was the business co-op teacher, and I taught typewriting. I was the rookie on the block and she never let me forget it. My first year of teaching was successful because of the support and guidance I received from Sharon, my girlfriend, the educator.

Joan Landon

I met Joan about a week later in a business department meeting.

Sidebar: Our business department leader was a White female and was appointed to the position during the summer before school started. The former department leader elected to leave and became the business

department leader at New School HS. Joan applied for the position at OSHS, but there was “talk” that she and Mr. Mean, OSHS principal, had a huge verbal altercation and he did not like her; therefore, she did not get the job and she received an undesirable schedule which consisted of floating (classrooms) and four preparations.

I walked into the department meeting, and I see five women seated in a group at the front of the room and another woman sat in the back. The woman sitting in the back was Joan. Her head was down and she appeared to be working. Denise, the department leader, started the meeting. Everyone was introduced because three of us were new to the campus. When Joan was introduced, she did not acknowledge that anyone was talking to her. I could not believe how unprofessional she was. When the meeting was over, I asked the department leader what was wrong with her. She explained Joan was sour about not getting the lead position, and she told me not to worry about her.

Joan did have some issues. She was the classic “*angry Black woman*.” She had been shunned from administration. Joan’s dress, demeanor, mannerism, attitude, personality, were unprofessional. Her disposition was negative and she had an aura that was undesirable and I did not want to be around her. When I found out she would be floating in my room, I was intimidated and did not know what to expect.

As time passed, I found Joan to be nothing like she portrayed. I observed her and Sharon daily. I studied how they interacted with children and modeled what they did. As Sharon and I grew together we adopted Joan and brought her into “our” group. We got her out of her “Hirachi” yes hirachi sandals, got her some new clothes, encouraged her to

get her hair done and befriended her. Joan and I had a common interest and that was walking the track. We began walking everyday and had many conversations about family, children, and education.

I credit my early teaching experience to these two ladies. They often joke about me being a little girl when I arrived at Old School HS. They instilled in me my African American culture, values, pride, and ownership for the education of our children. They are both retired teachers today. During their teaching days, they were full of life and were passionate about educating African American children. They were “worker bee” teachers, so I became a worker bee teacher just like them. These two relationships were monumental in my life. They taught me to be an African American female educator. I learned “to be” Black and that “being” a Black woman is exceptional and powerful. This experience led me to want to work with students on a different level.

During my tenure at OSHS, I served in many capacities; one was cheerleader coach. My many visits to the principal’s office as a cheer coach inspired me to return to school and obtain my Master’s of Education and Mid-Management Certification. During my last year at OSHS, I received the honor of Teacher of the Year and was a finalist for the Secondary Teacher of the Year for the Green Valley ISD. I received a great deal of exposure, and I credit my being hired as an assistant principal because of the achievement.

Assistant Principal New School High School, 1999-2003

I speak of NSHS in Chapter 1. The principal was very liberal in hiring practices, and he provided me the opportunity to excel and be an assistant principal. The Green

Valley ISD is segregated by demographics. Socio-economics and politics played an important role in deciding the fate of what schools were built, what schools acquired services, and what school board officials were elected. NSHS was the most diverse school in not only, the district but also, the greater Houston area. It was located on the West side of the district which meant (at the time) the White side. The history was we (African American administrators in GVISD) were not hired as administrators for schools on the Westside because of the majority White population.

Dr. Billman was the principal, White male who hired his administrative team to represent the school demographics. NSHS really was a pleasant place to work. Everyone worked well together there never seemed to be urgency or a purpose to what we did every day. We went through the day as “islands.” I never felt we were a “team.” Instruction happened, but if it did not, conversations were not held and to me that meant it was not important. This was 1999 and TAAS was the state accountability test, which meant the only students accountable for state ratings were 10th graders.

In my opinion, we were not trying to obtain an Exemplary rating with the district or the state because we were considered an “at-risk” high school. No one (at that time) expected or required us to do better. As long as we met the District norm, we were considered to be fine. NCLB was the legislation that prompted building administrators to monitor instruction more closely in order to meet accountability standards for the state, i.e., to make a difference. Suddenly, the state was looking at demographics. We “disaggregated” data and talked about why African American, Hispanic, and Economically Disadvantaged youth were not achieving at the same rate as White and

Asian students. We started talking more about the achievement gap. People began to understand what the achievement gap referred to; however, doing something about it was another story.

Closing the Gap

As campus administrators, we were told how to “close” the gap by learning the “tricks of the trade.” We learned very quickly about the bubble students which were literally the students, who were right on the edge of passing or failing, i.e. “right on the bubble.” Suggestions were made to focus on this group of students and we were advised not worry about the ones who totally bombed the test. If we focused on the children that just needed a little help, they would give us, the school, and our rating bigger returns. Basically, we would get more “bang for our buck!” The students, who failed every standardized test prior to the tenth grade, were not considered to be worth the time nor the investment. Those students would be too hard to work with and results would not be immediate and we needed results immediately. Students started school in August. In September we disaggregated the data and identified the bubble students. We placed the students in tutorials in October and provided additional support to them for the five months leading up to the test.

Another trick of the trade was “teach the test.” Our plan was to find the math or English teacher whose class did the best the previous year and have the same teacher tutor and conduct pullouts with the bubble students. During administrative meetings, behind the scenes at NSHS, we planned how to work with these students. I am sure it was a district norm being that the White female, Evilena, that was leading the district’s

curriculum department based her success of “paying attention to the bubble children” which in turn brought her previous school to exemplary in one year (the year prior to my being hired at NSHS).

Uppity High School as Associate Principal?

The problem? Evilena’s school (Uppity High School) was an affluent school and not at-risk. Demographics were 57% White, 37% Black, 11% Hispanic and other. One year the Hispanic sub population counted and the school cratered in ratings. Uppity High fell from being Recognized to Unacceptable. Green Valley ISD, board members and the Uppity High School community were devastated. This school was actually my entire reason for writing this dissertation. I arrived at Uppity High in the summer of 2003. It was my second administrative assignment, a promotion from assistant principal to associate principal. The journey to this school was paved with many barriers.

Approximately four months before I was hired, I received a call from the building principal, “Biggy.” Biggy was a White female, and she told me she needed a strong African American presence on the administrative team. She had observed me in several different meetings and told me she thought I was smart. The school, as I said, was affluent and teachers and administrators were having problems with discipline, primarily African American males. In the community, there were horror stories of African American children not being serviced and rumors of discrimination.

I was excited and flattered that I actually got a call before the position was posted. Of course, there was always talk that positions were filled before they were posted, but this was the first time it happened to me. She told me not to tell anyone she

was talking to me, but she wanted me to know that she was very interested in having me to join her team. I applied and rumors started.

The Drama Begins – A Black Associate at Uppity?

This school's leadership had been very elitist and majority White prior to my arrival. The campus did have African Americans administrators from time to time but none of them had strong personalities and they went along with status quo. They remained quiet and did little to make changes in how the school operated. By this time, I was known in the district for being a strong Black administrator, hence the phone call. Gossip began amongst the community, and White staff members "heard about my reputation" and decided they did not want "Shirley Rose" at Uppity High School.

Previous Uppity High Principal Doesn't Want Ms. Rose

The issue? Evilena (principal of Uppity HS two years prior to my arrival) heard about Shirley Rose applying for the associate principal at Uppity High and did not want me. Evilena wanted someone else, so she politely shared information with anyone who would listen. She said things like I did not complete tasks that were assigned to me, such as a Department Leader Handbook that was a TAMU class project for Dr. Doright for my internship with her. I was working on my internship for superintendency with Dr. Doright of GVISD. I chose Dr. Doright because she was the Assistant Superintendent of Academics and Curriculum in GVISD. I liked her and respected her and she assigned me to work with Evilena. I knew I needed to learn more about curriculum, and Evilena was well respected by everyone in the district including me.

The project was finished, but I had not submitted it to Dr. Doright. I had one more meeting with Dr. Doright to sign off on my internship and to present my project. I remember feeling nervous and anxious that I had not done something right. I then emailed Dr. Doright and asked to meet with her. We met the next day.

It was the same day I was to interview for associate principal at Uppity High. When I woke that morning, I felt awful. I knew the “enemy” did not want me to succeed.

Sidebar: All women have intuition, and my intuition was the Lord talking to me on that day. Please forgive my frame of reference when I speak of the “enemy” for I do not know how to talk about this particular situation without referencing and giving grace to God. On that day, He literally suited me with His armor and He brought me through as a devoted soldier to His cause. I was told to be obedient. He carried me and covered me through that day, and, to this day, I continue to listen to His commands.

Too many things were surrounding this job, and I really thought it would be better for me to remain at NSHS. I remember pinning a religious medal inside my lapel for protection. I prayed all morning for the Lord to cover me and guide me through the day. My first stop was the administration building for my meeting with my mentor, Dr. Doright, for internship. I walked in with my finished product (the department leader handbook) neatly in my brief case. I exchanged pleasantries with Dr. Doright and she immediately informed me that she was waiting on Evilena to join us. Evilena? I did not get the memo. I thought, “Oh my, this is not going to be good”

Sidebar: All characters involved are White and in my opinion have an issue with smart African Americans (female or male). Okay, little did I know that Evilena was best friends with Peppermint Patty, a department head at NSHS. Peppermint Patty was on my team of department leaders that I interviewed and met with to develop the Department Leader Handbook. This is the product that I presented on that day. When Peppermint Patty found out that Biggy, the present principal at Uppity, wanted me as associate she was not happy either. Peppermint Patty, and Evilena wanted someone else, someone not African American. I noticed Peppermint Patty's disposition with me changed immediately; she became difficult to deal with, sarcastic, and criticized work we previously agreed upon. She even insinuated that all we did was copy the faculty handbook and renamed it Department Leader Manual. I met with four department leaders in the District for a period of five months. It was the first week of May and it was time for me to be evaluated by Dr. Doright, my project needed to be complete. I could not understand why Peppermint Patty waited until the last meeting to complain. Well, correction, I do understand why she did it. Just another bump in the road.

Meeting continues with Evilena

I sat down and Evilena joined us. She had a superior smug grin and walked in with much attitude. The three of us sat down, and Dr. Doright started. She looked me straight in the eye and asked me for my journal and project. She thumbed through the

journal and had a look of disgust. (I am like what in the world?) My eyes opened and my body language was exceptionally loud; however, I did not utter a word. I repositioned myself in my chair and managed to keep my composure. I touched the religious medal under my lapel. I again, asked the Lord to cover me. I silently repeated over and over, “*No weapon formed against me. Protect me Lord. For I fear evil. Protect me.*” Dr. Doright looked me straight in the eye and told me she was disappointed in my work. She went on to state how she felt I did not take the assignment seriously, and the project was not acceptable.

Sidebar: Abduction moment again ... What? Is she kidding me? Me, Shirley Rose, not doing a project correctly? But, something with my name on it unacceptable? I fought from crying. I was like, no, you will not cry, Shirley. Do not allow these two White girls to even think they disturbed you. Keep your composure; remember whose child you are. You are a child of God and this is meant only to weaken you. You are strong...hold on...stay focused...do this...”

Putting me in my Place

I sat and allowed Dr. Doright to chastise me while Evilena looked on with pleasure. I said nothing until I was asked. Dr. Doright finally blurted, “What do you have to say for yourself?” I took a deep breath, and my statement went something like this: “Dr. Doright and Evilena, I apologize for not meeting the expectation that was set. I sit before you thoroughly embarrassed and wanting to redeem myself. I have no excuse. I am sorry for disappointing you and not completing this task according to your

recommendations and expectations. Can we start first with my journal?" Dr. Doright raised her eyebrow. I continued, "Please tell me what displeased you, or what did not meet your expectation." Dr. Doright was taken aback. She fidgeted in her seat and said, "Well the journal is fine; I have a problem with the Department Leader handbook." (Peppermint Patty, Evilena's friend had the same issue).

I quietly shook my head in agreement and said, "I would like the opportunity to redo. When I take on a project, my pride goes into my work. I know I was doing this for a grade and for a class at Texas A & M; however, I did want to add something of quality to the district. I do have an evaluation for you to complete for my professor. I can explain to him that the project did not meet the criteria specified, and I would continue to work on it until it meets your satisfaction." You could have bought her for a dollar! I switched the script on these two ladies faster than you could say 'round em up'. I turned to Evilena and simply asked her for suggestions and ideas on how to make the project better. She replied, "Yes I do. I need you to get with ... and do...and.... And...." I wrote down all of her suggestions and then asked when I could meet with her again to set some deadlines. She told me the following week. She obstinately walked out of the room.

Dr. Doright changes tone as Evilena exits meeting

Dr. Doright turned to me and grabbed my hands and smiled with pity, she said, "I am so sorry, Shirley." She changed from Dr. Mad to Dr. Glad. She looked at me apologetically and softened up her tone. I was like, oh my God, this was about Evilena not about her. We discussed the calendar, timeline and our next meeting.

Sidebar: The following week we met in my office at NSHS and my supervising professor, Dr. Smith, from TAMU was present. It was time for the evaluation. Before she arrived, I explained to Dr. Smith the situation and the political situation in which I found myself involved. I could tell by his face he understood, and I felt better. When Dr. Doright walked into my office, I updated her on my progress and let her know that I spoke with Dr. Smith about the project not being done to the district's satisfaction and expectations. Dr. Doright handed me a sealed envelope to hand to Dr. Smith. She had a crooked smile. It said to me, "Yeah, I got you." I could tell by Dr. Smith's look he understood what I shared with him prior to her entering my office. She walked off, and he remained. He said, "You did a great job!" holding up the envelope. "Do not worry about this." So, I dismissed the thought from my mind.

Finally the Interview for Associate Principal at Uppity HS

Later the same day, I had my interview with Dr. Sam in Human Resources for the associate principal at Uppity High School. When I left the meeting with Evilena and Dr. Doright, I was whipped. Literally, I felt beat up, defeated, and I cried all the way back to my campus. I confided in Dr. Billman, my supervisor at NSHS and the principal. I shared all what happened, and, for the first time, he saw my eyes well up with tears. I still was determined not to drop one (tear) in front of anyone. He was very supportive, and he tried to comfort me. He assured me this situation was political and then started

pulling resources (books, pamphlets) to help me complete project. He even gave me the rest of the afternoon off, so I could continue work on the manual.

Sidebar/Analysis: As I reflect back on the above experience, it was heaven sent. It taught me humility and taught me how to keep my composure. I often share with my students, my children, and my mentees, “You have no control over what comes your way, but you CAN control how you react to it.” There were many situations after this event that had I not kept my composure, and, had I not been humble, could have cost me professionally.

Because of the pressure I was under, I totally “bombed” the interview that day, but I did get the job. How do I know I bombed? Biggy called the next day and said, “Congratulations, Shirley. You are the new associate principal at Uppity High School!” My heart sank.

Sidebar: After everything I had gone through to obtain this job and this job was not just any job. This was the Associate Principal at a White campus in Green Valley ISD. I did it. I accomplished something no other African American in GVISD ever accomplished. I showed them (the little girl in me was obvious in my thinking) I could be just like the White administrators, and they trusted me. However, I did not feel it was a victory. The sophisticated sister in me worried if I was being set up for failure.

I replied, “Thanks.” She said, “You don’t sound too happy.” I said very carefully, “I am Biggy, and thank you for believing in me. You won’t be disappointed

you gave me a chance.” She continued to try to get me to talk, and said “What was wrong with you in the interview? You looked like a whipped puppy! Where was your confidence?” I was shocked she went there because at the time I really did not know her. I briefly shared my conversation with Dr. Doright and Evilena which occurred the morning of the interview, and she understood (or thought she said).

Home Life during the Transition

My personal life: I was married in 1986 to Byron. We were high school sweet hearts and dated for five years before we married. We met at Safeway. He was a produce clerk, age 17, and I was a checker, age 16. We began dating on February 18th, my eighteenth birthday. We were married for 22 years and divorced. We have two beautiful children, Chelsea 22 and Andrew 14. Byron was a high school graduate and never had any desire or interest in going to college. My teachers encouraged me to go to college, so I did. Byron was always comfortable with my seeking more education and making more money than he did. At first, I thought this would be the recipe for eternal success. But, as I read more and learned more, my interest in Byron wavered. It seemed a chore to go home. We divorced shortly after I became a high school principal. I would have scholarly discussions with him at first, then, later, his comments seemed to bother me. We actually began arguing over some of the concepts discussed. I decided early on I really was not interested in his opinion; I just wanted to talk to someone about it. In order to keep peace in the house, I became silent. However, it did not take long for me to find other outlets to have intellectual conversations. Byron and I grew apart and divorced. We are still friends, but as I write this I actually well up with tears. Had I been

satisfied with my life and position would we still be together? I remarried Kevin three years after the divorce and we have been married for four years. He has a 21 year old son. A work in progress, so I will not discuss any further.

What does the future hold?

My future plans and goals are simple. I would like to use my doctorate degree to help people. I do plan to stay in education and eventually become a superintendent. However, my ultimate dream is to become a motivational speaker. I love to listen to words of encouragement, and I benefit from them. I aspire to make people feel good about where they are today and help them to get where they want to be tomorrow. We have many barriers in our lives, and life, itself, can get us down. My motto is live, laugh, and love! The glass is not only half full...it is all I need. Living life in the now with hope today for what we have and promises for a better tomorrow is my plan for success. Empower those around you and encourage those who need and want it.

Opportunity is defined as “a chance, especially one that offers some kind of advantage, a favorable condition, as combination of favorable circumstances or situations.” Whenever there was a leadership opportunity I attached to it. I once heard President Barrack Obama comment on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* that he was not any different from any other African American. He just was able, prepared and the opportunity came his way. He talked about opportunity as if it was a missing ingredient for many African Americans.

Often I am asked why I became an educator. In search of the answer, I think back to my childhood and schooldays. Remembering my teachers who had such a positive

and powerful impact, my question became “How could I afford not to teach?” I am hopeful I grew up to be just like them – encouraging my students to do the impossible; encouraging them to be the bumble bee and fly!

CHAPTER VI

UPPITY HIGH SCHOOL

ASSOCIATE PRINCIPAL 2003-2005

This chapter will focus primarily on my journal entries from 2003-2004. My job assignment was associate principal. My first year at Uppity High School was my second year as a doctoral student at Texas A & M University. Every Wednesday night, I attended my Epistemology class and consistently made connections to what was happening in the high school in which I worked. I have selected a few excerpts to include in this dissertation to allow the reader to “feel” the time and place. The anecdotes will close the chapter. I must admit, Uppity High School was a very dark, lonely place for me; I often refer to it as my time in the desert. However, it was a time where I learned to be obedient, to be patient, to be organized, and to be an administrator with a purpose.

Uppity High School is located in Texas and is a part of the Green Valley Independent School District. Uppity enrollment, during the time I was the associate, was 2,029 with the following demographics: faculty – 86% White, 10% African American, 3.5% Hispanic and .5% other; student population – 51% White, 30% African American, 14% Hispanic and 5% other. The Uppity community, staff, and students were exceptionally proud of the 2002 TAAS Exemplary rating bestowed by the state of Texas. Since 2002, Uppity had also become a National Blue Ribbon School, Pathway of Excellence, and a “No Place for Hate” campus.

Background

The culture of the school was saturated with an “elitist” type atmosphere. Along with excelling academically, Uppity’s sports teams were among the top in the state. The Uppity Panthers won the 5-A State Baseball Championship and the 5-A State Golf Tournament two consecutive years. The girls’ softball team also brought home the gold and won the 5-A State Softball Championship. As stated earlier, the Uppity community was very comfortable being on top. However, faculty and staff were worried that the “new” TAKS test would place the status quo in jeopardy. Release of the 2004 TAKS scores proved to be challenging and brought awareness to the issue of classroom instruction.

Uppity student population became more diverse racially and economically when the District rezoned. In the fall of 2001, Uppity special populations (African Americans, Hispanics, Economically Disadvantaged, LEP, etc.) for TAAS were all less than 10%, and because they were less than 10% were not calculated in the accountability rating for the 2000-2001 school year which in turn, the school achieved an Exemplary rating. However, accountability today at Uppity High looks very different. With all of the special populations counting, the principal must be aware of the culture of the school and the expectations of the District for Uppity to remain a premier high school.

Case in point: Uppity has/had very strong department leaders that have been there since the school opened. During my first year as associate, the sponsor for the Academic Decathlon team asked the building principal to schedule students in a sixth period class for the team to meet for tutorials. She then asked the principal if she could

have the best science teacher to be assigned with her during this period to work with the Academic Decathlon students. The principal, in turn, asked me (since I develop the master schedule) if this was a viable option. I said no. I have the best science teacher with the TAKS science support class to work with 11th graders that did not pass TAKS the previous year. Biggy told me to change it. I could foresee this was going to be one of those difficult times of disagreement. She replied to me that she did not want to be responsible (blamed) for the Academic Decathlon team not winning state. She did not want to be known as the principal who caused the Uppity High Decathlon Team to “fall from grace.” (Actual words.)

Sidebar: For real? We are going to take a science teacher, wait, correction, the best science teacher we have away from the students who need her the most and let her work with the Academic Decathlon team? Lord Jesus, help me to understand. Because we do not want to “fall from grace?” Where is the responsibility for educating all? I took a deep breath and did what my “boss” told me to do.

Elitism

According to Bolman & Deal (2003), the above situation involved all four frames of leadership: political - because she was playing the game and subsiding to pressure because she was worried about her reputation; structural – because it affected the master schedule and informal leaders; human resource – she was taking care of herself and the students who the community and culture of the school deem to be important; symbolic- because it was exactly what the culture dictated to happen.

Uppity has been judged by its overall appearance of elitism. This image of elitism satisfied the needs and wants of the Uppity High community. The atmosphere for those fitting the profile was relaxed and comfortable. However, for those students, teachers, community members not fitting the profile, Uppity proved to be an unfriendly, uncaring, racist place. One must keep in mind these were the minority, so unfortunately, their voices and concerns were not always heard. Black women experience problems in White institutions because institutional leaders and other members do not recognize and acknowledge the cultural evolution that is taking place with the inclusion of Black professionals in their White institutions (Alfred, 2001).

The remainder of Chapter VI is devoted to my personal journal entries. Editing is intentional and excerpts will include contractions and common language for the purpose of understanding tone, climate and purpose of the entry.

Journal Entry One

February 18, 2004- Jason and Matt

Two African American senior boys. Jason – both parents at home. Matt – lives with Mom.

Jason and Matt forever get themselves into situations. On February 18th they bit off more than they could chew. For the past few weeks both boys were giving Mrs. Johnson, a first year African American drama teacher, trouble. Matt had been written up several times in the past and had a history with Ms. Johnson. Jason also had several write ups but not from Ms. Johnson. Ms. Johnson tried her best with the students. She tried to identify with them and be friendly with them – big mistake. Identification is one

thing but befriending teenagers is another story. Ms. Johnson continuously allowed the boys to come in late. Well, one day she decided that she had had enough. She would not let them in after the tardy bell sounded. The boys became irate and started to call her names. She ignored them, this happened before. Jason then hollered out loud "Uncle Tom." This offended Ms. Johnson and she called for security. The police officer came and escorted both boys to my office. I was not there on this day. I just happened to call the school during my lunch hour at Region IV and, my secretary, told me what happened.

I then called Biggy, and as usual, she exaggerated everything and told me I was going to have to do something with Matt and Jason, her exact words were, "they're making you look bad" I said what? She said, "People think they get away with everything. They are always in your office and nothing happens." I, of course, jumped to the defense and said, "Biggy, look at their discipline file. I have given them detention, ISS and suspension. Their parents and I are on a first name basis. I do not let them get away with anything," Her response, was I know that but everyone does not seem to think so. I said, "Everyone like whom?" She says, "You know, the other a.p.'s" I say, well all I can do is what I can do. I am sorry if other people do not think I am doing my job, but I know I am. Biggy says, "I know you are, but they are making you look bad." I hang up with her and just kinda say, forget them. What am I supposed to do? Yeah, I make a difference because they make a difference. I know how these students are treated here. They are second class citizens. The administrators think so; the teachers think so, so

they think so. They act the way they are treated. Treat children like little ingrates and guess how they'll respond?

When I returned to work two days later, nothing and I mean nothing had been done. The discipline slip sat on my desk for two days. I wondered, hmm, if this was such a tragedy, then why didn't someone do something with these little Negro boys that misbehaved so badly. So, I called both of them in. Jason was first.

Jason's mom is affiliated with a city councilman. I called and updated her on the situation. She was aware of a problem, but she did not know that it was as severe. Basically, here is where it stood. Ms. Johnson was very upset and had every right to be. She came up to my office and since I was not there, she went to another administrator, Ms. Lily White. Lily is a retiring, White administrator who had serious racial issues. I would even go as far as calling her a racist. Ms. Johnson spills her guts out to Lily and somehow she decides after the meeting with Lily to write up a probable cause statement (police report) on Jason and Matt. Probable cause is the first step to having them cited for a criminal referral. After she fills out the probable cause statement, (which will ultimately send the boys to court), she requests that they be removed from her class, because under Texas Education Code Chapter 37, a teacher has the right to request students out of her class.

Now I come in 7:30 a.m. and read this information on my desk. I am wondering how in the world did this happen? I warned the boys that I would be out for two days. I warned them to be good. They knew the other administrators had a problem with me – they actually heard Ms. White say that it did not matter what Ms. White told me, she

knew “Ms. Rose” was not going to do anything with them anyway. So I told them to be on their best behavior. So much for the warning.

I called Matt in second. I suspended him for 3 days. He did disrespect her and he deserved to be punished. I called in Jason and suspended him also. He had serious issues and did not understand. He just kept talking about how unfair this school is and how unjustly he had been treated the four years he attended there. I told him it did not matter what happened in the past, but that he was wrong in this situation. How could he pull the race card on this one when the teacher herself is Black? Through tears he raises his voice and tells me Ms. White put Ms. Johnson up to this. She is trying to hurt me and she wants me to suffer.

I decided I would investigate his claim. After all, how did a first year teacher know to write a probable cause in a way that was going to literally “fry” both boys. And how did she know how to formally request the boys to be removed from her room. Easily, when I was not available, she needed to speak to an administrator so my secretary told her that she could speak with anyone. Well, Lily was available. My secretary told Lily the story and in turn she “coached” the teacher and helped her to write the discipline slip as well as write the request for removal. However, Lily did NOT tell her how to handle the parents and the judge when all this “stuff” would hit the fan. Well, when it hit, Lily was long gone and it was placed right on my desk.

I had to call Jason’s Mom and tell her I suspended him. I also had to tell her about the possible citation, court visit, and him being removed from the class. She requested a meeting. I met with her, Ms. Johnson, and Mrs. White. Her question was

how did it get to this point? Lily White had nothing to say other than it is up to the teacher to make the decision to do this. Johnson said she had had enough and she wanted it over and did not want Jason in the class. I asked why Johnson did not have a paper trail on these students since they proved to be so unruly. Her response was she was trying to work with them. Mrs. J, Jason's mom, asked her why she did not call her. Now I have major problems with teachers not calling parents. Here we have a senior in need of a fine arts credit spring semester of graduation, being put out of a class and the teacher never called parent. Big problem. Johnson apologized for not calling and stated that it did not change the fact that he called her an Uncle Tom in front of the class.

Mom disagreed. Lily White was quiet. I thanked Lily for answering Mom's questions and dismissed her. She did not want to go, but I did not need a reporter going around talking about what she perceived to have happened. Ms. J, Johnson and I conversed. I listened as Mom tore into the perceived prejudice she felt her son and other African American males at Uppity HS experienced. Johnson sat and listened and then became defensive. Mom asked her about her maturity and judgment level. Mom was through and I dismissed Johnson.

When I dismissed Johnson, she made a bee line for Lily White's office. My understanding from the secretarial grapevine is that they talked about the way I handled the Mom and how I blamed everything on Johnson. I did allow Ms. J to speak to the fact that her son had experienced racism at Uppity and did not deny that I know it happens on a daily basis and I, myself, had experienced it and witnessed it. Anyway, the next day Johnson went to report me to Biggy. I just so happened to be in Biggy's office when she

came by. She poked her head in and asked to speak with Biggy. Biggy invited her in. I asked Johnson if it was personal and she said yes. I approached the door to leave but hesitated and asked if this was about me. She said yes. I then said, then I need to stay. Biggy agreed and I closed the door. Johnson went on to talk about the conference and how unfair I was and how unsupported she felt. She burst into tears and told me, “You just sat there! You let her attack me! You did not do anything to help me! How could you? I trusted you! You said nothing, nothing” Johnson, let out a large cry and howl. I took a deep breath. I thought “oh no she didn’t!” So, I tried to put myself in her position. A first year young stupid teacher.

Okay, now I am ready. I said, “Ms. Johnson, I did support you. You must understand that as an administrator I have to be neutral. I have to try to see both sides of this. In my opinion, Ms. J (parent) was not attacking YOU, she was attacking the system. Think about it Ms. J, she talked about Uppity HS and her perception of the teachers here. The only comment she made about you was your level of maturity. In fact, you agreed with her that you were trying to befriend the boys. Do you remember? She nods in agreement. I continue, “Ms. Johnson, another point to remember is Ms. J has media connections. I need to make sure that she is okay with how this conference was handled. I, as an administrator, need to keep this out of the news if at all possible. I need to protect you, Biggy, and the school.” My silence was deliberate. I have to be careful that I do not say things that will come back to haunt me. Sometimes it is better to just be quiet and listen. That’s what I did. I continued, “Now as far as supporting you. I have a few questions for you that I have not been able to ask because I did not want you to feel

that I was questioning your judgment. But since you are here with Biggy, she will be able to hear the conversation and understand my methods of questions.”

First, how did you know to write a probable cause on this case? As a first year teacher, I would never have known to do that. In fact, I did not know anything about probable cause until I became an administrator after 10 years in the classroom.” She said, “I really do not remember how I found out about it.” I know Lily White told her. How in the world do you not remember something as monumental as this? She was so distraught emotionally from the boys’ behavior that she wanted something done. I understand. She went to find out what could be done. She found out. But now she does not remember? Sounds a bit fishy to me.

Second, how did you know that you had a right to put these boys out of your class? Again, as a first year teacher, I would have never known I could do that. She said, “I do not remember.” Amnesia again? Needless to say, by this time the waterworks had stopped. She tried hard to remember the sequence of events. Even Biggy tried to help her memory and was a little shocked to hear her response that she did not remember; hence my purpose for questioning in front of Biggy.

The meeting ended with my telling her that she had my support, but not without me telling her how this could have been better. I told her had I handled the situation we both would not be sitting here now. She would not have had to have gone to a committee to remove the boys. I would have removed them totally from her care. I would have worked out something with the counselors because I did not think it was fair that she still had to even deal with the boys.

Mom and I were alone. Mom told me that she felt Johnson was “too friendly” with the students. She played with them and in return they talked to her any kind of way. I nodded in agreement. She went on to talk about the education (or should I say miseducation) of her son. As she spoke, I realized every word was true. She spoke of racism, double standards, and stereotypes. She even referred to Biggy talking about her. When Biggy spoke of Ms. J, she described her as a VERY articulate African American woman. She described a letter that Ms. J wrote and how it was VERY well written. When Biggy spoke of Ms. J it did bother me too. Why is it that when African Americans speak and write well it is an anomaly and is out of the norm? As Ms. J pleads her case, I listened and identified with everything she said. She talked about how her sons came home and spoke of injustices in the classroom.

But what really caught my attention is how she said her sons spoke about me. She said, “The students love you. They talk about Mrs. Rose all the time. They even compare you with Joe Clark!” I, of course, was flattered. I respect his work and actually have the same style; loud and obnoxious in the hallways but very caring one on one. The students know I mean no harm and they know that I truly care about them. She shared this sentiment with me and it really made my day. She went on to say, “Jason specifically told me not to talk to anyone but Mrs. Rose. He said you would understand and try to help. He said you were “real.” Again, it truly means a lot to me that the students knew I was at the school to help and service them. I strive to be the best I can be for students and I am glad to know they felt the same way.

She told me that she actually heard the song “lean on me” on the way to the meeting today, and it brought her hope that I would help her. Unfortunately, there really was not much I could do at this point. Lily White had already spoken with Johnson and pretty much gave her a game plan that would “fry” both boys. Matt and Jason both received citations from the police department for a major classroom disruption as well as ejected from her class. A teacher committee met one morning to decide the fate of the two boys. I asked if I needed to be there and the answer was no. Lily White met with three other White teachers presented the case and passed judgment. The verdict was that the boys would not go to Johnson’s class but every day during sixth period, they would go to an In School Suspension to receive their assignments and do their work. The assignment was to be given by Johnson via the ISS monitor and returned visa versa.

I had a major problem with this because basically the boys were not receiving instruction. Again, this happened mid-February so this means that because this so-called committee decided the boys just would be punished the remainder of the school year. Now, do not get me wrong, I did not feel the teacher should HAVE to teach these boys at all. But it definitely was not fair for them to be subjected to additional punishment. First, they were sent to my office for a day, second, they were placed in ISS (two full days) until I returned, third, when I returned I suspended for three additional days, fourth, they both received citations and had to make a court appearance, and fifth, they WERE put out of the class, and sixth, they were placed in an “ISS” room which meant they would be punished daily until the end of school.

The punishment was a little steep for calling a teacher an “Uncle Tom.” My analysis was, if they told the teacher “F@#k you!” They would have received citation, three days of suspension, and been back in class. But because the term was “Uncle Tom” it was “worse” than profanity? Unbelievable. I have had a student call an African American teacher a monkey. She was offended by the comment so, I took it very seriously, but it stopped after the citation and suspension. He was not put out of the class.

Ms. J continued and I listened. All I could think of during this time is how I, too, as a parent had to come to the rescue of my African American son. That story will come at another time.

I told Ms. J I would share her concerns with the principal. I did and the only thing that I saw that we could change was where the boys were going for class. I came to their defense. I basically said that ISS is a form of punishment. It was not fair to punish them everyday until May for what they had done. There should be a limit. Biggy agreed but refused to “veto” a decision that was made by a teacher committee. A committee she agreed was unjust. Personally, I thought, hell you are the principal why not just do what you think is right, especially in this case. Meet the parent half way! She would not, so I asked her if she was okay with me getting with Lily White and asked her if she would agree to the boys going to a study hall class to get assignments rather than ISS. To my amazement, she agreed. (Later, I heard she was sharing this information with all who would listen.) So, I called both parents and they were relieved that we were able to do something other than ISS.

A couple of weeks went by and the boys were having problems getting assignments from Johnson. She gave Jason a 50 and Matt received a 0 on their progress reports. Of course, both moms called me and I had to get with Johnson to find out what happened. The boys said they never got any work. Johnson said she gave the work to the study hall teachers. I asked the study hall teachers and both said they gave the boys what Johnson gave them. I could immediately see we were going to continue to have problems. Keep in mind both of these boys are seniors and both NEED this class for graduation. I applied pressure on Johnson. After all she wanted these boys out of her class. She allowed them to act like idiots prior to all of this junk happening (I know this because she confessed that she did. She said she allowed them on a daily basis to be loud because she thought she could control it.) I also still was a bit perturbed that she just did not wait for me to return to campus to handle this when the original incident took place. If I HAD handled this, the boys would have received a three day suspension and they would have immediately been transferred to another class. Meaning, she would not have to have anything to do with them. I would have just put them in another fine arts class. But NOOOOOO, Lily White wanted the committee to hear it. Johnson wanted the committee to hear it. And the committee unjustly caused the miseducation of two African American males.

As a teacher, I do not know if I would want to continue teaching any student who called me an "Uncle Tom" so I empathized with her. I would have relieved her of these two particular seniors from the start. Anyway, when I applied pressure to her, she went to another African American teacher to vent, Lucy Brown. Lucy came to my office

wanting to help Johnson. Her plea was anything I can do to help Johnson. I said super and asked her if I could set the boys up with her and just take Johnson out of her misery. She agreed. Wonderful, finally someone with sense. I had to approve through Biggy then the committee again. After, I went to Johnson and told her the good news. She was very relieved and asked why did we not do this earlier. I could have literally slapped her. However, I told her we have a solution now, let's just go with it.

The boys finished the class with Brown and graduated. Matt and Jason both ended up in court. The judge dropped all charges against Matt, because there was no proof that he said anything. Jason was fined \$500 for disruption of a public school classroom. Turned out the judge was not impressed by Jason's Mom and the ministers she brought with her to court. Lily White retired. Johnson resigned from GVISD 2 weeks prior to the next school year starting.

Analysis: After a year of service to this campus as an associate principal, I realized these stories were consistent. I grew tired and angry and worked diligently to help students. I was the senior principal, and this particular year at the commencement ceremony, the "senior African American boys" gave me 4 dozens of roses. I had cards signed by parents of these students and received many words of thanks. The main player in this story, Lily White, was in her last year of education. She did not like me and I would often tell people when she looked at me, I felt she could literally regurgitate. I felt she hated me. I was told that I was the "first" African American "woman" who had been her superior. She was okay with "us" being secretaries, teachers, or blue collar workers, but she never had to "deal" with the supervisory aspect. She did not like my

authority and she did not like me, simply because I was African American. I believe she purposely made the event above more than what it really was. She knew I was working with the boys and she knew I would have a problem with her disciplining them, and I did. She took out her frustrations on the boys and the parents.

After this incident with her, I was cautious and worked not to irritate her. I did not want her “showing me” what she could do. I thought to myself, “One year.” And I made adjustments, let her feel like she was in charge, and serviced children.

Journal Entry Two

September 18, 2004- Shooting off Campus

This evening at 7:30 p.m., I received a phone call from Officer Carter. One of our students was shot. He said it was an accidental shooting, and he was 90% sure the student was dead. I happened to be out with Chelsea and Andrew. Byron went out with his brother, so I decided to take the kids out for the evening. We had a very enjoyable time. The radio was so loud in the car; I did not hear the phone ring. When I noticed the phone I realized I had a missed call. I recognized the number to a police office at Uppity High School number. I immediately panicked and spurted out some profanity. Drew, my son, corrected me and told me how not nice that word was. I was worried because I knew we had a JV game this evening and I was afraid I was going to have to go back to work. When I called back, it was the athletic trainer's phone so I really was concerned.

Eventually I listened to my message and realized that Officer Carter was the person who called me and he left the message that one of our students may have been shot. He wasn't sure if the student had died but he was 90% sure that he had. But, he

kept saying it was not confirmed. Biggy was taking a vacation day the next day and Monday, so I had to decide what needed to be done. I knew she would have a problem if I did not call her, so I called her to let her know what happened. Carter did tell me that he tried to get in touch with Biggy, but she wasn't answering her phone. I called her home phone as well as her cell phone no answer. So, I decided I better let the counselors and other administrators know what was going on. I called Linda, one of the assistant principals, and shared the information with her. Since this was a junior and she was junior principal, I asked her if she knew the student. She said no, but she had a yearbook and asked me to hold on for a second. I did.

She came back on and was shocked to see the student was White ~ Why the shock? I did not ask. She then said, no, he is mixed with something. Gosh, she said, this is a good looking student. (Did she expect him to be ugly?) Oh my, light-skinned cute kid, she said. I then called Doria, counselor and very good friend of Biggy. She was the only counselor number I had available on my cell phone. When I called her I told her what happened and she told me she had another number for Biggy. I called the number and it was a friend of hers.

I explained the situation to Biggy and told her I would call the crisis team to be prepared just in case the child died to come to Uppity on the next day. She said that was her job and she would take over. I immediately pulled back and allowed her to handle the situation. I thought she was on vacation and out of town but apparently not. In situations like this, it is so easy to feel a need to do something. I had to be very careful not to step out of line or cross the line. I am always on guard not to overstep my bounds.

Biggy called me back. She called the crisis team scheduled them to come. Called all of his teachers and told them that the boy had died. (We never received confirmation the child had died.) Then she called the counselors. She called me and told me that she would be at work in the morning.

Carter called me back a bit perturbed that Biggy jumped the gun and said the student had died. While speaking to me, he did repeatedly say that it was not confirmed. Well, the student did not die, he was, however, in critical condition with a gun shot to the neck and the bullet was lodged in his spine. He underwent surgery but the doctors were unable to remove the bullet. He is paralyzed from the chest down. Biggy had to call everyone back but decided she would not call the teachers back. I thought this was not the right decision. How could anyone go to sleep knowing the information she just shared with them? She called me back and said she would be in for a couple of hours in the morning then she would be leaving. That was the last call I received that night it was 10:30 p.m.

Journal Entry Three

September 19, 2004-Steve's shooting Next Day

Arrived at work at approximately 6:45 a.m. Went directly to Biggy's office to find out more information. She shared the yearbook photos with me but again was surprised to see that one boy was White and the other was apparently mixed – White mom and Black dad. She even commented (Why did everyone just decide and assume that this boy was Black?) Biggy had already sent out an email that requested all counselors and administrators to meet in the front conference room so we could debrief about the

shooting. Upon arrival she shared that she was worried because Steve was shot at Lynn Grice's house with a gun that Lynn's Granddad purchased for him. They didn't know the gun was loaded. She worried that there would be retaliation against Lynn. She also laid out the plan for today. She would be leaving and if the child should die during the day, I would decide what to do.

I immediately reassured them our area superintendent would be called and basically she would be the one to tell me what to do. Before Biggy left, we debriefed again, and she wanted to be sure I knew what to do. I assured her that I would do only what she did, contact the area superintendent and ask her what to do. Actually to me this was rather easy. I really didn't have to make any decisions. So she left.

During the day we, the administrative team and counselor team, had assignments to go and speak with Steve's classes, just to reassure them that we cared and wanted them to know that. At lunch Tom, another assistant principal, White male, was demoted from associate principal, the position I now hold, came to me to tell me that he approved an email to be sent out to all staff from Bombshell Nellie. Bombshell is the speech and debate teacher. Both of the students that were involved in the shooting were from speech and debate and they were going to contest that evening. She was worried that the students were going to crater. She wanted to meet with all of her students to explain Steve's condition and not to blame Lynn for the incident.

Lynn was very distraught and has mental problems. I understood Bombshell's concern, but had to see the big picture. Okay why are we doing this? All of the classes were addressed by counselors and/or administrators about the incident. Why were we

calling these students out of class to say the same thing? So I asked Tom, why was this approved. He lied and said that Bombshell needed to do this and tried to transfer the blame to me by saying, didn't she talk to you? I replied, no she did not talk to me, and I point blank asked him if he approved her writing the email. He said yes.

I then told him he was going to have to retract and tell her no. He said it probably had already gone out. I asked him, why didn't you run that by me first? My reasoning was not that I WAS IN CHARGE but that I was in the meeting this morning and heard what Biggy's wishes were. He said, well I wasn't in the meeting and I did not know. I again, told him, no excuse. You should have asked me. He then left the commons to go and speak with Bombshell. He came back and told me that Bombshell understood and he would send another email after lunch. I told him I would send the email and went upstairs to do so.

Analysis: What was so blatant about this act was that Bombshell had issues with me last year. I was her PDAS supervisor. I observed a class of hers. It was okay – mediocre at best. Previously she had received better evaluations than the one I gave her, so she retaliated by telling people how unfair I was. I got wind of it and told her she was entitled to a post conference. She agreed and we met. During the meeting, I explained that her lesson was okay. She asked questions and the students answered the questions. I shared with her there was nothing special about the lesson. The reason for the proficient rating was because the lesson was proficient. I shared with her my idea of an exceptional lesson. She wasn't impressed. We agreed to disagree, and she opted out of an evaluation last year. I also spoke with her about professional courtesy and how in domain 5 under

professional communication, she could be scored as below expectations for basically gossiping about her PDAS supervisor and other administrators in the building. She started to cry and apologized for being so vocal.

I felt much racism from Bombshell. She couldn't look me in the eye. All she kept saying was how unfair I was to her. I did ask her to tell me how she felt I was unfair. Her response was that last year the administrator who observed her was very good and thought she was exceptional in all areas. I told her that I could come in again and perhaps see another lesson, but that particular lesson just wasn't exceptional. There was even one student that was asleep. I felt that she thought I was going to be submissive. Basically, since she came to me with her concern, I was going to "give in" to her demands and change her evaluation.

Well, I didn't; in fact, it really irritated me that she thought that just because she walked in my office that I would reconsider. She had no basis, no proof, and no argument. Her only defense was that last year it was better. So, I asked her, "What lesson did you teach for your observation for last year?" She described group activities with students and interaction with the teacher. I replied, sounds to me like learner-based strategies. This does sound like a good lesson. So I asked, "Why didn't you do something like that for this evaluation?" She replied, "I don't know, I just didn't."

My perception and this happened to me twice last year, was that she just did not think much of me coming to observe her. So guess what? She did not do anything special. My thoughts, okay, your prerogative, I will score accordingly, but don't get upset when you get do not get exceeds expectations.

Now back to lunch. After I sent the email and changed the time from 2:15 to 2:25, I went to see Bombshell. She was coming out of the English office. I knew she was upset because she had just come from the hospital, and Tom had already shared my veto of the email and meeting. I said hello Bombshell, and her reply was quick and snappy, she said she already spoke with Tom so I know what to do. I said very nicely okay, but I need to speak with you. Sharp – about what? I said, “How is Steve doing?” ignoring her rudeness. She hurried with an update so she could leave. I kept her a few more minutes just because she was so irritated with me. I told her what I expected in the meeting with the students and she literally could have just spat on me. I decided to just leave her alone and let her go and she did. I trotted down the hall to chew on Tom a bit more. He was out of line and never acknowledged it.

He should not have given Bombshell permission to send the email, let alone let the students out of class 15 minutes early without checking with me first. I pretty much ate Tom for lunch. But it didn't do any good because he still went upstairs and typed another email after mine! I guess it was a pride thing. But I cannot help but wonder, if that was me, what would he do? Well, I did share with Biggy later that night when she called for an update. She was not happy. Actually, I kinda felt sorry for Tom because he was used by Bombshell.

Journal Entry Four

September 22, 2004- Biggy takes a day off

Biggy returned to work yesterday morning. We had a team meeting at 6:45 a.m. She was a bit testy. I sent emails to her explaining what went on Friday with Tom,

Bombshell, and the email. She used the meeting to vent. She announced in front of all counselors and administrators that when she wasn't there; there should be no question – Shirley is in charge. Shirley is the principal. Of course, I love the support. But, she did not have to do it that way. The culprit was Tom. Pull Tom in and tell him not to do it again. Tell him what he did wrong. No, she decided to tell everyone. The problem with that is that Tom may be the only one that “didn't get it” So what did she do other than expose that there was a problem on Friday and the problem was that someone pulled rank on Shirley. Shirley told and now everyone was getting chastised. I really don't think she meant any harm. But, sometimes she just does not think.

I brought Drew, my son, with me to school because the meeting was so early. On Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday, I take Drew to school. Yesterday was Tuesday, so he either was going to be late or I was going to be late. Since Biggy made a point of speaking about Tom when he was late 7 minutes – sorry correction – 8 minutes to a meeting, I decided I needed to be on time so my personal time restraints would not be discussed with everyone in the building. So Drew came with me to school. He sat outside in the lobby while I attended this meeting. The meeting was informative about crisis prevention. Many of us were making comments about how we could make the plan better and as we were making suggestions, Biggy shot each one down one by one. I thought to myself why is she doing this? Normally when this happens I remain quiet. However, last Friday another high school in the district had a fire. I met some of the administrators, and they complained that it was just so hot outside.

So, I told Tom that we might want to add water and supplies that would assist cooling students and adults down in the heat if a fire should ever hit during the summer. Tom agreed but Biggy chimed in and said something to the fact like that sounds wonderful, but we cannot be responsible for water that is the fire department and the city's job. I decided to remain quiet. She went on to say how she would call the shots on this one. (My question, is who has been calling the shots on all of the other ones?) All I requested was that we add water! Anyway~~! The meeting ended productively, and I zoomed over to get Drew to school. As soon as his math teacher saw me, she came running down the hall. Ms. Rose, Ms. Rose, are you Drew's mother? I responded, yes. She then said he needed help with his manipulatives in math – not a problem.

I did not understand why the principal of the school, Biggy, went to such lengths to chastise Tom. I believe she wanted to show support for me, but in reality it hurt the team. I wanted to be able to speak with her confidentially so we could make sure the team trusted each other. This event divided the team and people were not trusting.

Got back to the school, and I had a serious teacher conference. Last week I had a senior Economics teacher write up three students for putting a virus on her computer. Biggy tells us to support teachers so I did. I did not really believe the students put a virus on the computer, but they were on the computer so I punished them. All three students had never been in trouble before. I recommended the teacher call the parents and document that she called. Well, she documented it all right. "Called Mrs. Scott 4:05:23 she was not home so I left a message, called Mrs. Goodson 4:06:13 no answer" Because of the way the time was reported, I detected just a bit of an attitude on her part. Well low

and behold, I had both parents to call me back and request a conference with the teacher.

Mrs. Scott's conference

Mrs. Scott was very nice walked in and sat down with her son. Mrs. Roberds, the teacher, walked in. She was so perceptibly outdone. Pissed off. Angry. Hurt. She sat down and her body language spoke volumes. As I gazed at her, I noticed that the side of her neck was pulsating! I thought, dang, what is her problem? Well, I started the conference and Roberds was obviously upset that she even had to be there. I asked the student his version of the story and Roberds her version of the story.

I then asked Mom to tell me what the issues were. Mom's biggest concern was that Roberds called her son and the other two boys idiots. Roberds did not deny she called the boys idiots but she didn't mean it. Both sides did come to an understanding. Roberds was so rude in the meeting that I had to have another meeting to discuss her demeanor. That was this morning.

Roberds was so distraught that she had to come back to my office after speaking with me, she summoned me to her room. I went to her room and asked what was the problem? She came to the door and said, "Why do I have to come to your office, I am in trouble aren't I? Are you going to attack me? Are you going to tell me how wrong I was? Tears began dropping down her cheeks. I was not prepared for this. I said, Annie, we need to talk. The parent conference could have been better, we just need to talk. She then told me; well can we do it before 1:00 p.m. I was planning on taking a half day, and

I really would like this to be over. I found someone to take her class, and we met with her PDAS supervisor.

Again, she walked in my office with major attitude. She sat and I began. I shared with her about body language and the way she conducted herself. We talked for about 10 minutes, and she said she really didn't know what I was talking about. So I let her have it. I point blank told her – "if I were the parent and that were my child, you would not be his teacher anymore. You were rude and unprofessional. You took her questions as a personal attack. I didn't see it that way. This is a mother. She is concerned about her son. She was asking legitimate questions. Get over it." She began crying and continued to do so for the next 45 minutes.

She could not recover enough to get to her next class. She, of course, had other issues. So I then became a "girlfriend" and tried to give her the "I'm a Woman" speech. You know the one that goes – I know girl, tell me about it. Been there. Did that. Don't want to do it again. I tried to encourage her to not focus so much on what this parent did but focus more so on how she could have handled it differently. We cannot control what comes our way, but we can control how we choose to respond to it. I said this about three times. We continued to talk about all that women have to go through. I shared some of my experiences with her. She began to open up to me.

She is White and married to an African American man. She has three children, two girls and a boy. One of the girls is lesbian and she is having issues with that. Her son attends Uppity and is a star player on the football team. She also said that he was a very good soccer player, but the team he plays with is totally White except for him. She

says he has been having problems on the team because there are two self-professed skin heads. They constantly call him the “n” word and he hates playing. (Just quit, I thought. Why expose your son to such punishment?) The other issue was finances. Just living above the means. I asked her if she had someone she could talk to and she said yes. I gave her a hug, and she left for the day.

Next issue – Rodney – escorted to my office for telling a teacher to “f%@k it then” Rodney did you say this – no Mrs. Rose – I told her to forget it then – Rodney, I am going to investigate and if I find out you said it, you are suspended. Did you say it – no Mrs. Rose, you can ask anyone in the class – I don’t want to ask the class I am asking you – Mrs. Rose I swear to God I didn’t say it ~ Well, as soon as that particular affirmation is spoken 99.9% of the time the student said it.

I sent him back to class it was lunch time and Biggy gets VERY upset when we are not on lunch duty. So, I will call students up at 6th period. Biggy walks into the commons 15 minutes into lunch approaches me and asks me about Rodney. Yeah, I am looking into it. Biggy- Why didn’t you suspend him? S- I haven’t had time to investigate. Biggy- You need to talk to teacher. S- Not a problem (I didn’t want to do lunch duty anyway) so I go to the teacher and ask what happened. Apparently he not only said “f.. it then,” he said f... about 6 other times and refused to leave class.

I go to the gym, he plays basketball, and I tell him to get dressed and come to my office. On the way to the office he asks me who did I talk to. I told him I interviewed 3 students and they said he said the f word. I lied. He said but I didn’t. I said I have 3

students and a teacher that says you did, so you did. We go to the office. I suspend for three days.

As I am reflecting on this incident, I still don't know how Biggy got involved. I am sure the teacher went to her and told her I did nothing. Of course, had I taken the lunch period on my own to investigate, it would have been wrong. But since Biggy got involved it wasn't a problem for me to miss my duty. My thoughts were that Biggy got involved because she perceived that I wasn't going to do anything so she was checking up on me – why – Rodney is a Black student. I think deep down she does think like everyone else that I am soft when it comes to our students. Duh~ I just have a way of seeing gray in this Euro American society. Black students normally don't get a fair shake. I feel its part of my destiny to even the score. But bottom line – if you're wrong you're wrong – Rodney was wrong.

After Rodney, I went back to the commons to do duty. Biggy and I were both pushing trash cans so students will not have an excuse not to throw their trash away; she points out blatantly Brian with a beard. Her motion to me is why haven't you fixed this – look at this – I wanted to say –you are the principal – you say something – you're talking to him! But no, I handle it. I am here to handle these Black students. I was hired to be “Joe Clark” and kick butt. That I can do, but Joe Clark had a heart for students and so do I. Anyway, I called Brian to my office and just literally tore into his butt. I had warned him about the beard before and he promised to take care of it. S-Brian I asked you to take care of this. B- I know Mrs. Rose, but I forgot. S- Well, now I am upset, my boss called me out , when I get called out you get called out – no choice today brother

shave or go to ISS for the remainder of the day. B- but Mrs. Rose, don't do me like that. You know I will take care of it. S-Yeah, I know, but we don't have a choice. I did allow you to slip. I should have checked you out yesterday, but it didn't happen. You are not going to make me look bad (I still have nightmares about Jason). You need to do this now. He did.

Journal Entry Five

September 28, 2004- Drew's Sick Day

Drew, my son 6 years old, was sick today. He woke up with a tummy ache. I knew he didn't feel well because he didn't eat his donuts. I bought him some Gatorade and told him if he didn't feel better later to call. Well around 9:30 this morning the clinic called and asked me to come and get him. This stuff is always difficult for me. Because as a woman I try not to allow myself to be too motherly on the job. If Byron, my husband, leaves work, he has to make up his time later in the week. But, not just that, even though he is very understanding, he still feels like it is the "woman's place" to see about sick children. So I did.

I knew we were having a team meeting this morning and tried to get everyone together quick. The team meeting is normally at 7:30 a.m. but Biggy had a dental appointment at 8:00 a.m., so she postponed the meeting. Definitely, her prerogative, she is the principal. It was about 9:45 and Biggy agreed that we could meet early. Now, Biggy is single and has an adopted daughter, age 7. She "supposedly" understands when we have to take care of personal stuff, but her vibes and body language speak differently. As soon as I told her I needed to go and see about Drew, she start

complaining about the lengthy agenda and just didn't know when we were going to have time to meet.

Her comment was, I guess we can reschedule if you have to leave. I, of course, told her not a problem. Of course, this is a problem. You mean to tell me that you come in 2 hours late on a Monday morning because of a dental appointment that can easily be scheduled for after school, talking about when we will find time?? Anyway, Drew was in the clinic, and he can just lie down until I get there. I knew had this been her daughter, we would have just rescheduled. I felt like a heel. I knew Drew needed me. I knew I should leave. But, if I leave, what does that say about me as a professional? I cannot handle it? My priority right now should be this team meeting. As I write this, I realize how stupid I was today. I should have left as soon as the nurse called.

Regardless, I stayed. There were 17 items on the agenda. The first three were mine, so I rushed through in order to hurry and get to Drew. Made no difference because everyone else, including Biggy, took their time. I really tried to be patient. Now, during our team meetings, when the bell sounds sometime we get up and patrol the halls and sometimes we don't. She knew I needed to get out of there so I just knew she was going to say let's just keep going. Nope. She said; let's get out in the halls. Pissed me off. I went upstairs, exited out of my computer, took a restroom break, and waited. We started again.

(I have noticed that there is a bit of a change with us in meetings. When I first arrived at Uppity, my input was highly valued. Many things I said were considered, and we changed quite a few ways of doing things. The reason was because Biggy had been in

middle school for about 6 years prior to returning to high school. She really had forgotten the high school way of doing things. However, at this school, there was the Uppity way of doing things. As I spoke, I triggered her memory and it helped with some of the offices being run more efficiently.)

We talked about some stuff and much of what I say was dismissed. Again, it pissed me off, because I thought, I really shouldn't even be here. I should be at home with my baby. So, I played the game and stopped providing a solution to their problems. Instead, my approach became in the suggestive format. Kinda like, "Well, what if we do it like this? or suggesting that I heard another school was doing it this way and it worked." This stuff gets old too, because it is like I always have to play a game. If I have a bright idea that I know will more than likely be shot down, I usually pretend I got it from somewhere else. Why? Because for some reason it seems to be received by the team and by teachers more readily. So, I suffered through the rest of the meeting and finally told Biggy I have got to go. Before I left, she asked if I was going to be there the next day and on Friday. I hurriedly checked my planner and said yes. She said good because while she was at the dentist she was told she needed some additional work done and she scheduled the work for Friday morning 8:00 a.m. Okay

I left and picked up Drew at 11:30. Two hours later from when I was originally called. Yes, I joked with the nurse as I walked in and said "bad mommy" referring to myself and smiled. However, when Drew looked at me it was with such a smile. He said, "You came Mommy, what took you so long? I thought you weren't coming." I told him I was sorry and we left. I really did plan on taking him over to my sister's house. She does

not work and that would allow me to return to work, but after he was so happy to see me, I just said no way. I am taking my baby home. That I did. I stopped and got him something to eat. Of course, when I got home, made a few job related phone calls, (don't want to appear that I am not taking care of business). After I asked Drew if he was tired and he said yes, but he wanted to sleep in my bed and he wanted me to hold him. I honored his request and played Mommy for the rest of the evening.

Journal Entry Six

Discipline committee meeting-October 13, 2004

*Today we had a meeting of the discipline committee. The reason of the meeting was Jody Winger sent me an email describing the halls of Uppity HS. I swear it seemed like something out of the movie *Lean on Me!* I immediately emailed her back and asked her to please explain. She emailed me back and said something to the effect that she should have kept her big mouth shut. I asked her why she felt that way and she told me that she was afraid that I took the comment the wrong way. So I asked her to come into the office so we could talk. She then emailed me back and asked if she was in trouble. I replied to her of course not and was a little offended that she felt that way. When she came into my office I invited her to sit down.*

She started telling me of all the trouble in the halls. Now, when administrators are out on the corners, the students act just fine. But when we don't show up on the corner, all hell breaks lose. I asked her if she could identify the students that were involved in acting up in the halls. She told me that she spoke to the upper classmen and "her" students (Honors/GT students). She said they told of stories that they witnessed

other students being disrespectful – not letting students get by in the hall as well as PDA – personal display of affection. They (the students) talked about how despicable these things were to them. I listened and asked her again if she knew the names of these offenders. She leaned over and whispered to me, “Shirley, it is not just the Black students!” I didn’t know why she was whispering, we were the only ones in the office. I invited her to join the discipline committee.

We met a couple of days later and the same old stuff came up. The teachers blamed most of the discipline on the “academic” students. I asked would it be possible for teachers to be in the hall along with the principals. They said they are already in the halls. They described a situation where Mrs. Tyler an advanced geometry teacher had a fight in her room during the passing period. They said that she couldn’t even stand in the hall because she had to monitor these students. I wanted to just scream. How could they decide that it was more important to monitor these students as opposed to all the other students? I asked well, is there a fight everyday? Of course, the answer was no. I said, okay so this happened once this six weeks? I would say the odds of something like this happening again is pretty slim. They ignored my comment and moved on.

Later after the meeting I debriefed with the administrative team. I shared with Lola, the counseling facilitator, what Jody said about it is not just the Black students. She laughed and looked at me and said that while Jody was waiting to speak with me, she went into her office and told her that she wanted to talk to me because the students that she identified as having issues were the Black students. I just shook my head and could not believe this woman even went there. So, again, it is the same old stuff. Why do

these teachers stay when they clearly don't want to be there? They don't want to teach our students.

Oh and then we had a major conversation about teachers calling parents. The teachers that were present argued that they don't have time to call parents. I asked R, an English teacher about communication with parents. She told me that with 160 students that she just did not have time to call parents. I asked her R, how many students did you write up today? She said none. I asked how many did you write up yesterday? None. How many did you write up last week? She hunched her shoulders and said probably about 6. I then said, okay so you would have only 6 parents to call all week. Can you do that? Well, if you put it that way, then that not so bad!

Journal Entry Seven

November 24, 2004-Coach Pete

Oh my so much has happened I don't know where to begin. First, about three weeks ago Biggy called me into the office to discuss a coaching situation. Biggy hired Pete in March as head football coach. He is African American has 18 years experience and comes from one of our more White campuses. He fit the profile to be able to come to Uppity High because he had experience with not only Black players but White players too. Biggy was very interested in hiring an African American coach and expressed her wants to anyone who would listen. Pete seemed like the perfect choice. Again, 18 years in the district, well respected, and it was "his time" he paid his dues. He interviewed and was hired. Pete, of course, wanted to hire his own people. There is pretty much an unwritten rule that once a new coach comes in, the old folks kinda get the shaft.

Now Uppity High had only one Black male coach until Pete came. The coach is Sam and he coached JV girls' basketball. Biggy promoted Sam to head girls' basketball coach. When Pete came Biggy told him he could hire two people. He did – Butch and Gus, offensive and defensive coordinators. Three coaches resigned in April and Pete was able to hire others. In all Pete brought in six new people. The football coaching staff prior to March of 2004 was Lily White. When the season opened in August, Uppity High added 5 African American faces to the coaching staff. All 5 coaches were assigned varsity coaching positions. Two of the remaining White coaches were reassigned to either JV or 9th grade football. In the coaching world, this is a demotion.

I met Pete in March and told him that I would like to share some things with him. We met for dinner one night and I shared just a tad of my Uppity experiences with him. I told him that Uppity was a very hard place to work if you are Black. He shared that he was looking forward to working there and had great respect for Biggy giving him a chance. I agreed with him and told him that she definitely has faith in him and she really wanted an African American for this job. I also warned him of possible things that could go wrong with Biggy. The main thing was to be sure to be truthful and honest with Biggy at all times and watch his back. I told him how teachers at Uppity were not used to African Americans telling them what to do. I told him to be careful about sharing things with them. He thanked me and appreciated my concern.

The season started uneventfully. We lost the first 3 games and Biggy started to get nervous. She kept saying that winning didn't matter as long as the students were learning and having a good time. I didn't really believe her but nodded in agreement. I

start noticing that Biggy began to become disillusioned with Pete. She started complaining of how he was not pulling his fair share. During his interview, he told Biggy that if hired, he would act as another administrator on campus. During the month of May, Pete made a daily pilgrimage to the commons during lunch to help supervise. Of course, in August and September that didn't happen. Biggy noticed. Other "little" things start coming up; Pete's coaches missed a faculty meeting. Pete barged into a Powder Puff Game meeting. It was 3:00 in the afternoon and Pete found out about 10 of his players were at a PP meeting and should have been in practice. He went to the meeting and blasted the players in front of about 200 other students. Then it was reported that he turned and blasted the four White teachers that were conducting the meeting. Biggy told me about the situation and how she couldn't believe what he did. I asked her who told her. She said one of the teachers that was down there. I asked her if she talked to any of the students. She said no. I asked her if she talked to Pete. She said not yet. So I thought to myself you only spoke to one side and you have already decided that he was in the wrong. She then went on to add that Pete is not doing what he promised. That many of the teachers are not impressed with him. My response to her was you know Biggy last year at this time, people thought the same thing about me. I just didn't get how all in a sudden she decided that he needed to be gone.

Shortly after (late October after the last football game) that a coach came into her office and said that he needed to talk to her about Pete. Since her confidence in Pete was diminishing daily, she couldn't wait to hear what coach had to say. He didn't want to meet in her office so he agreed to call her at home later that night. The next day she

told me the conversation and said we had a problem. Basically, coach told her he had been keeping a daily log of happenings out in the field house. He was distraught because of profanity that Pete, Butch, and Gus used on a daily basis. He had the date when Pete used the F word and when he (coach) asked him to stop with the vulgarity. Pete didn't stop. Coach documented. The next problem he talked about was preferential treatment of a player.

The player was a Black student from Westside – this is the school where Pete coached for 18 years prior to coming to Uppity. The student moved into Uppity attendance zone and there were issues from the start. First, Pete named him as starting quarterback. He was a junior. Biggy point blank asked Pete if he recruited the student to Uppity. Pete said absolutely not. She asked me if I thought Pete had recruited the student. I said yes, and I would bet my paycheck on it. That's what coaches do! So she and Pete went to the student's old residence as well as the new residence to do a residency check. Personally I know residency checks are made; however, not to this extent. In six years of administration, this is the first time I have ever heard of a principal AND a head coach going to the former residence to make sure the house was vacant. Yes, I thought race had a major role in the decision to do so. Biggy was told to do this by the athletic director to do this. So she did.

Well the student was legitimately an Uppity student. So Pete played him. However, many coaches, students, and parents noticed the favoritism that was given to this student by Pete. The coach told Biggy that this particular student, we will call him CS, walks freely in and out of Pete's office and that he is treated almost like a coach

*instead of a student. There was an incident on the field when CS messed up and the offensive line had to do bunny hops across the field. CS had one more set of bunny hops to do but stopped. Coach went up to him and said CS you have one more round. CS turned, looked at the coach and said f**k you and didn't do the hops. The coach told Pete what happened. The coach then said that Pete had absolutely nothing to say. Pete did not discipline nor reprimand CS in anyway.*

Now, Biggy had called him in and asked him about all of the allegations against him. He denied ever using profanity or ever being rude. She said okay and he left the office. After football season was officially over for Uppity, Pete took off a couple of days.

An investigation started shortly after. Coaches (all White) were called in to give statements. Maybe it is not totally fair to say White coaches. I think it was more of Pete's newly hired people against the old regime. Well, no one from the new regime was asked anything. I shared my concern for Pete as well as what I thought was and wasn't fair. I didn't understand how no one on "his side" was called in to share their views. Yes, Pete messed up. He, his defensive coordinator, and his offensive coordinator used profanity and treated the other coaches horribly. But I just don't think it was something to be totally dismissed for. I remember telling Biggy that I just wonder if the same thing would happen if the coach were White. Biggy looked at me, pointed her finger, and yelled at me "I need your support on this one Shirley, you know this is wrong." I rebutted, "You have my support out there (pointing my finger to the hall outside of her office) but in here (I point to the floor) I am going to tell you-you are wrong. I believe this is overkill and I don't want any part of it!"

Well, needless to say the gossip started shortly after. Coaches and other teachers start whispering about what was going on and then one Thursday after football season was officially over for Uppity, Pete took off. He was out on a Thursday and then again on Friday. The athletic trainer started a rumor that Pete was fired. Pete gets a call from a friend that worked with him at Westside. Pete panics. I notice he called me on my cell phone. I missed the call so I check my messages. His message to me is Shirley, give me a call, I heard something from a friend of mine and I need to talk to you. I first got nervous, because I like Pete and I knew why he was calling. But I didn't want to place myself in a position to where I could lose my job. Regardless of what I thought about the situation and Biggy, I knew I had to support her. That's my job. So I decided that I wouldn't talk to him until I spoke with Biggy about it. He called two times after that. Then Linda called. Linda is another a.p. who knew what was going on. I answered the phone and she was frantic. She told me that Pete was asking her if he still had a job. I told her to calm down. I didn't tell Linda he called me too. I didn't trust her. She said she called Biggy and told Biggy about it. While I was talking to Linda, Biggy calls. I tell Linda Biggy is on the other line so I hung up the phone. Biggy is freaked out saying that Pete called her twice and she is not going to talk to him. I thought, well how messed up is that? You go through all of this to get rid of him and you will not even give him the decency of a conversation. While I am talking to Biggy, Pete calls again. She tells me goodbye and I answer Pete's call. Pete asks me point blank, do I have a job? I tell him yes. He then asks what's going on. I tell him that there is talk about profanity being used in the field house and professionalism issues. (I felt it was okay to say this because it was

now common knowledge. I was very careful not to give him any confidential information.) He said that he knew about what I was talking about and sounded reassured. He told me that he wanted to talk to Biggy and if I knew if she would be at the volleyball game that night. I told him that she would definitely be there. I thought he should know, and, to me, he deserved to hear from her about the gossip. After all, to me, she caused much of the unrest by just handling it the way she did. We hung up and as of today, I have not spoken to him again.

Of course, come Monday morning, everything was in full effect. He was told Tuesday afternoon that he would no longer be the head coach for Uppity High School. The next day I was scheduled to be in Dallas. It was truly a godsend to not have to deal with the people on that campus. This all happened the week before Thanksgiving break.

I felt Biggy gave him the shaft. Her one unwritten non-negotiable is to be honest and upfront. Pete was not honest with her about the things that were going on in the field house. Biggy decided to call Human Resources to find out what to do. I thought to myself, why are you calling Human Resources? To me this was an in house problem. Why don't you take care of it? I would have called all three coaches in, told them what I heard. I would have scolded them and then told them now if it is true, it needs to stop immediately. I would have documented the conference by writing a stern letter of reprimand placed it in the file and then moved on. I still wonder why Biggy handled it in the way she did. I was not any part of the investigation. I have no idea to whom she spoke.

Once HR was notified they stepped in and took over. Pete was reassigned to Little HS as a teacher. He worked there 2 days and then was offered a job in a neighboring district teaching social studies and coaching freshmen football. Butch and Gus both stayed on at Uppity and taught. Absolutely no coaching. The job for head football coach was posted the next day.

Journal Entry Eight

February 17, 2005 -Stabbing

About two weeks ago two African American boys were arguing in the gym. Coach had a heads up on the situation and was able to come in between the boys. During the break up one of the boys pulled a knife and Coach's hand was cut. It happened during lunch. Three a.p.'s were in the commons and I was still in my office. Officer M. called on the radio for assistance asap. I ran downstairs and ran into a counselor. I found out someone had been stabbed. I immediately went to the clinic – no one – I ran around the corner and found out that he had already been taken to the hospital. So I then ran to the police office.

When I ran to the police office, I also ran into a counselor and just told her to follow me. Biggy was off campus at a curriculum meeting. When I got to the police office I realized we had a teacher cut, a student in handcuffs, another student upstairs, and a crime scene down our gym hall. I immediately told the counselor to do three things – call Biggy, the principal, call the area supt., and call community relations. As I said this, a teacher came to me and told me we had helicopters flying over and the incident was already on Channel 2's web site. I immediately called all of the a.p.'s together – they

wanted to do a lock down – I said no – let’s think this through. The only place we needed to lock down was the crime scene because there was no danger.

I made an announcement and told teachers and students to avoid the hallway by the gym. I also told teachers we had an incident that happened and as soon as possible we will update when we could. Lunch kept going and classes kept changing we did not miss a beat. I went to the front office to call community relations. When I was on the phone with them, Biggy called. She demanded I get off the phone with community relations and talk to her. So I did. When I got on the phone with her she asked me about 10 questions I couldn’t answer. I told her, Biggy this just happened I have not had time to investigate. She seemed agitated. I told her again, I need to get off of this phone so I can work. I hung up and then started to take parent calls. Biggy arrived on campus shortly after. She, of course, then took the driver’s seat. I did whatever she told me to do.

She called community relations back and they told her what she could and could not say to teachers, parents and the media. Channel 13 news anchor then arrived and she granted them an interview. While she did that, I took parent phone calls. When she came back in she made an announcement to the staff and students explaining what happened. After that community relations sent a letter for her to sign to distribute to all of the students. Biggy wanted to cancel course selection night. I told her I didn’t think that to be a good idea because parents would be concerned for the safety of their children.

I also told her she may want to have a voluntary faculty meeting. Just in case folks had questions, she agreed. My last suggestion was that her administrative team

needs to debrief the situation while it was fresh in our mind. (This she didn't do). The faculty meeting went well and teachers were glad that we wanted to speak about it. We debriefed a full two weeks later. That wasn't at all successful because the experience had diminished. It really could have been a productive session. In fact, she really didn't want to do this. I just kept talking about it. The next day we received numerous emails about what a great job we did. Biggy simply said thank you and shared that it was a team effort. Okay, I'll go with that. One Friday, we went to a conference together and the "stabbing" was mentioned again. One elementary principal complimented Biggy for a job well done. Of course, Biggy again said, it was a team effort. Then the other principal said, yes, but it was the leader. She stood and smiled and said nothing else. I just thought about the events which took place that day and I have to say I was pretty proud of myself and how I handled this situation.

Journal Entry Nine

February 21, 2005, Monday

I feel it necessary to start documenting my conferences with Biggy. Today I arrived to work at 6:50 and checked my email before going on duty. I sent an email out Friday about a proposed lunch schedule change. Biggy mentioned it to me on Friday and I plum forgot to do it. So when she mentioned it again, as soon as I went upstairs I changed one around. I sent it the staff. I indicated what the changes would be. Well, when I opened my email up I noticed Biggy had replied. The reply was more of a no you did not send this out – I felt it was a reprimand. She sent the email to me and copied everyone else.

Basically, she told me that she did not tell me to change it only to look at it and that she had to meet with the dept. heads. She also bolded words. I thought, why did she do that?

I emailed her back and told her I did not send this out to anyone and I should have put on the email for your review. But I didn't find it necessary to do that because we had just talked about it. So I was well aware she was already irritated with me. At 7:30 a.m. we were called to an admin meeting. As we sat down Linda asked about tutorials – making sure they were cancelled. Everyone said yes and Biggy said no she didn't know anything about it. Tom said well, Shirley----and I immediately (because I know Biggy was already pissed about the email and the Butch situation) went on the defense. I said no I did not cancel tutorials. (Again, I have to stress here that Biggy was having some major issues with my making decisions.) Then she shouted, "Stop it Shirley, just stop it! We are a team and it is not just you!" I said something like Biggy and she yelled back at me, "DON'T TALK BACK! I'm tired of it Shirley and after this meeting we need to talk about loyalty." She did this in front of Tom, Linda, and Tina. (All she preaches is treating people with dignity, respect, and integrity. That's all she wants. Yeah, right, is that what you call dignity?)

After being yelled at, I sat back in my chair and didn't say a word. Here I am 42 years old and this White woman just told me not to talk back to her. And guess what? I did not for fear of being written up for insubordination. After the meeting was over, she went into her office and I asked if she was ready for me. She said yes. I closed the door and sat down. She immediately started in on me with a tongue lashing. There were four points she mentioned that she had issues with.

1. *Senior Article*
2. *Patty Duke and how I said something about narking on her*
3. *DACs test and how I supposedly told the chemistry teachers how it wasn't important and how now it was all over the administration building.*

Senior article – basically there were untruths in the article a senior wrote. Tina sent the article to me for review. I called the student to my office and told her this wasn't a true story and told her she was going to have to rewrite or add an administrator's comments. I kept the letter and she left. Well, the student went on with the article, and it was printed. Apparently a group of seniors approached Biggy one day during lunch wanting to know more about the article. When she read it she called the little girl up, sacked her out, made her cry and then sent her home. I was reading the newspaper and could not believe they went on and printed it. I told Tina, I did not approve this. She said Biggy had already seen it and was fit to be tied. She said she called the girl into the office and made her cry. I responded, "Well, I'm not taking the hit on that one, I told the girl not to do it." Little did I know I was going to be quoted. Apparently two of the counselors heard the comment I said and went back and told Biggy.

The Patty Duke incident I didn't even remember. I really felt like I was about
12. Patty apparently told her I said something to her like since Patty went down and narked on me we have to have this meeting. I told her I really didn't know what she was talking about and "narked" is not even a word I would use.

The worst was the DACs thing. I supposedly had this meeting where I told 3 chemistry teachers that they didn't have to worry about DACs testing. By this time, I was so whipped I didn't know what to say. I said Biggy I really don't remember. I don't think I would have said anything like that, but if you have three teachers saying this—she cut me off—yeah, their saying it and it is all over the administration building. I said again, I really don't think I said that, but I wondered what could it have been that I did say? Apparently I said something. I asked her if Mr. Hote said I said it. She said, she didn't talk to him. So, again this was reported by Patty Duke.

Side note Patty Duke received a verbal reprimand from me about 3 weeks ago. She was upset and didn't recover from it. I truly believe now she was fighting back. She wanted to get me in trouble. Not only that, she was fueled by Peppermint Patty. A totally different story.

Analysis: Below as Biggy, principal of Uppity High School, speaks, her insecurities are apparent. She is not necessarily having issues with my work; she has issues with me doing her work and her not being aware. My analysis of the words below is she feels she is not in control of the situation or events, and I am gaining too much power. I am running the school and she is not going to allow.

Then she started complaining about all the things that she does not know. Shirley you are doing things and not telling me. I didn't even argue but in my mind I was like what? What in the world am I doing? I told her about the lunch schedule that it was only

for review and I should have put that on there, but I didn't know she would be suffering from PMS when she read it – oops, my bad!

Uppity is not the right place for you!

Analysis: I remember asking Biggy during another conversation such as this (yes, there were at least a dozen where her insecurities captured her brain and she spoke as if she was not versed in the field of education). She tells me “Uppity is not the right place for you!” Uppity is the right place for me, Shirley Rose is just not the right associate principal for you (Biggy)! Biggy was not interested in addressing the concerns of children; she was more interested in how the staff, community and district perceived her leadership. Biggy was protecting Biggy. *Then I was told the following things in no specific order:*

- *Shirley, everything you do backfires.*
- *You cannot and will not be successful here at Uppity.*
- *I know I hired the best person in the state of Texas.*
- *I care for you, you are my friend, but something is not right.*
- *Every day, every day someone tells me something about you.*
- *You always have an excuse or a reason.*
- *Yeah, you will apologize but it does not make things right.*
- *When you spoke with Dr. Severen, assist supt, I hoped you would have asked about what's in store for you.*

- *Eastside HS will be looking for an associate principal next year – I point blank asked her if she was hinting for me to go there – absolutely not, I am just telling you what may open.*
- *Pam was told not to apply for the new school so Butterfly will not open up.*
- *David Billingsley wants the new school so does Kurt Thomas.*
- *I don't know if you can ever be successful because you are African American.*
- *I don't want you going to people and asking them anything (meaning don't go to Patty Duke – don't research. The last time I did this I found Peppermint Patty in two lies and one of the teachers went and told Biggy about it).*
- *I don't think there is anything that you can do to make this better.*
- *You're messing up Shirley, you're messing up.*
- *I am still hurting from that head coach Pete stuff.*
- *People are terrified of you – they are scared to death of you.*
- *Basically, I got Shirley it is time for you to go. Just get out because it ain't working out. Needless to say, I was just whipped. I felt like I was 12. Feb. 2005*

Analysis of Journal Entries

Above is proof that people are intimidated by an intelligent, African American woman. Her first concerns about my personality occurred on Friday, December 19, 2003. It was Friday before the Christmas holiday, and she needed to speak with me. She began telling me that she knew I was the “right” person for the job, but she went on a tangent about always having to defend my actions. I did not understand, and I asked her to clarify. She actually told me the items above but added over and over “Uppity is just

not ready for you.” She was genuinely upset, and I consoled her by offering to do whatever she wanted me to, this included finding another position in the district. She replied, “No, I don’t want you to go.” In order to make it easy for her I said, “Biggy, I can tone it down. I can be silent.” In my “let me just get to the point voice” I said, “Biggy, do you want me in the back seat or in the trunk?” She said gingerly, “In the trunk.” I said, “Okay, you are the boss, consider it done.”

African American women are not hired for these positions because the majority of society is not used to our method of getting things done and they do not like our “assertive, aggressive” personalities. We make them look incompetent.

However, if they (the majority) would take time to experience and get to know who we are and understand our contributions are great. When the opportunity opens and we accept the position with the organization, we are committed, loyal, dedicated, trustworthy, studious, caring, and exceptional employees.

Our downfall? We do too much. They get scared. They do not understand why we work so hard. They do not understand why we work sick. They do not understand why we cancel vacations to get projects done.

Sidebar: My story tells the reader why I work so hard. I was trained to do so, along with all my biological brothers and sisters by our parents, Clarence and Theresa Guillory. I was taught to work and when you work you work hard. Be relentless and do not apologize for being at the top of the game.

In closing, I do pray my work brings another human being insight to the African American female administrator. We make them feel inferior and we do not even attempt to destroy how they feel about themselves, our purpose is to serve others. To give onto others, especially our children, what our parents gave to us. And, with each generation, what do Black people do? It is our plight, our purpose to give more to the next generation than we received. We are a people conceived in bondage and held down for centuries. I am an educator. I will continue to fight for all my African American brothers and sisters.

CHAPTER VII
BUTTERFLY HIGH SCHOOL
PRINCIPAL 2005-2012

Black Butterfly by Deniece Williams

Morning light, silken dream to flight
As the darkness gave way to dawn
You've survived, now your moment has arrived
Now your dream has finally been born

Black Butterfly sail across the waters
Tell your sons and daughters
What the struggle brings
Black Butterfly, set the skies on fire
Rise up even higher
So the ageless winds of time can catch your wings

While you slept, the promise was unkept
But your faith was as sure as the stars
Now you're free, and the world has come to see
Just how proud and beautiful you are

Let the current lift your heart and send it soaring
Write the timeless message clear across the sky
So that all of us can read it and remember when we need it
That a dream conceived in truth can never die

Cause now that you're free and the world has come to see
Just how proud and beautiful you are (Weil & Mann, 1984).

The lyrics above are to the popular song performed by Deniece Williams written by Barry Mann and Cynthia Weil. I use the lyrics as an introduction to my first principalship. I will call this school Butterfly High. "The butterfly effect is the phenomenon whereby a minor change in circumstances can cause a large change in outcome" (Andrews, 2009). I chose the name Butterfly High because of the symbolism of the insect. The butterfly's life cycle consists of four parts: egg, larva, pupa, and adult.

I moved from teacher, assistant principal, associate principal, and principal of a high school. Of course, when I think of a butterfly, I think of the caterpillar, the cocoon, and then the beauty at the end of the product, the butterfly. My “caterpillar/crawl” began as the assistant principal at New School; my cocoon stage was definitely Uppity High. I always felt that I was caged and bound and had to negotiate daily and defend who I was. I knew who I was ... the butterfly consistently moving and fighting to be released out of the cocoon. When the position of principal opened, I was able to break free from the cocoon and service children by believing in them and expecting them to be successful.

Interviewing for Principal

I interviewed seven times for a secondary principal both high school and middle school. Green Valley ISD had a special way of selecting principals; I cannot really share what the way was, other than being the “right” fit for the job. I assume now and assumed then the right fit was for the campus was decided depending on if the campus needed a female or male; a White or a Black; experience as a principal and or a novice; instructional leader or disciplinarian; etc. However, it really does get more complicated than just female or male. White female with experience? Black female with experience? Black male seated principal? Hispanic male? Hispanic female? Middle school experience? The list goes on and on. I interviewed for a middle school in the Uppity High community as well as Uppity High.

Here we go as I remember it~ Biggy, a White female, was the building principal of Uppity High. She hired me as the associate principal, and we worked together for two years. At first, I trusted her with my life. She gave me the opportunity to be an associate

principal in GVISD, and I will eternally be grateful for the experience. Because of “that” experience and “that” assignment along with class work at Texas A & M University, I was prepared to take on a principalship, and it ultimately prepared me to be the educator I am today.

It was the summer of 2005, (I had served two years as an associate at UHS) and Biggy knew I applied and wanted to be a high school principal. We talked on several occasions and she also tried to “help” me find another place. I received a phone call from three different high school principals (Old High, New High, and Eastside High) giving me a “head’s up” that Biggy called them and shared with them my personality was too intense for Uppity High, and she needed me to transfer to another school. Their advice to me was to get away from her as quick as I could because she was telling people I was a “loose cannon,” “had issues with White teachers and was militant.” Literally, she painted me as the angry Black woman; unfortunately, a reputation that followed me throughout my principalship. However, she always added that Shirley is a great disciplinarian; she just is not “right” for Uppity High. I respected all three men and valued their advice, so I became nervous and applied to several different school districts (as well as GVISD) for any administrative position. I had six years as an administrator and I applied for all administrative positions for which I was qualified. To me, “the writing was on the wall” and it was time for me to leave Uppity High School and Biggy.

Butterfly High School a Definite Possibility

I just knew it was time for me to exit Uppity High, and I wanted to leave on my own accord. I packed my office and waited for the phone to ring. About five days later, I

received a call from a friend who had connections with GVISD human resources department. She shared with me that I was being considered for Butterfly High. She further stated that apparently the superintendent at the time was ready to make a principal change (at Butterfly) and I was her choice. Actually, I was told that there were three spots available, and Uppity High was also looking for a new principal. The “informant” told me that Biggy applied for the assistant superintendent and actually was offered the position. I was shocked to say the least. I had no idea she was ready to leave Uppity High.

The informant told me who was going to all three high schools, and also went further to state that I was not being considered for Uppity High because Biggy had already started the rumor the faculty would revolt if I were to be principal and I was not the one for the job. To be quite honest, I did not want to be there anyway, the campus proved to be “my walk in the desert” as stated in Chapter VI.

First Board Meeting

I interviewed for high school principal and waited for the call. It came on Monday, June 13, 2005. The director of Human Resources called me at work (Uppity HS) at 7:40 a.m. and offered me the position for Butterfly High School. I accepted and she told me not to tell anyone of our conversation except my immediate supervisor, Biggy. She further explained my name was to be presented to the board that night for approval, and she would call me when everything was approved. I thanked her and hung up. Biggy walked into my office as soon as I placed the receiver on its cradle. I looked up and she walked in and closed the door behind her. I hesitated.

Sidebar: Understand at this point, I had heard so much gossip and witnessed so much back stabbing that I did not trust her as she sat in front of me. I despised her presence in my office and I realized she was only out for herself and this business of education was not about the students for her.

She asked me if HR called. I replied yes I had just spoken with Dr. Lawrence. She said, well you know I applied for the assistant superintendent, and I received a call that my name is also going before the Board. I congratulated her. She then went on to state the following, “Well, in order for you to get Butterfly High, all the dominos have to fall the right way. First, I have to get the assistant superintendent job in order for you to be a principal (I look bewildered and she clarified).” She continued, “They did not want you and I had to convince them you were the right person for the job at Butterfly. My position will be open here, but you know they (meaning teachers) would eat you alive.” I merely looked at her and listened. She continued, “Well, Al Booker, board member has a vendetta against me because of the PDAS you did on Greg Harris, you know they are friends, so this may hurt my chances.” The conversation went on about how she helped me and had it not been for her, I would have never received a call. She eventually left the office, and I felt sick to my stomach for the remainder of the day.

The school board at the time was one of the most dysfunctional groups GVISD ever had. Personal agendas took precedence over education and daily running of the school district. The Board’s plan was to fire the superintendent, so everything he wanted, they vetoed or gave him a difficult time passing. One area was top level administrators

he recommended for board approval. The school board meeting was at 7:00 p.m. that evening and I waited and waited for Dr. Lawrence to call to tell me I had been approved and congratulations. The call came at 12:48 a.m. the next morning. I was not approved. The meeting was over and the school board tabled the vote for the three high school principals. She further explained my name would be submitted at the next board meeting in two weeks! I WAS DEVASTATED! The next call I received was at 12:52 a.m. It was from another coworker informing me Biggy was approved for assistant superintendent.

Sidebar: Here I am finally. I am up for high school principal. Six years in the making, and I hit a roadblock. I was so hurt, yes hurt. I cried and ask God why me? I waited two full weeks for the next board meeting. During those two weeks, I absorbed myself into the Word and listened to Bishop T.D. Jakes. His series on “*Potholes*” helped me to get through. I consulted anyone I knew who had a personal relationship with Christ. I needed believers around me, because for the first time in my life, I knew I was under attack. I prayed and remained hopeful. I was weak. It just did not have to be this hard.

Second Board Meeting

Two weeks passed and June 27, 2005, finally arrived. By this time, Biggy moved to her new office in the administration building, and I was running Uppity High. (Please remember, my bags are literally packed, and I have boxes all around me. I contacted everyone I knew in Houston and the surrounding districts to give me an opportunity for

an interview). I found out the reason the board did not approve the three principals on the 13th was because a board member was not happy with the candidate who was recommended for the new high school, so they tabled the vote for everyone.

June 27th, my husband and I were celebrating a close friend's birthday at a local steak house. As we started to eat our salads, my phone rang, it was 7:20 p.m. and it was from Dr. Rushing, a new assistant superintendent who was African American. He said, "Shirley Rose, congratulations you are the new building principal of Butterfly High School!" I sighed deeply and responded, "Thank you!" He asked if I could talk. I shared with him I was at dinner with friends, and he asked me to step outside so he could share some information. I complied. He said, "Congratulations again, but I need to inform you that you were not a popular choice by the Board of Trustees. You were voted 4 to 3 (7 member vote), I was told the Board was always unanimous, and you are the only principal in history not to be approved by a unanimous vote." Well, okay. He continued, "You are to report to Uppity High tomorrow, and I will meet with you to explain my expectations and we can discuss more. I hear many good things about you, and I know you will be a wonderful principal. Goodbye." What???

Oh My God! I hung up the phone and walked back to our celebration. I sat at the table and everyone was so excited for me. I was numb. My husband looked at me and asked me what was wrong. Tears dropped from my eyes. I shared with my three friends and my husband what just transpired on the phone. In unison, they were all like, "So! who is the principal of Butterfly High?" They start laughing and ordered a bottle of champagne, and we toasted my promotion and enjoyed a wonderful steak dinner.

Moving Day

The next day, Tuesday, my husband came with me to Uppity High. At 7:30 a.m. He, Chelsea, Drew, and I packed all my belongings in the car. I handed the secretary the keys to the school, and I was done. We were on the Eastside of the district, so I had to pass the administration building on my way to Butterfly High (the West side). I stopped by the administration building to thank the superintendent for believing in me and wanted to express my appreciation. I was not sure if they were going to let me see him because it really was a “drive by” thank you.

As I walked into the foyer of the administration building, he immediately came to me. With a huge smile and arms reached out to me, he gave me a bear hug. He said, “I am so proud of you ‘they’ said such awful things about you! You prove them wrong, Shirley; I want you to be the best principal GVISD has ever seen!” Again, I was bewildered and simply replied, “thank you, Dr. Bowen, I promise, I will not disappoint you.” I left and drove to Butterfly High, which would be my home for the next seven years.

Butterfly High School History

Butterfly High opened in the fall of 2001. The school’s demographics were 38% African American, 37% Hispanic, 18% White and 7% Asian and Other. It opened with less than 1600 students, and the community was excited about a new school. The students were zoned in from neighboring high schools with lots of school pride for their previous schools. Butterfly’s first principal was Gus Bullhead, White male and former principal of a middle school. Mr. Bullhead was careful in picking his staff. Ladies were

required to wear stockings and closed toed shoes and men were to wear ties and dress shoes every day. Dress code and behavior of professional staff was closely scrutinized. His one and only goal for Butterfly High was to be an exemplary campus the first year at all costs.

This was the last year of the TAAS test and he did meet the exemplary rating, but the campus was reported to the district by administrators under his tutelage about “questionable practices” on the actual test day. The alleged practices included but were not limited to specific students being taken out of class, sent to the clinic and then sent home for being ill. The district notified TEA, and an investigation was launched and the school did not receive a rating. The principal resigned. The next building principal was a White female. She was in the district and many administrators in the district “felt she should have been the choice” from the start.

She was announced and everyone was happy. She had the reputation of being a good administrator and good for students. However, Butterfly High’s demographics changed in a matter of two years. There was “White flight” from the neighborhood as well as the faculty, because of the embarrassment of the rating scandal. Avila (2005) defines white flight as the departure of whites from places (as urban neighborhoods or schools) increasingly or predominantly populated by minorities. (The White population shrunk 10% as well as affluent African American parents moving out of the attendance zone for a better high school.

The second building principal, tried to manage and lead the school in the same way as her previous school. She was unsuccessful in working with the student

population and the school was literally “out of control.” Fights occurred daily and teachers began talking to others in the district about the school being an unsafe working environment. The principal diligently worked to correct the problem, but bottom line she just did not have the skill set needed to understand children placed at-risk or the environment and culture she chose to be placed.

Arrival to Butterfly High

When I arrived at Butterfly High I was the third building principal in its short four year history. Again, they tried a White male, White female, now enters Shirley Rose, an African American female who was known as a disciplinarian. I heard Butterfly High had serious discipline problems; the major issue was gang activity. The school bordered a neighboring district that had high mobility among students because of large areas of apartment housing and low income neighborhoods.

People apologized to me when I told them I was the principal of Butterfly HS. Even very close friends of mine would rub my shoulder or back in support of the hard times I would face. Cresten, an old friend of mine stated, “well you know that’s all ‘they’ give us, the low performing schools. Make the best of a bad situation!” I did not buy into any of the negativity. I felt I had a job to do, and I was going to do it.

My first order of business was to meet the community, students, parents, teachers and staff. I had several meetings of the different stakeholders in an effort to share my vision and mission. I worked with a diverse administrative staff, but noticed immediately the majority of the teachers were White. African American as well as White students are deprived of the opportunity to experience diversity because they are seldom exposed to

teachers of color who bring wider points of view to the learning dynamic (Wilder, 2000). They consistently said things like “these” students, “thugs” gang members. I heard stories of dress code, saggy pants on the boys with “grills” (shiny teeth plates that were worn in the mouth that were associated with thug/gang activity).

Parent involvement was virtually non-existent. I did meet parents, but all of them were White and did not represent the overall population of the school. These “minority” parents shared with me about the “riff raff” that moved into the zone and how the school went downhill from there. When school started the problem was evident. There was no structure and discipline procedures were very weak. Administrators were afraid to discipline because the previous principal sided with parents. She preached “keep the parents happy so parents won’t call the administrative building and complain.” However, this type of leadership created a climate of fear and uncertainty for the adults and the students were allowed to be disruptive to the educational process and not be held to the consequences for their actions. Bottom line? I walked into a “Lean on Me” type of situation.

Year One as a Principal

I entered into the building with an enrollment of 2578 students. Demographics had changed 43% Hispanic, 38% African American, 10% White, and 9% Asian and Other. The schedule consisted of a seven period day. We had fights everyday, in the morning before school, at lunch, after school and in between classes. The first week alone, we averaged three fights a day. Verbal altercations happened every class change. I contacted my supervisor and told him I needed his support in gaining control of the

school. He agreed and allowed me autonomy to make things happen and supported my disciplinary decisions. We had student assemblies, and we literally trained the students via intercom about expectations and respect – daily life lessons about being nice and courteous.

Children like to be liked. In my preliminary assessment of the campus, there was no school pride. Students were not connected to the school. Even after four years, students were wearing letterman jackets from the two schools where their neighborhoods were previously zoned. Teachers did not expect the students to learn or behave. They accepted the way they acted in the hall as “how they were.” The culture of the school was (I believe) a result of the White teachers and parents stereotypical evaluation of students of color and a different socioeconomic background resulting in bias. The neighborhood in which the students lived consisted of nice homes in a suburban setting. We had one apartment complex in the attendance zone, and by no means was it low income housing. We were 32 miles outside of the Houston city limits. The school was not inner city, so how did the perception and mentality that the students were less than other schools in the district originate?

Yes, a rhetorical question and I decided it was not important how the students arrived at this perceived mentality but what was more important was how we (as professionals) were going to change the perception. I really did not know how I knew what to do, but it happened. I believe the Lord answers prayers and helps poor souls lost and to be quite honest, I prayed and was lost daily.

Developing Culture and School Pride

I noticed on the first spirit day, our students were not dressed in school colors. They did not have t-shirts or other paraphernalia. We were a 57% placed at-risk campus, so many of our students really could not afford a \$10 t-shirt. We purchased t-shirts for all students in the school and handed them out at lunch. We also ordered a new mascot uniform, run-through blow up for the football team, student planners, and spirit towels. Yes, we gave students things, and all I asked for in return was respect. Our motto, “Believe in the Possibilities . . .” Students received positive affirmations daily.

Announcements started each day with music to sing to on the way to class. The tardy bell would sound and the Pledge of Allegiance would be said and BHS school song would be played. Student birthdays were posted at the front entrance and announced over the PA. We celebrated our student accomplishments daily by calling student names and letting them know we were proud of them and their accomplishments. There were times on Monday morning celebrations would last well over five minutes.

Discipline Issues – Dealing with Gangs

We had many fights that were gang related, and I challenged my brain to return to the old days at Old School to remember some of the strategies I used back then. I studied gang activity and attended seminars to improve my response to various situations. The term I continued to hear was “respect.” The students who did get into fights would often blurt out to me, “Miss, he disrespected me . . . No, you disrespected me!” Prominent forces in my first year were the bloods and crips.

I had many administrative meetings before school even started. I asked each of my administrators if they could change one thing, what would it be? The resounding answer was a late start day the school had for professional learning communities on Thursday mornings. Apparently the students would still arrive to campus at 7:30, but first period did not start until 8:25. Teachers would be in meetings and administrators would “babysit” the students in the commons. I thought to myself, “Are they crazy or just suicidal?” Anyway, coming directly out of the associate spot at Uppity High, I immediately sided with the administrators, because that was definitely a formula for destruction; however, buy in is needed when a major change happens, so I also met with teachers and asked about the time they spent in PLC and was it beneficial? They also wanted it to disappear. So, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) time no longer existed, and we sent the students to class. I became a hero pretty quick with all stakeholders involved in dealing with Thursday mornings. My next agenda item was the “gang mentality” some students held.

On the first day of school and all through the first semester, we dealt heavily with bloods and crips. We had approximately a hundred or so students wearing colors and representing. The true hardcore members were not afraid to announce their affiliation. Other students who may have been gang members were hesitant because we (administration) had the reputation of telling parents. My first concern was with the bloods. They appeared to walk around as untouchables, flash gang signs, and even do the handshake in front of adults. We began to crack down on their behavior. New procedures included sending students to an alternative school if they displayed three

signs of gang activity; we followed the procedure and began documenting the “gang bangers.”

Bobby was the leader, a lieutenant or captain, of the bloods. Bobby was a business man and everyone knew it. He sold products at school and teachers even would purchase his merchandise. His parents were from Nigeria, and Bobby was very Americanized. I was told stories of his antics and knew some of the administrators were actually scared of him. I summoned him to my office and decided to develop a relationship with him by talking about respect and pride. I told him I needed him to keep things off the campus because I was not going to tolerate innocent people getting hurt.

Basically, I told him, we were not going to represent blue or red, but orange, one of the school colors. We also discussed our school mascot a tiger. Here, we are not bloods or crips, we are all tigers who come together to learn. Bobby really was a smart student; hence, his ability to understand who I was and adhere to my request. About three weeks after I initial conversation, he was shot at the park after a homecoming dance at school. He survived the shooting; the bullet grazed his ear removing the top part of the ear and did not enter his temple. He eventually went to federal prison for selling counterfeit merchandise. Upon his release, he went overseas to attend school, and I am told he has a Master’s in Finance.

Well the crips were not happy that I made amends with Bobby and the bloods. So one morning one of those little crips went into the boys bathroom and “tagged me.” The campus police officers came to me and told me we had a problem, not an unusual statement coming from them, so I was like, what is going on? They showed me a picture

of graffiti on the wall, “Mrs. Rose 187.” I looked blankly at them and asked, “What is the problem?” I was told that 187 was the code for murder, and they interpreted the tagging as a threat to my life. I sighed heavily.

I called a meeting with the administrators and everyone was very concerned. I was too, but knew, this was a ploy for me to stop with the discipline. It was November of my first semester, and we had many procedures in place for students not to fight and procedures for them to be in class at all times. Thinking of my talk with Bobby, I asked one of my administrators, who was the leader of the crips? I was told Tyrell. I asked my secretary to send for Tyrell to come to my office.

When Tyrell arrived, I had the radio turned to a popular Hip Hop station. My back was to him, and I could hear him say, “Wow!” I said, “Good Morning Tyrell” he replied, “Good morning Miss, I did not know you listen to 95.5,” I said, “Yeah, every now and then. Tell me a little about yourself. What type of music do you like?” He pointed to the radio and appeared to be nervous, “Why am I here Miss?” I replied, “Well, I will be honest. I hear you are the leader of the crips.” He interrupted, “No, no, I don’t know whatcha talking about,” then laughed. I said, “I am talking about your boys taggin’ my name in the restroom this morning.” Again, he replied, “I don’t know whatcha talking about” and continued to smile and became very comfortable in my office. I went at him a different way, “Well I am told you are the man, but if you’re not, I need to send you back to class.” And, I began to write a pass. He asked me again about the music, “Why you listen to that Miss?” I said, “Because I like it, thanks for coming.” And, I handed him the pass. As he walked to the door, I asked him again, “Who is the

crip leader because I really need to talk to a man who can take care of this for me.” He sat down again and said something like, “Well, if I could help you, what do you want?”

I replied, “Look brotha, I am a sista trying to make a paycheck. This is how I pay my bills, how I keep my lights on. Why all my little brothas want to do this? I need you to help a sista out. Y’all stop taggin my name and creating all of this turmoil with the bloods. This is about respect. I respect you. Do you respect me?” He replied, “Yeah, yeah” I reiterated, “Yes?” he said, “My bad miss, yes.” So, we spoke for another five minutes or so and agreed we were all tigers, and we will all respect each other when we are on campus. I did not have any issues with Bobby and Tyrel after those conversations.

Cain and Abel

Yes, they were brothers, twins. Mom knew her boys were trouble and would always come to the office with her rosary beads to pray and exorcise the devil out of them. Cain was worse than Abel, and both were affiliated with bloods. Abel was low key, but he had a definite dislike for me. I talked to Bobby about Cain, but Bobby told me Cain was in a different sect and would not listen to him. I had two White male administrators who were very frightened of Cain. They would not administer discipline and left it up to me. I did it because I was not going to be afraid, and I was pretty sick and tired of the Black boys running “amuck” like they controlled something around there.

Cain

Cain had discipline issues daily. He did not respect teachers and talked to people any kind of way. I eventually sent him to an alternative school, and Abel was very upset

with me. I really did not care because Cain was being disobedient because adults allowed it. Cain actually graduated on time that year because of his placement in the alternative school. He completed his assignments and participated in commencement. He was high and smelled like marijuana when he shook my hand. He hugged me and told me, "See, I told you I take care of business." Abel did not graduate because he was short a math credit and needed to pass a section of TAKS.

The following year Abel came back to Butterfly to graduate. We had a situation in the neighborhood between a blood and a crip. Jeff, a crip and one who was involved in the incident, was in class and asked to go to the restroom. The teacher allowed it, and Jeff went directly to Mr. Howard's class, walked in and punched Wayne in the face. Wayne was a blood and sent word to his boys to be on look out for Jeff's homeboys. We started the investigation and found out Abel was a part of the altercation over the weekend also. I returned back to the office, looked out the window and saw Cain waiting in the front of the building. I went outside and told him to come into my office. He did so reluctantly. I questioned him, and he reminded me he was not in school anymore and I could not tell him s@#t. He stated he was there to pick up his brother. So, I called Abel to the front office. Abel was not happy and told me to leave him alone. I refused. I called for the campus police to join me. We questioned the boys about the activities that occurred over the weekend and neither one of them gave us any information. The bell rang and I kept both boys in my office until the front parking lot cleared. They were livid. I really did not care. My priority really was not about keeping Cain safe; it was about keeping the other 2500 students in the building out of harms way.

When the lot cleared, I walked Cain and Abel to the car. Abel gave me the finger as they drove off. When I tell this story I always add, if someone offered me a bullet proof vest on that day, I would have worn it. The day was Friday. I received word Monday morning Cain was shot to death and found at 2:00 a.m. in a ditch near the school. I attended Cain's funeral. He was the first "Tiger" I buried. When there was a time to speak, I went to the podium. Many students attended the funeral, and I felt they were waiting on me to say something. So I did. I first gave honor and glory to God and shared my condolences with his mother. Cain was a smart young man, but his choices were not always the best. I told Abel that I was proud of him coming back and finishing up his diploma and told him that Cain and I actually did have some conversations that were productive.

Abel returned to school a couple of days later. Instead of looking the other way (as he normally did), he came up to me and thanked me for attending his brother's funeral. He apologized for Cain disrespecting me, and he apologized for himself. I told him I accepted the apology, and we embraced.

Summary

These stories are plentiful during my tenure at Butterfly High. I share these two stories to set a tone for my reader. This was my first principalship and my first true love of a school building and the students who belong to it. I became a part of the community and their lives, and they in turn became a part of mine.

The next chapter is my journey to another high school in the district with placed at-risk students. The demographics are 81 percent African American and 18 percent

Hispanic and 1 percent white and other. I was asked by the superintendent to consider going to Eastside High School because the school needed a new image. Since I was successful at Butterfly and felt the job was complete, I agreed to be the principal at Eastside High. When I arrived to Eastside I was the first female principal in the school's short ten year history. As I walked into the building, I felt like I was in a "man cave." The school seemed cold and empty. The décor of the offices were somewhat old fashioned and dated. My administrative assistant and I immediately began hanging pictures and opening up mini-blinds. We purchased soft leather benches for the reception area, flat screen TVs so parents could view information why they wait for meetings, microwaves for the cafeteria so children could bring their lunches, etc.

When school began, I commissioned my journalism teacher to take pictures of the children and post the photos throughout the school. We also purchased a t-shirt for each student in the school in order to encourage school spirit and pride. Our choir teacher provided a CD of the chorus singing our alma mater and I played it everyday (as well as provided the words) so students would learn the school song. I added a very much needed "female" touch to a dull building atmosphere to create a different climate. Changing the climate is the first step to changing culture. The culture was one of mediocrity. Teachers taught at a low level and did not believe students could handle rigor in the classroom. Many students responded to their boredom but being unruly and not adhering to expectations for behavior. As the principal, I felt it was my first duty to gain control of the building. This included students and teachers.

CHAPTER VIII

PRINCIPAL EASTSIDE HIGH SCHOOL 2012

The challenge of educating African American students in our nation has been ongoing since our nation was formed. Many aspects of our educational system continue to be examined to determine how to better serve our African American students. An area that has proven to have an impact on achievement is culture (Carter, Hawkins & Natesan, 2008).

One of the dominant influences impacting a school's climate is the leadership of the principal (Bennis, 2003; Sergiovanni, 2001). African American principals use similarities in cultural experiences with students, particularly African American students, both as sources of caring and communication and as the basis for expecting high standards of achievement (Pollard, 1997). These similarities and common attributes shared by African American educational leaders and African American students allow a connection to be formed, and a bond to be made with the overall objective centered around student success and achievement (Lomotey, 1993). I am expected to know more about Black children just because I am Black. I always say children are children. They just happened to be placed in different circumstances and situations. What makes my leadership different? Me. Today I was walking down the hall on my way to the faculty lounge to get a Coke and saw about four children running. I had to laugh at myself because the children start running simply because they heard the heels on my sandals

tapping and knew I was coming. I laughed and smiled because it showed an act of respect. I did not run after them. I just yelled out, “Get to class; you know I’m coming.”

I like to think I lead by example. I dress everyday, look good, and smell good; sharp-everyday. I notice more children at Eastside stare at me. I walk into the commons, and I am immediately the center of attention. I remember Charles Barkley professing endlessly about how he is not a role model and parents need to step up and be the role model their children. At the time, I thought he had a point, until now. I have seen so many parents just not have it together. They are not role models for their children. I do believe if you are a public figure and you know children are looking at you, you should understand first of all who you are, and respect the position you hold and the power you have to emit change.

I am a role model for education: a standard of excellence. I am success to these children. I have met many parents at this new school. I have mothers registering their African American sons and daughters dressed inappropriately. For example, Mom brought daughter to enroll. Mom completed the enrollment process then came to ask me about free and reduced lunch. How to apply? How long it would take, etc. I gave her the information she requested. I introduced myself to her daughter as Ms. Rose, the building principal and welcomed her to Eastside High School. As I was shaking her hand I could not help but see Bria was wearing spandex tights, a tank top with her bra straps showing, tattoo on her neck, and piercing on her nose and lip.

Bria and Mother

I immediately shared with her we had a dress code policy, I said something like this: I asked her name again, she replied “Bria,” and I said “Bria, tomorrow be sure to wear regular pants and cover up your top. Bra straps cannot show when you come to school. You will also have to take out both piercings on the lip and nose.” She responded, “What’s wrong with what I have on?” I replied, “Nothing is wrong with it. It is just not appropriate for school.” Mother jumped into the conversation, “I think it is cute, and why can’t she wear that? I don’t see how what she wears has anything to do with her education.” Please understand mother was also wearing spandex, a tube top with extremely large breasts (no bra), tattoos, and bright pink hair. I thought to myself, “For real?” I am like, I need you to help me help your daughter. I tried not to jump to conclusions or stereotypes about who she was and from where she came. But, as a professional, I am now challenged and have the responsibility to not only teach the child, but to teach the mother.

I turned to the mother and spoke with a calm, low voice, I said, “Her outfit is fine and she is wearing it well. The problem is it is inappropriate for school.” Mom again said with attitude and a slight neck roll, “Why?”

Sidebar: I replied, still remaining calm as not to escalate the situation, because this parent will tell me off at the drop of a hat. She was waiting to tell me off or tell me that I did not care about her or her child. This was usually the time that I am told that I think that I am all that and my job is to make sure children get an education and not be the dress code police.

She will further go and tell me that is why this school is the way it is and I should go and tell the teachers to do the same, because teachers do not dress right either. Yes, this has happened before and will again if I am not careful to remain positive and focused on what needs to happen. She needed to follow the policy and it needed to occur every day. I did not care if she liked me, talked about me later, or even cursed me. Success will be measured when the child does what I tell her to do and meets the expectation as stated.

I replied and told her she has many features that would attract boys and men. There was a time and place for wearing that outfit and school was not the place. Mom again threw out, “I don’t see anything wrong with it.” I reiterated with a stronger tone and a stern look as to now put an end to this back and forth. I now stated, “The outfit is inappropriate and she cannot wear it to school. I do not want your daughter walking down the hall, and some boy slaps her on the bottom and she is offended.” Her response? Mother and daughter break out into laughter. I am like, okay.

Teaching Girls how to be Ladies

So how do you teach a girl to be a lady when her example at home is teaching her something else? I decided to ignore the mother and talk directly to Bria. Ignoring Mom, I replied, “Darling you need to be covered up. Do you understand?” She replied, “Yes.” I say, “Great, glad that you are here at Eastside High School. See you tomorrow!” Mom blurts out in disgust, “That is just stupid. What does she have on have to do with her education?” Being Shirley, and not ever passing up a question like this, I respond,

“Everything. I educate the whole child. I am teaching her how to dress appropriately in an educational setting.” I turn to Bria and asked her what did she want to be when she grew up? She replied, “An attorney.” I say, “Cool. Okay, Mom, your baby is going to have to know how to dress for the interview, how to dress for court, how to dress to impress, how to dress for an evening party (with class and elegance).” Mom replied, “That has nothing to do with today.” We agree to disagree.

Racism and Bigotry

The racism and bigotry they experienced, I experienced. Again, how as an educator do I choose not to be responsible for the education of who we are as women and our place in our society? How do I choose not to take the time to sit down and counsel another sister in need? Countless mamas in my office raising their sons alone and the sons do not respect her and choose not to respect anyone that tells them they are wrong. They sit in my office, Mom cries then the son cries. But, where is the solution? Give me a prescription for the tears to stop? I am now challenged yet again, how do I stop the tears? How do I stop the madness? What is the remedy? Tearing up just writing this ... Lord, help me, keep me to be strong, show me.

Sidebar: He (God) just did – a good education. He is telling me right this minute, “Shirley this is why I have you where you are. You did not want to go; you wanted something else? Remember? You are the right person, and I need you to be diligent and obedient and work the way I taught you. I got you. You are covered. Be strong and continue.”

Yes, I am a standard of excellence on campus. The students check out how I look, how I walk, how I talk, how I smell, and how much I care in my heart. This is quite different with African American children, and I thank the Lord for giving me the opportunity to do this. As I see parents walking in, I ask myself, “What are you teaching your child? These children? So, when they come to school they hear words like expectation, class and character, standard of excellence. Here, it is about learning. It is about learning to become a good person working to be a good productive citizen and learning to be productive in life.

Monday, October 8, 2012, I arrived to school at 6:45 a.m. I had personal issues with my stepson and his father, my husband. Stepson is 21 and not committed to anything as of the above date. So, I walked into work with a heavy heart. When I arrived, I hurried to the commons for duty. I noticed no other administrator is on duty, so that caused stress. I began to push the trash can (a normal practice to encourage students to throw their trash away) as I walked around the cafeteria. I addressed cell phones, dress code, earphones, sagging pants, t-straps, etc. I walked away from the east side of the cafeteria only to have my back to the west side. I turned around and saw children running. It was a fight. Even worse, it was a girl fight. Ugh. By the time I arrived to where the fight was, weaved hair pieces were on the floor. Yes, weave, lots of it. There were three people involved— two girls and a brother of one of the girls. Why were they fighting? Facebook issue. One of the girls posted on Facebook that the other girl had a sexually transmitted disease. The two girls were Liz and Kesha. Kesha tells Liz on Facebook to come over to her house (Sunday) to fight her. Liz tells her no, we will take

care of this tomorrow at school. Liz came to school prepared to fight. She saw Liz and went into a restroom, she walked out of the restroom and went directly to Kesha and pounced on her.

Kesha fell to the ground, and her brother stepped up. Well, the brother of Liz stopped him and told him to let them fight. The police officers approached and Kesha's brother went "crazy" and tried to get to Kesha. He was handcuffed by the police officer. Kesha has documented "schizophrenic" tendencies and in turn goes wild, so the other police officer handcuffed her. The student that actually started it, Liz, was calm. By the time I arrived at the scene, all I saw was hair on the floor. I picked it up, and held it up in the cafeteria and tell the children, this is why girls should not fight. (I end up on Facebook and instant messenger). After we cleared the cafeteria, I walked down the hall and started the announcements for the morning. The music was played and the selection was "Wake up Everybody" by Harold Melvin and the Bluenotes. I tell the students I chose this song so people would pay attention. I tell the students to listen to the words. It played for about two minutes, and then I heard a police officer calling me on the radio to turn off the music. I really did not understand what was happening, and he said it again frantically. I was not in the office so I ran back to my office to stop the music. I immediately proceeded to the police office to find out what was wrong. As I walked up, I saw Office Potter and a parent. The parent was screaming and cursing at him. From the conversation, I could tell she was the mother of one of the girls and was upset because her daughter was handcuffed. I waited and listened. The police officer was trying to get her out of the hallway and into a private office. I asked her to follow me.

She followed me to my office and shouted, “This is a horrible school. Everybody talks about this school, and someone needs to get control over it!” I chuckled in disgust, and she heard it. She responded, “You’re laughing? You think this is funny?” I did not deny I chuckled, and I replied, “Your daughter is the one fighting and you are talking about the school?” She reiterated, “You’re laughing.” I share it is not a funny laugh. She further goes on to state that she tried to call someone about this yesterday (Sunday). That she reported it to the police department. I asked her had she come to any of the four meetings I held since school started. She replied no. I shared with her I had four meetings, and each meeting I gave my cell number, so she had someone she could get in touch with. She was not impressed.

I left momentarily to do the announcements. After the announcements, I went to the police office to talk to her daughter. As I was walked to the police office, I noticed Ms. Jay in the clinic. I walked in the clinic and saw another student who appeared to be under the influence. The nurse was taking his vitals. I saw his eyes and confirmed to the nurse it appeared he had been smoking marijuana. I exited the nurse’s office and went back to my office and met with the mother again; however, I had another parent waiting for me, grading issue. I asked her if she could wait while I finished with the other parent and she agreed.

I returned back to my office and talked to mother in more detail. The mother was dressed in pajamas and a night cap. She went on to tell me her daughter was sexually assaulted by the attacker’s brother the past summer. Supposedly some detective came to school to interview her daughter, and we all should have been aware of the visit. I asked

the other administrators if they knew this student, and the answer was no. Not one of the administrators was aware of anything happening to the daughter. I decided to talk to the daughter to receive more information. The results were she was interviewed. Someone at Eastside High allowed a police officer to interview her alone (ugh). After I finish, I spoke to Liz. Liz was not remorseful, and told me if she (Kesha) talked about her again, she was going to fight her again.

I began my counseling session with Liz and my secretary called me on the radio and informed me that I had another parent in my office who wanted to speak with me. I returned to office and found Kesha's mother left to bring her elementary child to school. However, there was a parent with a grading issue and we were able to resolve it. Another parent walks in (number 4 now), and reported an incident that occurred last week.

Deon, her son, was accused of smoking marijuana out by the softball field during fifth period. He denied the allegations and then confessed to one of the assistant principals; however, he told his mother he confessed because the assistant principal told him if he did not, he was going to have to go to jail. I shared with Deon's mother I would investigate and get back with her by the end of the day. The next issue was in the registrar's office, an 18 year old male student, from Louisiana, came to register with the cousin he was residing with. The student had six credits and wanted to return to high school to obtain his diploma. I really did not have enough time to counsel him, so I asked if we could schedule an appointment the next day. I shared with him I really wanted to help him find the right placement but I wanted to have more time to discuss other options. He and his cousin agreed and left.

Kesha's Mom returned to my office 45 minutes later. The mother came back to school fully dressed. She had applied make-up and brushed her hair. She looked totally different from the lady we viewed earlier. This happened all before 8:15 a.m. I arrived to work at 6:45 that Monday morning. I share this particular story to shed light on the fact that CLEED schools are different.

Monday mornings could be full of "weekend issues" from the neighborhood. Meaning we, as administrators, had to stop everything that was planned to deal with hearsay and other things that happened since Friday evening when the students left the building.

Why are we continually not successful? Because we do not get the support. When we get a school, African American administrators are expected to go in and just work just like our White counterparts; however, our White counterparts do not have to deal with the same issues and budgets. Budgets are normally smaller because of fewer students enrolled. Most diverse high schools in the district are well known for gang violence, fighting, bullying, drug sales, "weed" smoking on campus, low teacher morale, and learned helplessness of the students.

I am challenged daily to guide and educate children under the NCLB legislation as well as prepare them for End Of Course (EOC) and all other classes. Then I am responsible for the children that do not have a role model. Bria (from earlier in the chapter) comes to school and she is not in appropriate dress attire. Something very simple and I did not think this was a big deal. She was with her mother. The mother was "tatted up" (lots of tattoos), and was scathingly clothed, and has different issues. I am

challenged to tell the daughter she was not dressed for school, where clearly her mother was not dressed to represent her at school as her parent. I have to say to the daughter that you cannot come to school looking like this even though your mother looks like this.

I am challenged as a building principal and as an African American female principal to educate the whole child. Yes, we hear that often, but what does it really mean? I have to teach this child what her mother is not teaching her at home because the mother really does not know it is wrong. And, if she does know and chooses to raise her daughter not knowing, who am I to interfere? I have to be the standard of excellence for education and make sure students understand, yes, I am African American, and I am female, and I am a standard of excellence for education and the buck stops here. The difference in my being here as opposed to a White female principal? I am her. I am Bria. I am the mother.

Analysis

Womanism

When writing about Eastside HS and the many African American mothers and African American female employees I encountered brings to light Womanism. The theoretical framework of womanism is evident in my daily life as an administrator leading a predominantly African American school. “To accept situations and circumstances other people wouldn’t dream of enduring.” I have come in contact with many of the negative stereotypes of womanism; “Sapphires” is the most prevalent.

The image of the Sapphire is a proud, sassy African American woman who always gets the last word and loves to tell people off. I have met and dealt with at least a

dozen of women who could fall in this category since my arrival to ESHS. I work with three ladies that reflect these characteristics and several mothers. As an African American female it is sometimes hard to deal with “Sapphires” because they have an air about them and when they walk into my office, they immediately want to belittle me and the position I hold. I actually had a Black mother who I was working with become angry with me because I told her that her son did not respect women. She told me, “he doesn’t have to respect you, you are just the Mother (foul word) principal!” as she took her hand and cleared the items off of my desk.

Unfortunately, I believe “district personnel” thought of me as a Sapphire. I had the reputation of “speaking my mind” which made people uncomfortable. I made comments during meetings and asked the questions others were afraid to ask. Actually in the research the theories of CRT and womanism were obvious themes. My womanist traits emerged because of the covert racism I experienced daily, as well as developed into my defense in times when racism was overt.

Critical Race Theory – Theme Four

The fourth and final theme of CRT, according to Delgado, is the “voice of color” thesis holds that because of their different histories and experiences with oppression, Black, American Indian, Latino writers think they may be able to communicate to their White counterpart’s matters that the Whites are unlikely to know (Delgado, 2000). I am vocal (Womanism) in meetings not only to bring social justice to students of color, but also to bring awareness to my colleagues who happen to be White. I do believe “whites are unlikely to know” the many barriers and constraints many placed at-risk students

encounter in maneuvering through the system of education, (i.e. low-socioeconomic status of parents residing in lower income housing, resulting in economically depleted schools, causing possible issues with hiring and maintaining quality teachers because of working conditions). In addition, I believe “whites are unlikely to know” the many roadblocks and pitfalls many administrators of color encounter in working to provide an education for students placed at-risk, (i.e. limited resources for economically depleted schools, issues hiring experienced qualified teachers and administrators with knowledge in curriculum and instruction and understanding of children of diverse backgrounds).

Sidebar: I literally just had a phone conversation with a colleague of mine about Eastside High School and Old School High School. Old School’s principal resigned after a year and a half. He was a White male and was highly respected in the district. He was asked to take the job at OSHS two weeks before the school opened that fall. I believe it was GVISD’s way of “showing” the African American community that “we” are putting our best and brightest high school principal at our weakest high school (a move which had never been done before).

Although Mr. Golden was an excellent principal, his experience was somewhat limited, meaning he was not accustomed to a culturally, linguistically, ethnically, economically, and exceptionally diverse campus. I attempted to meet with Mr. Golden on a couple of occasions, because I felt he really did not know what he was about to experience at Old School High School. First, being the principal of a CLEED campus in GVISD and second, being a White man

replacing 26 years of African American leadership on that particular campus. I wanted to be his “voice of color” theme four, Critical Race Theory.

Mr. Golden and I were both in the district as administrators for approximately 15 years. We actually earned our master’s degrees at the same time from a local university. He obtained an administrative position in the district two years before I did. He also obtained a principalship after three years as an assistant principal; it took me a total of six years as an assistant principal to be promoted to principalship. Mr. Golden’s experience was with predominantly affluent White/Asian communities. My experience began at Old School as a teacher for ten years and later as the principal of Butterfly High School for seven years. Both of these campuses were CLEED.

As soon as I heard Mr. Golden was going to be the principal at OSHS, I felt a need to speak to him about my interpretation of what “the job entails” now that he was with “us” (African Americans) at a campus placed at-risk. When I spoke with him, he immediately agreed with everything I said, but would add a disclaimer of why maybe my suggestions were not feasible. I suggested various items to purchase for the students to obtain buy-in, he smiled and replied, “They spent all the money.” I suggested having a fund raiser. He replied, “I have no one to work.” I also commented on a teacher activity that was very useful for our campus, he stated, “we already have it all set up for the first day.” I then told Mr. Golden, “Sounds like you have a plan, if you need me, let me know.”

Mr. Golden and I did not really connect again until a year later after a principal meeting. The meeting was about credit recovery and we were sitting next to each other. We both were dismayed by the leadership of the curriculum department not having a solution or answer for “our kids” placed at-risk. I (in my normal fashion) began to vent and make suggestions about what needed to happen. He joined in and after the meeting we talked.

Mr. Golden admitted to me, the job was hard. He actually admitted that he never understood the effort it took to manage and lead an “at-risk” school until he was actually in the driver’s seat. He commented specifically on discipline issues, and most days being an “assistant principal” instead of leading as a principal.

Summary of Mr. Golden’s Story

The white male, was asked to go to OSHS. Benefits? He was paid more money than any other African American principal that ever worked there. He was allowed to choose his own administrative team and he was allowed to “bring” his people with him. However, once he settled into the job and realized the magnitude of issues and problems facing children placed at-risk, he began asking for “student” needs: better teachers, different schedules, flexible hours, more administrative staff, more counselors, more support from district personnel, and more options for credit recovery for students, just to name a few. He soon found out, it was not that easy on “this” side of the district. Mr. Golden was not one to fight. He never had to.

Womanism theory is all in me. It is who I am. “To accept situations and circumstances other people wouldn’t endure” that is an African American female principal. Mr. Golden, White male principal, did the job for a full year and a half. During his third semester at OSHS, he resigned for another principalship in another district. The three African American principals prior to his arrival were all asked to resign the position. Mr. Golden resigned on his own accord and when his resignation became public, many important people met with him to ask “what was so bad that you are choosing to leave?” I asked for myself and his comment, “I just don’t have to work this hard, and Shirley, neither do you.”

CHAPTER IX

DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

Where do I begin? Who do they think I am?

They think I am a little Black girl from a dysfunctional home, and I was never to be anything but a servant to them. Little did they know I had an inner strength in me that allowed me to excel every time they laughed at me, embarrassed me, ridiculed me, taunted me, bullied me, humiliated me, or cursed me.

In fact, they even pushed me down twice and attempted to hold me down once.

Attempted, yes, the resilience my mother taught me brought me right back up.

I am patient, even though I am supposed to be an angry Black woman.

I am passionate, but it causes me pain for it is my weakness.

I am passionate; for it brings me joy for it is my strength.

I am successful, even though they did not give me what they gave others.

I am intellectual, even though they did not teach me with the same zeal they taught others.

I am articulate, because I was taught by White teachers and I mimicked their style.

I am a Beautiful African American Female Administrator who lives a purposeful life.

Why was it really different for me? The above poem was written on November 13, 2012. I had taken a vacation day from work to write. I prepared myself and decided I would not “dress” I would put on a pair of sweats and go to Chelsea’s room and devote the entire day to writing. Unfortunately, that particular day, I had my first “real” writer’s block. There were many times during the course of writing, I had difficulties putting

events into words; however, November 13th proved to be different. The words were not coming and I grew frustrated and angry. I decided to light a candle (my Catholic roots, the flame signified the Lord is present) and prayed. I took a deep breath and allowed myself to vent on paper; hence, the poem. To be quite honest, it was on a separate sheet and I wrote it in order to help me end the writer's block and it did. At the end of the night, I was closing my documents and discovered I had not done anything with it. As I read it again, I really enjoyed reading it. When I read the words aloud, I felt empowered and special. As I read today, I think when did it change for me?

Realizing things changed

My first "culture shock" as I refer to it, was when I was 21 years old. The story in Chapter V that refers to a White female applicant with actually no work experience was hired instead of me. People around me talked and I heard more about racism and how Blacks have to do more than a White applicant and how we have to be better than our White counterpart. "At an early age, African Americans are taught to be successful in today's society, they (African Americans) must be "better" than their White counterparts in order to compete for the same job, position, opportunity, etc." (Hall et al, 2012). That was the first time in my life that I did not get something because of the color of my skin (that I am aware). This also related to Critical Race Theory Theme 2, (page 61) "our system of White over color serves important purposes for the dominant group." "Color-blindness" is necessary to deter blatant forms of discrimination such as hiring White less qualified applicants as opposed to people of color with the same or better qualifications."

The next experience was my White supervisor screaming at me over the phone about my absence in a meeting; an event which resulted in my leaving industry and entering into the field of education. Following was my arrival to Old School HS, a predominantly African American staff and student population helped me to learn my African American culture. I listened, modeled, and took pride in being an African American female. Monumental in my educational career of “when did it change” was Epistemology. I remember lectures Dr. Clark and Dr. Skrla told about the fishbowl theory and the invisible knapsack of White privileges. “White privilege has been defined as unearned advantages of being White in a racially stratified society and has been characterized as an expression of institutional power that is largely unacknowledged by most White individuals” (Neville, Worthington, & Spanierman, 2001). I connected, and I learned the truth, “my” truth and I came to be.

Chapter Reviews

The remainder of this chapter will present my research questions as well as disclose additional dialogue, reflections, and expressions. The anecdotes that I shared throughout this study brought my story to life. As I stated earlier, I always wanted to share my mother’s story, but little did I know I had my own story to tell. I often joked with my secretaries, both two lovely African American women who truly had my back and took care of me at work, about being on Oprah. The story goes that my book about education, entitled “*The Chosen One*” would be on her book list and I would share my life story of being an outstanding educator and how we (me and Oprah) would change education in the United States. Yolanda Adams would also be on the show and I would

have a conversation with her about her CD “*Believe*” and how it became my anthem each and every time I ventured down Highway 290 to go to College Station to pursue my doctorate degree. The lyrics in the song always gave me a feeling of “I can do this, and I must do this for all of us.”

Chapter IV

“*The Chosen One*,” I actually gave myself that name in my family because I was the only sibling to go to college and obtain a degree. In Chapter IV, the story of my family, I talked about the struggles, trials, and tribulations we faced as a family unit. On December 15, 2012 we assembled (all six children and Mom) for my nephew’s graduation from a local university with a Bachelor’s Degree in Education. He completed his student teaching and became a certified teacher for the state of Texas. We now have five educators in the family, myself, Chelsea (my daughter), Marie (my neice), Mikey (my nephew), and Tina (Mikey’s sister and my niece). December 15th was the first time since Daddy died that we were all together. Mom was so happy and we were very glad Cindi and Marcia joined the celebration.

I also discussed my mother’s resilience and strength in Chapter IV. She was a strong presence and force all of my life and taught me at a young age not to complain.

Sidebar: One afternoon I was sitting at the kitchen table and Mom walked into the room. I was upset and started to complain about working, going to school, performing at football games, and the pressure I was under to do EVERYTHING. (I was 16 years old, an A student, worked at a local restaurant so I could pay my car note, and was a member of the drill team at my high

school, as well I was responsible for various chores, cooking, washing, cleaning, etc. around the house). I further complained my friends did not have to work or do chores and it was not fair. (My friends often boasted about how their parents would not allow them to work, that school was more important). I was looking for sympathy from my mother, instead, she replied, “If you have to complain about it, don’t do it.” I thought to myself, “That’s it? That’s all you are going to tell me, where is the compassion, understanding, sympathy?” Well, it was not in the kitchen that afternoon and to be quite honest, she could have coined the Nike phrase “*Just Do It*” thirty-four years ago.

I learned that day, at the age of 16, that whatever life puts in my path, deal with it. The hand you are dealt, play it and don’t fold. Make it work. And I did just that, thanks to Mom.

Daddy was a dreamer, and visionary. Think about how he left Louisiana and ventured to California and made a life for him and his family. He knew nothing other than what he heard people saying; however, he was successful. He learned to read and write in his 20’s while he was incarcerated. Regardless of what deficiencies and/or issues he had, he was a provider for his family. One of my girlfriends read Chapter IV and she commented, “Shirley, you are just like your father.” I replied, “How?” She replied my determination and not taking no for an answer. I asked her to explain further and she continued, “Take for instance, how he moved to California and did not know what to expect. You do that all the time, you consistently go into uncharted waters and come out victorious,” (she was referring to the successful principalship in GVISD.) She

continued, “Even the way you work off stress and entertain, you love to give parties and you love cooking for people, you get enjoyment when you make people happy. You are your Daddy’s child.”

Marie my niece commented, “You are like Pop, he was he was a self-made man and you are a self-made woman.” She went on to continue, “You know Nanny, no one cared if you finished college, if you chose to stop, nothing would have been said by anyone in the family; for example, when I graduated high school in 1997, you, Mom, Dad, and everyone expected me to go to college and everyone expected me to finish like you did in four years. Well I finished, but it took me five years!” Marie laughed and continued, “You set a precedent for the family, all I heard was Aunt Shirley did it, and she did it without any help. I and all of your brothers’ and sisters’ children was/is expected to go to college, because of “Aunt Shirley.”

Chapter V and VI

Chapter V and VI is a reflection of my professional career from Training Instructor with a local grocery chain to an associate principal of a predominantly White high school. My first experiences with my lifelong friends, Sharon and Joan were paramount. They were my African American mentors and confidants. I share throughout the dissertation that I did not have anyone mentoring me to become an administrator; however, I did not give due justice to these two women who “raised me” and brought African American culture and experiences into my life. In 2003, Sharon sponsored me as I pledged a graduate chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha, Sorority, Inc. Through the experience, I learned even more about African American women and our history. Our

Founders were all African American educators in 1908. Sharon and Joan also showed me what it meant to be a Black teacher and how to relate to and service African American children.

Through various stories and situations shared, tenacity, resilience, and persistence remained in my spirit to continue the journey, “*Never Give Up!*” I placed in quotes, and I now reference the lyrics of Yolanda Adams: “*Visions that can change the world trapped inside an ordinary girl, she looks just like me to afraid to dream out loud* as tears well up, as I read these words I have heard hundreds of times, I was afraid many days. I questioned God and many times was angry with Him for allowing “things to happen to me.” All He would tell me was to put on the armor. Isaiah 54:17 “No weapon formed against me will prosper” and continue the journey...*And though it’s simple, your idea, it won’t make sense to everybody...you need courage now, if you’re gonna persevere* No, my opinions, my thoughts, my words, did not make sense to people. He gave me the courage and He allowed me to persevere...*To fulfill divine purpose, you gotta answer when you’re called so don’t be afraid to face the world against all odds* Thank you Lord for choosing me and opening windows, when doors were locked and padded. ... *sometimes life can place a stumbling block in your way, but you gotta keep the faith...it’s all inside of you, you have everything you need* I did have everything I needed ...I had it all the time. I just had to be patient and allow His will to be done....*keep the dream alive, don’t let it die ...if something deep inside keeps inspiring you to try...never give up* (Adams, Lewis & Wright, 2001).

Chapter VII and Chapter VIII

I never thought the Lord would use me as a vessel to allow me to bring motivation and promise to a campus like Butterfly High. Butterfly was my first love; however going to Eastside as a matured, seasoned educator made my life purposeful. Yes, I realized after the first day of school at Eastside, my purpose was truly to educate our youth. The placed at-risk children that some educators do not want to service or even know are wanting and needing “us” – the few, the proud, the brave African American men and women who decide, yes, they (our students) are worth the best. Thank you, Lord for helping me to realize my purpose. Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011), according to the literature, women lead schools and districts purposefully.

Summary

In the words of my 14-year old son Drew, “Mom you have a dream job, you have the job everyone wishes they had.” I thought to myself, “out of the mouths of babes” (this comment was made when we were discussing Drew and what he wanted to do when he grows up). A dream job? I suppose it was my dream to lead a high school campus. The entire process of preparing, interviewing, networking, and promotion were an uphill battle.

The actual act of interviewing and obtaining the position of high school principal is challenging for all applicants, including women and men; however, for an African American female, it becomes difficult because of gender, race and the bigotry that results from being a product of both groups. Even more disturbing, is this pattern has been constant for more than a century. Beginning with the first female African American

principal in the United States, Fannie Jackson Coppin in 1869, African American women have been underrepresented as it related to the high school principalship. Ms. Coppin was discriminated against because of her race and gender. Oberlin College was the only institute of higher learning in the 1860's that actually accepted women, and, of course, after the Civil War, African Americans were not permitted in White universities. So African American women had to "find" a place where they would be accepted. Although women have made progress in attaining administrative positions in schools, few women have been able to obtain positions as high school principals (Grogan, 1999; Gupton & Slick, 2004; Fennell, 2005; Loder, 2005; Thurman, 2004).

The Texas Education Agency statistics of employed principal demographics 2007-2011 reports the following:

Gender Results

- The number of employed principals increased each year.
- The increases can be explained largely by a growing number of female principals
- The number of male principals has remained the same.

Race and ethnicity

- About two-thirds of principals were white, about one-fifth were Hispanic, and just over one-tenth were African American.
- The percentage of white principals declined, while the percentage of Hispanic showed a small increase.

The reported information by TEA included all elementary and secondary principals for the years 2006-2011. It did not break down White female principals or African

American female principals. All women (as well as men) were grouped together with racial counts. Where TEA states there is a growing number of female principals; 57.4% in 2006 to 60.4% in 2011, I would conclude the female representation is growing in the Hispanic population. In 2006, 19.7% of principals were Hispanic and grew to 21.8% in 2011. African American representation was 11.2% in 2006 and dropped slightly to 11.04% in 2011. White representation also declined from 68.5% in 2006 to 64.9% in 2011. Asian representation doubled from .28% to .55%; actual numbers were 21 principals in 2006 to 44 principals in 2011 (Ramsay, 2012).

This data clearly shows that in the state of Texas we, African Americans, are underrepresented as a race. In 2006, the state of Texas employed 7,394 principals (elementary and secondary) and 822 (11.2%) of those principals were African American. In 2011, the number of employed principals increased to 7,945, and 877 were African American (11.04%). In a five year period, our representation as African American principals remained stagnant, with a slight drop in percentage points.

Purpose

My purpose for writing this dissertation, *An African American Woman's Perception of her Journey to the Principalship*, was to share my story with other African American female administrators aspiring to become principals. This body of work was presented in the form of autoethnography to bring forward a thick description of the struggles, tribulations, and triumphs we, as African American women, face as high school principals. "The autoethnographer not only tries to make personal experience meaningful and cultural experience engaging, but also, by producing accessible texts,

she may be able to reach wider and more diverse mass audiences that traditional research usually disregards, a move that can make personal and social change possible for more people” (Bochner, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Goodall, 2006; hooks, 1994). It was also an effort to add to educational research about African American female administrators as well as to bring forth a story about African American women by an African American woman. I would like to believe the most important revelation of my work is I am not unique, and other African American women can identify with my story. The narrative approach allows us to witness the individual in his/her complexity and recognize that although some phenomena will be common to all, some will remain unique (Josselson, 1995).

I am an African American female who leads as a building principal. My story may be different; however, my goal as an educator is the same as all of my wonderful sisters servicing and educating children with a high level of expectations for all students who come our way. Because of their unique experiences, the perspectives of and for African American women is not expressed and adopted by all (Collins, 2000). It does not take magic, or some God-given birthright, to be an effective leader in education (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011); however it does take persistence, resilience, knowledge, and organization. Persistence is determination to continue, keep focused and stay the course. As the saying goes, “*How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time!*” We need to be consistent and dedicated to the task and our task is education for the students we serve. Shambaugh (2010) states “the resilience factor is what gets us back in the game and keeps us pursuing our goals instead of becoming discouraged and giving up.”

Knowledge of curriculum and instruction is paramount. We must be teachers of teachers. Organization is defined as “putting things in order.” We must keep order by being great leaders. The principal must believe all children can achieve at high levels, set expectations for colleagues, and have a commitment to excellence. We must believe and expect the best from all stakeholders.

Expressions

In the 1997-1998 school year, my tenth year of teaching, I was selected by my colleagues to represent Old School High School as teacher of the year and was named a finalist for Secondary Teacher of the Year for the Green Valley Independent School District. The following is an excerpt from writings I submitted to GVISD in December, 1997, explaining why I became a teacher:

From a family of educators, I did not emerge. I am from a simple background: father, a carpenter (third grade education), and mother, a homemaker (ninth grade education). As I reflect now, I am sure I was some statistician’s dream – Black, poor, and one of six children. I fell into so many at-risk categories that I could have probably created my own; yet, failure was not an option, for I was the “bumble bee.” “Aerodynamically, the bumble bee shouldn’t be able to fly, but it does not know this and flies anyway.” Like the bumble bee, I was not supposed to fly, but no one ever told me that success could not be mine. As a result, I am the only child out of six to attend and graduate from college with both Bachelor’s and Master’s Degrees. I consider myself the “chosen one”

in my family – chosen to pass onto others what was so freely given to me. For this honor, I am grateful to my teacher heroes.

School was always a place where I felt safe and wanted. Growing up in California, I was a young Black girl with all White teachers, but I knew not of prejudice. All I knew was that my teachers loved me. They called on me, they inspired me, and they were interested in me. They loved the way I wrote, spoke, looked, and laughed. In return, I loved them. I wanted to be just like them. I wanted to encourage children to do things and not know there were barriers, for I knew of none. In the midst of racism, with heroic compassion, teachers encouraged me to fly.

At the end of Chapter One, I quoted Patricia Collins work. This dissertation was written over a ten-year period, so I had to refresh my memory. I began reviewing Collins book, *Black Feminist Thought* which she revised in 2000. She began telling a story about when she was five years old and was chosen to play “Spring” in a program. She talked about how everyone loved her and how wonderful she felt. But as she grew up and her world expanded “things” changed. I identified with Collins immediately. I wrote the passage above in reference to my elementary and secondary days. As stated in Chapter One, teachers always saw the best in me and I, too, felt loved by everyone.

As a teacher, I saw very few racial situations; however, I was working with majority African American professionals. When I arrived at New School HS, as an assistant principal, I worked with a White faculty and staff, I witnessed several situations of Critical Race Theory Theme 1, where racism is “ordinary, the usual way

society does business.” This was my first experience of being used as the Black representative to talk to upset Black parents. I was “talked to” by the building principal for the way I “walked into a room” the teacher described it to him that I was “hostile” and “unfriendly.” I was also called into the principal office because a White teacher informed him that I was being racist because of his evaluation. (It was not up to his expectation). During the conversation, he actually told me in front of the White building principal, that the “kids” at the school often talked about me because “I acted like I was White” and they did not like me, in fact, the majority of the school, especially the “Black kids” did not like me. After these stories of overt racism and daily experiences of covert racism, I felt my wings had been clipped. I was not able to fly.

Patricia Collins said it much better than I:

As my world expanded, I learned that not everyone agreed with them. Beginning in adolescence, I was increasingly the “first,” or “one of the few,” or the “only” African-American and/or woman working-class person in my schools, communities, and work settings. I saw nothing wrong with being who I was, but apparently many others did. My world grew larger, but I felt I was growing smaller. I tried to disappear into myself in order to deflect the painful, daily assaults designed to teach me that being an African American, working-class woman made me lesser than those who were not. And as I felt smaller, I became quieter and eventually was virtually silenced (Collins, 1991).

I connected, related, understood, and empathized with Patricia Collins. The first time I read this passage, was in 2003, and I was the associate principal at Uppity High School. I

was asked to be silent (the detailed story is on page 201 of this dissertation) and I was silenced for a period of two years 2003-2005. When I arrived at Butterfly High, as principal of the school, I broke free from the “cocoon” and was able to fly again. Her last sentence gave me the inspiration and I continued the flight. To say the things everyone (even the White educators) wanted to say, but were too afraid to say for fear of going against the status quo, the norm. I now refuse to be silenced.

Findings-Research Question #1

How can African American high school principals encourage African American female teachers to become administrators?

First and foremost, it is up to the present generation of African American females to assist our “rising” stars: those teachers in the classroom now. I stated in Chapter V, when I began my journey, I had no African American female or male mentors. To be quite honest, I had no one mentoring me to be an administrator. When I shared my aspirations with my ‘teacher’ friends, they disconnected from me, because they thought I was a sell out and told me so. It appeared to me, it was an elite position for African Americans and those that were “in the club” did not want anyone else “in the club.” I was scrutinized and teased by my teacher colleagues when I told them I was in school to be an administrator and I was ignored when I told administrators I was interested.

Nine years ago, I approached Ms. Matthews, the only African American female secondary principal in GVISD to congratulate her and I was shunned. I was an associate principal at the time and wanted to meet with her to discuss how she obtained her position. I specifically went to a school board meeting to meet her. I went up to her to

shake her hand and she looked at me with as if to say, “yes?” Embarrassed, I put out my hand and told her congratulations. With both arms folded across her chest, she managed to release her right hand and shook my hand.

Sidebar: I realized I was having some issues breaking into Green Valley ISD as a credible candidate for a high school or middle school principal. Three things I was told to do by Dr. Billman, my White principal at New School HS, were to network, volunteer for committees, and look the part. He immediately commented, “Shirley you look the part, you walk the walk and talk the talk. Get to know people, let them get to know you on a personal level this will help.”

My networking included social events, happy hours, going to conferences and making sure I mingled with the “powerful players” in the district. The players were White male high school principals and they liked me. I knew this because they told me and they were “putting in good words for me.” During interviews, members of the committee would comment to me that Dr. Billman or Mr. White (the players) spoke very highly of my work ethic. However, I applied and interviewed seven times for a secondary principal within a two year period. I was always one of the top two candidates. Being one of the top two, my next step was to interview with the superintendent of the district. The superintendent always started the interview with “Shirley, you are a great administrator and in time....” then “the right fit” conversation followed. She further stated, “Hang in there; something is coming for you...” Yes, I heard on seven different occasions, the other candidate was a better fit than I.

I decided I would find an African American female “that made it” (achieved high school principal) and modeled what she did. A girlfriend of mine knew Ms. Matthews and suggested I “just go up to her and talk.” So, I did. The look Ms. Matthews gave me when she extended her hand was one of disgust and “how dare you approach me here at a board meeting.” I felt belittled and unworthy of her company. When I walked away, I thought to myself she was insecure. She was “the one” the “only African American female high school principal” in GVISD and it was clear she did not want to share the spotlight. She knew I was up and coming; however, she was not going to be the one to assist my endeavor and (I felt she felt) how dare I come in and try to take “her” spot in this district.

This brings to light the crab mentality that is unfortunately associated with African Americans. The analogy in human behavior is that members of a group will attempt to “pull down” any member who achieves success beyond the others out of envy, conspiracy or competitive feelings is crab mentality (Bolden, 2006). Another aspect of crab mentality is not necessarily to pull people down, but also, not to assist in bringing them up.

Instead of keeping African Americans away, we need to train, mentor and guide them into positions so they can be successful and ready to take on each new day. Together we can achieve more. Many studies (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003) have found that one of the most effective ways to prepare and support principals in their careers is to provide a mentoring program. King (1998) believes that it is important for historically

underrepresented groups to be provided opportunities to participate in mentoring arrangements, and that it is essential that mentoring experiences be culturally relevant.

We should support promising African American teachers in pursuing administrative certification and encourage them to become campus principals. As African American females, we need to be accountable for our role in elevating and recruiting African Americans females into these positions. When accountability becomes a part of the prevalent consciousness of African Americans, then we'll see the elevator stop going down and start going toward the roof (Lomotey, 1993).

A paradigm shift among African American educators must occur in order to encourage our own. We must be committed to assisting and mentoring each other. The theoretical framework of CRT is grounded in the thought that we must first deconstruct the beliefs of the dominant culture and then reconstruct a new way of thinking. Deconstruction of the process would be the traditional path to becoming an educator. Reconstruction? Many high schools boast of academies. In GVISD we have Engineering, Medical, Math and Science, Global Language, and at one time a Fire Fighting Academy. An academy at the high school level for Teacher training would be beneficial for our youth.

Not only would it encourage students to begin thinking about careers in education, but it would also assist in their understanding of pedagogy. Our experience has been to “get ours” and let the next person worry about his. There is a need for African Americans in educational leadership to reconstruct a new way of thinking. Collins (1991) notes that, “this interdependence of thought and action suggests that

changes in thinking may be accompanied by changed actions and that altered experiences may in turn stimulate a changed consciousness.” Our process needs to include assisting, mentoring, and encouraging our own. We need to release the “crab mentality” and understand this is about educating children. The children need us and we can be successful in educating our own.

We want our children educated.....Either the United States will destroy ignorance or ignorance will destroy the United States. And when we call for education we mean real education. We believe in work. We ourselves are workers, but work is not necessarily education. Education is the development of power and ideal. We want our children trained as intelligent human beings should be, and we will fight for all time against any proposal to educate black boys and girls simply as servants and underlings, or simply for the use of other people. They have a right to know, to think, to aspire. (DuBois, 1903).

Research Question #2

How has racism and sexism limited the African American female’s opportunities for advancement in a secondary public school setting?

When discussing this question with Dr. Webb-Hasan, I immediately said, “Well racism and sexism really did not hamper my advancement into principalship.” I also went on to share that most African Americans “that made it” think they are different from the norm. So I began to really think about this position and I pondered on whether

or not racism and sexism did affect my obtaining a principalship. I chuckled to myself realizing the part of the literature that states the following:

African American women usually do not internalize racism and/or sexism. They refused to let their ethnicity and their gender to present themselves as barriers to their professional goals; they refused to succumb to these barriers, and have not lowered their aspirations because of them (Mack, 2010).

When I stopped to think about racism and sexism, it took approximately one minute and two stories of my past appeared and the rolodex in my brain flipped first to Uppity High School. Racism was the reason I was not promoted from associate principal on that campus to principal. I did not even receive an interview because I was African American. The principal (Biggy from Chapter VI) of Uppity High School was promoted to assistant superintendent. It was common practice for the associate principal to advance if the current principal should leave. I was not even considered and Biggy blatantly told me, “Uppity High School is not ready for an African American principal, you won’t be successful here.” She shared her sentiments with the superintendent and other top level administrators.

The second story which relates to me being a “female” occurred during the hiring of a principal at Old School High School (the school where I began my educational career). I was the associate principal at Uppity High School and Old School High School was in need of a principal. The present principal, Ms. Matthews, happened to be an African American female and was beginning her third year at the school. (Ms. Matthews is actually the principal I referred to above in Research Question #1). It was

August and school was to begin in three weeks. Everyone in Green Valley ISD knew she was having problems. The assistant superintendent actually chose an associate principal, Dr. Goodwill, African American male, for her in order to provide more assistance to her and the staff. Talk had it that Ms. Matthews was very emotional and confrontational; in fact, she even cried at a meeting when she was told she would be losing staff because her student numbers were decreasing.

Dr. Goodwill was very determined and sure of himself. After spending two weeks with Ms. Matthews, he submitted his resignation and accepted a position as a professor at a local university. On the day Dr. Goodwill resigned, Ms. Matthews was attending an administrative in-service for the district and she was summoned to the district office to meet the assistant superintendent. The discussion ended with her asking to be moved to a position in the central office and the superintendent agreed. Old School High School was in need of a principal and an associate principal and school was to begin in three weeks. My supervisor, Biggy (Chapter VI), immediately pulled me aside (while we were attending the administrative in-service) told me what transpired, and asked me if I was interested in being the associate principal of Old School HS. (I just completed a full year with her and she was looking for another place for me to go because she decided 'Uppity HS' was not ready for a strong African American woman).

I told Biggy, I was interested in the *principal* position, not necessarily the associate spot, because I was already an associate principal. Biggy further told me that she knew GVISD was not interested in another woman running the school and that the community was lobbying for a strong African American male. So basically, she let me

know (again) I did not have a chance and to be quite honest, she was correct. Mr.

Tryagain was appointed principal of Old School HS the following week.

Sidebar: Mr. Tryagain was actually the associate principal three years prior to Ms. Matthews being hired for Old School HS. She worked with Mr. Tryagain for a year, complained about him, and he was moved shortly after her arrival. Mr. Tryagain's tenure at Old School HS lasted three years (the same amount of time as Ms. Matthews). He was replaced by another African American male, Dr. Peters. Dr. Peters' tenure was also three years. Dr. Peters was replaced by a White male, Mr. Golden. Mr. Golden was the building principal for a year and a half, submitted his resignation and has moved to another district. The school was once again in need of a principal.

This research question has proven to be the hardest to answer. I decided to bring in an additional personal story to support my findings. My niece, Marie, is an African American, English teacher with 10 years experience. She has applied in four different districts surrounding the Houston area and has the following experience: ESL training, AP certified, 504 training, LEP, English and mid-management certifications, works with various extracurricular groups around school such as Ladies of Distinction, cheerleaders, and presently at a Title 1 middle school campus in Texas. Her PDAS evaluation has been exceptional. She is articulate, smart, and intelligent. Marie has interviewed in several high schools and middle schools and has been a finalist, but has not yet received the job.

She shared this information with me and I was concerned about her answers to the questions in the interview. I wondered if she answered according to best practices and as an instructional leader, so I asked one of my White male colleagues to give her a mock interview. He told me she did exceptionally well and she would eventually be recommended for a job. A week later she interviewed for a school in GVISD and I asked the building principal, African American female, if I could sit in on the interview so I could evaluate her, the answer was yes. Marie did a great job and I had no idea she had grown so much as an educator. I literally had tears in my eyes when she completed. Again, her interview was fabulous. However, she did not get the job. She interviewed with another African American female middle school principal. The principal was looking for a strong African American male figure to be a role model for her students. Following is my analysis of the two interviews.

Interview #1

Claire (HS principal) wanted an African American female, but I believe Marie “looked” too much like the other African American female assistant principal already on her campus. They were both from the same African American sorority, same age, and both very pretty. I am not sure if skin tone reflected this decision, but I have my suspicions. She hired an African American female from a neighboring district and this person looked more like her. In fact, the new person became her confidant and the result of the hire actually divided the team.

Sidebar: The principal I am referring to was actually my successor at Butterfly High School. She was a highly competent Black administrator from a

neighboring school district. Her first principalship and she walked into the building with a very strong administrative team; unfortunately, she was more concerned about hiring “her people” than building relationships with the professionals already present at the campus. I do understand her reasoning, we, as African Americans are accustomed to people (we do not know) being deceitful, that we look for someone to “watch our back.” Our nature is to proceed with caution and to develop trust eventually; nevertheless, we do need to understand how others may “perceive” the action. Meaning, it is okay to hire someone to “have our back” but it is not okay to alienate the rest of the team. Mentors are so very important in situations such as this.

Interview # 2

Sharon (MS principal) was looking for a strong African American man who would be a role model to her African American male student population. It did not matter that Marie was a strong disciplinarian, ten years middle school experience, as well as having experience as an administrative substitute at her previous school. Sexist practices in the hiring and selection process has been noted as one reason for the limited numbers of females in administration (Gupton & Slick, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1999). Marie was again turned down because she was not the right “fit.” Sharon, unfortunately, was looking for a man, she was an African American female, her associate was African American female, and she did not want to hire another because of how it would “look.” She waited too long to make a decision so a White female was sent to her to fill the

administrative position that Marie interviewed for. In reality, Marie was not hired nor an African American male; a White female was placed in the position.

In Marie's case, sexism and racism both played a major role. The two women that interviewed her in GVISD were both African American female principals. Both ladies were principals of CLEED schools and both were looking for a "certain fit." Shea (1983) maintained "fit" is nothing more than a process to eliminate candidates based upon race, gender, or background.

Research Question #3

How does an African American female administrator's presence at a culturally diverse campus affect the climate and culture of the facility?

Her presence alone is in direct correlation with the success of the school. She is at top of her game. She has leadership qualities. She knows instruction and she knows curriculum and she knows how to educate, motivate, and connect with children of color. Nurturing is natural for African American women. A number of scholars corroborated the finding that women, more frequently than men utilized the approach of care and responsibility for others when resolving ethical and moral dilemmas (Beck, 1994; Schmuck, 1998).

We, African American females, walk onto a campus and we automatically feel we are the matriarch; we are Moms. Characteristics of female leadership once thought to be weaknesses are now considered ideal attributes of successful leaders (Grogan, 1999; Holtkamp, 2002; Harris et al., 2002; Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992). In my readings, I have noticed how many African American women administrators "adopt" the children in their

schools. Collins (2000) asserts “othermothering” is an ethic of care where African American women feel accountable to all the African American community’s children and treat them as they are their own children. At Butterfly High, I actually called them my babies. Another African American (older) woman gave me some advice one morning. She stated, “Ms. Rose, they are not babies, they are young men and women. If you treat them like babies, they do not understand.” I disagreed, and told her I respected her opinion, but at Butterfly High, they were children, and they were my babies. When they achieved senior (12th grade) status, I treated them as older, but not adults. They had time “to be grown and have grown up responsibilities.” Caring, effective communication, collaboration, and team building are now touted as necessary leadership traits in order to motivate and inspire teachers and students to meet the increasingly complex demands of today’s high schools (Grogan, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1990; Enomoto, 2000; Fennell, 1999).

How does it affect? It brings stability and promise to the campus and to the students. Our presence brings comfort to the parents. African American parents grew up in a world of racism, affirmative action, stereotypes, and bigotry. It is in our nature to mistrust society and the people we come in contact with whom do not look like us. In November, we elected President Barack Obama for a second term. We (African Americans) were nervous. A win for President Obama is a win for us. We are successful; however if he fails, we all fail.

Conclusion

Margaret Grogan (2011), when I think of myself and other women who are leading districts and schools that are making dramatic gains, I do not see effective educational leaders who happen to be women; I see leaders who are effective in part because we are women. As I wrote my conclusion, I fought with my inner self about what my findings really were. Who is Shirley Rose? What makes her tick? What makes her sad? What makes her happy? What makes her a good/great educator? And most importantly what makes her research worthy to be added to academe?

You hire people who have capacity; you help them build that capacity and you let them shine. And I get the residual effect of that all the time, but I no longer need to be in the limelight as ... the person who made all of this happen because that's not what makes me feel successful. When I have other people who feel empowered, who have a feeling of purpose and desire and direction and want to make things happen with the direction we set as a team, then I feel I've done my job. Lorraine Darnell (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011).

Dr. Webb-Hasan, my committee chair, consistently guided me and probed for my purpose for this research. She said, "Shirley, what do you want to say? This is your story. What do you want to tell other African American Female administrators?" I ask for forgiveness in the way I answer this question. I have pondered for two weeks in how to write this ending to my story. I give 24 years in education and 10 years of my research.

I want every African American female administrator to know and realize, we not only represent ourselves, we represent all African American females in the position. Every time we step into our work environment we have to be the best. In my tenure as an administrator for 14 years, I went through different phases in my career development. My first phase, I wanted to be the young, likable, hard working African American female everyone wanted to have in their school and parents thought was fair. Second, I wanted to be the best associate principal and wanted everyone in the district to know I was ready for a principalship. Third phase, as a building principal, I wanted to hire teachers who truly “believed” in students and knew they could make a difference in a child’s life. I also wanted to be the principal who showed Green Valley Independent School District that a CLEED school could be successful. Fourth phase, I want to work with and develop young African American women aspiring to be principals. I also want to recruit and encourage African American high school teachers to consider taking the step into administration. In my fourth phase, present day I am writing this dissertation; this study of my life to share. Many personal stories of my family life and even more experiences of my work life have been told in order to give meaning to my journey.

When I became an administrator my ultimate goal was to move up the ladder from principal, to assistant superintendent, to superintendent. It was all about “me.” In the process and struggle, I would help children and others, but ultimately, it was about achieving my goals and being at the top. As I became more involved in my career and really understood there was a purpose to my life, I became less important and my agenda changed. My fight truly was for the students and community I served. To be a servant

leader became more important than a job title. Reflecting back to the literature review and the womanism theory, African American women typically demonstrate gross displays of endurance and the absence of a personal agenda (Scales, 2001).

Implications

Most research in the field of education concerning women reflects women in general and is not specific to African American women. More research is needed for and by African American women as it pertains to the study of female leadership on secondary public school campuses. It appears more research that focuses on the specific experiences of African American women and the ways they negotiate identity in order to strategically position themselves for the position of high school principal is also needed.

Collins further asserts that, even though African American women operate in white power structure, they use their power to transform structures toward their agendas or goals. In recognizing her “outsider-within” status, African American women are then able to develop methods that enable them to survive and resist (Collins, 2000).

Racism and the impact it may cause an African American female in her journey to the principalship is often ignored and is consumed by the magnitude of other obstacles in her path (Burgess & Brown, 2000). Because of the different obstacles we face as African American females, it is necessary to establish mentoring programs for teachers to become administrators.

Mentoring

A mentor for me would have meant entering into administration possibly five years earlier than I did originally. It would have also helped me to understand the politics of the position. As a teacher in the classroom, it never occurred to me to be an assistant principal, let alone a principal. My interest in the position was only because of my many visits to the associate principal's office because of a cheerleading parent (I was varsity sponsor) that was upset with something I did or said. I always received his support; however, I became interested in his position. I researched the assistant principal position and the salary. I compared to my teacher salary at the time and it was nearly double. I also noticed that I would have to work as a teacher for approximately six more years to make what he was making. I had previous management experience prior to education, and I was interested in obtaining my masters degree. I agree with research that mentors can make a difference in the recruitment for African American females. I could have been easily recruited by an administrator who took a personal interest in me. I would have taken his/her interest in me as a compliment and truly considered the possibility.

Grove & Montgomery (2003) asserted that "in order for women to succeed in acquiring administrative positions in education mentoring must occur." They cited four advantages of this enabling strategy:

1. Mentoring can significantly enhance income and promoting possibilities for individuals experiencing these relationships.

2. Mentoring can assist in attracting and retaining women and minority professionals in the academic work environment.
3. Mentoring of younger workers reduces turnovers, helps mentees deal with organizational issues, and accelerates their assimilation into the culture.
4. The mentees benefit because someone is supporting them and help them interpret inside information.

African American women administrators can be effective mentors because they bring to their jobs a unique and diverse perspective as both women and minorities (Johnson, 1998). Studies indicate mentoring generally has a greater impact if the mentor is of the same race and gender, because they can relate to the same issues or challenges, culture, race, ethnicity (Johnson, 1998). Cross race mentoring relationships are often highly strained, and when they do exist it is less likely that these relationships will be of the deeper type that includes a socio-emotional dimension (Johnson, 1998).

Johnson (1998) further states:

If African American women protégés are able to find these assets in an African American woman mentor, they have secured the help of someone who has a greater chance of understanding the liabilities usually endured by African American women administrators:

1. Negative racial stereotypes
2. The solo role – being the only African American in the work group
3. Tokenism – which results in their being viewed as incompetent and their job seen as affirmative action related.

Final Reflections

The review of the literature for this autoethnographic journey signified African American women as a renewed prototype for effective school leadership, especially as it pertains to CLEED schools. With the age of accountability, African American female principals are now believed to possess the qualities necessary for a school to be successful.

Female principals generally practice democratic leadership, sensitivity, and a cooperative attitude as they lead (Eby, 2004; Shakeshaft, 1990). In addition to the leadership styles of female leaders, African American women leadership styles as principals are characterized as “caring for others” (Shakeshaft, 1999), while often being viewed as “other mothers” (Collins, 2000; Loder, 2005). Black women administrators are often characterized as “warriors”; they have a strong sense of mission and accomplishment, demonstrate intensity about their work, and have extremely high expectations for their performance (Pigford & Tonnsen, 1993). As African American females enter a high school as the principal, we bring our natural ability to nurture, because we are women.

This cultural consciousness is influenced by the way African American women define both family and community and how they determine what approaches are best suited to meet the needs of the community (Tillman, 2004; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Loder, 2005). “Other mothering” (Collins, 2000) is an important and necessary principle of being an African American woman. It links it to historical experiences where African

American women made such commitments because of a personal, social and moral obligation to strengthen the race.

Yes, make no mistake, we are strong, stern, disciplinarians and we also love the children we serve. How do we lead? We lead the way we do because of the schools where we accept the role of leadership. Every now and then one of us (I happened to be one) interview and receive the “White school” alternative, but, I will share, my sense of worth and my purpose is best exemplified in my service with “my” own children (African American children) because, I know and continue to study their needs. I respect their promise and need to be held to high standards. This in no way means I do not love or am not committed to “all” children, but my keen focus on those children who are African American, highlights my enhanced belief, especially after this journey, that purposeful and directed interest in their academic and social skill success is needed and extremely important to the work that I do and will continue to do as an instructional leader.

Letter to African American Female Administrators

Historically, I am a business teacher; that is where my teaching journey began. As a result, when I want to make sure everyone, and most especially African American women understand, I put it in writing:

November, 2012.

Dear Sisters:

First and foremost I love you and I believe in you. Every struggle you have is real and can be overcome. Find a support system: your family, husband, mother, father, sister,

brother, girlfriend. *I could have played it. I knew the rules of the game. I knew how to politic. I knew how to fraternize. Early in my career as a principal I took the strength finder test to find out what my strengths were: "WOO" Winning people over placed second in my strengths. I am a people person. I am social and I know how to get things done, and I know what people to talk to and make things happen.*

My first strength on this test my dear sister was being restorative. When I took the strength finder test, I did not like being restorative, I wanted to be a Maximizer. Yeah, a Maximizer! There seemed to be power in that word. Well I decided to take the test again, since I did not like the results, I chose to answer some of the questions differently and waited for the response. Again, I scored as being restorative. What exactly does that mean? I get a sense of purpose when I take on a project and make it better. I take the assignments no one else wants and obtain a sense of accomplishment from being able to do what no one else can do. I love to solve problems. Where some people are dismayed when they encounter a breakdown, I am energized by it. I enjoy bringing things back to life and I like to think my intervention actually allowed it to succeed.

I once saw a t-shirt with the phrase "Does not play well with others" and I thought about my behavior in district planning meetings. As I came up through the ranks, I met many people. Some I liked and some I didn't. Some liked me and many others didn't; however everyone knew my work ethic and knew I was tough and I was one of the top administrators in the district. Somehow, I made a name for myself as being 'difficult.' The word they used rhymed with witch, but it was used in a

“professional” sense, like a female who has it together but questions everyone who comes her way.

Is it About Children?

Well, that was/is me. I like to think I am a bit wiser and softer now. But when I first became a building principal, I noticed things were not fair. Most of the topics in meetings were not about children or instruction. Those topics centered around the mechanics of the district. When we did talk about children, we were always trying to take things away from them. I sat in meetings and witnessed building principals reducing the amount of time for commencement speeches, raising the bar on GPA to qualify for academic awards, and discontinuing “certain” honor cords for students to wear at graduation. Of course the students this affected were African Americans and Hispanics. I questioned the other high school principals heavily on why they were in education. Of the three Black principals on the high school team, I was the only one who was vocal about the changes that resulted in students getting less. I became the angry Black woman and became known as militant and aggressive.

Servant Leader

I am a Servant Leader. Why? I decided I was going to be the voice of the children no one really wanted to talk about in positive and productive ways (.i. e. African American, Economically Disadvantaged, and Hispanic students). The “majority” minority children in the district did not have a voice. Meetings about instruction centered on certain affluent schools in the district. We would literally talk an

hour about GPA and children playing with class rank. We talked about how we would not allow children to drop courses because they would be afraid their GPA would suffer.

Okay we need to talk about that, BUT, my children, those at Eastside and Butterfly, could not even phantom dropping anything! They needed every credit that came their way. So, yes, I became a student advocate for children placed at risk. The topics I wanted to talk about were tutorials, credit recovery, hiring qualified teachers, Saturday school, and blocking classes in order to give students more time in math and science. We also needed to talk about discipline, gangs, fights, neighborhood issues, social media, and parents. Sadly, these items did not receive attention.

In meetings, I did not play fair. I challenged district personnel who happened to be majority White females in meetings. These were the “newbie’s” of the district. Most of these ladies did not know anything about curriculum and instruction and did not come from an administrative background, nor did they ever work in a diverse school setting, so they did not know the daily grind of a campus. However, they were telling “me” how to go back and teach “my” teachers how to differentiate instruction?

Sidebar: I had an idea, how about differentiating the meetings of high school principals. Separate us into the haves and have nots, and address the concerns of “my campus and my students.” Let’s truly be productive and stop “playing” school. Let’s really do this. In fact, you sit down and let me tell you what I need and then you decide if you can handle it. (My apologies, abducted for a moment).

Undesirable Presence

I am back, basically, we would be notified of a new procedure, program or initiative, and told to implement within a week of receiving the information. Principals in meetings would mumble in disgust; however, Shirley asked the question everyone wanted to ask but scared to do so. Well, the White women did not like me and they knew the same people I knew. As time passed, I noticed I was not asked to be on anymore committees. My phone did not ring to host anything for the district. In fact, when I offered to have PDAS training for the district on my campus, I was told thanks but no thanks. I became an undesirable presence at meetings. Yes, I could have played nice and not attempted to help my students. But... my personality would not let me. The restorative sister in me was not having it. I was determined to make this better. It was neither in my being nor in my soul to allow mediocrity to survive when it came to children.

Playing the Game

I began to notice that my power of influence was shrinking. I had to think this again. Wait, I can not lose whatever ground I gained. I decided to review the rules of the game. How can I get what I need for children and encourage and empower the people I work with? Sometimes, I like to think I played the game but I cheated at times. Cheat is a strong word. The rules consistently change by the players. I am a player and I play to win. So why can I not change the rules? I did not. However, I changed the way I played the game. I changed my strategy. Like playing chess, watch your opponent and be careful of the moves you make. All moves I made I made for students. In order to lead,

one must have someone to follow (Maxwell, 2008). One can lead anywhere within the organization.

Believe

I started in small steps by planting the seed of “Believe.” I shared my ideas with other people in powerful positions and encouraged them to use the ideas as their own and share in meetings. My voice was being heard, not literally, but figuratively through other people, and it was received in a manner that was used to help students. I knew it was not about me; however, another byproduct resulted from my sharing with others and allowing them the ownership of the idea or program. I was able to earn my respect back and positioned myself in the organization where I was successful and I was necessary. Being a necessity is a good thing; nevertheless, it was clear to all, this was not about me. When I finally decided to pay attention to who had the dice and who was really running things, I adapted, accepted, and made adjustments to my agenda. I constructed my own rules as I progressed through all of the untruths and uncertainty. Yes, my hands were slapped every now and then but it was worth whatever strides we were able to make.

Children are products of this school; I have to admit I have saved a few. Once I realized it was an anointing and it is, the game playing became less important. Stephen Covey (1989) once said, “You can do things right, or you can choose to do the right thing.” Doing the right thing may cost a great deal. One must be very careful in choosing what “battle to fight” and “what hill to die on.”

In closing, my African American female administrators, you will be discriminated against because you are a woman, because you are African American, and because you are an African American woman. People will talk about you and they will say, “She’s hard to read,” “She is always angry,” “She looks at people crazy.” “She doesn’t know how to talk to people.” “She talks at you not with you.” You will be stereotyped as assertive and aggressive even unfriendly and hard to approach, simply carry yourself as the African Queen that you are recognize and adapt. You know who you are and it really is not your business what anyone thinks of you. Be strong. Be fair. Be equitable. Be kind. Be professional. Be generous. Do your job and do it better than anyone you know. When someone thinks of a great African American Female Principal, make sure they think of you! Further, when someone names a GREAT principal, make sure they think of you! Be a servant leader as a proud African Queen leading learners and their families to the land of promise, not peril.

And they will always say “She thinks she is all of that.”

And yes, you are. You are glorious. You teach the children others cannot and will not.

The proof is in the research, we teach culturally, linguistically, economically, ethnically, and diverse children and we do it well

..... and shout your students’ needs, their hopes, and their aspirations (with class and character) from the highest mountain and refuse to be silent.

The Lord gave me the opportunity and He also gave me the storms I had to go through to become a stronger and more determined administrator. Yes, I dealt with a

plethora of situations and circumstances; however, He gave me the tenacity to get through the storms to make things right for children.

I am Shirley. .. Pink fingernails, high heels, short skirts, team mom, and sorority sister. I am tough, short, sassy, all girl, red lipsticked, pink toes, pretty suits, tight jeans, attention getter, witty, and intelligent. I am mother, wife, daughter, niece, grandchild, ex-wife, sister, confidant, provider, caregiver, friend, principal, leader, mentor, and a standard of excellence. I am a dancer, a gentle, kind, warm hearted girl who cries at movies when people die and a tough mean witch when things are just not right. I am a passionate educator, an investigator, a fireball, loose cannon, and a student advocate. I am militant, possessive, African American, smooth, hard on the outside, soft on the inside, a sucker for an apology, free spirited . . . I work hard, love hard, play hard and lead even harder . . . That's me, Shirley.

Never Silent.

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