

VOICES FROM THE FIELD: BLACK WOMEN WHO HAVE
SUCCESSFULLY TRANSCENDED THE LEADERSHIP
PIPELINE INTO SUPERINTENDENCY

By

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Abstract

“A woman is like a tea bag- you will never know how strong she is until she gets in hot water.”

- Eleanor Roosevelt

Black women have such a unique journey in the world of education. It is so unique that only a Black woman can truly describe it, understand it, and tell others about it; and still, even then, not every reader of this dissertation will be able to fully comprehend the degree of scrutiny that Black women get when they ascend to any leadership position, especially superintendency. The aim of this study was to provide a glimpse into the lives of Black women who have made the journey into superintendency while delving into the trials and tribulations they have had to endure. This study also aimed to answer four questions from two different points of view: critical race feminism and black feminist thought. The research questions addressed (a) what are the barriers that Black aspiring women leaders face as they ascend to superintendency; (b) why Black qualified women are not attaining superintendency contracts; (c) how intersectionality affects upward mobility of Black women aspiring superintendents; and (d) the strategies Black women who attained the position used to gain their superintendency role. These women narratives reveal their experiences, highlighting how intersectionality plays a role in their success from both outside and inside perspectives.

Dedication

First and foremost, I want to give a sincere and heartfelt thanks to my creator, who has sustained, directed, and guided me through the good times and hard times through this journey. I would like to give thanks to my husband, Cristiano, who picked up the pieces when I couldn't, and made things happen, when I was not able to.

I would like to thank my mother, Phyllis, for instilling in me the belief in myself even when others could not see it. She made sure that my light shined so brightly when I was young, that no matter who tried to dull my light, it would continue to be a forever self-sustaining energy that would never die. Thank you for allowing me to accomplish the highest achievement in education.

Table of Contents

Abstract	iii
Dedication	iv
List of Figures	xi
Chapter I: Background	1
Introduction	1
History of the Superintendency	1
Current Trends of the Superintendency	3
Problem Statement	4
Purpose Statement	6
Research Questions	6
Significance of the Study	7
Implications to Leadership	8
Conceptual Framework	9
Critical Race Feminism (CRF)	9
Black Feminist Thought (BFT)	10
Term Definitions	12
Chapter II: Literature Review: The Pipeline	16
The Black Superintendency Pipeline	16
The Typical Pipeline vs. Non-Typical Pipeline	16
Black Students Experience	18
Black Teacher Pipeline	19
Black Principal Pipeline	23

The Emergence of Diversity	26
Black Male Leaders	26
Women Transcending Superintendency	27
Women Superintendents	27
Male Dominance	28
Glass Ceiling	28
Intersectionality: Impact of Gender and Race	30
The Intersectionality of Being a Black Woman Aspiring Superintendent	32
Networking and Mentors	35
Concrete Ceiling	36
Inequities in the Hiring Pipeline	38
Black Tax or ‘Invisible Tax’	39
Black Woman Superintendent Barriers	40
Coping Strategies	41
Hiring into the Superintendency	42
School Boards	42
Black Women Superintendents	44
Literature Review Summation	45
Chapter III: Methods	49
Statement of Study Design Approach	52
Qualitative Research	52
Critical Ethnography	53
Research Questions	56

Critical Ethnographic Questions	57
Researcher’s Role	58
Explanation of the Site and Participant	61
Selection Site Selection	61
Participant Selection	61
Chapter IV: Findings	67
Chapter Overview	67
Research Questions	68
Data Collection and Instrumentation	69
Coding	71
Results of Analysis: Themes	72
Theme 1: Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases	73
Heightened Scrutiny and Expectations	73
Empowerment and Collaborative Leadership	74
Steadfast Resilience	74
Defying Discouragement	75
The Collective Struggle and Triumph	75
In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendent for Overcoming Stereotype	76
Theme 2: Balancing Assertiveness in Leadership	77
Assertiveness vs. Perceptual Barriers	77
In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for Balancing Assertiveness in Leadership	80

Theme 3: Resilience in Facing Challenges	81
Personal Anecdotes of Resilience	81
Balancing Professional and Personal Lives	84
In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for Resilience	87
Theme 4: The Essential Trio for Empowering Black Women: Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers	88
Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers	88
Mentors: The Guiding Lights	89
Sponsors: The Game Changers	89
The Lack of Sponsorship for Black Women	89
Amplifiers: The Visibility Enhancers	90
The Synergy of the Trio	90
The Importance of Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers in Professional Growth	91
Mentors: Guiding and Advising	91
Sponsors: Advocating and Opening Doors	91
Amplifiers: Enhancing Visibility and Recognition	92
The Counterargument: Limitations and Challenges	92
Integrating the opposing views	92
In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for The Essential Trio for Empowering Black Women: Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers	92
Theme 5: Career Development	93
Career Development and Aspirations Early	93
Different Perspectives and Critiques: The World Outside	95

Theme 6: Anchoring	97
Overall Key Findings and Summarization	99
Chapter V: Summary, Implications, and Outcomes	101
Introduction	102
Summary of Data Analysis, Key Graphs, and Discussion	105
Superintendent Maeve Bailey's Interview - Transcript One	107
Superintendent Karina Allen	109
Superintendent Karina Allen 2nd Interview - Transcript Two	109
Superintendent Karina Allen 3rd Interview - Transcript Three	110
Superintendent Terri Daniels	113
Superintendent Brynlee Macklin	116
Summary of Overarching Themes	118
Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases	119
Navigating the Balance of Assertiveness in Leadership	120
Demonstrating Resilience in Confronting Challenges	121
Embracing the Vital Trio for Empowering Black Women: Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers	122
Fostering Career Development	122
The Concept of Anchoring	124
Implications and Conclusions	125
Implications	125
Research Question Conclusions	126
Conclusion for RQ1	126

Conclusion for RQ2	126
Limitations	127
Suggestions for Future Research	128
Conclusion	130
Appendix A Informed consent	132
Appendix B Black Women Superintendent Consent	137
Appendix C Interview Protocol Questions	140
Appendix D Recruitment Letter/Email	143
References	144
Curriculum Vitae	167

List of Figures

Figure 1 Superintendent Maeve Bailey Career Timeline and Progression	109
Figure 2 Dr. Superintendent Maeve Bailey’s Key Concept on Assertiveness Visual	109
Figure 3 Superintendent's Karina Allen’s Career Timeline and Progression	113
Figure 4 Superintendent Karina Allen’s Map of Core Values and Strategies	114
Figure 5 Superintendent Terri Daniels' Career Timeline and Progression	116
Figure 6 Superintendent Terri Daniels' Principal Leadership Impact	116
Figure 7 Superintendent Brynlee Macklin’s Career Progression	118
Figure 8 Superintendent Brynlee Macklin’s Systemic Barrier Visualization	119

Chapter I: Background

Introduction

According to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA, 2020), in the United States, the average superintendent is a married, White male with prior experience as a principal. In 2010, 91% of all superintendents fit this “modal,” but since then, the face of superintendency has slowly changed. Twenty-eight percent of superintendents are women, whereas more than 70% are men. The average age of an employed superintendent is 41–45 years old (AASA, 2020). The most common ethnicity of a school superintendent is White (68.6%), followed by Hispanic/Latino (14.0%), Black (10.2%), and Asian (4.6%). Presently, only 2.5% of the nation's superintendents are Black women (Joffe, 2021; Webb, 2022).

History of the Superintendency

Throughout its history, the superintendency has been predominantly occupied by White men. In the early 1800s, local governments and school systems searched for educators to head the schools as the demand for education grew. Because most schools were located in commercial and industrial cities, more families chose to send their children to school, leading cities to recognize the need for direction and supervision of their school systems. On June 9, 1837, Buffalo, New York, appointed the first superintendent of public schools, and a month later, Louisville, Kentucky, followed suit. Both cities only looked for men to fill the position, even though they were presiding over a sizable female-dominated system, due to the head supervisory role of the superintendency. This trend continued well past the mid-1900s (Barnum, 2018; Schiller, 2016).

As cities and the areas around them grew, the need for superintendents increased. Several states began to combine school districts so that schools in close proximity could use the same

system to teach. Two significant events propelled this movement: the invention of the motor vehicle and the 1874 Michigan Supreme Court decision on the Kalamazoo case, establishing the right of local school boards to tax property owners to support elementary and secondary education (Ornstein & Hunkins, 2017).

In the late 1800s, as schools became more comprehensive, turmoil began. The comprehensive school movement was started to bring all rural school systems, single-room schools, and children who had never been to school together into a single system called a school district. The equity movement pushed for all students in all public-school districts to get the same kind of education. Although the early reformers believed that education should be given to religious or non-religious and poor or wealthy, they did not take into account race (Parker, 2016).

By the early 1900s, the superintendency's role transitioned from less pandering to society and supervising children and teachers to solely supervising administrators. Elwood Cubberley (1920), a researcher and former superintendent, called this transition the struggle to become a "true professional." The superintendency did not get any easier as time progressed into the 1960s and 1970s. Civil unrest and racial tensions were evident across the United States, especially in large urban cities. Social changes were happening, and incumbent superintendents needed to perform differently from their previous role. New legislative mandates were being imposed that took away some authority of school boards and superintendents, with the desegregation policy after the 1964 Brown vs. Board of Education ruling being one of the most extensive mandates. Issues such as equal education opportunity for all students, community control of schools, interagency and intergovernmental cooperation, and compensatory programs resulted in lawmakers and federal government officials requiring school boards to focus on the performance

of the superintendent as well as looking at training and selection of superintendents (Brooks, 2021; Manna, 2018).

Current Trends of the Superintendency

Although, presently, the role of the superintendent has continued to change and conform to societal needs, in many ways, the superintendency is still the same. The demographic profile across the United States is still mostly White men, although the demographics of schools have quickly shifted. The school board still employs the superintendent and monitors their performance according to goals set forth by the board, or legislative mandates from the federal and local governments. However, because the position is so well known in the community or among the board's constituents, the relationship between the board and the current superintendent is very important to the superintendent's contract. If the relationship with the incumbent superintendent and the board is contentious, then it is hard to transcend. As a side note, "most superintendents are not in tenure-accumulating positions; they serve at the pleasure of the school board and are under the terms of a negotiated contract" (Candoli, 1995; G. P. Davis, 2022). When incumbent superintendents take the position, the first year is likened to a dance where the school board and superintendent get to know one another. By the second year, the superintendent has a clear plan, recognizes problems, sets programs into place, and puts the right people in the right places. Because changes are happening, good, bad, or indifferent, the third year becomes the "make-it-or-break-it" year for most superintendents (Rogers & McCord, 2020).

Usually, superintendents of large school districts have less than a three-year contract to run the district they oversee. Black superintendents, on average, receive a 2.5-year contract, and they wait for 5 or more years (AASA, 2020; G. P. Davis, 2022; Henderson, 2015; Webb, 2022). Black women superintendents, on average, receive a 2.0-year contract. Scholars believe that

should a Black woman ascend to superintendency, the “concrete ceiling” would make it difficult for them to penetrate the apparent barriers in an organization due to stereotypes relating to multiple oppressions such as race, gender, and class. This dissertation encompasses an investigation of how to ascend into the superintendency while successfully receiving a contract from a school board. Also examined is how longer than the average two-year contracts for current and former Black women superintendents across the United States are given (AASA, 2020; Henderson, 2015). It also contains the superintendents' narratives of their experiences and resiliency, serving as leaders of large metropolitan school districts.

Problem Statement

The intersectionality of race and gender plays a big part in the attainment of the superintendency. Studies have revealed that Black women are the least likely to ascend to superintendency or attain a superintendent contract. D. Davis and Maldonado (2015) described this phenomenon as the “glass” and “concrete” ceiling. The glass ceiling concept originated from Marilyn Loden’s first usage of the phrase “glass ceiling” while speaking as a panelist at the 1978 Women’s Exposition in New York. The glass ceiling effect is based on gender, whereas the concrete ceiling effect is based on racial barriers. Black women's intersectionality creates a glass and concrete ceiling impact that makes it extremely hard to ascend to the superintendency (D. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; G. P. Davis, 2022; Glass, 2000; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). With the lack of educational and professional support and opportunities for Black aspiring leaders due to racial and gender barriers, the effects of intersectionality will be felt by Black women aspiring to climb the educational ladder to become superintendents. Due to the disadvantages that barriers place on Black women aspiring leaders, knowledge that supports aspiring superintendents with

strategies to build resilience and overcome obstacles is lacking in the literature (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

When candidates for the superintendency are Black, it becomes harder to attain the superintendent position because the pipeline is inherently White male-dominated (G. Cox, 2017; Martínez, 2020; Walker, 2014). Recently, there have been efforts to create superintendent scouting efforts that specifically target superintendents of color (Brunner & Grogan, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011; Robinson et al., 2017). However, the purpose of these scouting efforts is usually to place these candidates in urban districts where previous superintendents have failed in creating sustainable climates and cultures and in increasing student achievement growth (Walker, 2014). Another problem that is uniquely an issue for superintendents, specifically identifying as Black is being expected to lead in troubled school districts because of their race (Robinson et al., 2017; Walker, 2014). Most of these superintendents usually end up working in urban school districts. Research suggests that the American school superintendent's role has been established through the White American men perspective, which has resulted in a norm regarding who should be at the helm of leading America's public-school districts (Alston, 1999; Brunner et al., 2003; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). The established superintendent's role includes unwritten expectations regarding gender, race, age, family responsibilities, and career path (Brunner et al., 2003). These expectations create bias, explicit for some or implicit bias for others.

Superintendents of color usually encounter extreme barriers when it comes to their decision-making, creating change and movement, attaining board approval, attaining staff and community approval, and maintaining their employment (G. Cox, 2017; Martínez, 2020; Walker, 2014; Wolfe, 2010).

Purpose Statement

Black women represent less than 1% of the superintendents in the Western Region of the United States and less than 2% of the superintendents in the United States, even though more than 14% students in U.S. schools are Black. Barriers and professional support impact the attainment of the superintendent's seat for Black women (Coleman, 2022). The purpose of this study was to explore, through the narratives of Black women superintendents, how they overcame barriers to secure their own employment as a superintendent (Bailey-Walker, 2018; G. Cox, 2017; Henderson, 2015). The hypothesis underpinning the research is that there are a limited number of Black women ascending to superintendency despite having a large number of qualified applicants in districts across the United States. The primary goal of this study was to gain better insights into (a) the barriers that Black aspiring women leaders face as they ascend to superintendency; (b) why Black qualified women are not attaining superintendency contracts; (c) how intersectionality affects upward mobility of Black women aspiring superintendents; and (d) the strategies Black women who attained the position used to rise into their superintendency role.

This chapter contains a synopsis of Black history, the problems superintendents face, the problems Black superintendents face, problems women face, and ultimately why certain areas of the United States have had limited opportunities for Black women superintendents, especially women to transcend to superintendency and maintain a contract.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents in the United States reflect and challenge dominant narratives and structures within the field of education leadership, and what implications does this have for creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems?

RQ2: How do Black women superintendents navigate and negotiate their identities in predominantly White and male-dominated educational leadership spaces, and what strategies do they employ to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face?

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because the literature on superintendency has historically been dominated by White male perspectives (Johnson & Brimmer, 2020). Although the literature on the experiences of White women in superintendency has increased due to the feminist movement, a significant gap still exists in understanding the experiences of Black women in this field (G. P. Davis, 2022; Johnson & Brimmer, 2020; Webb, 2022). By focusing on the perspectives of Black women who have either held or are seeking superintendency positions, this study aimed to amplify the voices of a historically marginalized group within educational leadership (see Coleman, 2022; Johnson & Brimmer, 2020; Webb, 2022).

The underrepresentation of Black women in superintendency positions is a concerning issue that deserves attention. Research indicates that only a small fraction of Black women, particularly on the West Coast, have held supervisory positions in education (G. P. Davis, 2022; Johnson & Brimmer, 2020). This phenomenon is attributed to the historical dominance of White men in positions of authority within education, leading to exclusionary practices and flawed pipeline preparation for women of color seeking superintendency positions (G. P. Davis, 2022; Johnson & Brimmer, 2020). This study can contribute to the literature on the impact of systemic and institutional racism on the career trajectories of Black women in educational leadership and shed light on potential strategies to address this issue.

Finally, diversity, inclusion, and equity are major initiatives in most districts in the United States (Exec. Order 13648, 2021). In 2021, one of the first governmental acts of President

Joseph Biden was to enact Executive Order 13985). Exec. Order 13648, 2021, established that affirmatively advancing equity, civil rights, racial justice, and equal opportunity are responsibilities of the whole government. Racial equity in education has been a struggle starting from the teacher pipeline into principal positions and beyond into superintendencies (Walker, 2014). Serving the requirements of a more diverse student body, however, requires greater racial and cultural variety among school administrators at all levels. (J. L. Jackson, 2002; Watson & Grogan, 2002). The aim of this study was to gain insights into the superintendency from the perspective of the person in that position by conducting in-depth interviews with Black women superintendents to learn about their experiences as they implemented or continued to implement intuitive strategies for effecting massive change and maintaining their employment. Also examined was how Black women superintendents navigate the educational system while using their intuitiveness in leading school districts as they reflect on their experiences. When Black women educators are ascending to superintendency, career mobility and access are structures in education that are reported to be often the cause of their ascension to stop. In explaining persistence strategies, interviews of the participating superintendents' experiences could be incorporated into a body of literature that will be used to hopefully prepare other leaders of color to pursue a superintendency, or at least to have better understanding and empathy for people who may not be a part of their culture. In explaining the practices and strategies of Black women superintendents, the aim of this study was to provide information to increase tenure as they use their persistence strategies to attain and maintain the superintendency.

Implications to Leadership

This study is important because it focuses on the strategies of superintendents who identify as Black and in school districts where most of the administrators are White and how

Black women superintendents keep their tenure or gain an extended contract. It also includes examples and strategies that can be implemented by Black superintendents who have experience working in large urban school districts across the United States, particularly in the states where the demographics present challenges for Black women to lead, such as Nevada. This study has a potential to improve upon the knowledge that is already available about ascending to superintendency as a Black Woman by revealing why and how certain Black women superintendents have survived, or not survived their tenure, as well as what techniques they used for ascendency. Also included in this study are some of their general "lessons learned" from their public failures or accomplishments.

As long as Black women superintendents continue to be underrepresented in education, fewer Black women would make it to superintendency. This study plays a substantial role in influencing future institutional change, as has been called for in research (Coleman, 2022; Delpit, 2022). The results of this research will contribute to the ongoing conversation about better defining systemic racism that affects how Black women aspiring superintendents ascend to the position while also calling out the difficulties and triumphs of Black superintendents.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for studying Black superintendents, with a focus on Black women superintendents, encompassed a synthesis in two areas of literature. These are (a) critical race feminism (b) Black feminist thought. These areas are discussed individually in the succeeding subsections.

Critical Race Feminism (CRF)

In this study, race and sex play an integral role in how effectively Black women transcend into leadership roles such as superintendency. The CRF addresses the role of race and

sex in legal scholarship (Crenshaw, 1991). Although this study did not involve exploring ways in which classism, colorism, and ableism compound the oppression of Black women, these "isms" are very much alive and is a part of how CRF accounts for the difficulties of Black women in U.S. society (G. Cox, 2017; Colbert, 2009; Crenshaw, 1991; G. P. Davis, 2022; Driver, 2014; Wolfe, 2010). CRF is a theoretical framework that addresses both racial and gender oppression. It emphasizes the concerns of minoritized women from their lens using their voices because Black men's oppression is addressed by racial makeup, (Caldera, 2016). The overall summarization of CRF "suggests the leadership capabilities of racial minorities are minimized due to the beliefs held by the dominant culture" (Crenshaw, 1989). CRF, a racial critique incorporating the many intersecting oppressions that women of color face, expands feminism beyond the foundational experiences of White, middle-class women (G. P. Davis, 2022).

Black Feminist Thought (BFT)

The idea of a Black feminist was first introduced by writers such as Fredrick Douglass, and William E. B. Du Bois understood and explored the ways in which Black women existed and viewed their existence through his writing (Collins, 1996, 2009, 2015). The term "Black feminist thought" was actually coined by Patricia Collins in her book about knowledge and consciousness to describe Black women as a unique group that exists in a place within American social relations where race, ethnicity, gender, class, and sexual orientation intersect and shape their individual and collective consciousness, self-definitions, and actions (Collins 1991, 1996). BFT has four dimensions on which it shapes the story from the lens of a qualitative researcher. The dimensions are: (a) lived experience as a criterion of meaning, (b) the use of dialogue to assess knowledge claims, (c) the ethic of caring, and (d) the ethic of personal accountability (Collins, 1991). Collins (1991), in her work, "The Social Construction of Black Feminist Thought,"

argued that BFT centers on both race and gender, and it grew out of Black communities as opposed to the White feminist movement which focused on how White women in general experienced oppression based on only their gender. The current study encompassed an exploration of ways in which Black women superintendents have ascended and how they have reflected on what has happened to them during their ascension into the superintendency.

The inclusion of CRF and BFT was intentional and critical to the current study. CRF allows research and interpretation based on historical patterns; it is the structures and barriers created and implemented that impede and hinder Black women from ascending into positions of power, such as the superintendency. Meanwhile, BFT allows research and interpretation based on Black women who have experienced these structures and barriers to voice their opinion on how these structures and barriers have thwarted their efforts and thus their ascension into the role of superintendent, or how they have been able to navigate, or override, these structures and barriers to become superintendents.

CRF and BFT are two distinct but interconnected fields that share significant similarities but have differences. CRF centers on racial identity as a fundamental part of women's experiences, and their intersection with gender oppression and emphasizes on the analysis of law as a central structure of society. It asserts that racism is not just a matter of individual prejudice but is embedded in social structures and systemic issues such as policies, laws, and institutions. The aim of CRF is to understand and examine the ways that race and gender intersect and shape the experiences of marginalized groups, specifically women of color. CRF also emphasizes the ways that power operates in society, specifically related to institutions such as the legal system or the workplace and aims to investigate how power dynamics create and maintain racial and gender inequalities.

BFT, on the other hand, is a field of study that focuses on the experiences of Black women in particular and the ways their experiences differ from those of other women, and the role of sexism, racism, and classism in their oppression. Its aims are to understand how Black women navigate their daily lives as members of a historically disadvantaged group and to recognize their strength and resistance to oppressive systems. In this field, the experiences of Black women are recognized as unique and complex, and the goal is to highlight the ways that they have historically been excluded from mainstream conversations on feminism or race. BFT rejects the idea that Black women's experiences can be reduced to generalized categories or labels and highlights the importance of recognizing the interplay between multiple forms of oppression and marginalization.

In summary, despite their similarities such as the focus on intersectionality, CRF and BFT differ in their emphasis on the centrality of race or gender respectively and the scope of the analysis. CFT is focused on critiquing and analyzing structures of power such as laws, policies, and institutions. In contrast BFT is centered on the experiences and perspectives of Black women and their unique experiences of oppression.

Term Definitions

This section includes definitions of the terms used and their relevance to this study.

Actualized Narrative: A collection of true and historically accurate experiences, interactions, and beliefs that are drawn directly from a specific group of people, persons, or ideas (Wolfe, 2010).

African Americans: African Americans (also referred to as Black Americans or Afro-Americans) are an ethnic group of Americans with partial or even total ancestry from any of the

Black racial groups of Africa. Most African Americans are descendants of enslaved people within the boundaries of the present United States (Wikipedia, 2021).

Black: A racialized classification of people, usually a political and skin color-based category for specific populations with a mid-to-dark brown complexion (Hurstun, 1937).

Black Feminism: A philosophy based on the tenet that "Black women are naturally valued" and that Black women's emancipation is a requirement linked to the human desire for autonomy rather than someone else's decision.

Critical Race Feminism: A pedagogy that asks how elements of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and other characteristics intersect and contribute to patriarchal structures of oppression and knowledge (Berry, 2010).

Critical Race Theory: A strategy created to empower marginalized groups and reveal prejudice in various U.S. social institutions and practices. While doing so, it questions the neutrality of an institution's ideology that systematically excludes people of color while giving special treatment to one dominant group (Bell, 1980; Crenshaw, 1988, 1991).

Concrete Ceiling: Reference to the barriers to career advancement for women of color. Concrete is difficult to break and unable to see through, unlike a glass, and that which cannot be seen remains hidden and unattainable (Catalyst, 1999).

Culture: People's shared understanding and strategies for evaluating, expressing, and responding to the social reality in which they find themselves (Lederach, 1995).

Equity: The quality of being fair and impartial.

False Narrative: A collection of biased and historically inaccurate experiences, encounters, and beliefs attributed, usually by others outside the group, to a particular group of people, persons, or ideas (Cadet, 2018).

Feminism: The advocacy of women's rights based on the equality of the sexes.

Gaslighting:

Glass Ceiling: An unofficially acknowledged barrier to advancement in a profession, especially affecting women and members of minorities.

Gaslighting: colloquialism, manipulation of information that leads a victim to question what they know to be true (Wikipedia; 2024).

Inequity: A lack of fairness or justice.

Institutional Culture: The surrounding morals and values of society as reflected within an organizational structure(s) (Akanji et al., 2019).

Intersectionality: Interconnected categories of superintendent race, superintendent gender, district context (i.e., urban districts) and longevity (Cadet, 2018).

Phenomenology: A methodological research procedure that focuses on descriptions of how people experience phenomena and how they perceive their experience of the phenomena under study (Glesne, 1999).

Superintendent: In the U.S. education system, a superintendent is an administrator or manager in charge of a number of public schools, a school district, or a local government body overseeing public schools. All school principals in a respective school district report to the superintendent. The role and powers of the superintendent vary among areas. According to W. L. Sharp and Walter (2004), a popularly held opinion is that "the most important role of the board of education is to hire its superintendent".

White Privilege: A set of advantages enjoyed by White people beyond those commonly experienced by non-White people in the same social, political, and economic spaces (A. Fields & Pence, 1999).

Whiteness: A construct that provides cover for racism against people of color in a multiethnic community (Frankenburg, 1993).

Chapter II: Literature Review: The Pipeline

This chapter consists of a review of the literature on the history of the superintendency in general. The first paragraph contains the basic outline of the process of obtaining a contract for a school superintendency. Chapter II then narrows down to the literature review on how Black aspiring leaders are promoted within the pipeline, hoping to become a superintendent. It also includes explanations on how, for Black educators, leaders, and aspiring superintendents, being on the road of success starts in the early school years. Scholars have studied how Black students are least likely to graduate high school and attain a four-year degree as compared to White students. Because the prerequisite for any educator starts with a four-year degree, it was imperative to start the literature review briefly from the young schooling age experience. The review presented continues from the Black student experience to the Black teacher experience, to the Black principal experience, and then the pipeline to the superintendency. The literature review also narrows further as the topic of gender is introduced. Each promotional level exhibits challenges due to race, and sometimes gender. For Black women aspiring to be a superintendent, obstacles can become impenetrable (Crenshaw, 1991; Webb, 2022). The last few paragraphs in the literature review contain an explanation of the obstacles in attaining superintendency for Black women educators.

The Black Superintendency Pipeline

The Typical Pipeline vs. Non-Typical Pipeline

The position of the superintendent is a highly sought-after role in the education sector. The role requires exceptional leadership skills, strategic planning, and experience in managing a school district. A significant disparity, however, exists in the number of White male superintendents and Black women superintendents in the United States. White male

superintendents often follow a typical career path that includes earning a degree in education, working as a teacher, and pursuing a master's degree in educational leadership or a related field. They gain experience by serving as assistant principals or principals before advancing to the role of superintendent. White male superintendents often have access to professional development programs, networking opportunities, and mentoring programs that help them acquire the necessary skills and knowledge to advance their careers (AASA, 2020). Black educators, in general, can have a similar experience, but with different outcomes depending on the level of privilege and barriers at each level of education, starting with elementary school.

In the case of Black educators, they must be successful as students, preservice teachers, teachers, principals, and superintendent candidates before they are offered any contract to the superintendency (Alston, 1999, 2000). Because of experiencing ongoing opposition, Black aspiring leaders in the pipeline are rendered invisible and silent, which affects their success in the pipeline (Brunner et al., 2003; G. P. Davis, 2022). Throughout public education across the United States, the number of Black, Latinx, and other students of color who receive public education has increased (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2019). In most public schools across the United States, however, more than 70% of teachers are White, with the majority of those teachers self-identifying as White females, flooding the teacher-to-principal pipeline (Walker, 2014). This leaves a small chance for teachers of color to be hired to lead schools and, even more so, to be the most influential and highest-ranking person as the superintendent (Coleman, 2022; Cortez, 2010).

The superintendency starts in the early years of elementary education. Students who have some success in elementary, middle, or high school usually have a higher chance of getting into college, a prerequisite for any state-required program of graduate study to obtain any license for

the superintendency (Kowalski & Glass, 2002). Regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender, all educators must attain education from all four institutions. This requirement can pose a problem with the number of potential superintendent applicants.

Black Students Experience

Historically, many Black students leave their K-12 schooling experiences without being properly trained and equipped for relevant high-paying jobs, or for admission to four-year colleges and universities (Douglas et al., 2008; Thompson, 2004). Going back to 1870, Jim Crow laws required that schools across the nation be racially segregated. In 1890, Winter Park, the first school for "colored" children, was opened in Florida. Although Black children could attend school, not all books, educational materials, and supplies were equitable. In 1896, the Supreme Court decision of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* established separate public schools for Black and White students. The decision also deprived Black, and other children of color, of equivalent educational advantages (Bryant, 2019). Aside from the disproportionate discipline, a higher number of Black and other students of color were deprived of school rights and privileges such as textbooks, curricula, basic supplies, experienced teachers, tutoring programs, and even sports (S. L. Johnson et al., 2021). These deeply held beliefs and decisions have continued to ripple throughout history (Douglas et al., 2008).

Since the early 1900s, there has been a consistent increase in the level of segregation found in schools (Frankenberg et al., 2003). This increase is due to *de facto* neighborhood segregation, urban area demographics, and an increasing tendency of courts and the executive branch to cease enforcement of existing integration orders (Clayton, 2011). In 1954, however, the Supreme Court ruled in *Brown vs. Board of Education* to legally desegregate schools, which was a step toward fair and equal education for students of color (Bell, 1980; Bryant, 2019). In the

minds of many scholars and politicians of color, the U.S. justice system was taking a turn in the right direction (Bell, 1980). Nevertheless, for decades to come, marginalized youth and children of color have been continuously underserved, especially in their school experiences. Part of the school experience of Black students includes microaggressions, inferior curricula, classes with more inexperienced teachers, and being overly disciplined (Bottani et al., 2016; Howard & Navarro, 2016; NCES, 2019).

In 2021, Black students were still at an educational disadvantage compared to White students in the United States (Kurtz-Costes et al., 2014; Massey et al., 2011). Black students at K-12 scored at least 20 points lower in all educational domains (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2021; Rader & Pennell, 2019). These factors have a two-fold relationship: leadership impact and leadership pipeline. Both were integral to this research. Leadership impact acknowledges that leaders make impactful decisions that can and do change student outcomes, particularly for those historically marginalized. Mentors and educational leaders in any pipeline are, for the most part, well aware that Black students need a nurturing environment, counterintuitive to the environment that public education provides. If students from marginalized communities are not guided or nurtured appropriately, they will not be able to enter the superintendency pipeline. Nationally, 70% of teachers are White; the pipeline is currently a product of profound racial disparity that does not prepare or guide Black students into teaching, let alone the superintendency.

Black Teacher Pipeline

In the Black teacher pipeline, it is important to examine the literature on teacher preparation programs and on a district's effort of recruitment. Because teacher preparation is key in the initial recruitment of potential candidates and the retention of teachers, teacher preparation

programs are the first step for attaining teacher licensure, which, if not done well, can be an obstacle for the Black teacher pipeline (Madkins, 2011; Templeton et al., 2021). Teacher preparation programs are considered essential to the pipeline of Black aspiring leaders for two reasons. First, they have the power to recruit from underrepresented communities, such as the Black community. Second, they can prepare teachers to teach in various ways to diverse students to positively affect their outcomes (Sulsky, 2022; Templeton et al., 2021). Oddly enough, and with enough guidance and mentorship, good teacher preparation programs can prepare teachers to be successful enough to be promoted to the next job (Sulsky, 2022). Historically, teacher preparation programs have not been diligently recruiting from underrepresented communities, and they often neglect to prepare Black preservice teachers in the entry-level skills needed for Black educators to be successful (Sulsky, 2022; Templeton et al., 2021).

Teacher preparation programs have a direct impact on the recruitment of Black educators and their academic success. According to research scholar Bryan (2017), despite research studies and recommendations to diversify teacher education, most preservice teacher programs have not made intentional efforts to attract a more diverse preservice teacher education population. Most teacher preparation programs attract White teacher candidates and intentionally place more barriers that discourage possible Black teacher candidates (Sulsky, 2022). Barriers can be in the form of less relatable content being used in high-level instruction, instructors being less accessible, instructors using unfair grading practices, and Black students experiencing microaggressions. These obstacles are a considerably large problem for diversifying the pipeline into administration, and eventually into the seat of the superintendency (NABSE, 2013). Those who become prepared in the teacher pipeline may or may not have the skills necessary to

eventually lead a school district, and effectively support all students, especially Black students (Sulsky, 2022).

After successfully graduating from a teacher preparation program, teachers go through the recruitment process to find their job as a classroom teacher—a first step on the path to superintendency. Public school teacher recruitment is distinct from the recruitment of high-status industries such as law and banking, where HR departments serve as effective allies to businesses in meeting their human capital requirements (DeArmond et al., 2009; Simon et al., 2015). Public school districts rely upon their district human resource division to recruit candidates (DeArmond et al., 2009; Simon et al., 2015). This approach is due, in part, to the staffing policies that have historically limited whom schools could consider hiring. As a result, most recruitment efforts have resulted in hiring a majority of White, young, middle-class women teaching in most of America’s classrooms, even though there is a clear need to hire more Black educators (G. P. Davis, 2022; Webb, 2022).

Researchers and scholars have linked the effects of hiring predominately young White female teachers to a myriad of problems related to student achievement and racial equity across students and educators (Bottlani et al., 2016; Gist et al., 2019; Haddix, 2017). The most prominent problem is a lack of cultural competency, which has been shown to contribute to the over-discipline of Black students, and to a proficiency and achievement gap between Black and White students (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019). Bottlani et al. (2016) examined and identified over-disciplining among Black male students, including outside of school suspensions, which has been attributed to low achievement in school (National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019). A lack of cultural competence does not only impact student experiences, but many Black educators, where the staff are predominantly White female teachers, have also experienced

microaggressions, some severe enough to have left the profession altogether, resulting in further decline in the Black educator pipeline (Gist et al., 2019; Haddix, 2017).

Milner and Howard (2004) wrote a journal article titled "Black Teachers, Black Students, Black Community, and Brown: Perspectives and Insights from Experts, On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Ruling." In this article, the scholars made a substantial argument after the ruling of *Brown et al. v. Board of Education Topeka Kansas*, noting that the Black (specifically the African-American) community experienced a significant decrease in their Black teaching force (Milner & Howard, 2004; Tillman, 2004; Webb, 2022). Several causes contributed to this decline, but the major causes were the integration efforts of Black children into schools that only hired White teachers. This new error caused the closure of schools in Black neighborhoods, extended bussing or transporting Black children into different schools and neighborhoods, and led to a massive termination of Black teachers (Milner & Howard, 2004; Webb, 2022). The Black community has never recovered in educational gains since 1964.

Although the Brown lawsuit was intended to ensure equity in resources and support the Black educational system, educational, systemic, and structural racism used its gaps to further advance its agenda by decimating the existing Black educational system (Webb, 2022). In the "pre-Brown" educational environment, Black students had Black teachers, principals, and a few superintendents. Unfortunately, with the passage of desegregation laws, massive layoffs and demotions occurred in the Black educator workforce (Milner & Howard, 2004; Webb, 2022). In the years between 1954 and 1965, nearly 38,000 Black teachers and administrators across 17 states lost their positions (Webb, 2002).

In relation to the importance of diversifying the superintendency pipeline, there is another argument regarding increasing the Black teacher pipeline (Haddix, 2017). Since 1965, there has

been a steady rise in the Black student population; however, the Black teacher population has never been able to recover to the teaching population it once had (Webb, 2022). Currently, eight percent of all educators identify as Black (NCES, 2022). According to some estimates, between fall 2017 and fall 2029, the percentage of public elementary and secondary White students would decrease from 48 to 44% (NCES, 2014). The percentage of Black students is projected to remain at 15% in fall 2029; however, the percentage of those who identify as mixed race, specifically those of mixed with Black, is projected to increase. Given these statistics, an increase in the Black teaching population would be expected. However, examining the current incoming pre-teachers, the population of teachers of color will not increase, specifically Black teachers (NCES, 2022). According to scholars, the ideal teaching environment has teachers with different backgrounds, so students can see themselves in their learning experiences, and they can experience learning from educators of different cultures and backgrounds (Haddix, 2017).

Black Principal Pipeline

Because the principalship is usually the step before a leader qualifies for the superintendency, the principal pipeline can be either a hindrance or supportive for leaders entering the superintendency, depending on its quality and effectiveness. It is the gateway to higher leadership positions in education, including the superintendency. A well-functioning principal pipeline that provides rigorous training and development opportunities can help aspiring superintendents build the skills and competencies they need to succeed in higher-level leadership positions.

On the other hand, a poorly functioning principal pipeline can limit the potential of aspiring superintendents and create barriers to entry for those seeking to advance to higher leadership positions. Such barriers could include inadequate or insufficient training, a lack of

mentoring and coaching opportunities, or limited access to high-quality professional development. In summary, the principal pipeline plays a critical role in developing and preparing leaders for the superintendency, and its effectiveness can have a significant impact on the quality and diversity of leadership in education.

There are two current issues revolving around the principal pipeline. The first issue is that most school superintendents have a hard time hiring Black educational leaders and the second is that many Black educators seeking promotion report that they experience barriers that delay or deter promotions in education (Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2009; Theoharis, 2018). In recent articles, superintendents have reported that Black principals are harder to find due to the lack of Black educators. Some scholars believe that Black principals are harder to find due to the bias and microaggressions Black educators experience during their tenure as teachers from supervisors including superintendents (Theoharis, 2018; Townsend, 2019). As a result of the historical hiring, firing, and treatment of Black principals, they have become vastly underrepresented in public school districts across the United States (Milner, 2013; F. Brown, 2005; Sáenz & Ponjuan, 2011; Theoharis, 2018; Townsend, 2019; Webb, 2022).

Going back to the 1954 landmark decision *Brown v. Board of Education*, most Black students attended segregated public schools that were led by Black principals, teachers, and staff (F. Brown, 2005; Webb, 2022). One of the consequences of this law was the intentional decline in the number of Black teachers that could have been in the pipeline for principal and district office positions or those who could have been a principal and district leader while helping other Black educators enter the pipeline (F. Brown, 2005; Sulsky, 2022). Unfortunately, with the decimation of early Black educational leaders, the Black principal and superintendent pipeline

has struggled to pick up more than 8% of qualified applicants to serve schools in the United States (F. Brown, 2005; Sulsky, 2022).

For the past several decades, policymakers and researchers have defined the paucity of Black teachers as a supply problem that impacts Black children most directly (I. Williams & Loeb, 2012). However, the United States teacher labor market has openly discriminated against hiring Black teacher applicants (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2017). As qualified Black applicants apply to teach, their chances of receiving an offer were significantly lower than those of qualified White candidates, indicating discrimination in the teacher labor markets and inadvertent lowering the pool for qualified Black principal leadership (D'Amico et al., 2017; Darling-Hammond, 2006; Pager et al., 2009)

A lack of Black principals in large urban school districts limits Black candidates from the superintendent's pool (M. R. Fields et al., 2019). Currently, 70% of all superintendents identify as White males (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; NCES 2019; J. L. Jackson, 2002; Reyes-Guerra et al., 2022) According to Duran (2014), although the data representing superintendents of color indicates progress, it still confirms a dramatic underrepresentation of women and people of color in relation to White males (Duran, 2014). This underrepresentation causes concern to scholars because it is the superintendent's job to communicate and drive a clear and coherent vision for student success. Amid the highly politicized environments of urban school districts, superintendents must serve as collaborators, visionaries, good communicators, and agents of change, especially for underserved student populations (Duran, 2014; M. R. Fields et al., 2019; Meyer et al., 2010).

The Emergence of Diversity

Black Male Leaders

The literature in the above sections addressed the path of the Black leader. In this section of the literature review, the history of the Black superintendent is examined as a whole in the United States. The focus then narrows to the history of Black superintendents in the western part of the United States.

The United States has slightly changed with a small increase of Black superintendents overall, especially the urban inner-city schools. Before the 1970s, superintendents who presided in the inner-city, rural, and suburban school districts were mostly White men who supported a system set up for the advancement of White people (Cormier, 2003; G. P. Davis, 2022; Kowalski, 1995). As time went on, and more students of color began occupying inner-city school districts, White families began moving from the inner cities to more suburban areas. Most of those areas lined the outside of local cities or were in more secluded areas. As White student enrollment in inner-city schools decreased in the 1950s and 1970s, Black enrollment in inner-city schools steadily increased (Cormier, 2003; J. H. Jackson, 1999). With changes in civil rights laws, the demand for Black leaders began to be voiced by Black community leaders such as Malcolm X. In some communities, there was a desire for the next superintendent to be Black. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, Black educators, the majority of whom were men, were appointed as superintendents of inner-city school districts, with only four being women (Cormier, 2003; J. H. Jackson, 1999).

The first Black superintendent was hired for a large metropolitan school system in the United States in Trenton, New Jersey, in 1969. His name was Ersel Watson. In 1970, Marcus Foster was named superintendent of Oakland Public Schools (Scott, 1980). By 1974, there were

43 Black superintendents in almost 15,000 school districts (Scott, 1980). Moody (1996) then reported that there were 223 Black superintendents in the United States at the time of his study. Around this time, according to a study by Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999), superintendents of color made-up five percent of all U.S. school district leaders.

In 1990, only 3.4% of the 15,000 districts reviewed by the American Association of School Administrators had superintendents of color, with Black men making up the majority of these superintendent appointments. This increase was due to the demographic changes in U.S. metropolitan areas where Black superintendents were appearing more frequently. As numerous Black students were enrolled in major districts' schools, experts anticipated a growth in the number of Black superintendents (American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 2010). By 2020, Black men led 12% of urban districts, whereas Black women only led 8%. Nationally, less than 1% of school districts are led by Black women and men (AASA, 2010).

Women Transcending Superintendency

Women Superintendents

Although the first female superintendent was documented in 1916, the superintendency has always been over 80% male-dominated (Cornell, 2015). According to statistics, women made up over 50% of school principals in the United States between 1990 and 2000 (AASA, 2000). Although there has been gains over the last 10 years, between 2000 and 2020 there has been a slight increase in the number of women superintendents to 26%, meaning that 74% of superintendents are men (AASA, 2020). Over the past three decades, more and more women have entered the teaching workforce striving to make a difference in leadership positions. Nevertheless, women, who are the "backbone and brain trust" of America's public schools, are still extremely underrepresented in the role of superintendency (Sawchuk, 2022)

Male Dominance

Miller et al. (2006) stated that educational administration is a patriarchal system that has created and supported barriers for women who want to become superintendents. Social scientists have explained male dominance using three models: the "meritocracy model," the "discrimination model," and the "women's place model" (Miller et al., 2006). In the meritocracy model, women themselves become the problem because of their personal traits, characteristics, abilities, and self-image. This model accounts for the hidden belief that men are more competent because women are less intellectual (Miller et al., 2006). The second model is the discrimination model, which accounts for the systemic gender bias in education. It addresses how women are usually locked into low-power, low-visibility, and dead-end jobs such as evaluators, supervisors, and coordinators (Miller et al., 2006). According to the last model, the woman's place model, social perspective explains how society views what is "lady-like" and "who looks like a leader." It gives defined roles and how people are forced to stay in those roles (Miller et al., 2006).

Glass Ceiling

The term "glass ceiling" was first used in 1984 by Gay Bryant, the then-editor of Working Woman magazine in an Adweek profile. In the article, Bryant stated, "Women have reached a certain point - I call it the glass ceiling. They're in the top of middle management and they're stopping and getting stuck" (Ad Age, 1990). The term quickly gained popularity and was later popularized in a 1986 Wall Street Journal article by Carol Hymowitz and Timothy Schellhardt (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986). The term has since become a widely recognized symbol of the barriers that women and minorities face in advancing to higher positions in the workplace.

In 2022, the pipeline had over 50% of school leaders as women, and women earned around two-thirds of all leadership degrees (Sawchuk, 2022). Women, however, encounter many barriers that stop them from transcending into the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan, 2005; Standford, 2022; Superville, 2016). Most women leaders face explicit and implicit bias in hiring: they have fewer mentors than their male counterparts, they have less access to mentors or networks that open doors to new positions, and they are expected to have a "family life" to attend to that negates or inhibits them from leading a school district (Superville, 2016).

Women leaders have complained that there is a double standard on personality traits. When researchers looked at traits such as being more forthcoming and having higher expectations, women were considered "mean" and put more weight into what is considered feminine roles and expectations rather than the job skills needed for the actual work (Superville, 2016). The final barrier to breaking through the glass ceiling is that most boards will not hire women as superintendents. As hard as women work to be promoted, many have often reflected on their experiences when interviewing with boards as negative because, in many instances, men, who had the same level of education and experience or less, would often get the job (Restine, 1993; Superville, 2016). Women who had applied for these positions and worked to get them but did not would often fall victim to "imposter syndrome" because they felt like they did not fit into the superintendent's world. These obstacles create the "glass ceiling effect," which is when you think you can attain something that becomes unattainable because of an underlying or unseen barrier.

A 2020 study done by AASA revealed that women leaders were not hired for positions that lead to the position of superintendent. For example, 75% of elementary classroom teachers are women, and for most, when they ascend into the administrator world, they usually ascend as

an elementary principal (Glass, 2019). Most superintendents begin their careers as high school or middle school teachers, then as secondary deans or assistant principals, sometimes as district administrators, and finally as superintendents (Glass, 2019). Because most women ascend into elementary principalships, their paths are different in terms of educational leadership, a difference that makes it difficult to be considered a viable candidate for superintendency. Most of the time, previous superintendents had some kind of training from a colleague or superintendent school that helped them get ready for the job. Although women are more likely to enroll in educational programs, only 10% of them opt to earn superintendency credentials along with their educational degree (Glass, 2019; Stanford, 2022).

Intersectionality: Impact of Gender and Race

Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' to describe how discrimination against different facets of a person's identity can overlap and impact their lives (Crenshaw, 1989). Although Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality applied to legal scholarship in 1989, the theory grew more momentum as Black women started recognizing that they were being discriminated in almost every aspect of their lives. In Crenshaw's (1989) article, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics," she argued that the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism. She also argued that a person cannot use the "feminist theory" or just "women's experiences" to explain a Black woman's experience. To fully understand the depth of discrimination that applies to Black women, the research indicates a need to consider both race and gender. The lens that must be used is the Black feminist lens (Crenshaw, 1989). When applied to Black women,

intersectionality clarifies the difference between discrimination against White women versus Black women.

Scholars in the field of intersectionality believe that the feminist movement creates a space for White women to be heard and receive justice for their suffering and oppression, while still upholding White supremacy (Crenshaw, 2004). According to Hansen (2019), Black women activists struggled with how their demands were slipping between the cracks of social movements such as feminism and unions campaigning for worker's rights in the late 1960s. Because of the "single-focused" lens on social inequality (Collins & Bilge, 2016), there was not much room to talk about the many problems Black women face. Although it is clear that intersectionality is very complex and there are so many facets of a person being that makes everyone's story unique, the factors that make this concept fascinating is how dependent intersectionality is on environment, history, and social identity (Crenshaw, 2012). Another illustration of intersectionality comes from the work of academic G. Cox (2017), in which she compared the experiences of White and Black women, who are both discriminated against. Although she did not refer to it by that name exactly, she was quite open and honest about the inequalities in prejudice caused by intersectionality in her dissertation.

According to the research conducted by G. Cox (2017), "because she has the same skin color as the majority of men in leadership, the White woman can ignore the influences of race and ethnicity and concentrate on gender discrimination, whereas Black women may face prejudice not just due to race or gender" (p. 53). Black women, and other women of color, may encounter "gendered racism," but they might not be able to disentangle the role that their many identities play in the discrimination they face. Frequently misunderstood or sometimes intentionally judged, women who identify as Black are often viewed as unskilled in using soft-

skills, having a nasty disposition, being untrustworthy, threatening, and more likely to be unethical, which leads to not being able to build networks that support their promotion, or not being given opportunities that promote growth in leadership (Carter-Frye, 2015; G. P. Davis, 2022; Driver, 2014; Sanz-Hucle, 2010).

G. Cox (2017) drew attention to the work of a second social justice scholar, Zora Neal Hurston (1937), who referred to these weighty identity concerns as "burdens" in her writing. Hurston also mentioned that Black women carry these responsibilities with them every day of their life. According to Hurston, Black women are the "mules of the world." In a similar vein, Huckle (2010) discussed the weights of racism and sexism that Black women endure because of their experiences with multiple forms of oppression (Carter-Frye, 2015; G. P. Davis, 2022; Driver, 2014; Sanz-Hucle, 2010). Society has continued to disenfranchise Black women to favor and promote men and Whiteness (Caldera, 2016; G. P. Davis, 2022). This practice is evident when examining how many men are in the superintendency and how many White women are in the superintendency versus how many Black women are in the superintendency. Black women superintendents have repeatedly spoken out and said that they were rejected at five times the rate as White women (Colbert, 2009; G. P. Davis, 2022).

The Intersectionality of Being a Black Woman Aspiring Superintendent

Being a Black Man aspiring leader has its obstacles (Grogan & Miles Nash, 2021). Being a woman aspiring superintendent has its obstacles (Grogan & Miles Nash, 2021). A Black women superintendent aspirant faces more challenges than any other marginalized intersection of race and gender (Coleman, 2022; Webb, 2022). Researchers believe that 8% of qualified applicants in the superintendent's pool are qualified Black women, but less than 2% of them get contracts as superintendents. Black women have long been marginalized in favor of White male

doctrine, including White supremacy and White male ideology—the ideology of Whiteness and what is considered to be the standard in education (G. P. Davis, 2022). Throughout the history of education in the United States, Black women leaders have collectively shared similar experiences of racism in the workplace. A Black woman leader's experience, however, varies depending on how close to Whiteness she presents herself, either in her physical features or demeanors that are more acceptable to White people (Coleman, 2022; G. Cox, 2017; Daniels, 2022; G. P. Davis, 2022; Hansen, 2019; Webb, 2022). Nonetheless, the barriers to becoming a superintendent are so great that most Black women do not receive an offer of employment until 5 years after earning all necessary credentials, whereas it can take up to 2 years for other superintendents to be promoted (G. P. Davis, 2022).

Horsford et al. (2021) discussed the phenomenon of Black women superintendents going through barriers to attaining a contract, in her article, "Black women Superintendents." She also stated, "As a growing number of aspiring and practicing leaders who identify as Black women enter graduate-level leadership preparation programs and join the ranks of educational administration, [but as they do they are constantly bombarded with internal struggles to the] questions concerning race and gender in leadership." Black women aspiring superintendents in preparation programs are often presented with set of perspectives, realities, and strategies that may not align with those experienced by leaders who identify as Black women. For these reasons, their leadership perspectives, epistemologies, and contributions are essential to understanding of the superintendency and the field of educational leadership (Horsford et al., 2021).

Several factors impact the journey of Black aspiring women superintendents. As alluded to in the first paragraph of this subsection, Black aspiring superintendents must have “the fit”

(Coleman, 2022; Horsford et al., 2021). This first factor is one of the factors that starts early in an aspiring superintendent's career. Scholars have written entire articles on how Black women have to change their physical appearance to even be considered a candidate in the pipeline (Coleman, 2022; Osler & Webb, 2014). Based on stereotypes, Coleman (2022) and other scholars named at least six barriers experienced by Black women in their leadership journey that have contributed to them not getting promotions. These obstacles have led to overt racial inequities that can, at times, add extra insecurities and hardships to Black women leaders (Horsford et al., 2021). The first one is skin tone: a darker skin tone is considered more offensive and leads to less opportunities for promotion. The second barrier is hair type: if a Black woman's natural hair is more ethnic looking, then it is considered not professional to wear it, a Black woman's natural hair is discouraged, and hair that is long and straight is preferred (Coleman, 2022). The third obstacle is the ethnic look: a Black woman who looks more Sub-Saharan African or dresses more ethnically has a harder time promoting. The fourth barrier is facial features: the size and shape of the nose and lips are a distinctive marker for Black women. In Coleman's (2022) research, she mentioned that although other races of people modify their bodies to obtain these ethnic features, Black women are still not expected to accentuate them and they are still considered unattractive. The fifth barrier is physical features: Black women, for the most part, have a spectrum of physical features that differ from White women (i.e., larger hips, bigger butt, and wider frame). These natural Black feminine features can contradict society's view of beauty and according to researchers, and thus can be considered distasteful. Lastly, Black women are supposed to be mothers, cooks, cleaners, and 'fixer uppers', but not superintendents (M. A. Brown, 2018). Although these stereotypes have become barriers for Black women aspiring superintendents, Hoyt and Murphy (2016) summed up this experience

when they wrote that these “particular barriers to the attainment of the superintendent roles for Black women was the biased perception of ‘lack of fit’ only because elite leadership was associated with being White male” (Coleman, 2022).

Because physical appearance can hinder a Black woman from being promoted early on in her career, how Black aspiring women superintendents are provided support to develop their skills as leaders is significant (G. P. Davis, 2022; Horsford et al., 2021). Many Black educators have often reported that they are overlooked in leadership opportunities. When Black women are not given opportunities to sharpen their skills in other roles, it becomes a barrier that affects their upper mobility into the superintendency (D. L. Brown et al., 2017; Katz & Smith, 2021). This phenomenon is considered job segregation and is experienced quite often as Black women persist in vertical movement (W. Y. Johnson, 2006).

Networking and Mentors

Most White men, who become superintendents, have built networks that secured their superintendency (Hansen, 2019). For Black women who are working their way to the superintendency, the journey is lonely. Most Black women aspiring to be superintendents have revealed that to combat barriers, they have found that if they are not better situated on the scale of Whiteness, such as those listed in Coleman’s barriers, then the job is usually given to another candidate (G. P. Davis, 2022; G. E. Taylor, 2016; Wallace, 2020). The answer is that Black women must create their own network to overcome their networking obstacles (G. P. Davis, 2022).

The other part of the glass ceiling for Black women superintendents is what Hansen (2019) wrote in her dissertation as a phenomenon that happens in the pipeline to superintendency: the “glass cliff.” She wrote, “The glass cliff is a metaphor used to describe a

phenomenon whereby women are more likely to be appointed to top leadership positions in organizations that are struggling, in crisis, and/or are at risk to fail,” and this likelihood is high when that candidate is a Black woman (Hansen, 2019). Hansen (2019) elaborated, “Cook and Glass (2014) suggested that a woman’s greater emotional stability and interpersonal skills are highly valued in organizations that are in crisis.” The savior effect considers the post-promotion prediction that women will be granted fewer opportunities to prove their leadership capabilities compared to men, leading to shorter tenures. Institutional diversity suggests that gender bias and in-group preference shape promotion decisions and tend to limit the mobility of women (Hansen, 2019).

Concrete Ceiling

The term "concrete ceiling" was first used by journalist Rebecca Traister in a 2015 article for New York Magazine titled "Hillary Clinton vs. Herself." In the article, Traister wrote, "But the more accurate metaphor for Clinton’s experience may be a concrete ceiling, an obstacle as weighty as the famously unbreakable glass ceiling but even harder to see through" (Traister, 2015). Traister (2015) used the term to describe the systemic barriers faced by Hillary Clinton and other women in politics, particularly the deeply entrenched gender biases that can limit their opportunities for advancement. Since then, other journalists and commentators have used the term "concrete ceiling" to describe the persistent gender inequalities that exist in the political arena (Solnit, 2019).

The term "concrete ceiling" has also been used in the context of Black women in the workplace. In 2013, activist and author Trudy Bourgeois published a book titled "The Hybrid Leader: Blending the Best of the Male and Female Leadership Styles." In the book, Bourgeois (2013) wrote about the experiences of Black women in corporate America and how they face a

"concrete ceiling" that limits their opportunities for advancement. The term "concrete ceiling" was used to describe the additional barriers that Black women face in the workplace, including racial discrimination and stereotyping. Since then, other authors and activists have used the term to highlight the unique challenges faced by Black women in breaking through these barriers (M. West, 2020).

Gatekeepers give opportunities to people who are deemed "worthy" and keep people out who are considered unworthy. Many Black women experience some type of gatekeeping as they strive for career advancement. For women, men usually "gatekeep" advancement to dominate or keep in possession of the higher paid, higher authority roles, which is the glass ceiling effect. Women can see their goals and some women can remove the barriers to reach it. For Black women, however, the barriers are so insurmountable that they feel hopeless that they will ever reach the goal of superintendency. The gatekeepers not only deem Black women as unworthy for promotion because of male dominance, but they also look at the stereotypes of characteristic of Blackness in Black women that they deem "not fit" for the job. This effect is the concrete ceiling effect. Whereas the glass ceiling effect is based on gender barriers, the concrete ceiling effect is based on the intersection of gender and racial barriers (Coleman, 2022).

G. P. Davis (2022) mentioned, "While the glass ceiling affects diversity in education leadership broadly, unwritten rules and gatekeeping practices in search and hiring of superintendents hinder Black women more specifically." G. P. Davis concluded that most superintendents started their journey in high school: "the gates are open widest to applicants who have high school principalships and central office level experiences, which benefits White men over Black women who typically hold elementary principalships or other administrative roles that are viewed as less demanding" (p. 55). Adding a layer of race to this, G. P. Davis (2022)

demonstrated that superintendent search firms are typically run by 50–80-year-old White men who are strongly connected to the "good-old-boy" network and typically select aspiring superintendents who "fit" the typical White male leadership persona, unless specifically instructed to find diversity. Although some of this is slightly changing, it is problematic for Black aspiring women superintendents, especially if the scouting firm or school board do not have the opportunity or built-in systems to see Black women in leadership roles, or Black women as competent to become their next superintendent (Bailey-Walker, 2018; G. P. Davis, 2022). As a result, Black women have to continuously challenge society's biases if they are ascending to the superintendency. They also have overcome these barriers by staying resilient and persevering through the hard times (G. P. Davis, 2022).

Inequities in the Hiring Pipeline

Black aspiring women superintendents have to be successful as teachers and principals before any school board would recommend them as a superintendent (Alston, 1999, 2000). When Black women are serving as principals, however, they often experience non-acceptance of the authority position by upper-level administration and district stakeholders, subtle to overt disdain toward them, and inadequate responsiveness to directives. They also face opposition, which restricts their advancement and places their jobs in jeopardy (Pruitt, 2015). Because of historical inequalities, societal injustices, and the fear of change, the continuous gatekeeping of Black women leaders prevails in education, diminishing the ascension of Black aspiring leaders into the position (Brunner et al., 2003; Cadet, 2018). As a result, several Black aspiring women superintendents, rendered invisible and silent, have quietly quit, resulting in many turning to something else (Brunner et al., 2003; G. P. Davis, 2022).

The danger of Black aspiring women superintendents quietly quitting is that throughout public education across the United States, the number of Black, Latinx, and other students of color who receive public education has increased, but that of the leaders who represent these children has not (NCES, 2019). In most public schools across the United States, however, more than 70% of teachers are White, with the majority of those teachers self-identifying as White females, flooding the pipelines of teacher-to-principal and principal-to-superintendent (Walker, 2014).

Black Tax or 'Invisible Tax'

Because Black educators are not given the opportunity to advance at the same rate as White educators, when Black educators are finally given the opportunity to perform administrative duties and tasks, they do so in a quasi-administrative or diluted capacity (Russell & Wright, 1990). The "invisible tax" or "Black Tax" is referred to as the historical structure where Black owned-homes and businesses had to pay a discriminatory property tax in America, which helped keep systemic and institutionalized racism afloat (Van Dam, 2020). This same concept happens in education. The "Black Tax" in education refers to Black aspiring leaders being hired in the most difficult schools, while given little to no support, and still being expected to make astronomical changes within a school and being judged with the same metrics as their counterparts who have less challenging schools (Pottiger, 2022). In these cases, if the Black aspiring leader makes gains on assessment or metrics set by the district, then they are looked at favorably and might be able to advance. However, if they are not able to make gains, then this hinders the Black aspiring superintendent from advancing in the leadership pipeline as a superintendent, even if they are interviewing against one who did not make gains, but is a White aspiring leader.

Another issue with the invisible tax is that some Black women superintendents say that they were appointed to their positions because of the quota system or the usage of tokenism in a certain region of the country or the world (Valverde, 1988). Because White educators typically view this type of appointment to a leadership position as unfair or unjust, Black women superintendents have reported experiencing more microaggressions and have found it more difficult to lead because they must extensively navigate within their leadership role to govern effectively. This challenge is true regardless of their qualifications or experience.

Black potential superintendents must either relocate to districts that are less discriminatory in providing opportunities to black educators aspiring to superintendent positions, or, if they are already appointed as superintendents, contend with the hidden bias of tokenism. Black superintendents have added work to build trust and relationships to combat perceptions of tokenism and its accompanying biases. Because of negative attitudes toward Black administrators, Black candidates find it difficult to obtain and be considered for superintendent positions outside of school districts that serve underrepresented students. Even after Black women aspiring superintendents have successfully completed the interview process, received approval from the board of trustees and the community, and have been promoted to the highest professional salaried position in the public school sector, they continue to be confronted with unrealistic expectations of doing more with less, and assimilating into various cultural backgrounds (Coleman, 2022; G. P. Davis, 2022; Webb, 2022).

Black Woman Superintendent Barriers

For Black women who make it through both glass ceiling and the concrete ceiling to attain the superintendency, they encounter additional barriers in the role itself. For a superintendent to be successful, they must have a high level of self-esteem, a dynamic network

of collegial and political support, and inspire a belief in others that they are competent to do the job (G. P. Davis, 2022; Henderson, 2015). Unfortunately, for many Black Superintendents, the opposite happens. When Black women superintendents are faced with a wave of barriers, many Black women recount fears and insecurities about their capabilities (Bailey-Walker, 2018). Many Black women superintendents report that they have less collegial support and engagement, which leads to isolation. They are seen as problematic, which causes their district personnel, school boards, and educators in their district seem to inherently have less faith in their capabilities, straining their ability to make effective decisions for their district (G. P. Davis, 2022).

Coping Strategies

It is important for Black women to be astute to their environments as they ascend to the superintendency. In many educational environments Black women leaders are minoritized and marginalized; and, if not careful, are more likely to find barriers that will prevent them from moving into other leadership roles that can potentially give them the necessary skills for the superintendency. Black women often find themselves leaning on coping strategies when facing workplace challenges (D. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; G. P. Davis, 2022; Kubu, 2018). Most Black women leaders must first identify how the internal politics operate and develop strategies to decipher the organization's bureaucracy (G. P. Davis, 2022). To continue in their current roles successfully and ascend the pipeline, Black women usually downplay their effectiveness, maintain a low profile when their involvement becomes too public or intrusive, use appropriate or professional humor when eliminating uncomfortable moments, and become very guarded with their position and the use of their position (G. P. Davis, 2022; Kubu, 2018;). It is imperative, and one of the strongest characteristics of a Black woman ascending the leadership ladder, to become

very self-efficacious as they face obstacles that challenge their leadership worthiness (Beckwith et al., 2016; G. P. Davis, 2022).

Hiring into the Superintendency

School Boards

School boards across the nation spend an enormous amount of money and time searching for a superintendent (Lemon, 2015). Hiring companies have no room for hiring mistakes (Collins, 2001). Many school boards understand that selecting a superintendent can affect the educational system in a community negatively or positively and many years (Lemon, 2012). Nationally, school boards and superintendents view the superintendent's role as vital to district success (Forsyth, 2004). Whether supporting collective bargaining negotiations (J. Sharp, 2012), monitoring student achievement, or ensuring professional development and central office collective responsibility, superintendents serve as instructional leaders across the nation (Byrd et al., 2006; McLeod & Tanner, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1989; Southern Regional Education Board, 2010). Regardless of the high stakes, and sometimes, adversarial environments, superintendents influence communities, families, and policy (Reed & Patterson, 2007).

When all these elements are at stake, school boards, especially boards whose members are elected and not appointed, rely on techniques that they believe are unbiased, such as a comprehensive interview procedure as the first step in their search (Lemon, 2012). Most hiring firms complete a needs assessment with the community. From the needs assessment, a firm usually cross-references the candidates' interviews with the needs assessment to determine whether they are a good match. For this method to work, the person who wants to be superintendent usually has to explain how their skills match those of the community (Lemon, 2012).

The second step is examining their credentials. Credentials are not the same as accomplishments, and most boards are trained in understanding what to look for when applicants are listing accomplishments or credentials. Credentials are certified documents of achievement that show that a person is entitled to credit or official power (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023a). Accomplishment is achieving an activity (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023b). Lemon (2012) stated that the third step is to write up a job description before the interview, which allows the board to focus on their needs, not impressions. Step 4 suggests that the board of education prioritize personal and professional qualities. In Step 5, individual board members are encouraged to become effective interviewers. In Step 6, the board is reminded to check references. In Step 7, the board reviews the resume. Step 8 is the last step. Blackwell and Carlson (1995) stated that the board should do research to make a candidate score sheet that will be used during the final interviews.

Despite this system, which is deemed focused and unbiased, any applicants of color, though, seem to recount experiences of bias and prejudice that hinder their chances of attaining superintendency positions (Terranova et al., 2016). According to findings from several research studies, some predominantly White school board members have been found to believe that Black women are not qualified to do the job of a superintendent, even when these women possess the academic and administrative qualifications necessary for the position (Glass, 2000; K. L. Taylor & Tillman, 2009; A. B. West, 2018). Even when school boards employ objective methods, a significant gender gap persists among minority group members, as evidenced by the fact that Black women make up only 2% of superintendents (A. B. West, 2018). According to Joseph (2010), when a board is conducting a search for a new superintendent, members scrutinize key skills, knowledge, and personality traits of a potential school district chief administrator in the

context of their school district's needs and demographics because the board is responsible for hiring the new superintendent. In situations where board members typically refer to White males as educational leaders, Black women face a great deal of scrutiny (Joseph, 2010).

Black Women Superintendents

Currently, research documenting Black women in superintendency positions is limited. However, more and more studies are being published. To understand the full impact of how Black women have been excluded from the superintendency role, this literature review focused on the history of the superintendency overall, not on the first Black woman.

The first recorded Black women superintendent was Velma Dolphin Ashley (Revere, 2006). She began the superintendent's position in Boley, Oklahoma, on July 1, 1944. At the young age of 32, Ashley headed her school district for 12 years until she resigned and was succeeded by her husband, Lillard Ashley. Although she is the first recorded Black superintendent, most scholars do not recognize Mrs. Ashley as the first Black Woman to lead in a superintendent's capacity due to her husband claiming all 24 years of the superintendency (Revere, 2006).

By 1970, almost 170 years after the start of the superintendency, there were three Black women superintendents: Edith Gains from Hartford, Connecticut; Margert Labat from Evanston, Illinois; and Barbara Sizemore from Washington, D.C. (Revere, 2006). By 1978, there were five Black women superintendents, and by 1985, there were 29 Black women superintendents. Following this data trend of Black women superintendents, there should have been a significant increase of Black women superintendents. At this time, Black women represent five percent of all superintendents in the Council of Great City Schools, which most Black Superintendents around in the United States, male or female, take part in. In districts across the United States,

however, Black women represent two percent of all United States superintendents (Council of Great City Schools [CGCS], 2010).

Literature Review Summation

The literature review revealed that since the early 1830s, the job of superintendent has been given to White men with a standard education and the bare minimum of qualifications (NCES, 2019). For many years, the actual role of the superintendent was to be the facilitator of professional staff development, curriculum development, administrative evaluation of schools and technical assistance for the schools in the district (Morales, 2004). The role is, however, different from the role of the superintendent today. The position's responsibilities still include acting as chief administrator, negotiator-statesman, foremost communicator, reengineer, major fundraiser, visionary, and chairperson of the school foundation (Cortez, 2010). Race, gender, ethnicity, or the intersections of all of them have made the attainment of the superintendency harder for Black administrators (CGCS, 2010).

Social scholars have continued to voice their deep concerns about the institutional practices of exclusion, racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism in public school administration (Hansen, 2019). Because of politicized oppression, many groups have spoken out and demanded social justice through reforms (Hansen, 2019). Through those debates, many movements, such as the feminist movement and Black Lives Matters, have made the U.S. society to examine and acknowledge the disparities that have happen and continue to happen to Black people in education (Hansen, 2019).

One persistent disparity, and the focus of this research study, was Black women ascending into the superintendency. In the west coast of the United States—Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington—there are 1,158 superintendents. Out of these, only 19 superintendents

are Black women, which equals less than one percent of the superintendents in all states (Webb, 2022).

The underrepresentation of Black women administrators in public school districts throughout the United States has implications for the superintendency pipeline (Goings et al., 2018). For the last few decades, Black superintendents have written dissertations describing their experience while promoting or striving to keep their jobs as superintendents (Cadet, 2018; Delpit, 2022; Fong, 2021; Wolfe, 2010). Black superintendents and researchers have identified the following barriers: racism in hiring practices, unfair expectations, the "extra tax" that they pay in the over-politicized education system, higher superintendency turnover for them, and longevity that was not previously extended to them (Cadet, 2018; Domene, 2012; Fong, 2021; Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Grissom & Andersen, 2012; A. B. West, 2018).

Although the literature reveals barriers, longevity, turnover, and some strategies within the superintendency, gaps exist when looking at the rate of turnover that happens to Black superintendents over time and in certain areas of the United States, such as the western part of the country. The literature also reveals a gap in why Black superintendents are not receiving the same offers and maintaining tenure as White superintendents. Why Black women superintendents are receiving a far less amount of opportunities compared to White men superintendents is another gap indicated in the literature.

Another summation in the literature is offered by a well-known researcher, Bell Hooks. According to Hooks (2012), Black women who ascend to leadership roles often face unique challenges and pressures that stem from the intersections of their race and gender. In her book, "Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism," Hooks wrote about the ways in which Black

women are often marginalized and excluded from mainstream feminist movements, as well as from leadership positions in organizations and institutions.

When Black women achieve positions of leadership, Hooks (2012) argued that they are often subject to stereotypes and microaggressions that question their competence and authority. Hooks also noted that Black women bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and resilience to their leadership roles. Hooks indicated that Black women's perspectives and insights can be valuable in creating more inclusive and equitable institutions.

As Black women ascend into superintendent roles, they may also face challenges related to the racial and socioeconomic disparities in education. In her book "Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom," Hooks (1994) wrote about the importance of challenging traditional models of education and creating spaces that allow critical thinking and dialogue. She argued that Black women leaders in education have a unique opportunity to advocate for transformative approaches to teaching and learning and to address the systemic inequalities that affect themselves and those who are marginalized.

In final summation, taking a critical lens to the study of Black women in superintendent roles can provide insight into the complex power dynamics and systemic inequalities that shape their experiences. M. Smith and Johnson (2020) suggested that a need for more literature to highlight the strategies and practices that Black women superintendents use to navigate the challenges of their roles, while also identifying the structural barriers and microaggressions that they face in their work. The added body of literature can help contextualize the experiences of Black women superintendents within the broader educational landscape. As Hankins et al. (2018) noted, educational institutions are shaped by deeply ingrained patterns of racial and gender inequality, which can limit the opportunities and outcomes for Black women leaders. By

examining the historical and cultural contexts that shape the experiences of Black women in superintendent roles, critical ethnography can provide a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities that they face.

Chapter III: Methods

The underrepresentation of Black women in the position of superintendent is a significant issue in the western region of the United States, as well as in the country as a whole. Despite Black students comprising over 14% of the student population in U.S. schools, Black women hold less than 1% of superintendent positions in the Western Region and less than 2% of such positions nationwide. To further understand and add to the body of literature, the following question guided this study: how do Black women superintendents remove, face, or reverse systemic barriers that hinder their promotion?

The objective of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of Black women and their authorship as superintendents as they ascend to the superintendency (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022). These experiences can be gleaned upon to help support other Black women, as well as other people who are interested in dismantling systems of oppression, to recognize that part of the educational system gate keeps Black women from positions of power. The findings from this investigation will help prepare Black women for ascension into the superintendency and help those who are not Black women understand the contributions to the educational system of Black women superintendents. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of Black women who have become superintendents and their stories of how they have ascended through the pipeline by allowing them to narrate their experiences in ascending into public school's superintendency seats in California, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada.

To understand the lived experiences of these women, two concepts, Critical Race Feminism (intersectionality) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT), drove this study's methodology and analysis (Coleman, 2022; D. D. Johnson & Thomas, 2022). Both frameworks helped shape the methodology to collect the narratives of these women in the most honest and open way,

while maintaining the integrity of the study (Coleman, 2022; D. D. Johnson & Thomas, 2022; Peters-Hawkins & Wilson, 2022). BFT is the theoretical framework, which explains why being a Black woman has its difficulties from their point of view while telling their story and emphasizing their voice. This theoretical framework is important and vital to the integrity and merits of any research.

Within the framework of this dissertation, BFT was instrumental in exploring and understanding the layered experiences of Black women who have ascended to the role of superintendent. This theoretical perspective allows us to examine the intersecting challenges related to race, gender, and leadership within educational contexts. BFT, with its roots in the work of scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, provided a critical lens for analyzing the narratives of Black women superintendents, highlighting how their identities and experiences are shaped by both racial and gendered dimensions of power and discrimination. By employing BFT, this research not only acknowledges the unique journeys of Black women in educational leadership but also challenges the dominant discourses that often marginalize their voices and contributions. It underscores the resilience and strategic navigation of these women through institutional barriers, while critiquing the systemic structures that create such obstacles. BFT also elevates the importance of Black women's agency, wisdom, and leadership philosophies, framing their experiences not just in terms of the barriers they face but also their transformative potential within the sphere of education. Thus, BFT was not merely a backdrop for this study; it was a critical framework that shaped the understanding of the complexities of Black women's leadership in education, providing rich insights into their struggles, strategies, and successes in navigating the path to superintendency.

Incorporating Critical Race Feminism (CRF), as conceptualized by Kimberle Crenshaw, into Chapter 3 of this dissertation was pivotal for examining the multifaceted barriers encountered by Black women superintendents. CRF, with its foundation in acknowledging the intersectionality of race and gender, provided an essential theoretical lens through which the experiences of these superintendents were analyzed. This approach allowed a deeper understanding of how systemic racism and sexism uniquely impact Black women in educational leadership roles, particularly in the realm of superintendency.

CRF's emphasis on the interlocking nature of oppressions helped highlight not only the visible barriers these women face but also the subtle, nuanced forms of discrimination that might otherwise be overlooked. By applying CRF, this dissertation uncovered the specific ways in which race and gender intersect to create a complex set of challenges for Black women aspiring to or occupying superintendent positions. CRF enabled a critical examination of the educational system's structural dynamics, policies, and practices that perpetuate inequality and hinder the advancement of Black women into leadership roles.

CRF's focus on narrative and counter-storytelling as methods for revealing and challenging the dominant discourse made it a powerful tool for amplifying the voices of Black women superintendents. Their stories and experiences, as explored in this dissertation, not only illuminate the systemic barriers they encounter but also their resilience, strategies for navigating these challenges, and their contributions to transforming the educational landscape. CRF was not just a theoretical backdrop for this study; it was central to understanding the lived realities of Black women superintendents and to advocating for equity and justice in educational leadership.

This chapter is outlined in five subsections. It begins with an introduction followed by a statement of study design, including a discussion on qualitative design and critical ethnography

as the methodology. The other sections include research questions, the researcher's role, an explanation of the site and participant selection, and data collection method and procedures, and a synopsis.

Statement of Study Design Approach

Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a research methodology that involves exploring and understanding social phenomena through in-depth analysis, interpretation, and description of the participants' experiences, perceptions, and meanings. Qualitative research methods include techniques such as observation, interviews, focus groups, and document analysis, among others. The goal of qualitative research is to develop a deep and rich understanding of a social world, often from the perspective of the participants themselves. Qualitative research is particularly useful when exploring complex social phenomena or when seeking to understand social issues from an emic perspective.

According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is a “means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.” Similarly, Denzin and Lincoln (2018) described qualitative research as “a situation activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible.” In qualitative research, the researcher is often an active participant in the research process and seeks to understand the context, culture, and social interactions that shape the participants' experiences. Qualitative research is widely used in the social sciences, including fields such as anthropology, sociology, psychology, and education, among others. It is particularly useful when exploring complex social issues, understanding the lived experiences of

marginalized groups, and gaining insights into how individuals and groups make meaning of their world.

Critical Ethnography

The aim of critical ethnography is to understand social phenomena through an in-depth analysis of culture, power, and social relationships. This qualitative research approach is critical of the dominant social order and seeks to expose and challenge the assumptions, values, and ideologies that underpin it. Critical ethnography combines traditional ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviews, with critical theory to explore the ways in which power relations shape social reality. The critical aspect of this approach is that it challenges the status quo and seeks to understand the lived experiences of marginalized communities (Anderson, 1989; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018)

Using critical ethnography in a study about Black women superintendents was imperative for several reasons. First, Black women have been historically marginalized and underrepresented in leadership positions in education. Their experiences are unique and cannot be fully understood without taking into account their intersectional identities as Black and female. Second, a critical approach is necessary because the dominant discourse about leadership in education is often based on White, male, and Western models of leadership, which may not be applicable or relevant to Black women. Therefore, a critical ethnographic approach allowed deeper understanding of the experiences of Black women superintendents and the ways in which they navigate and negotiate power relations in education. This approach yielded insights into how to create more inclusive and equitable leadership practices in education.

Critical ethnography is a valuable qualitative research approach for studying the experiences of Black women superintendents. This approach fits into qualitative research in

several ways. First, it focuses on power and inequality: critical ethnography emphasizes power relations and social inequalities, which is particularly relevant when studying the experiences of Black women superintendents. These women face multiple forms of oppression and marginalization based on their race and gender, and critical ethnography can provide insights into how these power dynamics operate in the context of educational leadership. Second, it emphasizes on context and culture: qualitative research, including critical ethnography, focuses on understanding the context and culture of the lived experience. This approach is essential when studying Black women superintendents because their experiences are shaped by the historical, cultural, and institutional contexts in which they work. Third, it recognizes multiple perspectives: qualitative research, including critical ethnography, recognizes the importance of multiple perspectives and voices. This approach allows the researcher to hear the voices of Black women superintendents themselves, rather than relying solely on external measures of success or predefined leadership models. Fourth, it emphasizes on reflexivity: critical ethnography emphasizes reflexivity, which involves reflecting on the researcher's positionality, assumptions, and biases. This emphasis is particularly important when studying Black women superintendents, as the researcher must be aware of their own positionality as an outsider to the community they are studying. Overall, critical ethnography is a valuable approach for studying the experiences of Black women superintendents in qualitative research. It allows deeper understanding of the power dynamics, cultural context, and multiple perspectives that shape their experiences in educational leadership (Anderson, 1989).

The following are the steps the researcher used to conduct the critical ethnography:

1. Defining the research question: The first step in critical ethnography is to clearly define the research question or problem. The question should be focused on understanding power relations and how they shape social reality.
2. Selecting the site and participants: The researcher needs to select a site where the research will take place and identify the participants who will be involved in the study. The site and participants should be chosen based on their relevance to the research question.
3. Conducting fieldwork: Critical ethnography involves conducting fieldwork, which includes participant observation and interviews. The researcher must immerse themselves in the social world of the participants and observe their behavior, interactions, and practices.
4. Documenting data: The researcher should document the data collected during fieldwork through detailed field notes, audio or video recordings, and other relevant materials. It is crucial to collect data systematically and record as much detail as possible.
5. Analyzing data: The researcher should analyze the data collected during fieldwork using critical theory and other relevant frameworks. The analysis should focus on power relations, social inequalities, and the ways in which they shape the participants' experiences.
6. Writing up the findings: The final step in critical ethnography is to write up the findings. The researcher should use a narrative style to present the data, analysis, and interpretation of the findings. The writing should be critical, reflective, and self-

aware, acknowledging the researcher's positionality and biases (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Overall, critical ethnography is a complex and iterative process that requires a deep understanding of critical theory, ethnographic methods, and social issues. It is important for the researcher to approach the study with reflexivity, self-awareness, and an openness to learning from the participants' experiences (Anderson, 1989; Creswell, 2014). Critical ethnography can inform strategies for addressing the disparities and inequalities that affect Black women superintendents and the communities they serve. As Lather and Smithies (2016) suggested, a critical ethnographic approach can identify the policies, practices, and cultural norms that perpetuate inequality in educational institutions, and can inform strategies for creating more equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students. By centering the experiences and perspectives of Black women leaders, critical ethnography can inform transformative action that addresses the root causes of systemic inequality in education.

Research Questions

RQ1: How do the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents in the United States reflect and challenge dominant narratives and structures within the field of education leadership, and what implications does this have for creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems?

RQ2: How do Black women superintendents navigate and negotiate their identities in predominantly White and male-dominated educational leadership spaces, and what strategies do they employ to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face?

Critical Ethnographic Questions

As critical ethnographic approach seeks to understand and critiques power dynamics, inequalities, and social justice issues within a particular context, the following ethnographic questions were used with Black women superintendents regarding their journey to becoming superintendents:

- As you reflect on your ascension into the superintendency and narrate your journey, what strategies did you as a Black woman needed to attain the role of superintendent? How do Black women superintendents remove, face, or reverse systemic barriers that hinder their promotion? Tell a time when you felt that barriers were used against you?
- How have your experiences as a Black woman shaped your journey in becoming a superintendent? What challenges have you faced in your journey, particularly in a predominantly White and male-dominated field, and how have you navigated them? How have you leveraged your identity and experiences to challenge dominant narratives and systems that perpetuate inequality and oppression in education?
- In what ways have institutional and systemic barriers hindered or facilitated your ascent to the superintendent position? How have you confronted and addressed these barriers, and what strategies have you used to overcome them? How have you built networks of support and allies within and outside of the educational system to advance your career goals?
- How has the intersection of race, gender, and other social identities influenced your leadership in the journey of becoming a superintendent? How have you leveraged your identity and experiences to challenge and transform institutional policies and practices that perpetuate systemic oppression, particularly for marginalized communities? How

have you built coalitions, networks, and partnerships with stakeholders as you ascended into the Superintendency? Tell a time when you had to use your network to help you ascend?

- What are some of the tensions and contradictions you have experienced as a Black woman ascending to the superintendency, particularly in navigating the expectations and demands of various stakeholders such as school boards, teachers, parents, and community members? How have you managed these tensions and balanced competing priorities in your leadership roles? What strategies have you used to maintain your authenticity and integrity as a leader while still fulfilling the expectations and responsibilities of your past position?

These questions helped illuminate the complex and multifaceted experiences of Black women superintendents. It also revealed insights into their leadership practices, challenges, and contributions to advancing equity and social justice in education. By centering on the voices and experiences of Black women superintendents, this critical ethnographic research challenges dominant narratives and systems that perpetuate inequality and oppression and offers alternative visions and possibilities for transforming educational institutions and practices.

Researcher's Role

As a Black woman aspiring superintendent, I am very well aware of my role in the research, as I identify with the participants and their experiences with ascending to the superintendency. Like many other researchers, however, I am and will continue to be honest and open with my thoughts while letting readers know that the entire research paper is written from the viewpoint of a Black Woman. I am not sure whether I can remove myself from my work on this paper because those who identify themselves as Black Women and myself are the subject of

this paper. Any statement other than the one above would be deceptive. As I construct meaning from the narration of stories, I intend to learn from those stories and their meaning for future scholars and aspiring superintendents.

In my journey, I have worked as an educator for 23 years. I started in 2001 as a substitute teacher, and then ascended to a special education teacher 2004, an elementary general education teacher in 2008, an assistant principal in 2017, and a principal in 2021. Every part of my journey has been met with obstacles that did not propel me into leadership roles. Because I choose to live in my own authenticity, I am passionate about writing this study in such a way that it can propel Black women and other marginalized individuals, who are so easily overlooked, and encourage them not to give up but continue to press on and persevere as they successfully maneuver within a system designed to oppress.

As an aspiring Black woman superintendent, my positionality was pivotal to the fabric of this research. My journey and identity deeply resonated with the narratives of Black women striving for leadership roles within the educational system—a system that has historically marginalized voices like ours. This research is not merely an academic endeavor but a personal voyage that mirrors the lived experiences of those it seeks to understand and represent.

Throughout my 23-year tenure in education, starting as a substitute teacher in 2001 and evolving into roles such as a special education teacher, general education teacher, assistant principal, and ultimately a principal, my path has been rife with systemic barriers. These barriers did not serve to propel me forward but rather posed significant challenges that tested my resilience and determination. My commitment to authenticity and my desire to elevate the narratives of Black women and other marginalized individuals through this study are driven by a

passion to incite change. Through this study, my aim is to empower those overlooked by a system designed not for their success but for their oppression.

This research delved into the systemic and personal obstacles faced by Black women superintendents. My dual identity as a Black woman and an educator with extensive experience in both teaching and administration positioned me uniquely to explore these challenges with depth and empathy. Over three decades—23 years in educational roles and 7 years in administrative capacities, all within Nevada—have not only honed my professional expertise but have also aligned me with the collective struggles and triumphs of Black women in educational leadership.

This shared identity with my study's participants fostered a profound trust and understanding, crucial for exploring the nuanced experiences of Black women in leadership positions. This mutual identification ensured a depth of conversation and insight, allowing a rich, empathetic analysis of their stories. My approach to research was deeply informed by both an intellectual and experiential understanding of the challenges faced by Black women in education, ensuring that the study reflected the participants' realities accurately.

My positionality also enriched my engagement with existing literature and discourse on educational leadership, enabling me to interrogate and expand upon prevailing narratives from a perspective acutely aware of the intersections of race, gender, and power. My identity and experiences were integral to the credibility, depth, and relevance of this research, positioning me to contribute a more inclusive and nuanced understanding of leadership within education.

In conclusion, my identity as a Black woman and my professional trajectory in education and administration significantly informed my research methodology, approach, and overall contribution to the field. Through this lens, I aimed to illuminate the challenges faced by Black

women superintendents, advocate for systemic change, and celebrate the resilience and leadership of Black women in education.

Explanation of the Site and Participant

The purpose of this dissertation was to explore the journeys of four Black superintendents and the challenges they faced in achieving their position, as well as the strategies they employed to overcome these challenges. The methodology employed in this study was a critical ethnographic approach to examine the broader social, cultural, and political contexts that impact Black superintendents' experiences. Descriptions of the site and participants are provided in the following subsections.

Selection Site Selection

This study involved superintendents across the United States who had applied to be superintendents of public schools in California, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada. The superintendent demographics of the states are listed in Table 1, based on previous reports (Webb, 2022; California Department of Education, n.d.; Nevada Department of Education, n.d.; Oregon Department of Education, n.d.; Washington Department of Education, n.d.; OSBA, 2022; CAAASA, 2022)

Participant Selection

For this critical ethnographic research study, participant selection followed specific criteria related to the research question and objectives. The study focused on the experiences of Black or African American women who had held or applied for the position of superintendent in California, Nevada, Oregon, or Washington. A snowball sampling technique ensured the individuals with relevant experiences and perspectives to contribute to the research aims and objectives participated in the study.

The inclusion criteria were as follows:

- Identify as Black or African American
- Be or have been a superintendent
- Identify as a woman
- or/and have applied and gone through the process of becoming superintendent of California, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada

Table 1

Superintendent Demographics of Participating States

State	Total Student Population	How Many Districts	Black Women Superintendents
California	6,163,001	977	15
Oregon	582,661	197	1
Washington	1,078,119	306	3
Nevada	486,682	17	0

To identify potential participants, I used various strategies, such as reaching out to professional networks and organizations, contacting state departments of education, and posting recruitment messages on social media platforms. I invited potential participants who met the selection criteria to participate in the study. I obtained informed consent from all participants and ensured that their identities remained confidential throughout the study. By selecting participants who had held or applied for the position of superintendent in the selected states, my aim was to

provide a deeper understanding of the challenges, barriers, and opportunities that Black or African American women encounter on their journey to superintendency.

The sampling strategy employed was snowball sampling, which included posting an advertisement on LinkedIn and distributing recruitment flyers at educational conferences such as the Council of Great City Schools annual conference, to locate potential participants who met the eligibility criteria of serving as a superintendent and self-identifying as Black or African American. I asked each participant to keep a journal and reflect on their experiences through three Zoom interviews. The initial interview lasted 60 minutes, followed by two subsequent interviews that lasted 45 minutes each. I recorded all interviews and transcribed and analyzed them using the qualitative data analysis software program, NVivo.

In qualitative research, coding is a pivotal process where data are categorized and labeled to discern meaningful themes and patterns. A well-defined coding scheme forms the bedrock of qualitative research, providing a systematic approach for data analysis that remains firmly rooted in the research questions. Guest et al. (2012) defined a coding scheme as a "collection of codes and definitions designed to structure data" (p. 11). The creation of a coding scheme necessitates collaboration within the research team and should be aligned with the research questions. The coding scheme should encapsulate the core concepts of the research questions while retaining flexibility to accommodate emerging themes or categories during data analysis.

Developing a well-defined coding scheme is a crucial step in the qualitative research process, as it offers a structured framework for data organization and analysis that remains closely aligned with the research questions. As emphasized by Saldaña (2016), a coding scheme should possess the duality of being "flexible enough to accommodate emerging information and robust enough to provide a clear organizational structure" (p. 3). To craft a coding scheme, the

researcher reviewed the research questions and identified key concepts and themes through an iterative process of open coding. This process involved thoroughly reading and re-reading the data, generating ideas, and engaging in discussions within the participants. After the essential concepts and themes are identified, the researcher proceeded to develop a set of categories or codes that encapsulate these ideas, continuously refining and revising the coding scheme as necessary.

The timeline for coding scheme development entailed the following 2–3 month plan. In the initial month, I reviewed the research questions and conducted an initial data review. Following this, the researcher convened to identify key concepts and themes and initiate the open coding process. In the second month, I continued open coding and commenced work on a preliminary coding scheme, including code categorization and definition refinement. The first coding cycle focused on individual words or phrases that commonly reoccur. The second cycle encompassed larger passages, potentially using the same coding units. In the third month, the researcher finalized the coding scheme, ensuring comprehensiveness, clarity, and adaptability to emerging information. This phase involved piloting the coding scheme on a subset of the data and making any necessary adjustments. By the end of the third month, a well-defined coding scheme was in place, forming a solid foundation for rigorous, consistent, and data-grounded analysis (Saldaña, 2016).

To ensure each participant understood the research objectives and procedures, I provided them with an informed consent form, outlining the study's purpose, data collection methods, confidentiality measures, and the potential risks and benefits of participation. The interview questions focused on various themes, including identity and intersectionality, institutional and systemic barriers, leadership style and approach, community engagement and partnership, family

and background, and social justice and equity. These interviews allowed participants to share their experiences, perspectives, and insights in a semistructured format, providing rich data for in-depth analysis. After conducting the interviews, I transcribed the data and imported them into NVivo for analysis. Employing a critical ethnographic approach, I scrutinized the data for recurring themes and patterns, delving into the broader social, cultural, and political contexts that influence the experiences of Black superintendents.

To ensure the trustworthiness and accuracy of the data analysis, I employed two key methods: member checking and peer debriefing. Member checking involved sharing the findings with the participants and soliciting their feedback and corrections. Peer debriefing entailed sharing the data and analysis with other researchers and experts to gather feedback and validate the findings. After completing the data analysis, I compiled a narrative report summarizing the key themes and patterns that emerged from the data. The report included direct quotes from the participants to illustrate their experiences and perspectives and contextualized the findings within the broader social, cultural, and political contexts that influence the journey to superintendency for Black educators.

The findings of this study has contributed to the broader understanding of the challenges that Black superintendents face, the strategies they use to overcome these challenges, and the factors that contribute to their success. The study will also contribute to the transformation of educational institutions and practices by identifying areas where change is needed to promote equity and social justice in education.

This work will prove valuable to a larger body of work. The methods for disseminating the findings including presenting the findings at academic conferences and having them published in peer-reviewed academic journals. An additional strategy is sharing the findings with

the participants and other stakeholders in the education community, including school boards, district leaders, and advocacy organizations. Sharing the findings widely will promote dialogue and collaboration around the issues facing Black superintendents and contribute to advancing equity and social justice in education. Overall, this dissertation contributes to the literature on educational leadership and provides insights into the experiences of Black superintendents. The study provides a platform for Black superintendents to share their experiences and perspectives, informing future research and practice in educational leadership.

In conclusion, Chapter III included a discussion of the methodology used in exploring the experiences of Black women superintendents in California, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada, in their ascension to public school's superintendency seats. The methodology used was a qualitative research approach, with a critical ethnographic design to understand the social phenomena through an in-depth analysis of culture, power, and social relationships. BFT and intersectionality served as frameworks for data collection and analysis. The researcher's role has also been discussed in this chapter. The chapter also included an explanation of site and participant selection and data collection methods and procedures. The aim of the methodology adopted for this study was to develop a deep and rich understanding of Black women's experiences in leadership positions and offers insights into creating more inclusive and equitable leadership practices in education.

Chapter IV: Findings

Chapter Overview

This critical ethnography is a qualitative study that focused on strategies that shifted power relations and dynamics that may have been barriers on the journey to becoming a superintendent (Anderson, 1989). The aim of this study was to provide insight into the lives of the lived experiences of four Black women who served or were serving as superintendents in public school districts in Oregon, Nevada, Washington, and California. The significance of these qualifiers lies in the remarkable underrepresentation of Black women in superintendent positions within the educational leadership landscape, particularly in the western region of the United States. According to statistical data, less than 0.3% of all superintendents appointed on the West Coast are Black women (C. C. Smith, 2018). Although there is a comparatively higher presence of Black Women superintendents in the eastern and southern parts of the United States, it is noteworthy that California exhibits a relatively more progressive stance in the appointment of Black Women superintendents when compared to other states in the Western region (Johnson & Brown, 2019).

Given the exceedingly low numbers of Black women superintendents in the western United States, a snowball sampling technique (Smith & Williams, 2020) was an effective approach to identify and recruit superintendents whose demographic characteristics met the criteria for participation in this study. The four superintendents participated in individual interviews. Following the completion of each interview, the researcher meticulously commenced the subsequent phases of data collection, coding, and analysis to facilitate the formulation of a comprehensive and insightful presentation of the research findings (Beall-Davis, 2017).

As the two-level analysis method has been used in other studies, this study also followed the two-step process for the data gathered from one-on-one interviews with four Black women superintendents. The first level was connecting ideas and quotes that had similar patterns of meaning and experiences. The second level of analysis was examining all aspects of literature that supported and opposed viewpoints and provided a snippet of how the outside world might view the same situation from a different lens (Allen-Thomas, 2021; Collins, 1990; G. Cox, 2017).

After concluding each of these interviews, six overall themes emerged. Although more themes could emerge from a total of over 20 hours of interviews, this study focused on the alignment of experiences and viewpoints of these four women. The emerging themes were as follows: (a) overcoming stereotypes and biases (M. A. Brown, 2018); (b) balancing assertiveness in leadership, (c) resilience in facing challenges; (d) the essential trio for empowering black women: mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers (E. Williams, 2007), (c) career development (S. A. Davis, 2010), and 6) anchoring (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

Research Questions

The research questions guiding this investigation focused on the strategies employed by Black women superintendents to navigate the educational leadership landscape, the barriers they encounter, and the support systems that facilitate their success. The analysis to answer these questions followed a qualitative methodology, employing thematic analysis to interpret the rich, detailed narratives provided by the participants. The research questions for this study are as follows:

RQ1: How do the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents in the United States reflect and challenge dominant narratives and structures within the field of

education leadership, and what implications does this have for creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems?

RQ2: How do Black women superintendents navigate and negotiate their identities in predominantly White and male-dominated educational leadership spaces, and what strategies do they employ to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face?

Data Collection and Instrumentation

From the August 2023 until December of 2023, four former and current Black women superintendents participated in two to three interviews each, averaging over 90 minutes per interview over Zoom and in person. Following the interviews was transcribing the recorded interviews using NVivo and then hand coding, for more precision (Saldaña, 2016). All of these women had worked or applied to work in senior leadership roles in California, Nevada, Oregon, or Washington State; however, two of them had been able to secure their superintendency on the east coast of the United States. In these semistructured interviews, the interviewer asked one to two interview questions per participant. During the interview, each participant chose the direction in which they wanted their experiences to be shared. Intertwined in their experiences usually were their perception, believes, and interpretation of events from their viewpoints. Further interviews continued that commonality and expounded on particular details, which added to the validity of their voice.

After each interview, the researcher shared the transcribed recordings with each participant to review for a level of accuracy. Following the return of the transcribed recordings by each participant, the researcher reviewed the transcription as an added level of validity. The researcher then proceeded with uploading each interview into Nvivo for coding (see Saldaña, 2016).

In the educational landscape of the four states under investigation, namely, Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington, the presence of Black women as superintendents has been notably scarce. Despite their diligent efforts, applications, and dedicated service, the attainment of superintendent roles by Black women in both these states and beyond has remained a rare occurrence. The narratives gleaned from these accomplished individuals, coupled with an extensive and meticulous coding process, constitute the focal point of this dissertation. This research focused on the distinct experiences and formidable challenges that Black women superintendents encounter within the realm of education, shedding light on the intricacies that define their professional trajectories.

The aim of this study, grounded in qualitative analysis, was to discern the multifaceted dynamics shaping the journeys of Black women superintendents and their unwavering perseverance. A central theme explored is the pivotal roles of mentorship, sponsorship, and amplifiers in fostering their career development. Through in-depth interviews with four Black women superintendents, the researcher sought to uncover the nuanced realities that have influenced their leadership pathways within educational settings and to elucidate the means by which they have navigated these realities, ultimately ascending to the esteemed position of superintendent. Each of the participants were given pseudo names to protect their identity.

In summary, this dissertation contributes to the broader discourse on educational leadership by offering a comprehensive examination of the unique experiences of Black women superintendents. Using qualitative research methods, this study unveils the intricate fabric of their professional journeys, emphasizing the instrumental roles of mentorship, sponsorship, and amplifiers in their career development. By elucidating the challenges and achievements of these individuals, this research enriches the current understanding of the complexities inherent in

educational leadership and provides valuable insights into the pathways to superintendent roles for Black women. The demographic information of the participants is shown in Table 2.

Table 2

General Demographic Information of Participants

	Name	Age Range	Education Level	Status	Years as Superintendent	Served in	Identifies as
0	Superintendent Maeve Bailey	50-70 years	Ed.D.	Retired Superintendent	11 years	California	Black Woman
1	Superintendent Terri Daniels	40-60 years	Master's in Education	Fired as Superintendent	7 years	Nevada	Black Woman
2	Superintendent Karina Allen	50-70 years	Master's in Education	Retired Superintendent	5 years	New York	Black Woman
3	Superintendent Brynlee Macklin	30-50 years	Ed.D.	Current Superintendent	1 year	Rhode Island	Black Woman

Coding

The findings of this dissertation may offer valuable insights into the experiences of Black women superintendents, contributing to a deeper understanding of the intersectionality of race and gender in educational leadership. The aim of this research was to highlight the importance of mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification in supporting the career progression of Black women in superintendent roles, and to provide recommendations for policy and practice that can foster more inclusive and supportive environments in educational administration.

In synthesizing the data from interviews with Superintendent B, Superintendent Karina Allen, and Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, the study revealed diverse perspectives on the complexities of being a Black woman in a leadership position in education. The participants discussed their career trajectories, challenges faced, and the support mechanisms that have been

crucial in their journeys. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's interviews, for instance, emphasized the importance of mentorship and networking, reflecting on her experiences in various educational settings. Similarly, Superintendent Karina Allen's responses highlighted the role of strategic career moves and the impact of professional networking on advancement. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's insights revealed the significance of mentorship and equity initiatives, as well as her experiences navigating educational leadership during challenging times such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The presentation of findings in the subsequent chapters is based on an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of Black women superintendents through interviews. The narratives provide a rich tapestry of knowledge, resilience, and strategic acumen, illustrating how mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification are not just abstract concepts but also the lived realities that significantly impact the professional journeys of these women leaders

Results of Analysis: Themes

Table 3

Themes – Overarching Findings

#	Question	Theme	Representative Quote	Interviewees
1	RQ1	Overcoming stereotypes and biases	I am an American Black woman who has lived in a lot of different parts of this country	Superintendent Karina Allen, Dr., Superintendent Brynlee Macklin
2	RQ2	Resilience in Facing challenges	The quickness in his response to tell me that I was not capable	Superintendent Terri Daniels, Dr. Superintendent Maeve Bailey
3	RQ1	Career Development	I've been in education, now this is my 36th year in education	Superintendent Karina Allen
4	RQ2	Anchoring	... my family being the bedrock of it all	Superintendent Terri Daniels
5	RQ1 & RQ 2	The Essential Trio for Empowering Black Women	The support from mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers has been crucial	Dr. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, Superintendent Terri Daniels
6	RQ2	Anchoring (Additional Quote)	What is anchoring you in time of storm? Find that joy and be reflective. You need to know who you are so that you aren't tossed by every other kind of way	Dr. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin
7	RQ2	Resilience in Facing Challenges (Additional)	Facing and overcoming obstacles in my path has thought me the true meaning of resilience	Dr. Superintendent Maeve Bailey

Theme 1: Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases

Black women in leadership positions in education, such as Superintendent Karina Allen and Superintendent Maeve Bailey, shared powerful testimonies of facing societal stereotypes and biases. Superintendent Karina Allen, a Black woman, began her career in education in 1988 and quickly learned the importance of resilience and determination. Despite the challenge of stepping

into a classroom where a teacher had previously suffered a nervous breakdown, Superintendent Karina Allen embraced the role, believing both she and the students needed each other.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey, too, faced discouragement from a high school counselor who suggested she aim for a career as a secretary rather than a pediatrician, despite her good grades and aspirations. This experience, though disheartening, did not deter her from pursuing a successful career in education.

Heightened Scrutiny and Expectations

As Black women in leadership roles, Superintendent Karina Allen and Superintendent Maeve Bailey provided insights into the heightened scrutiny and expectations they faced. Superintendent Maeve Bailey, who identifies as Black and female, recounted her journey of overcoming societal limitations, including those imposed because of her race and gender. She credited her mother, who instilled the belief that she could accomplish anything she set her mind to, as a pivotal influence. Superintendent Karina Allen's upbringing, under the guidance of educator parents and surrounded by successful people of color, also shaped her resilience and commitment to social justice.

Empowerment and Collaborative Leadership

Both leaders have made significant efforts to empower others and foster collaborative environments. Superintendent Karina Allen reflected on her early teaching experiences and how they informed her leadership style, emphasizing the importance of building relationships and understanding students' needs to help them succeed. Superintendent Maeve Bailey highlighted the skills she learned outside of education, which later became invaluable in her role as a superintendent, allowing her to lead collaboratively and leave a lasting legacy.

Steadfast Resilience

Superintendent Karina Allen's introduction to educational leadership was beset with trials that tested her resolve. Beginning her career as a teacher in the late 1980s in Shreveport, Louisiana, she encountered an environment that she considered a stark departure from the orderly, disciplined classrooms she had anticipated. She stepped into a situation where chaos was the norm, and student disengagement was widespread. Yet, Superintendent Karina Allen did not falter. She perceived this not as a deterrent but as a pivotal moment where her presence could be the catalyst for change. By choosing to see the potential in her students and committing to their success against the backdrop of a fractured learning environment, Superintendent Karina Allen demonstrated an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education and the importance of representation and resilience.

Defying Discouragement

Superintendent Maeve Bailey's formative years were marked by a poignant incident that could have altered her professional trajectory. As a bright student with aspirations of entering the medical field, she was abruptly discouraged by a high school counselor, who, influenced by the biases of the time, attempted to steer her towards a more "traditional" role for a woman of color. This encounter could have stifled her ambitions, but instead, it served to fortify her determination. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's path to educational leadership, which eventually led her to a superintendency, was built on the foundation of challenging and overcoming the limitations others attempted to place on her. Her journey underscores the importance of self-belief and the refusal to accept societal constraints on one's capabilities and potential.

The Collective Struggle and Triumph

The collective experiences of Superintendent Karina Allen and Superintendent Maeve Bailey spotlight a critical theme in the narrative of Black women in educational leadership: the perseverance to overcome. They both encountered societal stereotypes and biases that attempted to define their roles and limit their aspirations. Yet, through a combination of personal strength, professional dedication, and an unwavering commitment to the communities they served, they not only overcame these obstacles but also paved the way for future generations of educators. Their testimonies are not singular stories of individual success; they are emblematic of a broader struggle against systemic barriers and a testament to the power of perseverance and the potential for triumph amidst adversity.

Theme 1 highlights the intricate balance between assertiveness in leadership and the external perceptions influenced by gender and racial stereotypes. The lived experiences and professional journey of Superintendent Karina Allen reveal the nuanced strategies employed by leaders to navigate these complex dynamics. This exploration provides a deeper understanding of the resilience, adaptability, and assertive tactics necessary to overcome stereotypes and personal challenges while maintaining a harmonious balance between professional and personal life.

In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for Overcoming Stereotypes

Superintendent A: "And you don't get over that. I think that that's the thing. It's not something you get over that you stop doing because you have to do it for so long for so many hours... And for many of us as Black women in leadership even before we reach that superintendency level we find that that becomes our day-to-day life. Because there's always people looking at us. There's always people judging us whether or not we have the skill whether or not we have the know-how. There's always someone that thinks that they can do it better. So

we always have to be mindful of that. And we always have to bring our best self and we always have to be assertive. And that assertiveness comes through not because you're yelling but you just have to be very confident in how you present yourself and very confident in how the tone, the language, the words, your body language, your expressions, you have to present very confidently all the time"

"I've always felt the need to prove my competence twice as much." This statement encapsulates a common sentiment among participants, reflecting the dual burden of confronting stereotypes about both race and gender.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey: "The assumption was I'd be too soft or too hard, but never just right."

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin: Being black leaving a white organization... Part of it was being black and part of it was being from Las Vegas... Even just down to how I dressed but I didn't care because my mom and daddy raised me confidently... I remember having a board member who wanted to change the way I dress and I actually told the board member I actually said 'Girl bye' to her... And I think that that was tough for people in Reno because I didn't back down"

Theme 2: Balancing Assertiveness in Leadership

The domain of educational leadership is often fraught with challenges stemming from societal stereotypes and expectations. For leaders, especially women of color such as Dr. Superintendent Karina Allen, assertiveness is not merely a leadership trait, but a necessity often perceived through the lens of racial and gender biases. This theme addresses the balance between assertiveness and perceptions shaped by these stereotypes, offering insights into the personal anecdotes, resilience, and leadership philosophy of Dr. Superintendent Karina Allen.

Assertiveness vs. Perceptual Barriers

Assertive leadership is pivotal in advocating for educational reform and policy changes. However, when women of color exhibit assertiveness, they often encounter perceptual barriers rooted in deep-seated stereotypes. Dr. Superintendent Karina Allen's experience reflects this challenge, as she articulated, "I do not feel that it is my responsibility or my role to try and educate white America about being black or being me. I don't." This statement encapsulates the struggle of being assertive while constantly battling misconceived perceptions.

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin explained that the challenge of being assertive often lies in the delicate balance between being perceived as too aggressive and not being heard at all. This balance is particularly difficult in leadership roles where assertiveness is necessary but can be misconstrued based on gender or racial stereotypes. Superintendents, in this context, face perpetual barriers rooted in these deep-seated stereotypes. For instance, women or individuals from minority groups might be labeled as "bossy" or "overbearing" when exhibiting the same assertiveness that might be praised in their male counterparts. These stereotypes create an additional layer of complexity, as superintendents must navigate not only the usual demands of their position but also the biases and expectations that come with their gender, race, or ethnicity. The challenge is to assert their leadership effectively while countering and overcoming these stereotypes, which can undermine their authority and effectiveness.

In the discourse of leadership and assertiveness, the insights provided by Superintendent Maeve Bailey offer a profound understanding of the nuanced challenges faced by leaders, especially those from marginalized groups. Superintendent Maeve Bailey posited that assertiveness, a quintessential trait for effective leadership, is often entangled in a web of cultural and gender-based stereotypes. These stereotypes invariably affect the perception and reception of

assertive behaviors, creating a disparate impact based on the leader's gender or ethnic background.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey articulated that while assertiveness is universally touted as a critical leadership skill, the manner in which it is interpreted and valued is heavily skewed by societal biases. This skewed perception leads to a double standard where identical assertive actions are differently labeled, often negatively for women and minority leaders, branding them as "overbearing" or "aggressive" rather than strong and decisive. Such labeling not only undermines the authority of these leaders but also perpetuates a cycle of bias that hinders the cultivation of diverse leadership.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey also emphasized the importance of context and cultural understanding in the expression and perception of assertiveness. She advocated for a leadership paradigm that not only recognizes but also values diverse assertiveness styles. According to her, overcoming the deeply ingrained stereotypes requires a twofold approach: individual leaders must develop a keen awareness of how their assertive behaviors might be interpreted and, simultaneously, organizations must strive to foster an environment where diverse expressions of leadership are acknowledged and respected.

In essence, Superintendent Maeve Bailey's perspective sheds light on the complex interplay between assertiveness, leadership, and societal stereotypes. Her insights call for a more nuanced understanding and approach to leadership development, one that acknowledges and addresses the additional challenges faced by leaders from underrepresented groups. This understanding is pivotal in the pursuit of a more inclusive and equitable leadership landscape. As such, Superintendent Maeve Bailey's contributions are not merely academic; they offer practical

pathways for organizational change and personal development for leaders striving to navigate the multifaceted terrain of assertiveness within the context of deep-seated societal stereotypes.

Although Dr. Superintendent Karina Allen articulated the challenge of being assertive amidst racial and gender biases, Superintendent Maeve Bailey and Superintendent Brynlee Macklin expressed their perspectives too. All leaders face the common challenge of navigating assertiveness against the backdrop of societal stereotypes. This section has included a comparison of how each leader approached assertiveness and how they perceived and responded to the barriers they faced.

Each leader's journey is marked by unique challenges and personal stories of resilience. Dr. Superintendent Karina Allen's narrative of overcoming professional obstacles is juxtaposed with the experiences of Superintendent Maeve Bailey and Superintendent Brynlee Macklin. This section focused on their individual anecdotes, highlighting the common thread of resilience and determination that runs through their stories and how it shapes their leadership.

In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for Balancing Assertiveness in Leadership

Superintendent Karina Allen: "I'm constantly calibrating my assertiveness, aware that I'm navigating a minefield of stereotypes." "Finding my voice meant learning when to push forward and when to pull back, all while staying true to my vision and values." "You have to figure out what information can be shared with whom and when and what information do I need to keep over here... They're going to make a judgment on you as a leader because of something going on in your personal space"

Superintendent Maeve Bailey: "There's always people judging us whether or not we have the skill whether or not we have the know-how... And we always have to bring our best self and we always have to be assertive... you just have to be very confident in how you present yourself and

very confident in how the tone, the language, the words, your body language, your expressions you have to present very confidently all the time"

Theme 3: Resilience in Facing Challenges

Personal Anecdotes of Resilience

Superintendent Maeve Bailey, Superintendent Karina Allen, and Superintendent Terri Daniels faced and overcame heightened scrutiny in their professional journeys. Their paths reveal common themes of resilience, innovation, and a commitment to educational leadership, despite the challenges that often accompany being a woman and, in some cases, a woman of color in such high-profile, demanding roles. Superintendent Maeve Bailey recounted an early encounter with a high school counselor who, upon hearing her aspirations to be a pediatrician, quickly dismissed her ambition, suggesting she become a secretary instead. This early dismissal of her capabilities could have derailed her aspirations, yet she persisted in her education and professional development. Her resilience is further demonstrated by her approach to her career in education, where she took on challenges with a passion for serving children and families, often doing innovative work that others had not attempted.

She described an incident where she applied for an assistant principal position in haste and got the job, bringing her innovative ideas into the new role, which included starting an honor roll dinner that had not been previously done. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's strategy was not to focus on what she could not do but rather on what was possible. She continuously sought opportunities to impact more students and families, which led her to take on roles of increasing responsibility. Superintendent Bailey also highlighted the importance of building strong relationships with all staff and stakeholders, valuing everyone's contribution and fostering a

respectful and inclusive culture. She emphasized the need to address issues head-on and create an environment where inappropriate actions are not ignored but addressed constructively, thereby changing the campus culture and climate.

Facing the compounded challenges of being a Black woman, Superintendent Bailey often encountered the word 'no,' but she used these experiences to become stronger and more appreciative, allowing her to connect with families from diverse and often disadvantaged backgrounds in a meaningful way. Her response to the many 'no's and 'but's she encountered was to ask, "Okay and let's think about what we can do." She used the word 'and' as a powerful tool to shift paradigms and encourage a growth mindset among her colleagues and in her leadership approach.

Superintendent Bailey's journey to leadership was not straightforward; she faced many barriers and had to advocate strongly for herself, proving that it is possible to navigate the system and achieve one's goals with determination and an understanding of how to make the system work for oneself. In her narrative, Superintendent Maeve Bailey described a challenging relationship with a superintendent who initially did not support her, which led to significant stress and almost drove her to seek employment elsewhere. However, their relationship improved over time, and he eventually encouraged her to pursue her doctorate, demonstrating the complexities of professional relationships and the potential for growth and support even from unexpected sources

Like Superintendent Maeve Bailey, Superintendent Karina Allen's journey from a teacher to a superintendent in the educational sector is marked by continuous resilience. She navigated professional and personal challenges, each time emerging stronger and more determined. Her resilience is not only a testament to her character, but it also serves as an inspiration for those

facing similar battles. As she put it, "While that was a challenge it's also my biggest strength because it gave me the confidence and the evidence that I needed to know that I'm better than that."

Superintendent Allen focused on creating robust systems and procedures before crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, which allowed her and her district to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. Her leadership style emphasized community partnerships, collective development of vision and mission, and aligning new initiatives with these goals. She acknowledged the political nature of her role and navigated it by already having an operational system in place and by ensuring community partners' initiatives aligned with the district's vision. Superintendent Karina Allen also touched upon the challenge of building a team as a Black woman, highlighting high visibility and engagement as key strategies. She confronted microaggressions and the need to prove her capabilities constantly. In her journey, she emphasized the importance of being true to oneself and not allowing others to dim one's shine, advocating for the importance of focusing on one's mission to ensure job security and fulfillment.

Superintendent Terri Daniels began her career with a clear vision of leadership, declaring her future role as a boss on her first day as a teacher. Her progression to leadership was characterized by a hands-on approach and a belief in data-driven strategies to enhance student outcomes. Superintendent Daniels' tenure as a principal was marked by significant improvements in student proficiency. Her path to superintendency involved overcoming setbacks and recognizing the broader plan for her career, which included an unexpected offer to become an area superintendent. Superintendent Terri Daniels faced challenges associated with being a Black woman in leadership, dealing with microaggressions and navigating biases related to her race and leadership style. She spearheaded initiatives to combat inequity and racism, and her

approach to leadership was informed by the lessons learned throughout her life about resilience and authenticity. Superintendent Daniel's advice to young leaders emphasized the importance of hard work, self-knowledge, and the courage to let one's abilities shine.

The resilience strategies of Superintendent Karina Allen and Superintendent Terri Daniels serve as powerful examples of how Black women leaders in education have managed to overcome heightened scrutiny and biases. They did this through strategic foresight, community involvement, a focus on systemic change, and using their personal experiences to inform their leadership approaches. Both leaders highlighted the importance of staying true to one's values and mission, which ultimately drives success and transformation within the educational landscape. These narratives would contribute richly to a dissertation, providing real-world examples of leadership that confronts and overcomes systemic challenges. They also offered insights into the unique experiences of black female superintendents, serving as case studies for strategies that can be employed by others facing similar challenges.

Balancing Professional and Personal Lives

In several educational journals and articles, women speak of being criticized because they must balance their professional and personal lives. In the exploration of the intricate balance between personal and professional life, the experiences and strategies of Superintendent Bailey, Superintendent Allen, and Superintendent Macklin provide invaluable insights. These educational leaders, each with their unique perspective, demonstrate the multifaceted nature of managing dual roles in highly demanding positions. The following discourse reflects an interpretation of their strategies, aiming to shed light on the broader implications of their approaches for effective leadership.

Superintendent Bailey adopted a strategy centered on the principles of intentional living and clear prioritization: "Balancing the professional demands of leadership with personal life requires a clear understanding of one's values and priorities. It's about making intentional choices and being present where it matters most." This perspective underscores the importance of deliberate decision-making and the conscious allocation of one's time and energy.

Superintendent Bailey's approach suggests a model where leaders are encouraged to define their values and align their actions accordingly, ensuring that their professional endeavors do not overshadow personal well-being and relationships.

Superintendent Karina Allen emphasized the role of community and support systems in achieving a harmonious balance. She remarked, "I believe in the power of community and support networks, both within the professional realm and in my personal life. It's about giving your best where you are and trusting your team to do the same." This approach highlighted the significance of collective effort and the reliance on a strong support network. By fostering a sense of community and shared responsibility, Superintendent Allen implied that leaders can maintain their commitments to their professional roles while ensuring personal life remains nourished.

Superintendent Macklin's strategy focused on the quality of engagement in both spheres of life. She stated in several instances, "To me, balance is not about equal time, but about meaningful time. It's about being fully present and engaged, whether I'm making decisions for the district or spending time with my family." This viewpoint shifts the discourse from a quantitative division of time to a qualitative assessment of engagement. Superintendent Macklin's perspective suggests that the essence of balance lies in the depth of involvement in

each aspect of life, advocating for a fully immersive approach whether in a professional setting or personal environment.

In synthesizing these perspectives, it was evident that effective leadership and personal fulfillment are not mutually exclusive but complementary components of a well-rounded life. The strategies employed by Superintendent Maeve Bailey, Superintendent Karina Allen, and Superintendent Macklin illuminate the diverse methodologies leaders can adopt to navigate the complexities of their roles. These strategies are not prescriptive but indicative of the broader principles that underpin a balanced life: intentionality, community, and engagement.

In conclusion, the balance between personal and professional life as demonstrated by these educational leaders reflects a deeper philosophical understanding of leadership and well-being. Their approaches, characterized by deliberate choices, supportive relationships, and meaningful engagement, provide a blueprint for current and future leaders aiming to cultivate a harmonious existence amidst the myriad demands of their roles. This discourse not only contributes to the academic understanding of leadership balance but also offers practical implications for those seeking to navigate this challenging yet rewarding terrain.

In an exploration of the contention surrounding work-life balance strategies, critiques have surfaced against the paradigms of intentional prioritization, reliance on community support systems, and quality engagement. These criticisms argue that although intentional prioritization is advocated for its focus on balancing what matters most, it simultaneously engenders the neglect of other significant life aspects, potentially fostering a sense of inadequacy ("Choose Intentional Prioritization," n.d.). Although support networks are underscored for their role in creative stimulation, reliance on such frameworks can precipitate personal conflicts, especially when intimate relationships are juxtaposed with 'work spouse' dynamics (Stollberger et al.,

2021). The emphasis on quality engagement over quantitative time allocation does not encapsulate the totality of personal life quality, particularly when adverse work conditions persist (Why Work-Life Balance Isn't Balanced," n.d.). These perspectives collectively illuminate the nuanced challenges inherent in achieving an equilibrium between professional and personal spheres, challenging the efficacies of both Superintendent Allen, and Superintendent Macklin's strategies.

In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for Resilience

Superintendent Maeve Bailey: "I didn't take the direct route. So I took the indirect curvy road route... I've been blessed in that manner... Finally at 34 when I realized I needed to finish this that was the first thing 'Okay well finish the bachelors do that.'

Superintendent Karina Allen: "And the challenge that I face as a black woman throughout is being underestimated. Now that is the biggest challenge. But I'm going to also say that is also the biggest strength. Because as soon as you know that you have been underestimated, you have already won the game; you've won the battle; you've won the war... So when you talk about in terms of race underestimated. When you talk about in terms of gender underestimated. When you talk about both of them together underestimated"

Superintendent Terri Daniels:" Sometimes you got to lose to win something bigger. And I think part... and you got to know when it's okay to do that... But you got to understand your mission. And if you can't understand your mission first and you're just chasing jobs you might want to think about where you want to be in the next 10 years"

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin: "Resilience for me is not just bouncing back; it's about growing through what I go through."

Theme 4: The Essential Trio for Empowering Black Women: Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers

Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers

In the interview with Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, she summed-up what the other Black women Superintendents were saying as one of the most important parts of their journey: mentors sponsors and amplifiers. She stated,

“You talk about mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers. Your mentor is a person that's going to be like, "Hey, this is how you do something. Call me if you need something." Your sponsor is the person that's going to be like, "I know Brione. I got an opening. She's ready to be this. I'm going to put her there," which is a political gamble for a person, and Black women tend not to be sponsored so much as mentors.

We will have a gaggle of mentors all the time. We won't always sponsor women because it can be a political gamble. People are like, "Well, why did you put her there? Why did you not have a full-blown process? Why you didn't whatever?" But then an amplifier is somebody who is already in your system, who gives you opportunities to amplify your leadership so people see you as a leader when you positionally are not one. So Dr. Lathan amplified me.”

In the journey of professional growth, especially for Black women, the roles of mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers are crucial. These roles, as highlighted by Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, are distinct yet synergistic, each playing a pivotal part in navigating the complexities of career advancement.

Mentors: The Guiding Lights

Mentors are akin to navigators in the uncharted waters of professional development. They offer guidance, share wisdom, and provide support. According to Superintendent Macklin, a mentor is someone who says, "Hey, this is how you do something. Call me if you need something" (Mullen, 2023). This role is particularly vital for Black women, who often face unique challenges in professional settings due to systemic biases and a lack of representation. A mentor not only offers advice and knowledge but also serves as a sounding board, helping to build confidence and resilience. Although mentors are crucial, their role is often limited to advising and guiding, which, though invaluable, may not always be sufficient for upward mobility.

Sponsors: The Game Changers

The role of a sponsor is more proactive and involves a degree of risk. Sponsors advocate for an individual's advancement or placement in opportunities that lead to career growth.

Superintendent Macklin described a sponsor as someone who says, "I know [this person]. I got an opening. She's ready to be this. I'm going to put her there" (Mullen, 2023). This act of sponsorship is a political gamble, especially when it comes to sponsoring Black women, who are less likely to be sponsored than their counterparts. The sponsor uses their influence and credibility to open doors that might otherwise remain closed. Their endorsement can be a powerful catalyst for career advancement, providing opportunities that extend beyond the reach of mentorship alone.

The Lack of Sponsorship for Black Women

Despite the critical role sponsors play, Black women are often at a disadvantage when it comes to finding sponsors. This disparity stems from systemic issues and biases within

professional environments. Sponsoring a Black woman can be seen as a political gamble, with questions raised about the process and motives behind such decisions. This hesitancy to sponsor is a significant barrier, hindering the ability of Black women to access the same opportunities for advancement as their peers.

Amplifiers: The Visibility Enhancers.

An amplifier, as defined by Superintendent Macklin, is someone within the system who provided opportunities to showcase and enhance one's leadership abilities, even when they do not hold a formal leadership position. Superintendent Macklin shared her personal experience, noting, "Dr. Lathan amplified me" (Mullen, 2023). This role is crucial in making one's skills, talents, and potential visible to a broader audience. Amplifiers help in creating a narrative that positions individuals as leaders, thereby increasing their visibility and perceived value within an organization. For Black women, who often struggle with visibility due to systemic biases, amplifiers can play a vital role in highlighting their competencies and leadership potential.

The Synergy of the Trio

The combination of mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers forms a powerful support system for Black women. Whereas mentors provide guidance and advice, sponsors open doors to new opportunities, and amplifiers enhance visibility and recognition. Together, these roles create a dynamic framework that can significantly propel Black women forward in their careers.

In conclusion, the empowerment of Black women in professional settings requires a concerted effort to provide mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification. Organizations and leaders must recognize the unique challenges faced by Black women and actively work to address these through intentional and supportive actions. By fostering an environment where

Black women are guided, advocated for, and visibly supported, progress can be made towards a more equitable and inclusive professional landscape.

The Importance of Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers in Professional Growth

In today's competitive professional landscape, the roles of mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers are increasingly recognized as critical components of career development and advancement. Research has indicated that these roles can significantly impact the trajectory of one's career, particularly for underrepresented groups. These findings are discussed in the subsequent subsections.

Mentors: Guiding and Advising

Mentorship is widely acknowledged as a key factor in professional success. According to a study by Gaskill et al. (2018), mentorship provides individuals with guidance, knowledge sharing, and support that are invaluable in navigating the complexities of career progression. Mentors offer insights based on their experiences, helping mentees avoid common pitfalls and accelerate their learning curve. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2019) highlighted the importance of mentorship in developing professional competencies and expanding networks.

Sponsors: Advocating and Opening Doors

Sponsorship goes beyond mentorship by actively advocating for an individual's advancement. A Harvard Business Review article by Hewlett et al. (2011) emphasized the role of sponsors in providing visibility, advocating for key assignments, and championing their protégés' promotions. This form of support is particularly crucial for individuals from underrepresented groups who may otherwise be overlooked in traditional advancement processes.

Amplifiers: Enhancing Visibility and Recognition

Amplifiers play a unique role by increasing an individual's visibility within an organization. Ibarra et al. (2010) found that amplifiers help in creating opportunities for individuals to demonstrate their leadership skills and potential. In this way, they enhance their professional reputation and prospects for advancement.

The Counterargument: Limitations and Challenges

Despite the apparent benefits, some researchers have argued that mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification can have limitations. A counterpoint presented in the Journal of Business Ethics by Dobbin et al. (2017) suggests that these relationships can perpetuate existing power dynamics and biases, especially if mentors and sponsors favor protégés who resemble them demographically. This can inadvertently reinforce the status quo and hinder diversity.

Integrating the Opposing Views

Integrating these viewpoints suggests a need for a more inclusive approach to mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification. To address potential biases, organizations should encourage diverse mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, ensuring that individuals from all backgrounds have equal access to these career development tools. In conclusion, though mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers play a crucial role in career development, it is equally important to recognize and address the challenges and limitations associated with these relationships. An inclusive approach, one that consciously works towards mitigating biases and promoting diversity, can maximize the benefits of these relationships for all individuals, regardless of their background.

In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for The Essential Trio for Empowering Black Women: Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers

Superintendent Karina Allen: "I have many mentors, and so I can name them, but I won't do it justice because there's too many... People come into your life in different seasons based on what you need at that time. And you can't direct that. Sometimes it's very unplanned, the people that come into your life and serve as mentors, and they may serve as a mentor for six months, for a year, and then the communication dies down. But then you always have that connection with them that you know you can reach out to them and talk to them" Later in Superintendent Karina Allen's conversation that she mentions other people who mentored her into the next position, "Billie Rayford talked to me as well and said 'This is something that you need to do. Our district needs people like you.'... I filled out the paperwork. I went home and I talked to my husband... 'Absolutely get that paperwork turned in. We're going to do whatever we need to do.'

Superintendent Terri Daniels: "My first job was as a third-grade teacher... And I taught next to my third-grade teacher. It was her last year... And she of course remembered the young me and she was actually so delighted to see I'd become a teacher."

Theme 5: Career Development

Career Development and Aspirations Early

The career paths of Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, Superintendent Karina Allen, Superintendent Maeve Bailey, and Superintendent Terri Daniels illustrate a journey from grassroots classroom involvement to the pinnacles of educational leadership. Each of these influential women began their careers as teachers, a foundational experience that deeply informed their perspectives and strategies as they ascended to higher roles, eventually reaching the superintendency. Their journeys highlight how early career choices and experiences can significantly impact one's ability to rise to and excel in educational leadership.

For all four women, their initial roles as educators allowed them to understand the intricacies of the educational system from the ground up. Their early choices to focus on specific areas—be it equity, operational excellence, resilience, or strategic navigation—equipped them with unique skills and perspectives that became invaluable as they took on higher leadership roles. These experiences not only shaped their leadership philosophies but also prepared them to face and manage the complex challenges of superintendency. Each step they took, from teacher to principal to superintendent, was built on a foundation of early career experiences and choices, demonstrating a cumulative impact on their ability to lead, innovate, and inspire. Their paths illuminate the importance of the journey from the classroom to the district office, showcasing how early career decisions and experiences can profoundly influence one's trajectory and effectiveness in educational leadership.

In Superintendent Terri Daniels' interview, she articulated how her cumulative experiences at various levels within the education system prepared her for the superintendency. Reflecting on her journey, Superintendent Terri Daniels mentioned:

I was an AP for one year at overall elementary school and decided ... I was going to ... well we had AP trainings and ... I remember Paul [inaudible] was an area superintendent and he told all of us... 'It's easy when you talk about what you can do for kids when you work in a school where every PA comes to you or 80% of the school is at grade level. The question is can you take your set of skills to a school that is not performing and transform it?' And I remember getting up and saying 'I believe that achievement is not a place it's a belief.'...He was like 'Well you need to apply for a job in the east region.' And I was like 'I don't speak Spanish. I ain't coming over there.' ... But I applied to be a principal and I actually applied with the notion of after being an AP for a year I was

going to go see where I was weak so I could work on that the following year as an AP but I got the principal's job.'

This quote illustrates how Superintendent Terri Daniels' experiences and reflections as an assistant principal and then as a principal, where she confronted and overcame various challenges, directly contributed to her readiness for the superintendent role. Her focus on transforming schools and her belief in achievement as a mindset rather than a fixed state showcase the critical thinking and leadership approach that equipped her for the complexities of superintendency. Her journey through different roles within the education system provided her with a comprehensive understanding and a unique skill set that would become invaluable in her ultimate role as a superintendent. Superintendent Maeve Bailey also discussed how her earlier experiences contributed to her development and preparedness for superintendency. Superintendent Maeve Bailey, relating her previous roles to her superintendency, underlined the critical role of earlier experiences in shaping her leadership style and capabilities.

From the information provided, it was evident that her journey through various educational roles, coupled with the challenges she faced and overcame, significantly impacted her ability to ascend to and excel in the role of a superintendent. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's story is a testament to how early career challenges and the support and guidance from mentors can prepare an individual for complex leadership roles such as superintendency, fostering resilience, strategic thinking, and a deep understanding of the educational landscape.

Different Perspectives and Critiques: The World Outside

Some of the Black women superintendents interviewed mentioned, or at least alluded to, the hierarchal leadership model and how they have still achieved to the superintendency. Some scholars might argue that alternative leadership models in education seek to distribute

responsibilities, foster collaboration, and promote inclusivity within the school community. Distributed leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, shared leadership, and servant leadership offer promising ways to create more inclusive, flexible, and effective leadership structures (Spillane, et.al, 2004; Hallinger, 2005; Lambert, 2002). For Black women in education, these models can provide a more accessible and empowering pathway to leadership roles such as superintendency, allowing them to leverage their strengths and make significant contributions to their institutions (Tillman, 2004).

Alternative models can provide more opportunities for Black women to demonstrate leadership skills and contribute to decision-making processes, even when they are not in the top position. Traditional hierarchies can perpetuate systemic biases, making it harder for Black women to ascend to superintendency. More collaborative models might help mitigate these barriers by valuing diverse contributions and reducing the emphasis on a single leader's power. Distributed and shared leadership models can facilitate stronger professional networks, providing Black women with more access to mentorship and support, which are crucial for navigating the path to superintendency. Black women often bring unique perspectives and leadership styles. Alternative models that value diverse approaches can allow them to lead in authentic and effective ways, challenging stereotypes about what effective leadership looks like.

In Conversation: Quotes from Superintendents for Career Development

Superintendent Karina Allen: "So I was a second-year teacher. Kay Simonovic (Superintendent's principal at the time) walks into my room... and she hands me this packet from UNLV which is for a master's program in administration... 'You would be great at it. You've got all the leadership qualifications... This is your application. And included in the application is the letter of recommendation that you need from your supervisor.' From there I moved to central

office. I was a human resources director for secondary ed. Then I moved to the director's position Director of Instruction and Facilities Administration. And from there I was an associate superintendent and then I started supervising principals. And I did that for 8.5 years... And then I retired and then I became a superintendent in Albany, New York for the city school District of Albany. Did that for six years" In this superintendent's story, she was invited into apply for positions, even before she had the credentials. However, she talks about the need to have the knowledge behind and being well prepared because people "always tested your knowledge" as a Black woman supervising them (referring to micro aggressions). She also talked about being well read as an advantage point.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey: "My years as a teacher were really focused on learning to teach... I always found a way to do something that hadn't been done. "I always focused on building relationships with the students, building relationships with the families... Everyone was appreciative. "I did all sorts of creative and innovative things as a teacher for all kids, for all families. "People saw my heart and my passion... They believed in me as a leader... I was able to not just talk the talk but walk the talk." "I strategically sought out leadership opportunities, even when they were outside my comfort zone, as steppingstones toward my goal." later in her career she reflected on how valuable going for leadership opportunities was for her, it opened doors for other people to see potential. "So the principals, all the administrators, and supervisors at the time saw something in me that they were like, 'Okay, you're ready for administration. You need to apply for this. You need to do that. We need to set you up as an administrative intern. "I was encouraged to apply as to a position, courses and principal got that... Then encouraged to move into a district level position... I had recently completed my doctorate."

Theme 6: Anchoring

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's insights shed light on the importance of anchoring for Black women in education, particularly those who may feel disheartened or at the brink of giving up. Anchoring, as she described it, is the practice of finding and nurturing sources of hope and purpose. One crucial source of hope, according to Superintendent Macklin, is to continually focus on the students. She advised educators, especially those in direct service roles, to regularly visit classrooms, witness students' growth, and rekindle their enthusiasm. This reconnection with the tangible impact they have on students can provide an immediate boost and a sense of purpose.

Superintendent Macklin also emphasized the need for Black women in education to be deliberate in creating space for themselves. She encouraged them to choose the tables they sit at and the circles they engage with carefully. This deliberate approach ensures that they are surrounded by individuals and opportunities that align with their goals and values. She also stressed that hope alone is not a strategy; rather, it should be combined with purposeful actions:

“But women just need to find out what that is, what does bring you joy? What is anchoring you in a time of storm. I'll also add that if everything happened the way you wanted it to, job after job level, after level, after level, you're still going to need to do that. You're still going to need to be reflective and find that thing, because then you get to a point where now everybody wants something from you, and you now have to have wisdom and know who you are so that people can just toss you every other kind of way. So that would be my advice”

In terms of anchoring, Superintendent Macklin underscored the importance of identifying one's end goal and unique contributions to the field of education. She suggested that Black

women educators should not only focus on external comparisons or career progression but also turn inward to discover what brings them joy and purpose. Serving others and the community can be a powerful way to find value and connection, even during challenging times. Ultimately, anchoring involves self-reflection and knowing oneself to navigate the educational landscape effectively and maintain resilience amid storms. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's insights provide valuable guidance for Black women in education, emphasizing the importance of hope, deliberate choices, self-reflection, and finding sources of joy and purpose as anchors to sustain them on their educational journeys.

Superintendent Karina Allen: "My family has been my anchor, offering unwavering support and a safe harbor against the storms of my profession."

Superintendent Maeve Bailey: "I couldn't bring myself to tell my parents that [about changing career paths]... I decided 'Okay now you're a single mom what are you going to do?'" "I remember hard times as a single mother... I cried... but God is good. So I think the strength of being that I learned as a child and seeing others as Black women we just have to be strong."

Superintendent Terri Daniels: "Colleagues who became friends and my faith have been my bedrock, guiding me through challenges with grace and resilience."

Overall Key Findings and Summarization

“Chapter IV: Experiences and Perceptions of Black Women in Educational Leadership ” is a profound exploration into the challenges, strategies, and triumphs of Black women who have ascended to superintendent positions in education. Over a period of months in 2023, several Black women superintendents from Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington participated in interviews, providing rich qualitative data. The aim of this study was to understand how these

women's experiences and perspectives reflect and challenge the dominant narratives in educational leadership and the implications of this for creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems.

The key findings highlight the relentless resilience and strategic acumen of these women in the face of persistent societal stereotypes, biases, and heightened scrutiny. The participants, including Superintendent Maeve Bailey, Superintendent Karina Allen, and Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, shared experiences of overcoming discouragement and leveraging their identities to empower others and foster collaborative leadership. Their stories are not only personal victories but also part of a larger narrative of perseverance and triumph over systemic barriers.

Black feminist theory and critical race feminism served crucial viewpoints in this study, providing a lens to understand the intersecting oppressions of race, gender, and other social identities. These frameworks helped analyze how societal structures and dominant narratives specifically impact Black women leaders. They also emphasized the importance of their voices and experiences in challenging and transforming these narratives, contributing to a more inclusive understanding of leadership.

Understanding the influence of the outside world, predominantly shaped by White men, is vital in recognizing how different narratives and stereotypes can impact the perception and treatment of Black women leaders. The societal stereotypes and biases these women face are often rooted in a historical context dominated by White male perspectives, which can distort the view of their capabilities and leadership styles. Recognizing this influence is crucial in consciously working to dismantle these biases and in appreciating the unique and valuable perspectives Black women bring to leadership roles.

In conclusion, this study not only sheds light on the specific challenges and strategies of Black women in educational leadership, but it also underscores the importance of mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification in supporting their journey. The participants' stories are a testament to their resilience and the critical need for more inclusive and supportive environments in educational administration. The study is a call to action for policy and practice changes that recognize and address the unique hurdles Black women face, moving towards a more equitable and diverse educational leadership landscape.

Chapter V: Summary, Implications, and Outcomes

Introduction

African American women superintendents in the United States have faced significant challenges over the years due to their historical experiences with slavery, desegregation, the Civil Rights movement, and the Black Feminist Movement (G. Cox, 2017). Their journey to occupy positions ranging from the chief executive seat to superintendency in the field of education has been marked by formidable struggles (G. Cox, 2017). This research holds transformative significance for two main reasons. First, it encompassed an exploration of the intersectionality of race and gender within the context of African American women superintendents in California, Nevada, Oregon, and Washington. Second, it involved a meticulous examination of the distinctive path of African American women ascending to superintendent roles, shedding light on the pivotal roles played by mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers in shaping their career trajectories. The study addressed the intricate challenges they confront, as they navigate the demands of leadership while contending with societal expectations. This chapter highlights their remarkable achievements, providing a detailed map of the complex landscape of educational leadership and offering valuable insights into the pathways and strategies that facilitate the progression of African American women into these influential positions.

The study's core findings highlight the unwavering determination and strategic prowess displayed by Black women superintendents as they navigate persistent societal stereotypes, biases, and heightened scrutiny. The participants, Superintendent Karina Allen, Superintendent Maeve Bailey, Superintendent Terri Daniels, and Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, shared their journeys of overcoming discouragement and harnessing their unique identities to empower

others and promote collaborative leadership. Their narratives are not just personal victories; they form part of a broader narrative of perseverance and triumph against systemic obstacles.

Within this critical ethnography study, Black feminist theory and critical race feminism occupy critical positions, serving as essential lenses for analyzing the intersecting oppressions stemming from race, gender, and various social identities. These frameworks facilitated an examination of how societal structures and prevailing narratives distinctly affect Black women in leadership roles. They also underscore the importance of acknowledging their voices and experiences as catalysts for challenging and reshaping these narratives, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of leadership.

Recognizing the influence of the external world, predominantly shaped by White men, is crucial in understanding how various narratives and stereotypes can impact the perception and treatment of Black women in leadership. The societal stereotypes and biases that these women encounter often have deep roots in historical contexts dominated by White male perspectives, distorting assessments of their capabilities and leadership styles. Acknowledging this influence is imperative in the conscious effort to dismantle these biases and in recognizing the unique and valuable perspectives that Black women bring to leadership positions.

Vignettes of the Superintendents

Superintendent Karina Allen's career exemplifies a journey of resilience and strategic leadership, with over 30 years spent in education, primarily in the Southwest. Her transition to the role of a superintendent in the East marks a significant phase in her long-standing commitment to education and equity. Overcoming challenges and stereotypes as a Black woman in leadership, her educational background and experience have equipped her to lead with innovation and a deep understanding of the educational landscape. Her tenure as a superintendent

showcases her ability to navigate through diverse educational environments and make impactful decisions.

Karina Allen embarked on her educational journey with a steadfast dedication to transparency, equity, and empowerment. Hailing from various parts of the United States, she has accumulated over 36 years in education, showcasing a deep-seated commitment to fostering academic excellence and inclusive environments. Her narrative is a testament to overcoming stereotypes and biases, leveraging her resilience, and strategic acumen to navigate the complexities of educational leadership as a Black woman. Superintendent Karina Allen's story is one of relentless perseverance, strategic foresight, and a profound commitment to uplifting and empowering the educational community.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey's path in education is marked by assertiveness, dedication, and a career spanning over 30 years, culminating in an 11-year tenure as a superintendent in a California school district. Her story, from facing discouragement to embracing leadership, underscores the importance of support, mentorship, and networking for Black women in educational leadership roles. Retiring from the California school district, Superintendent Maeve Bailey's career is a testament to her resilience and unwavering commitment to educational excellence and equity.

Dr. Maeve Bailey's narrative illuminates the challenges and triumphs of her career in education, characterized by assertiveness, resilience, and a profound connection to communities of color. With a rich background in educational leadership, Superintendent Maeve Bailey emphasizes the importance of mentorship, network building, and the delicate balance between professional assertiveness and societal perceptions. Her leadership journey is marked by overcoming discouragement and stereotypes to advocate for educational equity and student

engagement, all while managing the complexities of work-life balance and navigating the gendered and racial dynamics of leadership.

Superintendent Terri Daniels' journey in education, culminating in over 8 years as a superintendent, is a reflection of her visionary leadership and commitment to transformative outcomes. As the first Black woman to serve as a superintendent in one of the southwestern states, notably Nevada, her path reflects a blend of innovation, strategic decision-making, and a dedication to achievement and equity. Her diverse experiences, from teaching to administration, underscore her ability to tackle complex challenges and inspire change within the educational landscape.

Terri Daniels, with a clear vision for leadership from the onset of her career, illustrates a journey through education defined by strategic leadership and a commitment to equity and excellence. Her ascent from teaching to the superintendency is characterized by data-driven decision-making and a focus on transformative outcomes. Despite facing biases and challenges associated with her race and gender, Superintendent Terri Daniels' story is one of resilience, strategic deliberation, and impactful leadership, emphasizing the critical role of mentorship and support networks in her journey. Her narrative offers valuable insights into overcoming barriers and exemplifies visionary leadership grounded in authenticity and perseverance.

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin brings over 15 years of experience in education, with roles spanning various states across the United States, including positions on the West Coast. Currently in her first year as a superintendent on the East Coast, her leadership journey highlights a deep commitment to mentorship, equity, and navigating the challenges unique to educational leadership. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's narrative demonstrates the

complexities faced by Black women in superintendent roles, emphasizing the importance of support systems and the power of resilience in overcoming barriers.

Dr. Brynlee Macklin's leadership narrative encompasses a comprehensive journey from her early teaching experiences to her current role, facing and overcoming systemic barriers. With her upbringing instilling values of perseverance and resilience, Superintendent Brynlee Macklin navigates educational leadership with a keen awareness of the challenges posed by institutional and systemic barriers. Her story sheds light on the strategies employed to confront stereotypes and biases while fostering an environment of equity and inclusion. Through networking, coalition-building, and a focus on transformative policies, Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's journey reflects a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in navigating educational leadership as a Black woman, offering a blueprint for effecting meaningful change within the educational landscape.

Summary of Data Analysis, Key Graphs, and Discussion

In the course of evaluating the data, it became apparent that though a shared collective experience existed among the interviewees, distinct individual nuances also existed that rendered their narratives particularly distinctive. Following the conclusion of each interview, the unique strengths that each superintendent possessed and that have been instrumental in propelling their leadership journey came to the fore. To neglect the recognition and articulation of these distinctive attributes would be to commit an omission that undermines the integrity and the authenticity of their voices. In acknowledgment of this, additional graphical representations, figures, and succinct summaries have been incorporated into the respective sections dedicated to each interviewee.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey's Interview - Transcript One

From the first set of transcripts, Superintendent Maeve Bailey's journey embodies resilience and determination, stemming from her early ambition for a medical career despite facing discouragement from her high school counselor. Undeterred by this initial setback, she embarked on a non-linear path, transitioning from private industries to teaching before ultimately reaching the superintendency. Throughout her career trajectory, Superintendent Maeve Bailey confronted and surmounted systemic barriers rooted in racial and gender biases, drawing strength from her identity as a Black woman to challenge inequities within the educational system. Her narrative underscored the transformative power of perseverance and the value of diverse experiences in navigating the complexities of leadership, which is the context of this entire study.

In Dr. Bailey's summary, she described her leadership approach as deeply rooted in authenticity and empathy, as evidenced by her ability to connect with low socioeconomic communities where she implemented initiatives informed by personal experiences. Dr. Bailey's emphasis on building relationships, especially in communities of color, and garnering support from various stakeholders within the educational community played a pivotal role in her advancement to higher leadership roles. At the core of her educational philosophy is her commitment to engage students and families and have them at the core of her leadership, no matter how she was being treated, resulting in tangible impacts on student engagement and educational equity. Educational equity gave her the edge that she needed to solidify her leadership as she made it through the superintendency. Through her journey, she has been exemplifying the profound impact of authentic leadership in shaping transformative educational outcomes.

From the second set of transcripts, Superintendent Maeve Bailey's leadership journey

underscored the necessity of assertiveness, particularly as she ascended the career ladder, where proving her worth and capabilities became paramount. Assertiveness can be both an asset to the ascension on the educational ladder and a detriment to Black women leaders. She candidly discussed the challenges she faced as a Black woman leader, often contending with perceptions of being bossy or mean when simply asserting herself professionally. This perception challenge highlighted the complex dynamics that Black women leaders navigate in asserting their authority while combatting stereotypes and biases.

Reflecting on the demands of the superintendency, Superintendent Maeve Bailey acknowledged the relentless nature of the role, which blurs the lines between work and personal life. Most women talk about the constant need to work more to prove their worth. Balancing these demands with familial and relational commitments presents a constant challenge, underscoring the need for resilience and adaptability in maintaining equilibrium. She also delved into the gendered and racial dynamics of error perception, noting disparities in the amount of grace afforded to White males versus women, and particularly Black women, who often find themselves compelled to apologize excessively for mistakes.

Amidst these challenges, Superintendent Maeve Bailey underscored the importance of cultivating support networks comprised of trusted friends and colleagues, especially fellow superintendents who can empathize with the unique trials of the role. She also highlighted the strategic management of personal information and perceptions, recognizing the scrutiny leaders faced based on their personal circumstances both within the workplace and in their personal lives. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's narrative illuminated the intricate interplay of assertiveness, perception management, and the pursuit of work-life balance in the multifaceted realm of educational leadership.

Figure 1

Superintendent Maeve Bailey Career Timeline and Progression

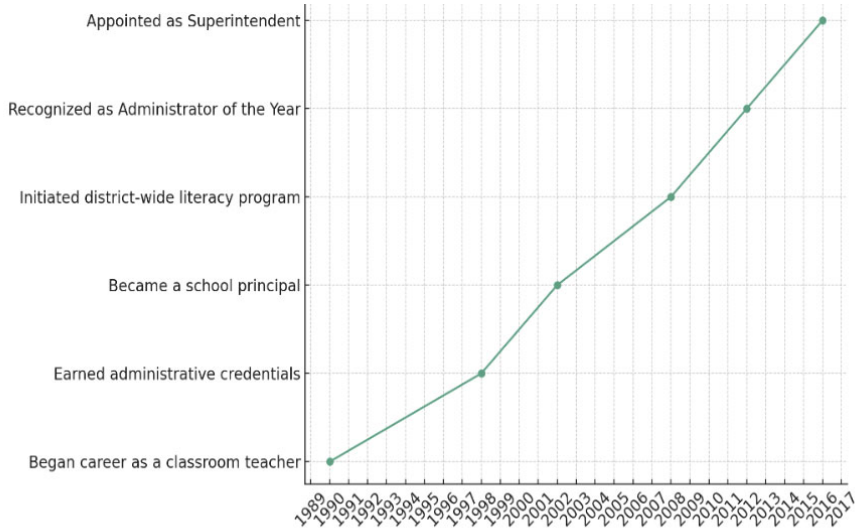
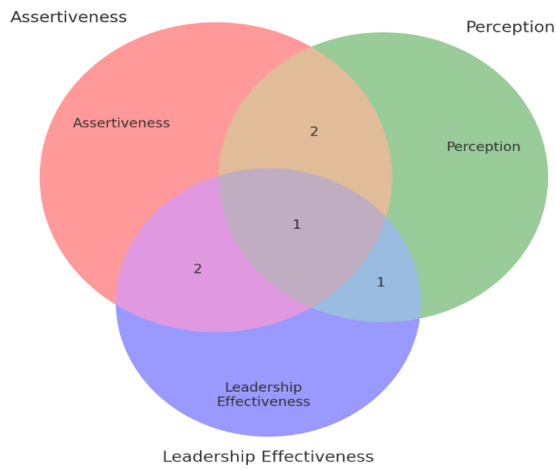


Figure 2

Dr. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's Key Concept on Assertiveness Visual

Intersection of Assertiveness, Perception, and Leadership Effectiveness



Superintendent Karina Allen

Superintendent Karina Allen's interview offered a nuanced exploration of her leadership journey, highlighting key themes that underscored her proactive approach to crisis management, transparent communication, community engagement, team building, and the navigation of microaggressions and stereotypes. Superintendent Karina Allen mentioned transparent communication and centralized decision-making processes can showcase the interconnectedness of these elements in fostering trust and accountability within the district. Her engagement with various community partners and stakeholders can be illustrated through a network diagram, highlighting the collaborative approach she takes in shaping the vision and goals of the district. Moreover, Superintendent Karina Allen's focus on team building and visibility can be depicted through a timeline or flowchart, illustrating her efforts to foster relationships and establish her identity and professionalism early in her tenure.

Finally, Superintendent Karina Allen's insights into empowerment and inspiration can be captured through quotes or testimonials overlaid on images of her engaging with students, staff, and community members. Her explanation of mentorship and advocacy for aspiring Black women in education encapsulated her commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion within the educational landscape. Overall, visualizing Superintendent Karina Allen's interview themes provided a compelling narrative of her leadership journey and the transformative impact she seeks to achieve within her district and beyond.

Superintendent Karina Allen 2nd Interview - Transcript Two

The second set of transcripts offers more insights. Superintendent Karina Allen's narrative offers a profound exploration of her identity and its intersection with her educational and professional journey. As an African-American woman, she embraces her identity with pride,

reflecting a strong sense of self-understanding and authenticity. Her career trajectory, spanning from a teacher in Shreveport, Louisiana, to ascending to the superintendency, was deeply influenced by her upbringing and values instilled by her family, particularly her parents, who were educators themselves. This familial influence underscores the importance of heritage and legacy in shaping Superintendent Karina Allen's commitment to education.

Throughout her life, Superintendent Karina Allen has confronted discrimination and racism, both in her childhood and professional endeavors. Despite these challenges, she exhibited remarkable resilience and assertiveness, drawing upon her experiences to navigate and overcome barriers. Mentorship played a crucial role in her journey, with support and encouragement from family members and professional colleagues propelling her towards administrative roles. Superintendent Karina Allen's leadership philosophy is deeply rooted in her upbringing and experiences, emphasizing values of respect, preparation, and communication. This integration of personal values into her leadership style underscores her commitment to fostering inclusive and supportive environments within educational settings.

Superintendent Karina Allen 3rd Interview - Transcript Three

Superintendent Karina Allen's leadership approach is characterized by meticulous preparation, proactive measures, and transparent communication, particularly evident in her response to crisis management scenarios such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Emphasizing the importance of clarity and readiness, she underscored the need for decisive action and open dialogue to effectively navigate challenges. Amidst her professional responsibilities, Superintendent Karina Allen shared personal anecdotes, offering glimpses into her humanity and the delicate balance she maintains between her professional duties and family life, often drawing inspiration from moments spent with her grandchildren.

Overcoming the challenges of underestimation stemming from her race and gender, Superintendent Karina Allen demonstrated resilience and strength, transforming these situations into opportunities to showcase her competence and exceed expectations. Her educational philosophy centers on high expectations for student achievement and a staunch refusal to celebrate mediocrity, reflecting her unwavering commitment to academic excellence. However, she also navigates broader societal and institutional barriers, addressing wage disparities, the glass ceiling, and the pervasive stereotypes faced as a Black woman in leadership roles, all while reflecting on her own career trajectory and achievements.

Superintendent Karina Allen's insistence on being well informed and prepared is underscored by her commitment to continuous learning and engagement with various resources. From her reading habits to her pursuit of knowledge, she emphasized the importance of staying informed to effectively navigate the complexities of educational leadership. Through her leadership approach, personal anecdotes, and advocacy efforts, Superintendent Karina Allen emerged as a resilient and informed leader, challenging barriers, advocating for excellence, and inspiring others to do the same.

Figure 3

Superintendent's Karina Allen's Career Timeline and Progression

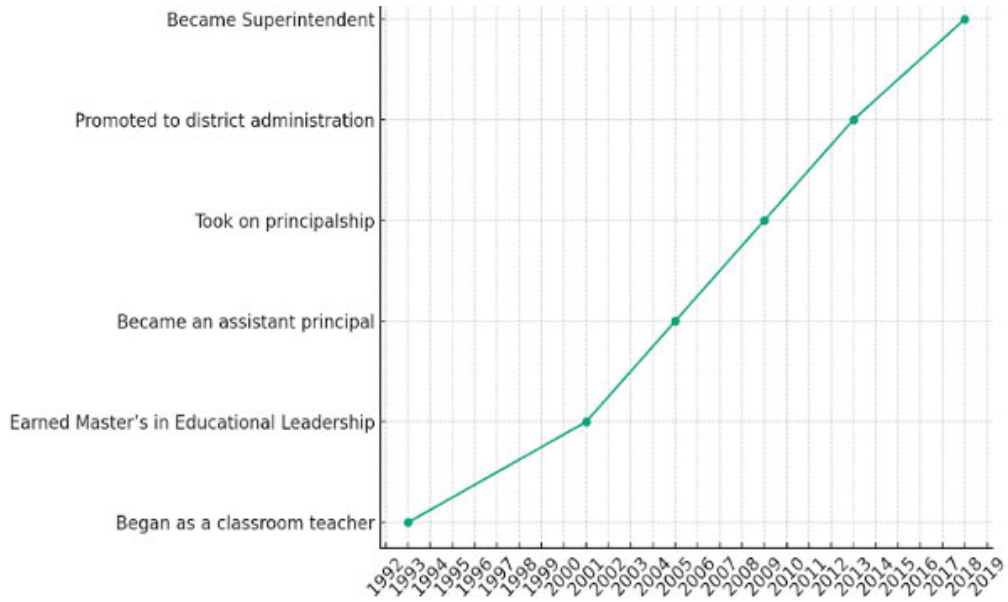
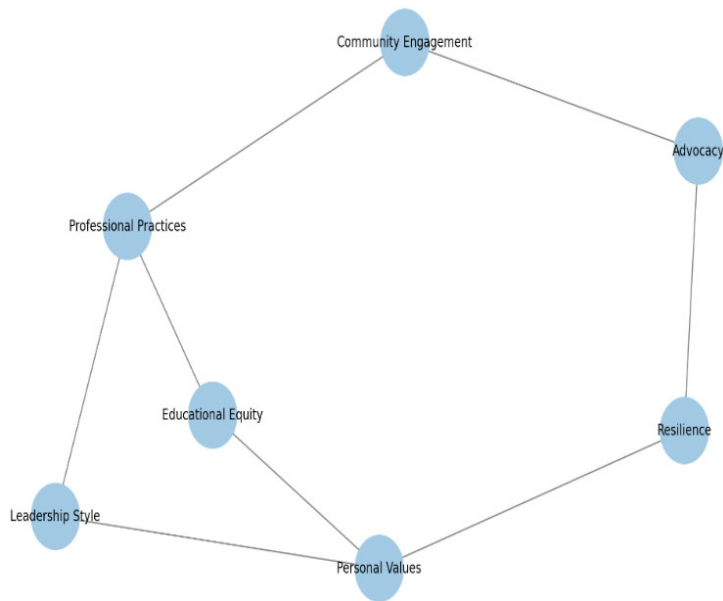


Figure 4

Superintendent Karina Allen's Map of Core Values and Strategies



Superintendent Terri Daniels

Superintendent Terri Daniels' interview offered a rich tapestry of her career journey, marked by ambition, strategic leadership, and unwavering commitment to equity and excellence. From the outset, she exhibited a clear vision for leadership, declaring her future aspirations even in her early days as a teacher, showcasing her foresight and determination. As she progressed from teaching to principalship, Superintendent Terri Daniels emphasized the pivotal role of data-driven decision-making in driving positive outcomes, demonstrating her ability to navigate professional growth with purpose and precision.

In the face of challenges, Superintendent Terri Daniels' leadership was the most rewarding, particularly during her tenure as a principal tasked with transforming a school with

low proficiency rates. According to Superintendent Terri Daniels, her focus on children made it harder for her critics to doubt her leadership. Through strategic interventions and unwavering resolve, she successfully elevated the school's performance, underscoring her capacity to lead in times of change with resilience and determination. However, her journey was not without its hurdles, as she encountered biases and judgments based on her race and gender. Yet, Superintendent Terri Daniels' confidence and resilience enabled her to navigate these barriers with grace, reinforcing the importance of authenticity and self-advocacy in leadership.

Throughout Superintendent Terri Daniels' superintendency, strategic deliberation, centered on equity, effective communication, and intentional decision-making characterized her leadership. Under her guidance, impactful initiatives were implemented, yielding tangible outcomes such as resolving budget deficits and increasing graduation rates. Reflecting on her journey, Superintendent Terri Daniels acknowledged the profound influence of mentorship and support networks, while also imparting valuable advice to aspiring leaders, emphasizing the significance of hard work, knowledge acquisition, and staying true to one's mission. Through her narrative, Superintendent Terri Daniels emerged as a beacon of inspiration, exemplifying the transformative power of visionary leadership grounded in authenticity and perseverance.

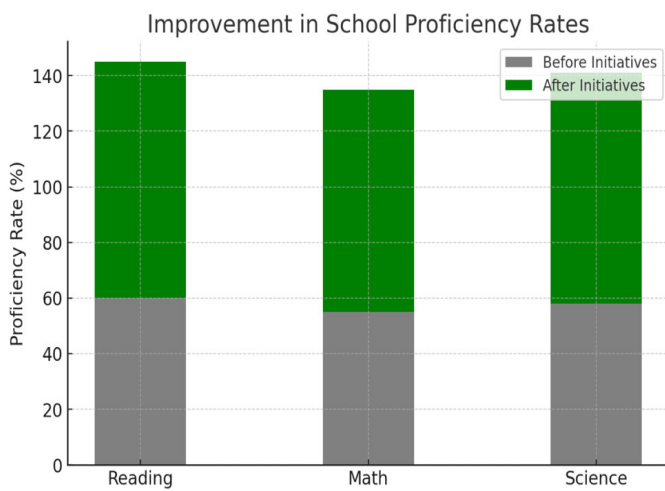
Figure 5

Superintendent Terri Daniels' Career Timeline and Progression



Figure 6

Superintendent Terri Daniels' Principal Leadership Impact



Superintendent Brynlee Macklin

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's interview encapsulated a comprehensive narrative of her journey to superintendency, spanning from her early teaching experiences to her current leadership role. A prominent theme throughout her discussion was the strategies she employed as she ascended the ranks of educational leadership despite facing systemic barriers. Reflecting on her upbringing and the values instilled by her parents, Superintendent Brynlee Macklin emphasized the importance of perseverance and resilience in overcoming obstacles within a predominantly white male-dominated field.

As a Black woman in educational leadership, Superintendent Brynlee Macklin offered valuable insights into the challenges she faced and the transformation she underwent professionally. She candidly addressed institutional and systemic barriers, including stereotypes related to assertiveness, loudness, and body image, and shared strategies for navigating these obstacles while building networks of support, such as the importance of mentorship, sponsors, and amplifiers. Later in the interview, Superintendent Brynlee Macklin revealed the influence of race, gender, and social identities on her leadership style, highlighting her efforts to challenge and transform institutional policies and practices to promote equity and inclusion.

The interview also focused on Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's experiences with tensions and contradictions inherent in her leadership role, as she strove to maintain authenticity and integrity amidst societal expectations and biases. She provided valuable insights into networking and coalition-building strategies that she used for career advancement, underscoring the importance of building alliances with diverse stakeholders to effect meaningful change within the educational landscape. Overall, Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's narrative offers a

nuanced exploration of her leadership journey, highlighting the complexities and triumphs of navigating educational leadership as a Black woman.

Figure 7

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin’s Career Progression

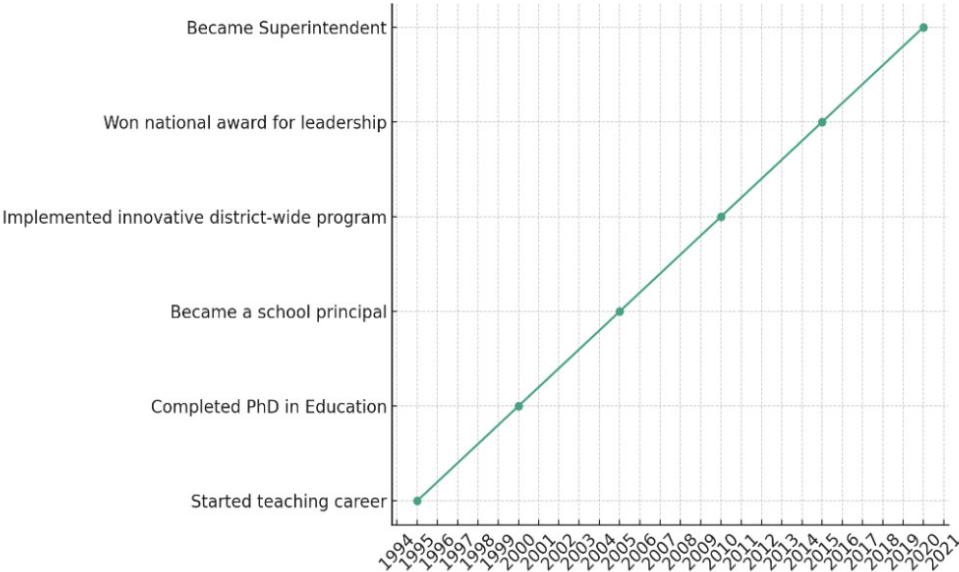
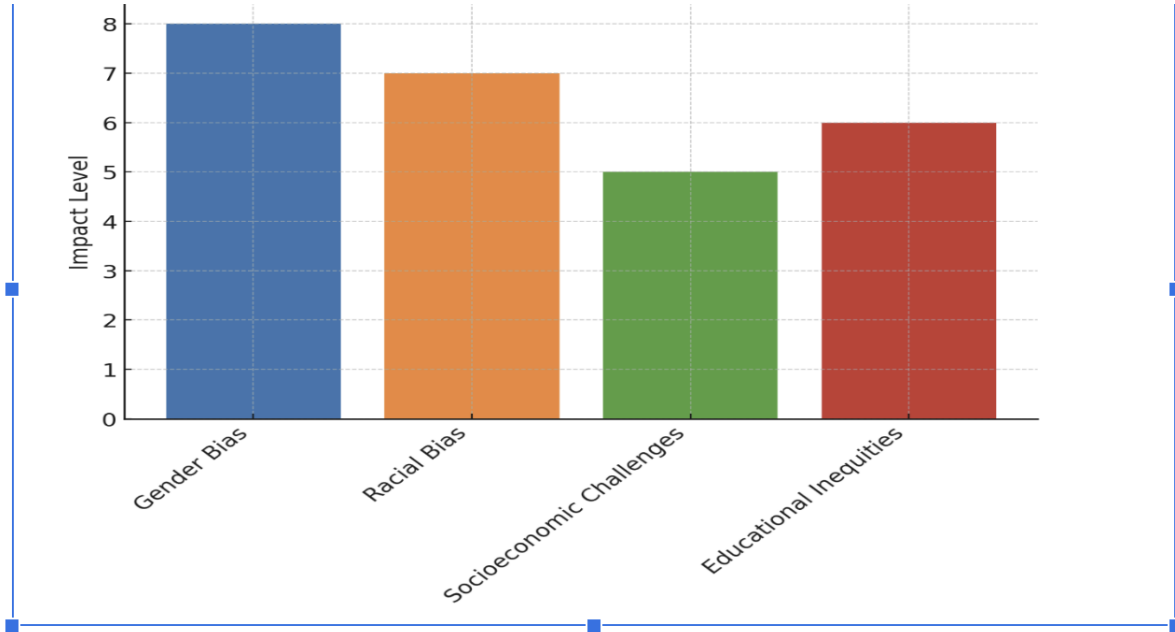


Figure 8

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's Systemic Barrier Visualization



Summary of Overarching Themes

As mentioned in the previous chapter, following the conclusion of each interview by running the interviews through Nvivo, six overarching themes emerged. Although it is possible to argue that a multitude of themes could arise from a comprehensive analysis of over 20 hours of interviews, this study primarily focused on identifying the convergence of experiences and perspectives among four women. The emergent themes can be summarized as follows:

1. Overcoming stereotypes and biases (M. A. Brown, 2018).
2. Navigating the balance of assertiveness in leadership.
3. Demonstrating resilience in confronting challenges.

4. Embracing the vital trio for empowering Black women: mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers (E. Williams, 2007).
5. Fostering career development (S. A. Davis, 2010).
6. The concept of anchoring (Lloyd-Jones, 2009).

Overcoming Stereotypes and Biases

Prominent Black women in leadership roles within the field of education, including figures such as Superintendent Karina Allen and Superintendent Maeve Bailey, have shared compelling narratives about their encounters with societal stereotypes and biases. These women have experienced a shared commonality of people viewing them as either not fit for the role or having to be overly qualified to be considered for the role. Starting in her early years, Superintendent Karina Allen, who embarked on her educational career in 1988, swiftly recognized the significance of resilience and determination. She faced the formidable task of stepping into a classroom where a previous teacher had experienced a nervous breakdown. Nonetheless, Superintendent Karina Allen embraced this challenge, firmly believing that both she and her students were mutually beneficial to each other. Superintendent Maeve Bailey, similarly, confronted discouragement early on when a high school counselor suggested she consider a career as a secretary rather than pursue her dream of becoming a pediatrician, despite her outstanding academic performance and aspirations. This disheartening experience, however, did not deter her from ultimately forging a successful career in education.

The Black women superintendent narratives delved into the intricate equilibrium between assertiveness in leadership and external perceptions shaped by gender and racial stereotypes. The examination of the lived experiences and professional voyage of Superintendent Karina Allen revealed the nuanced strategies deployed by these leaders in maneuvering through these intricate

dynamics. This exploration offers a deeper insight into the resilience, adaptability, and assertive approaches essential for overcoming stereotypes and personal obstacles, all while maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between one's professional and personal life.

Navigating the Balance of Assertiveness in Leadership

Black women are often looked at as over assertive, although leadership causes for a more assertive persona overall. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin highlighted the intricate challenge of striking the right balance when it comes to assertiveness, which often involves navigating the fine line between being perceived as overly aggressive and not being heard at all. This balance becomes particularly complex in leadership roles, where assertiveness is essential but can be subject to misinterpretation due to gender or racial stereotypes. In this context, Black women leaders have continually grappled with enduring obstacles deeply rooted in these entrenched stereotypes. For instance, women and individuals from minority backgrounds may find themselves labeled as "bossy" or "overbearing" when displaying the same assertiveness that is lauded in their male counterparts. These stereotypes add an extra layer of complexity, requiring superintendents to navigate not only the usual demands of their position but also the biases and expectations associated with their gender, race, or ethnicity. The challenge lies in effectively asserting their leadership while confronting and surmounting these stereotypes, which can erode their authority and effectiveness.

Within the realm of leadership and assertiveness, Superintendent Maeve Bailey's insights provided a profound understanding of hurdles confronted by leaders, particularly those from marginalized communities. Superintendent Maeve Bailey suggested that assertiveness, a fundamental trait for effective leadership, is intricately entwined with cultural and gender-based

stereotypes. These stereotypes inevitably influence how assertive behaviors are perceived and received, leading to differential impacts based on the leader's gender or ethnic background.

Demonstrating Resilience in Confronting Challenges

These four women superintendents have collectively confronted numerous challenges in their careers, often encountering more "no" responses than affirmative ones. In Chapter IV, Superintendent Maeve Bailey shared a compelling story from her past, recounting an encounter with a high school counselor who dismissively discouraged her ambition to become a pediatrician, suggesting a secretarial career instead. Despite this early setback, Superintendent Maeve Bailey displayed remarkable resilience as she pursued education and professional development. Her dedication to serving children and families in the field of education was characterized by a fervent commitment, leading her to embrace innovative initiatives previously unexplored by others.

One notable example of her proactive approach was her swift application for an assistant principal position, which she successfully secured. In this new role, she introduced innovative concepts, such as initiating an honor roll dinner that had not been implemented before. Superintendent Maeve Bailey's strategy centered on focusing on possibilities rather than limitations, consistently seeking opportunities to extend her influence to more students and families, ultimately resulting in her assuming positions of greater responsibility. Superintendent Maeve Bailey also underscored the paramount importance of nurturing robust relationships with all staff members and stakeholders. Her emphasis on valuing everyone's contributions fostered a culture of respect and inclusivity. She advocated for addressing issues directly and creating an environment where inappropriate actions were constructively addressed, ultimately playing a pivotal role in transforming the campus culture and climate. Despite facing

compounded challenges as a Black woman, Superintendent Maeve Bailey turned the numerous instances of encountering "no" into opportunities to strengthen her resilience and connect with diverse and disadvantaged families meaningfully. She responded to adversity by asking, "Okay, and let's consider what we can do," employing the word 'and' as a potent tool to reshape perspectives and promote a growth mindset among her colleagues, imbuing her leadership approach with a transformative quality.

Embracing the Vital Trio for Empowering Black Women: Mentors, Sponsors, and Amplifiers

This section of research was one of the most important and eye-opening themes for Black women who are ascending to the superintendency. The interviews revealed the critical roles of mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers in the professional development of Black women. Mentors offer guidance and support, helping build confidence and resilience. Sponsors actively advocate for career advancement and open doors to opportunities. Amplifiers enhance visibility and recognition, making one's skills and potential more visible within an organization. Black women often face challenges in finding sponsors due to systemic biases, hindering their access to career opportunities. The synergy of mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers creates a powerful support system that can significantly advance the careers of Black women and their path to superintendency. To empower Black women in professional settings, organizations and leaders must actively provide mentorship, sponsorship, and amplification, fostering a more equitable and inclusive professional landscape.

Fostering Career Development

The career paths of Superintendents D, A, B, and C showcase their journey from classroom educators to educational leaders, highlighting how early career experiences significantly influence their effectiveness in higher leadership roles. These experiences equipped

them with unique skills and perspectives that shaped their leadership philosophies and prepared them to manage the complex challenges of superintendency. Their trajectories underscore the importance of the progression from teaching to district leadership and how early-career decisions profoundly impact one's path and effectiveness in educational leadership.

Superintendent Terri Daniels' journey demonstrates how her experiences as an assistant principal and principal prepared her for the superintendency. Her focus on transforming schools and her belief in achievement as a mindset rather than a fixed state highlight her critical thinking and leadership approach. Her diverse roles within the education system provided her with a comprehensive understanding and a unique skill set, vital for her role as superintendent.

Superintendent Maeve Bailey also emphasized how her earlier experiences and mentorship played a crucial role in shaping her leadership style and capabilities. Her journey through various educational roles, coupled with the challenges she faced and overcame, significantly impacted her readiness for the superintendency. It illustrates how early-career challenges and mentorship can prepare an individual for complex leadership roles.

The narrative emphasizes the importance of alternative leadership models in education, such as distributed leadership, transformational leadership, instructional leadership, shared leadership, and servant leadership. These models offer more inclusive and flexible approaches, allowing Black women to leverage their strengths and make significant contributions to educational institutions. Alternative models promote collaboration, reduce biases, and provide opportunities for mentorship and support, facilitating the path to superintendency for Black women and allowing them to lead authentically and effectively.

The Concept of Anchoring

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's insights shed light on the concept of anchoring, which is particularly crucial for Black women in education who may face disheartening moments or feel close to giving up. Anchoring, as described by Superintendent Brynlee Macklin, involves finding and nurturing sources of hope and purpose. One significant source of hope she highlighted is maintaining a focus on the students. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin advised educators, especially those in direct service roles, to regularly visit classrooms, witness students' growth, and rekindle their enthusiasm. This reconnection with the tangible impact they have on students can provide an immediate boost and a sense of purpose.

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin also emphasized the need for Black women in education to be deliberate in creating space for themselves. She encouraged them to carefully choose the tables they sit at and the circles they engage with to align with their goals and values. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin underscored that hope alone is not a strategy; it must be combined with purposeful actions.

Superintendent Brynlee Macklin also stressed the importance of identifying one's end goal and unique contributions to the field of education. Instead of solely focusing on external comparisons or career progression, she advised Black women educators to turn inward to discover what brings them joy and purpose. Serving others and the community can provide a powerful way to find value and connection, even during challenging times. Ultimately, anchoring involves self-reflection and self-awareness to navigate the educational landscape effectively and maintain resilience in the face of adversity. Superintendent Brynlee Macklin's insights offer valuable guidance for Black women in education, highlighting the significance of

hope, deliberate choices, self-reflection, and sources of joy and purpose as anchors to sustain them on their educational journeys.

Implications and Conclusions

Implications

After examining the experiences of Black women superintendents and highlighting the profound impact of race and gender on their leadership journeys, this study emphasizes the importance of resilience, assertiveness, and overcoming systemic barriers in navigating predominantly white and male educational spaces. The narratives revealed the critical role of support networks, including mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers, in advancing their careers. The chapter underscores the need for a conscious effort to dismantle biases and acknowledges the unique insights these leaders bring to education, advocating for more inclusive and equitable educational systems. Other implications such as confronting race and gender bias; building resilience; cultivating support network; establishing mentors, sponsors, and a supportive professional network is vital; assertive leadership; employing assertiveness to establish authority and lead effectively, managing stereotype threat; navigating political landscapes; and ensuring that you have an anchor, something that keeps the “why” in front of you as you lead are all strategies Black women superintendents need as they navigate into the superintendent seat.

Understanding how each of these implications can play a role in gaining the superintendent seat is vital for Black women superintendents, especially if they started or ended their careers in Nevada, California, Washington, and Oregon. California currently has 25 out of 1175 superintendents who identify as Black women superintendents. This figure is the highest among the four states.

Research Question Conclusions

RQ1: How do the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents in the United States reflect and challenge dominant narratives and structures within the field of education leadership, and what implications does this have for creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems?

Conclusion for RQ1

The experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents reflect a determination to overcome societal stereotypes, biases, and heightened scrutiny. They navigate the balance of assertiveness in leadership, demonstrate resilience in confronting challenges, and value the support of mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers. These narratives challenge dominant structures in education leadership by promoting inclusivity, acknowledging diverse leadership styles, and advocating for equitable and inclusive educational systems especially in areas that sparsely promote Black women into leadership roles, let alone superintendency.

RQ2: How do Black women superintendents navigate and negotiate their identities in predominantly White and male-dominated educational leadership spaces, and what strategies do they employ to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face?

Conclusion for RQ2

Black women superintendents navigate their identities in predominantly White, male-dominated spaces by leveraging resilience, assertiveness, and strategic networking. They also employ strategies. Examples include building support systems, confronting biases directly, and promoting inclusive policies to overcome challenges and assert their leadership effectively.

Limitations

This study encountered several significant limitations that impacted its scope and depth of analysis. The first challenge revolved around the sample size of Black women superintendents within the targeted regions of California, Oregon, Washington, and Nevada, who were willing to participate in the study. Obtaining these participants proved to be a considerable hurdle, as there were limited eligible individuals, possibly due to scrutiny and discomfort among potential participants. The dearth of participants may have affected the generalizability of the study's findings, potentially overlooking valuable perspectives.

A second limitation pertains to the appointment locations of two out of the four superintendents in the study. These individuals were initially appointed in other states but possessed substantial leadership experience within the four states targeted. Although this may not be a strict limitation, it highlights a broader issue of the distribution of Black women superintendents, raising questions about the equitable distribution of opportunities for such leaders.

Another noteworthy limitation centers on the subjectivity inherent in data gathered through interviews. Even with the use of analytical tools such as Nvivo, the qualitative nature of interview data can introduce biases or interpretations that may not fully capture the nuances of the participants' experiences. The researcher dedicated a significant amount of time to analyzing audio recordings thoroughly, attempting to mitigate subjectivity, but this limitation underscores the inherent challenge of subjective data in qualitative research.

The researcher's personal background as a Black woman leader pursuing a doctorate in executive leadership may introduce a subtle form of bias. The shared experiences and commonalities between the researcher and participants might influence the interpretation of

findings or the framing of questions during interviews. Although this shared background could enhance rapport and understanding, it should be acknowledged as a potential source of bias.

Lastly, a notable limitation lies in the study's focus on the self-perception of Black women superintendents as they ascend the professional ladder. Insufficient attention has been given to how the outside world perceives these leaders from their own viewpoint. This gap in research restricts a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and biases Black women superintendents encounter from external perspectives, which could provide valuable insights into the broader societal context of their leadership roles.

In conclusion, this study faced several limitations. These included sample size constraints, appointment locations, subjectivity in interview data, potential researcher bias, and the focus on self-perception rather than external perspectives. Recognizing and addressing these limitations is crucial to ensuring the validity and relevance of the study's findings in the context of Black women's leadership experiences in education.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future researchers, following the analysis of the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents, could explore the external perceptions and societal narratives about these leaders. They might focus on how different stakeholders, including students, parents, and other educators, perceive their leadership styles, decision-making processes, and impact on educational outcomes. This approach could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and biases these leaders face and reveal strategies for fostering more inclusive and equitable educational environments.

Building upon the existing analysis of the experiences and viewpoints of Black women superintendents, researchers can delve deeper into the intricate dynamics of external perceptions

and societal narratives that surround these accomplished leaders. Such future study could embrace a multifaceted exploration, examining how various stakeholders, such as students, parents, fellow educators, and the broader community, perceive and respond to the leadership styles, decision-making processes, and overall influence of these superintendents on educational outcomes. By taking this approach, researchers may uncover a richer tapestry of insights into the multifarious challenges and ingrained biases that African American women superintendents encounter in their roles. Understanding the external perspectives and societal narratives that shape these leaders' professional experiences is crucial for identifying the nuanced barriers they face. Such insights can pave the way for more effective strategies to promote inclusive and equitable educational environments.

Future study could involve conducting surveys, interviews, and focus groups with diverse stakeholders to capture a comprehensive range of perspectives. These data-gathering methods would help elucidate how racial and gender stereotypes may influence perceptions of leadership and decision-making within the educational context. Such research could also involve examining the impact of these superintendents on student achievement, school culture, and community engagement from multiple angles, shedding light on their broader contributions.

Ultimately, a deeper exploration of external perceptions and societal narratives surrounding African American women superintendents would not only advance the current understanding of their experiences but also reveal valuable insights to dismantle biases and cultivate more inclusive and equitable educational environments for all.

Expanding upon the insights distilled from this dissertation, it becomes evident that a crucial trajectory for forthcoming research lies in delving deeper into the intricate process of dismantling systemic racism. This endeavor entails actively engaging in the reform of policies

entrenched within the realms of academia and government at all levels. Such an approach demands not only a meticulous scrutiny of prevailing structures and policies that perpetuate racial and gender disparities but also the conceptualization and execution of transformative strategies aimed at uprooting these inequities from their very foundations.

At the heart of this endeavor lies the imperative inclusion of Black women as essential thought partners and decision-makers, thereby ensuring their substantive representation within policy-making spheres. By affording Black women seats at the table, institutions can transcend mere tokenism and cultivate a truly equitable environment that not only acknowledges but also leverages the distinctive perspectives and expertise they bring. Future research should delve into the intricate mechanisms through which these inclusive policies can be meticulously crafted and effectively put into practice, meticulously scrutinizing the ripple effects of such reforms on dismantling barriers for Black women striving for leadership roles within academia and beyond.

This avenue of investigation holds immense promise in furnishing actionable insights for crafting more equitable and inclusive educational and governmental systems. Such systems would be poised to recognize and confront the intersecting challenges encountered by Black women, thereby advancing the cause of justice and fostering a more harmonious societal fabric.

Conclusion

This study focused on the lived experiences of African American women superintendents in Nevada, California, Oregon, and Washington, highlighting not only the barriers they encounter but also their notable triumphs. By intertwining CRF and BFT, the analysis offers a profound understanding of how these women navigate and dismantle the intersecting oppressions

within predominantly White and male-dominated educational environments. CRF and BFT frameworks illuminate the resilience and assertiveness these women exhibit as not just personal attributes, but as survival strategies honed against systemic racism and sexism. This study accentuates the critical importance of support networks, mentors, sponsors, and amplifiers in aiding these women's journey towards career progression. It calls for a radical shift towards inclusivity and equity within educational systems, aligning with CRF and BFT principles that advocate for recognizing and valuing the unique contributions and perspectives of African American women. The conclusion of this exploration is a powerful testament to the transformative potential of their narratives. It challenges entrenched norms and practices, fostering inclusivity, and propels forward the agenda for significant changes in educational leadership. Through the lens of CRF and BFT, this study not only highlights the achievements of African American women superintendents but also serves as a clarion call for systemic change, paving the way for a more inclusive, equitable, and diverse educational leadership landscape.

Appendix A
Informed Consent



Title of Study: **Voices from the Field; Black Women Who Have Successfully Transcended the Leadership Pipeline into Superintendency**

Investigator(s): Brione Minor-Mitchell

For questions or concerns about the study, you may contact Brione Minor-Mitchell 702-355-4482.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted, contact **the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-0020 or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.**

It is unknown as to the level of risk of transmission of COVID-19 if you decide to participate in this research study. The research activities will utilize accepted guidance standards for mitigating the risks of COVID-19 transmission: however, the chance of transmission cannot

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a qualitative research study. The purpose of this study is to capture individual narratives from each interviewee (natural conversations) to examine the lived

experiences of Black Women who have become superintendents and how they have navigated the educational system in becoming superintendents. During this process, I would collect information concerning these interviews and report the findings for a wider audience.

Participants

You are being asked to participate in the study because you fit this criteria:

If you are or have been:

- Superintendent or former Superintendent
- Identify as Black
- Identify as Woman
- Served in a leadership position in Nevada, California, Washington, or Oregon

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

- 3 –interview sessions that will not exceed 1 hour each; These sessions will be audio recorded for the collection of audio data to coded and used for research purposes. Your identity will be given a pseudonym and your confidentiality and anonymity protected at all cost.

Your participation is not expected to be more than a 3-hour commitment over the course of 3 months. Participation will involve individuals participating in voluntary interviews with the participants explicit permission and having questions as conversation starters, but the PI will allow the conversation to take a more organic direction to elicit authentic responses to their experience.

Participation is voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the project at any time without any risk to yourself. If this occurs, you are free to choose between destroying your contributions to the study or releasing them for use without your participation.

We will meet online for most meetings and no more than 2 face to face meetings. We will meet in a space that interviewees will feel comfortable sharing their stories, and one which maintains their privacy requests.

You will be assigned a **study participant identification code** for identification purposes of all data collected. The codes will be kept in a separate location with restricted access.

Research participants can be assured, only personnel privy to the study will have access to the data. This is usually the principle investigator/evaluator, coordinator, and/or research assistant.

During the study all electronic data will be safely store, secured, and privacy protections in place.

Note: Recordings will be erased once the information needed for research has been obtained.

Benefits of Participation

There may not be direct benefits to you as a participant in this study. However, we hope to learn from the lived experiences of Black Women Superintendents.

Risks of Participation

There are risks involved in all research studies. This study may include only minimal risks.

There are minimal specific potential risks to human subjects involved. It is using well documented research methods (observations and interviews). Minimal physical or mental risks are involved in this study. In the event, an individual feel any psychological stress and/or feel uncomfortable in answering any of the questions the following free resource are available if you should experience any distress:

UNLV Health Center

4505 S. Maryland Parkway

Las Vegas, Nevada. 89119

(702) 774-7100

In the event we choose to hold face to face interviews, all CDC recommended guidelines that are relevant to face-to-face meeting will be engaged to mitigate COVID-19

Cost /Compensation

There may not be financial cost to you to participate in this study. The study will take approximately 3-5 hours of your time. You may not be compensated for your time.

Confidentiality

All information gathered in this study will be kept as confidential as possible. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study. All records will be stored in a locked facility at UNLV for 5 years after completion of the study."

After the storage time the information gathered will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate in this study or in any part of this study. You may withdraw at any time without prejudice to your relations with UNLV. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

Participant Consent:

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I have been able to ask questions about the research study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Audio Taping:

I agree to be audio taped for the purpose of this research study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Participant Name (Please Print)

Appendix B

Black Women Superintendent Consent

Brione Minor-Mitchell, Lead Researcher

Doctoral Students of the University of Nevada Las Vegas,

Department of Educational Psychology, Leadership, & Higher Education

Purpose of the Research

Brione Minor-Mitchell, a Doctoral college student from the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, is inviting you to take part in a research study. The purpose of this research is to examine the how Black women overcome obstacles as they ascend to the superintendent position.

Your part in the study will be to share your lived experience for a qualitative study aimed at reporting experiences in the form of narratives. In this study we will examine the obstacles that hindered your progress into the superintendency, and how you overcame these events.

It will take you about 3 hours to be in this study. Ideally 3 one-hour interviews over the course of 1-3 months.

Study Benefits:

At this time, we are not aware of how participating in this study can directly benefit you.

However, this research may help us to understand the effects on the career trajectory of program participants who identify as Black women.

Participation:

You do not have to be in this study. You may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. Participation is voluntary. Refusal to participate or withdraw at any time will not involve any penalty or loss of benefits, to which the subject is otherwise entitled. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the

study. (If you will be collecting data from students of any of the researchers, include the following statement: If you decide not to take part or to stop taking part in this study, it will not affect your grade in any way.)

Location of the Research and Time Commitment:

Many meetings will normally take place online or via a secure virtual meeting space such as Zoom or Google Meet. Safety protocols will be in place (passwords, room preview-live, etc..).

Compensation:

For the purpose of this study no financial or other compensation will be offered.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

It is our aim to protect the privacy and confidentiality of all interviewees and the people whom are list within their narratives. All information collected will be kept private at all times.

If problems shall arise, in full disclosure, we might be required to share the information we collect from you with the University of Nevada Las Vegas-Office of Research Compliance and the federal Office for Human Research Protections. If this happens, the information would only be used to inquire about how we completed the study and if it was done properly while protecting your rights.

All data collected will be safely secured in a locked and secure file cabinet at the University and confidentiality protocols will be in place.

You may choose to stop taking part in this study after today. If you do, we will not collect any more information from you. However, we would keep and use the information we had already collected from you.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact the Principal Investigator at

Brione Minor-Mitchell

The University of Nevada Las Vegas

bminor@unlv.nevada.edu

minorba@nv.ccsd.net

(702) 355-4482 Office

(702) 799-8780 Alternate

Appendix C

Interview Protocol Questions

VOICES FROM THE FIELD: BLACK WOMEN WHO HAVE SUCCESSFULLY TRANSCENDED
THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE INTO SUPERINTENDENCY

Primary Research Question

How do the experiences and perspectives of Black women superintendents in the United States reflect and challenge dominant narratives and structures within the field of education leadership, and what implications does this have for creating more equitable and inclusive educational systems?

Sub-questions:

How do Black women superintendents navigate and negotiate their identities in predominantly white and male-dominated educational leadership spaces, and what strategies do they employ to overcome the challenges and obstacles they face?

Research Questions

As critical ethnographic approach seeks to understand and critiques power dynamics, inequalities, and social justice issues within a particular context, here are some potential critical ethnographic questions for Black women, superintendents that can be explored in their journey of becoming superintendents:

- As you reflect on your ascension into the superintendency and narrate your journey, what strategies did you as a Black woman need in order to attain the role of superintendent? How do Black women superintendents remove, face, or reverse systemic barriers that hinder their promotion? Tell a time when you felt that barriers were used against you?

- How have your experiences as a Black woman shaped your journey in becoming a superintendent? What challenges have you faced in your journey, particularly in a predominantly white and male-dominated field, and how have you navigated them? How have you leveraged your identity and experiences to challenge dominant narratives and systems that perpetuate inequality and oppression in education?
- In what ways have institutional and systemic barriers hindered or facilitated your ascent to the superintendent position? How have you confronted and addressed these barriers, and what strategies have you used to overcome them? How have you built networks of support and allies within and outside of the educational system to advance your career goals?
- How has the intersection of race, gender, and other social identities influenced your leadership in the journey of becoming a superintendent? How have you leveraged your identity and experiences to challenge and transform institutional policies and practices that perpetuate systemic oppression, particularly for marginalized communities? How have you built coalitions and networking and partnerships with stakeholders as you ascended into the Superintendency? Tell a time when you had to use your network to help you ascend?
- What are some of the tensions and contradictions you have experienced as a Black woman ascending to the superintendency, particularly in navigating the expectations and demands of various stakeholders such as school boards, teachers, parents, and community members? How have you managed these tensions and balanced competing priorities in your leadership roles? What strategies have you used to maintain your authenticity and

integrity as a leader while still fulfilling the expectations and responsibilities of your past position?

Appendix D

Recruitment Letter/Email

Dear Black Women Superintendents,

We are conducting a research project for a dissertation to discuss the obstacles that Black women face in becoming a superintendent. As a Black woman superintendent, we believe that you have invaluable experiences and insights that can contribute to this important conversation.

We are seeking Black women superintendents who are willing to participate in an interview-based study that will examine the challenges and obstacles that Black women face in attaining superintendent positions. Your participation in this research will help to shed light on the systemic barriers that Black women encounter in their career journeys, as well as strategies and approaches that have been successful in overcoming these obstacles.

As a participant in this research project, you will have the opportunity to share your story and your experiences, which will help to advance our understanding of the challenges and opportunities that exist for Black women in educational leadership. Your participation in this study will also contribute to a growing body of literature on diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational leadership.

We recognize that your time is valuable, and we are committed to ensuring that this study is conducted in a respectful, sensitive, and supportive manner. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty.

If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact us at your earliest convenience. We look forward to hearing from you and learning from your valuable experiences.

Sincerely,

Brione Minor-Mitchell, ABD

University of Nevada Las Vegas, - Graduate Student.

bminor@nevada.unlv.edu

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