

Walden University

College of Education and Human Sciences

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Abstract

Black Women in K-12 Leadership Positions Perceptions About the Challenges of
Obtaining a Position

by

Whitney Brown Johnson

MA, Western Governors University, 2020

BS, Western Governors University, 2019

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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October 2023

Abstract

The research problem of this qualitative study was the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions in the United States (U.S.). This study is important because the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions in the U.S. remains challenging. The purpose of the study was to explore Black women's challenges in seeking leadership positions. Grounded in the conceptual framework of intersectionality, which recognizes the interaction of multiple social identities, the research question examined Black women's perceptions of the challenges of obtaining leadership roles in K-12 education. In this qualitative basic inquiry, a self-designed, semi-structured interview protocol with open-ended questions was used to explore the challenges of obtaining leadership roles, focusing on how race and gender influence Black women in obtaining K-12 leadership. The sample of 10 participants was selected based on their experience in educational leadership in the U.S. and self-identification as Black women. Through thematic analysis, patterns related to the research question were derived through coding, categorizing, and identifying themes. Findings revealed that the intersection of race and gender amplifies the unique obstacles faced by Black women seeking K-12 leadership positions. These obstacles include systemic barriers, lack of mentorship, expectations for code-switching, micro-aggressions from stereotyping, and over-scrutiny of credentials. Recommendations include evaluating intervention efficacy and observing policies enhancing diversity. The implications for positive social change include urging educational entities to revisit hiring practices to catalyze shifts towards inclusiveness to increase the representation of Black women in K-12 leadership.

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Dedication

To Lauren, Olivia, AliceKate, Eleanor, and Cora — my daughters. May you always chase your dreams with the unwavering belief that the world is yours to shape. You have been my inspiration, reminding me every day that with passion and perseverance, anything is possible. Pursue what sets your heart on fire, for you have already ignited mine.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The underrepresentation of Black women in educational leadership is a persistent issue that requires the dismantling of systemic barriers and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (Johnson & Fournillier, 2021). Discriminatory practices, implicit bias, and cultural stereotypes have contributed to the lack of Black women in K-12 leadership positions (Aaron, 2020; Agosto & Roland, 2018; Budig et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2019; Genao & Mercedes, 2021; Perrone, 2022; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021; Vick & Cunningham, 2018). Given the historical and institutional inequalities marginalized communities face, equity in school leadership is an equal opportunity and fairness in outcomes and processes (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019). However, there is a gap in practice on the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. Results from the study has the potential to contribute to positive social change by advancing understanding of the perspectives of Black women K-12 school leaders and informing efforts to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in educational leadership.

Chapter 1 presents the background of the problem that briefly summarizes the literature related to the scope of the study and describes the gap in practice. It then identifies the research problem, including evidence that the problem is current, relevant, and significant, while building on previous research. Next the subsection addresses the purpose of study and states the research question. Intersectionality is introduced as a conceptual framework that grounds the study, utilizing a qualitative research approach through a basic qualitative design to gain insight into the perceptions of Black women

seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. Assumptions, scope and delimitations, and limitations are addressed. The chapter lays the foundation for subsequent chapters.

Background

The U.S. education system is facing a disparity in the representation of Black women in leadership positions (Perrone, 2022). In the United States, Black women’s race and gender, Black and female, are subjugated classifications that divide them into two devalued groups and results in a double disparity experience (Aaron, 2020). Throughout the history of the United States, Black people and women have faced prejudice and discrimination based on aspects of their identities (Weiner et al., 2022). Black women in school leadership are not immune to discrimination based on their race and gender. Despite having the qualifications and skills required for these roles, Black women are not appointed to K–12 leadership positions at the same rate as other demographic groups (Chance, 2022; (see Tables 1–4). According to recent statistics, just over 10% of all principal positions in the United States are held by Black individuals, compared to the Black population which is 13.6%, creating a discrepancy of 3.6% (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018; United States Census Bureau, 2022).

Table 1

Number and Percent of Female Principals in the U.S. by Race

Year	Total Number of Principals	Number of White Female Principals	Percent of White Female Principals	Number of Female Black Principals	Percent of Female Black Principals
2015-2016	90,410	36,830	40.7%	6,340	13.0%

Note. From the “Number and Percentage Distribution of Public School Principals by Gender, Race, and Selected Principal Characteristics: 2015–16.” by National Center for Educational Statistics. Copyright 2018.

Table 2*Percentage of Black or Female Teachers and Principals in Public Schools, 1999-2021*

Year	% Female K-12 Teachers	% Female K-12 Teachers	% Female K-12 Teachers	% Female K-12 Teachers
2020-2021	76.8	6.1	56.0	10.4
2017-2018	76.5	6.7	53.7	10.5
2015-2016	76.8	6.7	54.2	10.6
2011-2012	76.3	6.8	51.6	10.1
1999-2000	74.9	7.6	43.8	11.0

Note. From the “Number and Percentage Distribution of Public School Principals by Gender, Race, and Selected Principal Characteristics: 2015–16.” by National Center for Educational Statistics. Copyright 2018.

Table 3*Percent of All Principals in the U.S. by Gender*

Year	% Male	% Female
2020-2021	44.0	56.0
2017-2018	46.3	53.7
2015-2016	45.8	54.2
2011-2012	48.4	51.6
1999-2000	56.2	43.8
1993-1994	65.5	34.5

Note. From the “Number and Percentage Distribution of Public School Principals by Gender, Race, and Selected Principal Characteristics: 2015–16.” by National Center for Educational Statistics. Copyright 2018.

Table 4*Percent of All Principals in the U.S. by Race*

Year	White	Black	Hispanic	Asian	Pacific Islander	American Indian/Alaska Native	Two or more races
2020-2021	77.1	10.4	9.3	1.0	0.3	0.6	1.3
2017-2018	77.7	10.5	8.9	0.9	0.2	0.7	1.0
2015-2016	77.8	10.6	8.2	1.4	0.2	0.7	1.1
2011-2012	80.3	10.1	6.8	0.9	-	0.7	1.1
1999-2000	82.3	11.0	5.2	0.8	-	0.8	-
1993-1994	84.3	10.4	4.1	0.8	-	0.8	-

Note. From the “Number and Percentage Distribution of Public School Principals by Gender, Race, and Selected Principal Characteristics: 2015–16.” by National Center for Educational Statistics. Copyright 2018.

This underrepresentation of Black principals raises concerns about the equity and diversity of educational leadership and its influence on student success (Cyr et al., 2021). Research has highlighted the importance of having a diverse educational leadership team to improve academic outcomes for students of all races and ethnicities (Aaron, 2020; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019). A lack of diversity in leadership positions can perpetuate biases, stereotypes, and inequities and limit opportunities for all students to reach their full potential (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019). Black students may benefit from having role models and leaders who understand their experiences, so this lack of representation can have a negative effect on their educational experiences (Chance, 2022). Diversifying leadership in schools can enhance learning outcomes for all students, including scholastic performance, graduation rates, and social and emotional growth. Schools can make learning spaces more inclusive and equitable for all students by increasing the number of Black women in K–12 leadership roles.

Investigating the barriers that prevent Black women from being appointed to these roles is crucial to create solutions, such as targeted hiring practices and professional development initiatives (Duchesneau, 2020). Scholars, policymakers, and practitioners widely acknowledge the underrepresentation of Black women in educational leadership positions (Budig et al., 2021; Cyr et al., 2021). Black women face systemic barriers to educational leadership positions, such as discrimination and bias, a lack of support and mentorship, and limited professional development opportunities (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Black women school principals also face unique challenges in their leadership roles, such as being tokenized and having their authority questioned more frequently than

their White counterparts (Budig et al., 2021). They also report feeling isolated and unsupported, leading to burnout and turnover. Other barriers include lack of access to professional development opportunities, which result in a “leaky pipeline” effect (Perrone, 2022, p. 5). Women and people of color face barriers to advancement and opportunities to reach their full potential (Vick & Cunningham, 2018). Thus, there is a need for policy changes and cultural shifts to address Black women’s systemic barriers in advancing into educational leadership positions and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the sector (Genao & Mercedes, 2021).

Despite the growing recognition of the problem of underrepresentation of Black women in educational leadership, there is a lack of research on effective strategies for promoting the advancement of Black women into leadership positions. Addressing this gap in practice is essential to promoting equity and social justice in education and ensuring that the leadership of schools reflects the diversity of the student population. The gap in practice that the study will address is the lack of research on the challenges of obtaining a position for Black women into K-12 leadership positions. Though previous research has focused on the experiences of Black female principals in predominantly White schools (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Swanson & Welton, 2018), little attention has been given to the role of intersectionality in their professional advancement. The gap in practice highlights the need for further research to understand better the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. This study is important because the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12

leadership positions in the United States remains challenging (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018).

Problem Statement

This study addresses the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions. The percentage of principal positions held by Black individuals in the United States is only 9.5%, whereas the percentages of White and Latinx principals in 2021 were 78.4% and 8.7%, respectively. The percentages of women principals were 57.4%, but only 43.7% and 33.5% of principals at the middle and high school levels were women, which is lower than the percentage of female students in any given year (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). These statistics indicate that the racial/ethnic and gender characteristics of school leaders do not represent the student population, which is about 50% female (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018).

The problem is not limited to quantity of Black principals but also the quality of education and the development of young minds (Cyr et al., 2021). The limited presence of Black individuals in leadership positions can limit the representation of diverse perspectives, leading to a lack of culturally responsive teaching and limiting students' access to role models who share their experiences (Duchesneau, 2020). Discrimination in the pipeline also negatively influences qualified candidates of color and women, excluding them from school leadership positions (Perrone, 2022). The lack of representation has implications for Black female students' experiences and the schools' effectiveness in promoting equity and social justice. Although the number of women in educational leadership positions is increasing, the underrepresentation of Black women in

K-12 leadership positions remains a critical problem in the United States. The lack of diversity in school leadership is a multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive understanding of the underlying factors contributing to this issue.

Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study was to address the gap in practice by exploring Black women's challenges in seeking leadership positions. Black women K-12 school leaders are underrepresented, and their progression to leadership positions within the education system is a multifaceted and intricate issue that requires thorough exploration.

Information from the study helped to understand how Black women leaders perceive the role of these challenges in shaping their experiences and those of other Black women in leadership positions within the education sector. The results deepen the understanding of the unique barriers, opportunities, and strategies Black women leaders encounter within the education sector. This study draws on a range of relevant literature (Aaron, 2020; Agosto & Roland, 2018; Budig et al., 2021; Cyr et al., 2021; Genao & Mercedes, 2021; Perrone, 2022; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021; Sales et al., 2019; Weiner et al., 2019). By understanding the challenges that Black female K-12 school leaders face, policymakers and educational leaders can identify the necessary steps to increase representation and create more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position?

Conceptual Framework

The concepts that support this study include intersectionality. Intersectionality is a framework that recognizes that individuals are shaped by multiple social identities and that these identities intersect and interact with one another to create unique experiences of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). In the context of the research question “What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position?” intersectionality is relevant in several ways. The intersection of race and gender identities shapes their experiences and perceptions in unique ways that may differ from those of Black men, White women, or other racial/ethnic groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Second, intersectionality suggests that it is not enough to simply examine the experiences of Black women as a monolithic group (Crenshaw, 1991). Instead, it is important to consider the ways in which other social identities, such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability status, may intersect with race and gender to shape experiences of privilege and oppression. For example, a Black female principal who is also a lesbian may face different challenges and barriers than a Black female principal who is straight. Finally, an intersectional perspective suggests that the experiences and perceptions of Black women leaders cannot be fully understood without considering the broader societal and institutional contexts in which they operate (Crenshaw, 1991). This perspective includes examining the historical and ongoing marginalization of Black women in leadership positions as well as the ways in which racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression intersect and operate in educational settings.

The logical connections between the framework presented and my study is that Black women seeking leadership positions face unique challenges in obtaining leadership positions due to the intersection of their race and gender. Black women's identities, both as Black and women, affect the types of barriers that they face when seeking leadership positions. These challenges include, for example, stereotypes and biases that may limit their opportunities for advancement. Additionally, a lack of representation of Black women in leadership positions may affect the support that they receive when seeking leadership positions. The choice for incorporating intersectionality is made to provide a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions and answer the research question of what the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position are through an intersectional lens.

Nature of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. Specifically, I aimed to understand and describe how Black women leaders perceive the role of these challenges in shaping their own experiences and those of other Black women in leadership positions within the education sector. A basic qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration and understanding of the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding complex and socially constructed phenomena like power and inequality issues (Creswell

& Creswell, 2018), which aligns with the complex social issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in K-12 education leadership. Additionally, a basic qualitative research design was selected as it emphasizes the subjective interpretations of participants and focuses on understanding the phenomena under study without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). This research methodology aligns with the study problem, purpose, and research questions, as the purpose was to gain insight into the perception of intersectionality on the advancement of Black women into K-12 principal positions in the United States.

The open-ended semistructured interviews using a self-designed interview protocol allow participants to share their experiences and perspectives, which can be effectively captured through qualitative research methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I collected data from 10 Black female K-12 school leaders by asking semistructured questions (see Appendix). All interviews were conducted remotely and audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interviews were transcribed, read, and reread for accuracy. Afterwards, the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and recurring themes in participants' responses. The aim was to gain insight into the perceptions of Black women in education leadership roles, focusing on how their intersectional identity affects their opportunities for advancement.

Definitions

Gendered racism: Gendered racism is a form of discrimination that results from the intersection of racism and sexism. It refers to how individuals from certain racial and ethnic groups, particularly women, are discriminated against based on gender and race.

Gendered racism is often embedded in institutional policies and practices and can manifest as microaggressions, stereotypes, and discrimination in employment and education.

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a conceptual framework that suggests individuals hold multiple social identities (such as race, gender, class, and sexuality) that interact and intersect to shape their experiences and opportunities. Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced it in her 1989 paper “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics.”

K-12 school leaders: K-12 school leaders are responsible for the day-to-day operations of primary and secondary schools (kindergarten through Grade 12). They oversee teachers, staff, and students and ensure the school runs smoothly.

Qualitative research: Qualitative research is a research method that seeks to understand human behavior and experiences by exploring in-depth the meanings individuals attach to their experiences. Qualitative research involves collecting data through interviews, observation, and focus groups. Data analysis involves identifying patterns and themes in the data to generate theories and hypotheses.

Systemic barriers: Systemic barriers refer to the societal and institutional policies and practices that limit opportunities and access to resources for specific groups based on race, gender, or socioeconomic status. Systemic barriers can include discriminatory hiring practices, lack of access to quality education, and limited access to health care.

Assumptions

Assumptions are critical to the meaningfulness of the research. One assumption is that Black female K-12 school leaders have unique experiences and insights due to their intersectional identities. These experiences and insights may affect their perceptions of intersectionality on the advancement of Black women into K-12 leadership positions. This assumption is necessary to address the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions. Another assumption was that the participants in the study would be truthful and forthcoming in their responses to the interview questions (see Appendix), which was necessary for the data to be accurate and meaningful. I also assumed that my interpretation of the participants' responses accurately reflects their perceptions and experiences, which is necessary for the findings to be valid. Finally, I assumed that the conceptual framework of intersectionality is a helpful lens through which to explore the research question. Intersectionality as a lens is necessary for the findings to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on this topic. Overall, these assumptions provide a foundation for the research questions and the methodology used in this study.

Scope and Delimitations

The boundaries for this study were limited to Black female K-12 school leaders in the United States. Other populations, such as Black male leaders, non-Black female leaders, or non-educational leadership positions, were not included. Another focus of the study was intersectionality of race and gender and did not explore other intersecting identities, such as class or sexual orientation. Conducting the study meant situating the conceptual framework of intersectionality from within, which emphasizes the complexity

of identity and how it affects experiences of oppression and privilege. Other conceptual frameworks that are relevant to the topic, such as Black feminist leadership, critical race theory, and social identity theory, are also leveraged to understand the perspectives of Black women K-12 leaders in the United States.

The findings of this study may not be transferable to other populations or contexts due to the limited scope. For example, the experiences of Black female K-12 school leaders in other countries may differ from those in the United States. However, the focus of the study was on intersectionality as a framework for understanding the perceptions of Black women in leadership positions has broader implications for addressing the underrepresentation of women of color in leadership roles across various industries.

Limitations

One of the main challenges was the access to participants, particularly Black female K-12 school leaders, who are an underrepresented population. The participants may have concerns about participation due to confidentiality or workload. To overcome this barrier, I planned on multiple recruitment strategies, such as leveraging professional networks, collaborating with school districts and education organizations, advertising the study on relevant online platforms, offering incentives, and assuring privacy and confidentiality protections for the participants.

Ethical considerations are also a requirement. Researchers must ensure that a study is conducted ethically and respectfully by obtaining informed consent and approval from the institutional review board (IRB) to ensure that the study procedures meet ethical guidelines. Consideration must be given to the participants' cultural and social nuances to

conduct the study respectfully. An ethical, efficient, and effective study can be conducted by addressing these limitations, challenges, and barriers. Addressing the limitations, challenges, and barriers ensures that the results can be used to promote positive social change in education.

Significance

This study on the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position is significant in several ways. First, the focus of the study was on the intersectional experiences of Black female school leaders, which has received limited attention in existing research. By exploring the unique challenges and opportunities Black women face in K-12 leadership positions, the results can provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational leaders seeking to promote diversity and equity in school leadership.

The significance of this study also lies in its potential to emphasize the systemic barriers that Black women face in education leadership positions and to identify strategies for promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion in the sector. By using the theory of intersectionality as the conceptual framework, the findings provide a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of Black women in education leadership roles. Results could contribute to a broader discussion on the importance of intersectionality in promoting social justice. Findings from the study have the potential to promote positive social change by addressing the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions. By highlighting the experiences and perspectives of Black women leaders, the results can contribute to efforts to increase the representation of Black women in

educational leadership roles. Additionally, the study findings can inform professional development programs for aspiring and current K-12 leaders. By identifying the barriers to entry and success for Black women in these positions, the findings can help develop targeted professional development programs that address the unique needs of this group.

Findings from this study can also help raise awareness about the perceptions of Black women in leadership positions and contribute to broader discussions on diversity and social justice in education. By exploring the factors that influence the advancement of Black female K-12 school leaders, policymakers and educational institutions can develop targeted interventions and strategies to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in the education system. The findings have the potential to inform policies and practices that support the advancement of Black women in educational leadership and contribute to positive social change by promoting equity and diversity in K-12 education. Finally, the results can contribute to advocacy efforts to promote policies that support the advancement of Black women in K-12 leader positions. By shedding light on the challenges faced by Black women K-12 leaders, the findings can help build a case for policy changes that promote equity and inclusion in educational leadership.

Summary

Chapter 1 laid the groundwork for this study, focusing on the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 education leadership roles. It delved into the problem statement and purpose of the research, which was to explore the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. The chapter also highlighted the need to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in education by

addressing systemic barriers. Though past studies have identified the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles, recent research has shifted toward determining the mechanisms that perpetuate this underrepresentation. Despite this growing recognition of the issue, there is still a lack of effective strategies for promoting Black women's advancement in leadership positions.

Chapter 2 will provide a literature review of previous studies that have explored the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions. The review will highlight Black women's systemic barriers, including discrimination, bias, limited access to professional development opportunities, and the importance of having a diverse educational leadership team to promote equity and social justice. Additionally, the chapter will examine recent studies that have identified the mechanisms that perpetuate underrepresentation and highlight the need for policy changes and cultural shifts to address these barriers.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions is the problem addressed in this research. Though women hold slightly more than half of the principal roles in K-12 schools, Black women hold just over 10% of those positions. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of Black women about the challenges of seeking and obtaining leadership positions. The research question is “What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position?”

The literature review is divided into several main sections to provide a comprehensive literature review. The first part is an introduction that outlines the study question and explains why understanding the perspectives of Black female K-12 school principals is essential. The section on Black women in K-12 leadership provides an overview of the representation of Black women in educational leadership roles, discusses the challenges they experience, and highlights successful examples. The section on Black female K-12 school leaders’ perceptions of intersectionality and its effect on the advancement of Black women into leadership roles. Finally, the conclusion summarizes the reviewed literature and emphasizes the relevance of the review to the research question and the groundwork for the current study on Black female K-12 leadership positions.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature search strategy for this study involved using various academic databases such as ERIC, Education Source, JSTOR, and Google Scholar to identify

relevant scholarly articles, books, and other publications related to the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 school leadership positions and intersectionality. The search terms used in the literature search strategy included *Black women in education leadership*, *K-12 school leadership positions*, and *advancement of Black women in education leadership*. I applied several inclusion and exclusion criteria to refine the search results and ensure that the literature reviewed was relevant and recent. These included a focus on publications published in the last 5 years, seminal literature, articles and books written in English, and studies conducted in the United States. I also examined the reference lists of articles and books deemed relevant to the study to identify additional relevant publications. This method ensured that the literature review was comprehensive and included relevant publications that may have been missed in the initial search. The literature search strategy was designed to identify relevant scholarly publications that would provide a comprehensive understanding of the problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership positions and the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position.

Conceptual Framework/Theoretical Foundation

This study's conceptual framework is based on intersectionality theory, which recognizes the complex and interconnected nature of individuals' social identities and how they shape their experiences of privilege, marginalization, or oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality refers to the concept that multiple social identities, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect and interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). This theory recognizes that

social identities do not exist in isolation, and the experiences of individuals are shaped by the intersections of these identities (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality considers how power relations and hierarchies shape individuals' experiences and opportunities, where some social identities are privileged, and others are marginalized and experience discrimination. Intersectionality recognizes that discrimination and privilege are not just individual-level phenomena but are also embedded in social structures and institutions, such as laws, policies, and cultural norms. Lastly, the intersectionality framework acknowledges that experiences of discrimination and privilege are shaped by historical and contextual factors, such as historical patterns of discrimination, cultural norms, and societal attitudes toward diverse groups. For instance, Black women's experiences of discrimination cannot be understood solely through the lenses of either race or gender; rather, their experiences are shaped by the intersection of both categories (Collins, 1990). Intersectionality theory suggests that individuals' social identities intersect to create unique experiences shaped by various forms of oppression and privilege (Crenshaw, 1991).

Theorists

Intersectionality theory was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her seminal work, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." Patricia Hill Collins (1990) further developed the theory in her book, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, where she

argued that intersectionality provides a framework for understanding the experiences of Black women and the influence of systems of oppression on their lives.

The theory's development and the use of the term intersectionality are attributed to Kimberlé Crenshaw. Crenshaw's writing, which first appeared in the late 1980s and early 1990s, concentrated on the experiences of Black women, specifically how being both Black and a woman led to specific forms of oppression that could not be understood entirely by examining racism and sexism in isolation. In her works, Crenshaw argued that conventional approaches to antidiscrimination legislation and policy concentrated on specific instances of identity-based discrimination, which did not consider the experiences of people who experience multiple, intertwining forms of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw's work made clear the importance of using an intersectional perspective to comprehend and resolve issues of inequality and prejudice.

Patricia Collins, another seminal theorist in the intersectionality field, expanded Crenshaw's work by creating a framework for understanding the connections between and mutually reinforcing the intersecting forms of privilege and oppression. Collins's (1990) work stressed the significance of understanding how various systems of power and oppression interact, influence, and create distinct experiences of privilege and oppression for individuals and groups. Collins asserted that an intersectional analysis was required to comprehend the experiences of marginalized people and groups fully and to create successful strategies for social change.

Kimberlé Crenshaw and Patricia Collins have made important contributions to the development of the intersectionality theory and the recognition of its significance for

comprehending and resolving oppression and inequality. Crenshaw's work concentrated on Black women's experiences and emphasized the need for an intersectional knowledge of oppression and discrimination. Collins expanded on Crenshaw's work by creating a paradigm to comprehend how interlocking power systems influence one another and produce distinctive experiences of privilege and oppression. Overall, the work of Crenshaw and Collins has influenced the field of intersectionality and highlighted the significance of taking an intersectional approach to comprehending and resolving issues of oppression and disparity.

Black women leaders have emphasized how past upheavals and conflicts shaped intersectionality theory. Black women leaders have emphasized the significance of comprehending the historical setting in which intersectionality emerged (Lee & Tapia, 2021). Intersectionality emerged as a concept because of the experiences of Black women, and it is deeply rooted in their history and struggles. Intersectionality theory developed as a reaction to the limitations of mainstream feminism and civil rights activism, and the struggles of Black women and other marginalized groups influenced the movements (Grabe, 2020). Black women leaders have also stressed the significance of comprehending the historical background of systemic racism and oppression. Angela Davis wrote, "We cannot understand the present without understanding the past, and the past is shaped by a history of systemic racism and oppression" (p. x). Black women leaders have used this historical backdrop to inform their conception of intersectionality and to create plans for attaining racial and gender justice.

Elements

A key element in intersectionality is how social identities intersect and interact. Intersectionality includes discussing how race, gender, sexuality, class, ability, and other identities intersect to create unique experiences of oppression and privilege. The idea of intersectionality acknowledges that people have numerous social identities and that these identities interact to produce individual experiences of privilege and oppression. It is important to understand how social identities interact to influence a person's experiences to effectively combat inequality and prejudice (Easterbrook & Hadden, 2020). For instance, discrimination may be experienced differently by a Black woman than by a Black male or a White woman (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Fuller et al., 2019). Or compared to a disabled person who identifies as heterosexual, a disabled person who identifies as LGBTQ+ may face several types of discrimination (Blanck et al., 2021). These identities interact to produce singular experiences that cannot be comprehended entirely. An intersectional strategy is used when people who identify with multiple marginalized groups may experience different types of discrimination and oppression. These experiences cannot be addressed by focusing on each identity in isolation (Crenshaw, 1991; Simon et al., 2021).

Intersectionality also addresses how power functions at the intersections of social identities. Addressing inequality and social justice issues depends on a knowledge of the complexity of how power systems interact and shape an individual's experiences. Intersectionality acknowledges that power and privilege structures do not exist in a vacuum but rather intersect and interact to shape people's and groups' experiences (Misra

et al., 2020). The way power operates at these intersections is another key element in intersectionality. Discussion must include how systems of oppression and privilege are created and maintained and how they influence individuals and groups (Guimaraes Correa, 2020; Simon et al., 2021). The power structures of race, gender, class, and sexuality combine to influence a person's experiences (Misra et al., 2020). These experiences are due to the intersection of these systems, which can lead to unique experiences of oppression and discrimination. For example, women of color experience discrimination distinct from those experienced by White women or males of color (Nadal et al., 2021). Recognizing and addressing problems of inequality and social justice problems requires understanding how power systems function at these intersections (Bharat et al., 2021). A perspective on power that considers intersections of identities acknowledges that diverse groups may exercise their power in many ways and that some people or groups may possess greater power than others (Montoya, 2021).

Social Justice

Intersectionality has been used in social justice movements. Intersectionality can be used as a tool for advocacy, and how it can help better understand and address issues of inequality and oppression (Simon et al., 2021). Intersectionality has been used as a tool for advocacy by highlighting the distinctive experiences of people and groups with numerous marginalized identities (Nadal et al., 2021). For example, the #SayHerName movement arose in reaction to the police killings of Black women. A focus of the #SayHerName movement is using an intersectional approach to draw attention to the experiences of Black women who have been victims of police violence, which is an

example of intersectionality as a tool for advocacy (Joseph, 2022). The #SayHerName movement has aided in increasing awareness of the distinct ways Black women are influenced by police brutality and the criminal justice system by highlighting how race and gender intersect to create unique experiences of oppression.

The LGBTQ+ group has also used intersectionality as a tool for advocacy (Daum, 2020). Intersectionality considers the possibility that people who identify as LGBTQ+ also have other marginalized identities, such as racial or socioeconomic status. The intersecting identities may influence how they are treated unfairly and oppressed. Advocates for LGBTQ+ rights can better understand and address the specific forms of discrimination and violence that people with multiple marginalized identities may experience by focusing on how these identities overlap and produce distinctive experiences (Troshynski & Bejinariu, 2021). Intersectionality can be used as a tool for advocacy and to better understand and resolve inequality and oppression by highlighting the distinctive experiences of people and groups with multiple marginalized identities.

Frameworks

Intersectionality is often used as a research framework to recognize the complexity of human experiences and how various social identities intersect and interact (Bauer et al., 2021; Etherington et al., 2020). An intersectional approach stresses the importance of considering how various social identities intersect and interact with one another and how this affects the experiences of people and groups in research design and methods (Bharat et al., 2021). A multifaceted data collection and analysis strategy that

acknowledges the significance of how social identities intersect is necessary (C. Thomas et al., 2021).

An intersectional research methodology has been used in several important works. For instance, Collins (1990) examined the experiences of low-income African American women residing in urban areas using an intersectional approach. Collins examined how the intersection of race, gender, and class affected women's experiences of poverty, prejudice, and health care access. Quinn (2022) similarly examined the experiences of Black men who have sex with men using an intersectional approach, investigating how men's experiences of prejudice and marginalization within the Black community and the LGBTQ+ community were influenced by the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. By taking an intersectional approach to studying design and methodology, it is possible to better understand how various social identities intersect and interact with one another and how this affects the experiences of individuals and groups. This paradigm's practical applications in research can also be shown by highlighting noteworthy studies that have adopted an intersectional strategy.

Intersectionality as a framework is relevant to the current study in several ways. First, the research question explicitly focuses on the experiences of Black women who hold leadership positions in K-12 schools: What are the perspectives of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position? The intersection of race and gender identities shapes their perceptions in unique ways that may differ from those of Black men, White women, or other racial/ethnic groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality suggests that it is not enough to simply examine the

experiences of Black women as a monolithic group and that it is important to consider the ways in which other social identities, such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or disability status, may intersect with race and gender to shape experiences of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, a Black woman principal who is also a lesbian may face different challenges and barriers than a Black woman principal who is straight. Finally, an intersectional perspective suggests that the perceptions of Black women K-12 leaders cannot be fully understood without considering the broader societal and institutional contexts in which they operate (Crenshaw, 1991). This includes examining the historical and ongoing marginalization of Black women in leadership positions, as well as the ways in which racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression intersect and operate in educational settings.

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

This literature review will provide an overview of previous research on the representation of Black women in educational leadership roles, the concept of intersectionality, and previous research methods in the section titled Black Women in Leadership in a Historical Context. Additional focus of the literature review concerns sections regarding Black Women in Leadership Identities, Black Women in Leadership Experiences, and Black Women in Leadership and Philosophical Approaches. The resources reviewed will also identify gaps in earlier research and lay the groundwork for the current study.

Black Women in Leadership in a Historical Context

Black women have a long history of battling for their rights and inclusion in positions of power in the United States. Black women have been a critical force in the fight for social justice and equity throughout history, from the suffrage campaign to the civil rights movement (Overstreet et al., 2020). Despite their accomplishments, Black women have frequently been disregarded and underrepresented in leadership roles (Motro et al., 2022). Black women leaders continue to experience a variety of forms of bias and discrimination, which has shaped their present experiences considering their history of exclusion and marginalization considering their history of exclusion and marginalization (Nadal et al., 2021).

The fight for equal representation and inclusion of Black women in positions of power has been a longstanding battle throughout American history. Black women have played significant roles in social justice movements, often serving as key organizers and activists (D. Thomas, 2019). For example, in the suffrage campaign, Black women such as Ida B. Wells and Mary Church Terrell fought for both women's rights and racial equality. In the civil rights movement, Black women such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Ella Baker played crucial roles in organizing and leading protests and advocating for change (Roumell & James-Gallaway, 2021).

Despite these contributions, Black women have historically been overlooked and underrepresented in leadership positions (Sales et al., 2019). This lack of representation has persisted into the present day, as evidenced by the small number of Black women in positions of power in various fields. For example, Black women make up only 2% of

Fortune 500 CEOs, and a similarly small percentage of elected officials (Fairfax, 2019). Even after achieving leadership roles, they often encounter difficulties and biases caused by their intersectional identities (Sales et al., 2019).

Black women leaders face numerous challenges that are shaped by their history of exclusion and marginalization (Page et al., 2022). They may experience gender and racial biases that are compounded, leading to double discrimination (Chaney et al., 2021). They may also encounter challenges related to socioeconomic status, as Black women are more likely to live in poverty than other groups (Sales et al., 2019). They may be perceived as not fitting in with the dominant culture of their organizations, leading to isolation and a lack of support. A study of Black women executives found that they often felt like outsiders in their workplaces and had to navigate complex social dynamics in order to be effective leaders (Erskine et al., 2021). These obstacles can impact their ability to access resources, gain promotions, and navigate their careers.

One of the main challenges facing Black women leaders is a lack of representation in leadership positions (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020). Studies have shown that Black women are underrepresented in leadership roles across various industries, including politics, academia, and business (Alfred et al., 2019; Chance, 2022). This lack of representation can limit their opportunities for advancement and limit their ability to influence decision-making processes.

Black women leaders also face restricted access to resources, including funding, mentorship, and networking opportunities (Chance, 2022). Black women entrepreneurs, for example, face greater barriers in accessing capital and financial support than their

White male counterparts (Shelton & Lugo, 2021). This limited access to resources can make it difficult for Black women leaders to build and sustain successful organizations and initiatives.

Implicit bias in hiring and promotion processes can create additional obstacles for Black women leaders (Tevis et al., 2020). Hiring managers often hold implicit biases that can lead them to overlook qualified Black women candidates in favor of less qualified White male candidates (Williams et al., 2020). This can limit Black women's access to leadership positions and contribute to the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles.

Black women leaders' recent experiences have been influenced by their past encounters with bias and discrimination. Despite recent advancements, Black women leaders continue to encounter several difficulties and obstacles, such as a dearth of representation, restricted access to resources, and implicit bias in hiring and promotion (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Scholars and practitioners can work to create more equitable and inclusive leadership opportunities for Black women in various leadership positions by acknowledging the history of exclusion and marginalization that Black women have experienced in leadership roles.

Black Women in Leadership Identities

Race is frequently a critical identity that shapes the experiences of Black women leaders, and it produces distinctive experiences of oppression and privilege (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). According to Black women leaders, understanding the role of race in diversity and how it affects their experiences as leaders is important (Curtis, 2017). Black

women leaders experience difficulties because of their racial identities. Black women leaders in higher education experienced racial microaggressions, such as being misidentified as administrative or support staff or thought to be less capable than their White peers (King et al., 2022; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). These experiences can limit Black women's opportunities for advancement and add to feelings of exclusion and marginalization.

Despite these obstacles, Black women leaders have drawn fortitude and resiliency from their racial identities. Black women leaders stressed the value of creating supportive networks of other Black women leaders who shared their experiences and viewpoints (Cyr et al., 2021; Sales et al., 2019). Through these networks, Black women can support one another and speak out against institutionalized prejudice and oppression in their workplaces.

It is crucial to understand how race interacts with Black women's identities influence their leadership experiences. Black women leaders encounter obstacles because of their racial identities, such as marginalization, intersectional discrimination, and microaggressions. They have also challenged systemic racism and oppression by creating networks of other Black women leaders who can support them and draw power from their racial identities.

Gender is a key identity that shapes Black women's experiences in leadership. Gender interacts with other social identities to produce experiences of oppression and privilege (Etherington et al., 2020). Understanding gender's role and how it affects their experiences as leaders is essential, according to Black women leaders. Black women

leaders experience difficulties because of their gender identities. Black women leaders in organizations with a majority of White employees frequently experience pressure to adhere to White, male leadership standards (Glass & Cook, 2020). Their sense of dissonance between their racial and gender identities and leadership styles may result from this pressure, negatively influencing their effectiveness as leaders.

Despite these obstacles, Black women leaders have found inspiration and fortitude in their gender identities. These characteristics result from their dedication to advancing social justice and equality and their experiences as Black women (Sales et al., 2019). American Black women leaders frequently use collaborative, empathic, and emotionally intelligent leadership philosophies, which can increase their effectiveness as managers.

Black women's gender identities shape their leadership experiences. Black women leaders face difficulties because of their gender identities, such as pressure to follow White male leadership standards and bias and discrimination based on gender. They have adopted leadership styles prioritizing collaboration, empathy, and emotional intelligence while advocating for equality and social justice. However, they have also used their gender identities as sources of strength and innovation.

Black Women in Leadership Experiences

Recognizing how race, gender, and other social identities intersect to influence Black women's experiences in leadership roles is essential to understanding Black women's perspectives. Black women leaders encounter various difficulties because of their identities. Black women in leadership roles in education frequently experience

multiple forms of marginalization and oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism (Nadal et al., 2021). These situations can exacerbate feelings of self-doubt, imposter syndrome, fatigue, loneliness, and exhaustion.

Because of the intersection of their identities and organizational contexts, Black women leaders frequently encounter barriers. Black women leaders often believe they must manage the “double bind” of being both Black and female, which can restrict their opportunities for influence and advancement (Trzebiatowski et al., 2022). Organizational cultures that favor masculine leadership standards and undervalue feminine leadership styles frequently worsen this dilemma.

Despite these barriers, Black women leaders have found courage and creativity in their intersectional identities. Black women leaders in the United States frequently take a “hidden figures” approach to leadership, utilizing their exceptional views and experiences to foster innovation and change within their organizations (J. F. Davis, 2021). This strategy results from their dedication to advancing social justice and equality and their proficiency in navigating intricate networks and systems.

Black women leaders encounter experiences and difficulties which must be acknowledged and addressed. The intersection of their identities and organizational settings, as well as numerous forms of oppression and marginalization, are challenges faced by Black women leaders (Saunders et al., 2021). They have adopted leadership styles prioritizing collaboration, empathy, and social justice, though they have also used their distinctive views and experiences to spur change within their organizations

(Lomotey, 2019). They have embraced their intersectional identities as sources of strength and innovation.

Black women leaders may hold varying degrees of power. In this context, the capacity to influence or control others and make choices that affect their lives is called power (Lomotey, 2019). Due to the intersection of their identities, Black women leaders may experience difficulties in gaining and using power (Wheaton & Kezar, 2021). For instance, they might experience both sexism and racism at work, which can restrict their chances for growth and erode their authority once they are in positions of leadership. Additionally, stereotypes and biases may be applied to Black women leaders, undermining their authority and trustworthiness (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). For instance, when establishing authority, they might be perceived as “too emotional” or “too aggressive.” In contrast, White male leaders displaying the same behaviors might be perceived as self-assured and assertive.

Black women face obstacles and difficulties when accessing leadership roles and succeeding because of their intersectional identities (Chance, 2022). The historical and continuing discrimination against Black women and their intersectional identities is the root of these obstacles. The “double bind” that Black women frequently experience is one of the main obstacles to their ability to hold leadership positions (Bettini et al., 2022; Trzebiatowski et al., 2022). The stereotypical expectations of Blackness and traditional gender roles are both anticipated by Black women. The challenge for Black women to be recognized as capable and successful leaders because of these frequently conflicting expectations remains. In addition, microaggressions and other forms of discrimination

against Black women are frequent, leading to hostile work situations and preventing them from advancing in their careers (Carter et al., 2022).

The absence of participation and support within leadership structures is another obstacle to Black women's access to leadership positions (Sales et al., 2019). Black women are frequently underrepresented in leadership positions, which can restrict their access to chances for mentoring and sponsorship (Chance, 2022). Furthermore, Black women may experience a culture of exclusion, and preexisting biases and stereotypes may be reinforced by the absence of diversity in leadership structures (Bernstein et al., 2020).

The social norms that restrict Black women's chances for success must be challenged, and Black women must be given the authority to assert their leadership (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). The structural obstacles that prohibit Black women from accessing leadership opportunities, such as discrimination in hiring and promotion procedures, a lack of diversity in leadership structures, and insufficient support systems for vulnerable workers, must also be addressed by institutions (Kyere & Fukui, 2022). A concerted effort from people and institutions is needed to remove these obstacles and difficulties. Developing more inclusive and equitable workplaces requires a knowledge of the effects of intersectionality on the leadership chances and success of Black women. We can work toward a more just and equitable society where everyone can thrive by acknowledging and addressing the barriers and difficulties that Black women experience.

Black Women in Leadership and Philosophical Approaches

Several key concepts, including Black feminist thought, which recognizes the unique experiences of Black women and their perspectives on issues of gender, race, and social inequality. Critical race theory also examines how systemic barriers perpetuate social inequality for Black women in education leadership positions. Social identity theory provides a lens through which to analyze how Black women K-12 school leaders navigate their intersecting identities in the workplace and how their identities influence their perceptions of the advancement of Black women into K-12 leadership positions.

The focus of standpoint theory is overcoming oppression. It recognizes that a person's place and experience in life affect their ability to learn. Standpoint theory also encourages and helps people tell stories and reflect on their lives. Standpoint theory emphasizes the significance of considering the perspectives of disadvantaged groups to understand social phenomena. According to the standpoint theory, marginalized people and groups have distinctive viewpoints on social, cultural, and political problems. According to Patricia Hill Collins, "outsider within" perspectives can offer essential insights into how oppression and control are exercised (Collins, 1990). Black women leaders have claimed that because of their experiences as Black women, they have a unique vantage point from which to examine how race and gender intersect. Black women's experiences with race and gender are integrative rather than additive, as Kimberlé Crenshaw points out, and cannot be fully comprehended within the confines of either category alone (Crenshaw, 1991).

Understanding Black women leaders' perspectives has benefited from applying critical race theory. This framework focuses on how racism and racial inequality interact with other forms of oppression and how they are ingrained in institutions and societal structures (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). To understand how Black women leaders' experiences of racism and discrimination are shaped by their intersectional identities, scholars have applied this paradigm to the experiences of Black women leaders (Lomotey, 2019). Doharty's (2020) study uses epistemologies like Critical Race Theory (CRT) because it helps show how racism and social disadvantage affect certain groups.

CRT was developed in the 1970s and 1980s to investigate how race interacts with oppressive and power structures (Crenshaw, 1989). "CRT seeks to expose how race intersects with other forms of subordination, such as gender, class, sexuality, and able-bodiedness, to create unique experiences of marginalization and oppression," writes Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991). Black women leaders have led the development and application of CRT to comprehend the intersections of race, gender, and other social categories.

The notion of intersectionality, which acknowledges how various oppressions intersect and interact to produce distinct feelings of marginalization, is one of the fundamental ideas of CRT. According to A. Y. Davis (1983), there is no hierarchy of oppressions because they are all interrelated and reliant on one another. Black women's leaders have contended that CRT needs to put Black women's experiences and those of other marginalized people at the center.

Black women's leaders have used CRT to create plans for attaining racial and gender justice and to criticize legal systems that uphold systemic racism. In addition, Black women's leaders have emphasized the significance of comprehending how the law and legal structures support systemic racism and oppression. Social norms and values mold the law and are deeply ingrained in a history of racial and gender subordination, as Mari Matsuda observes, and does not exist in a vacuum (Matsuda, 1995).

Intersectionality as a theoretical paradigm has been important for understanding the experiences of Black women leaders (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). Scholars have highlighted the significance of understanding how individuals' identities are complex and intersectional and how this affects how they experience leadership and power (Johnson & Fournillier, 2021). Understanding how Black women leaders deal with the intersections of race, gender, class, and other factors in their leadership positions has received critical scholarly attention (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Fuller et al., 2019). Black feminist thought is a theoretical framework based on the seminal works of Patricia Collins and Gloria Watkins that centers on the experiences and perspectives of Black women in understanding systems of oppression (Collins, 1990; Watkins, 1981). This theory acknowledges the unique experiences of Black women and recognizes the intersectionality of their identities as race, gender, and class (Collins, 1990). It also emphasizes the importance of agency and resistance in challenging systems of oppression (Watkins, 1981).

Patricia Hill Collins' (1990) book, "Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment," is a seminal work on developing

Black feminist thought. In this book, Collins argues that Black feminist thought provides a framework for understanding the experiences of Black women and the influence of systems of oppression on their lives. She also emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding the complexity of Black women's experiences. Similarly, Watkins (1981) book, "Ain't I a Woman?: Black Women and Feminism," also emphasizes the importance of centering the experiences of Black women in feminist discourse and highlights how systems of oppression intersect to influence the lives of Black women.

CRT is a framework that examines the intersection of race and law in the United States and how legal systems perpetuate racial inequality (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). This theory, based on the seminal works of Delgado, Stefancic, and Crenshaw, posits that racism is not just an individual act but is a systemic issue embedded in legal and social structures. It also recognizes that the experiences of individuals are shaped by their social identities and the historical context in which they live (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Delgado and Stefancic's (2001) book, "Critical Race Theory: An Introduction," is a seminal work in developing CRT. In this book, they argue that CRT provides a framework for understanding how race intersects with law and how legal systems perpetuate racial inequality. They also emphasize the importance of understanding the historical context of racism in the United States to address systemic issues. Similarly, Crenshaw et al.'s book, "Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings That Formed the Movement" (1995) highlights the importance of examining the intersectionality of social

identities, particularly race, and gender, in understanding the experiences of individuals and the influence of systemic racism.

Social identity theory is a framework that examines how individuals define themselves based on their membership in social groups and how these identities shape their attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors (Hogg & Abrams, 1988; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This theory suggests that individuals need to belong and that social identities provide a sense of belonging and self-esteem (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Social identity theory also recognizes that social identities can be a source of prejudice and discrimination when individuals view their group as superior to others (Hogg & Abrams, 1988).

Tajfel and Turner's (1979) article, "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict," is a seminal work in developing social identity theory. In this article, they propose that individuals form social identities based on their membership in social groups and that these identities shape their attitudes and behaviors toward members of other groups. They also suggest that individuals need to belong and that social identities provide a sense of belonging and self-esteem. Similarly, Hogg and Abrams's (1988) seminal book, "Social Identifications: A Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations and Group Processes," expands on social identity theory and explores how social identities shape intergroup relations and attitudes toward other groups.

The importance of understanding how different identities intersect and interact with one another to create distinct experiences and challenges for those who hold these identities has been emphasized by scholars as opposed to simply focusing on the additive effects of multiple identities (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989). The significance of

intersectionality for understanding Black women's experiences in various settings, including politics, education, healthcare, and the workplace, has been highlighted in recent literature (Yamaguchi & Burge, 2019). Focusing solely on race or gender is insufficient to capture Black women's experiences fully, and scholars have stressed the need for more intersectional approaches to research and policy (Haynes et al., 2020; Yamaguchi & Burge, 2019). Black women leaders experience intersectionality differently from other groups due to their race and gender identities (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). The intersection of race and gender for Black women creates unique experiences that differ from other groups (Crenshaw, 1991). Black women leaders must navigate the intersectionality of race and gender while also dealing with the demands of their position. Black women leaders reported that their intersectional identities positively and negatively affected their careers (Chance, 2022; Hypolite, 2020).

Black women leaders in Hypolite's (2020) study reported that their intersectional identities helped them to build connections and relationships with their colleagues and staff. The leaders stated they could relate to their colleagues and staff personally because of their shared experiences. Black women leaders also reported that their intersectional identities helped them to understand and address issues of diversity and equity within their organizations. While Black women leaders in Hypolite's (2020) study reported some positive effects of their intersectional identities, they also reported negative effects. The leaders noted that they often experienced discrimination and bias from their colleagues and superiors. Some leaders said they had to work harder than their

counterparts to be taken seriously and earn respect. The participants also reported feeling isolated and unsupported within their organizations.

Black women challenge racial, gendered, class-based, and other power systems (Banks, 2020). Scholars have emphasized the significance of putting Black women's experiences and perspectives prominently in social justice organizations, emphasizing intersectionality as a tool for empowerment and resistance (Simon et al., 2021).

Understanding the perspectives of Black women leaders has benefited from theoretical models that emphasize intersectionality. Scholars have stressed the significance of numerous theoretical ideas over the past five years, including standpoint theory, CRT, and intersectionality itself. Hall (2020) emphasizes the value of putting Black women leaders' perspectives at the center of study and policy; scholars have applied this framework to the experiences of Black women leaders (Lomotey, 2019).

Intersectionality theory acknowledges how various oppressions engage and intersect to produce distinctive experiences of marginalization and oppression. According to Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality holds that different grounds for identification combine to create different experiences of privilege and oppression (Crenshaw, 1991). To understand the intersections of race, gender, and other social identities, Black women leaders have been at the forefront of creating and applying intersectionality theory. Recognizing the intersections and interactions between various oppressions is one of the intersectionality theory's major accomplishments. There is no order of oppression (Lorde, 2020). Black women's leaders have stressed the significance of putting Black women's experiences and those of other marginalized people at the center of discussions.

Mainstream feminism has frequently come under fire for failing to consider the unique experiences of women of color (Watkins, 1981). Black women activists have also used the intersectionality theory to criticize mainstream feminism for failing to address the experiences of women of color. Black women's leaders have contended that intersectionality offers a framework for comprehending how race and gender interact to produce distinct experiences of marginalization and oppression. Recent literature has emphasized the significance of intersectionality-centered theoretical frameworks for understanding the experiences of Black women leaders. The specific challenges and opportunities that Black women in leadership positions face require knowledge of standpoint theory, CRT, and intersectionality itself.

Summary

In conclusion, this literature review investigated the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 school leadership positions and laid the groundwork for the current research on the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. The review was divided into several sections, including an introduction that outlined the research question and explained why knowing the perspectives of Black female K-12 school leaders is important. The Black Women in Leadership in a historical context section presented the history of Black women in leadership battling for their rights and inclusion in positions of power in the United States. The section on Black Women in Leadership Identities described and explained how race and gender shape the leadership experiences of Black women in leadership positions. The section on Black Women in Leadership Experiences gave an overview of

Black women's representation in leadership positions, discussing their challenges and highlighting successful examples. Overall, this literature review thoroughly examined previous research on the underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 school leadership positions, highlighting gaps in previous research and stressing the review's relevance to the research question.

In the methodology chapter, I will explain the research methodologies used in this study. This chapter covers the sampling approach, data collection techniques, data analysis processes, and ethical considerations in interviews with Black female K-12 school principals. The plan for answering the research question that asks: What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position? The chapter will serve as a road map for the study, showing how the research will be conducted and how the data will be analyzed.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Chapter 3 of this qualitative study outlines the research method used to explore the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions. The Research Design and Rationale section will provide an overview of the basic qualitative research design employed in this study to answer the research question and why it was chosen. The Role of the Researcher section will discuss my positionality, potential biases, and how I navigated my role as a researcher. The Methodology section will outline the systematic approach used for data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection section will describe how the participants were selected and recruited for the study, the criteria used for participation, and the data collection methods. The Instrumentation section will describe the self-designed, semistructured interview protocol used to collect data in this study. The Data Analysis Plan section will describe the thematic analysis technique used to analyze the data. Finally, the Ethical Procedures section will outline how the treatment of human participants in this study followed the ethical guidelines set by the Walden University IRB.

Research Design and Rationale

The research question was designed to understand the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position. The research tradition is qualitative research, suitable for investigating complex social phenomena such as intersectionality, which was the framework of the study. A basic qualitative research design also emphasizes the

subjective interpretations of participants and focuses on understanding the phenomena under study without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses (Burkholder et al., 2019). Interviews and observations allow for an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives, which helped cast light on the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Role of the Researcher

As an observer in this research, I collected data by observing and recording the participants' behaviors, interactions, and experiences. Observing their answers to interview questions, as well as their nonverbal behaviors and reactions, was part of this (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). I took detailed notes on what I noticed, being careful to stay objective and not interpret or impose my biases on the data.

Conducting research within the participants' work environment, which could create conflicts of interest or power differentials, is one of the ethical issues that may emerge in this study. I have no personal or professional relationships with the participants in this research as a White female 6th-grade math instructor. There are no supervisory or instructor relationships in which the participants wield authority. However, it is essential to recognize that as a researcher, I may have biases or assumptions that influence how I interpret the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). A bias that I hold is that though I am a White woman, I have an excellent working relationship with Black women leaders. To counteract these biases, I participated in reflexivity and critical self-reflection throughout

the study process, keeping my positionality in mind and how it may influence my observations and interpretations.

I followed all ethical guidelines and standards established by my institution and relevant regulatory bodies, including obtaining IRB approval before conducting the study. All participants provided informed consent and had the option to refuse involvement without repercussions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Regarding incentives, I offered participants a small gift card as a token of gratitude for their time and involvement; however, I ensured that the incentives did not unduly influence or bias participants' decisions to engage in the study (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). In addition, I took measures to safeguard the confidentiality and anonymity of participants by removing any identifying information from the data and ensuring that the data is securely stored.

Methodology

The systematic approach that was used for this study is qualitative, with a basic qualitative design. The qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because it allowed for an in-depth exploration and understanding of the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. Qualitative research is appropriate for understanding complex and socially constructed phenomena (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), which aligns with the complex social issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion in K-12 education leadership. The focus is on understanding the phenomena under study without manipulating variables or testing hypotheses (Merriam, 2009). The qualitative research approach and basic qualitative

research design were selected for this study based on their alignment with the problem, purpose, and research questions, as well as their ability to provide a nuanced understanding of the perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. The open-ended research question allowed participants to share their experiences and perspectives, which can be effectively captured through qualitative research methods (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Furthermore, qualitative research is valuable for exploring power and inequality issues, including race and gender (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009).

Participant Selection

This study's population were all the Black women K-12 school leaders in the United States. The sample was 10 Black women principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and superintendents from public schools in the United States. Purposive sampling, or criterion sampling, was used to select participants based on specific criteria relevant to the study question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The criteria for participant selection in this research is that participants must identify as Black women and have experience as K-12 school leaders in the United States.

Purposive sampling is justifiable for this study for several reasons. The population for the study is very specific and targeted. It only comprises Black women principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and superintendents from public schools in the United States. Given this specificity, purposive sampling is an appropriate method for selecting participants who meet the inclusion criteria (Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021). By selecting participants who meet the specific criteria, the researcher can

ensure that the sample is diverse enough to capture a range of experiences and perspectives, while also being homogeneous enough to allow for meaningful comparisons and analysis (Burkholder et al., 2019). The use of purposive sampling helped ensure that the findings are representative of the experiences of Black women school leaders in the United States. Purposive sampling also helps to maximize the efficiency of the research process by selecting participants who are most likely to provide the information needed to answer the research question (Ravitch & Carl, 2021).

Participants were chosen by employing multiple strategies. Recruitment strategies included leveraging professional networks including the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, and sororities like Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., collaborating with school districts and education organizations, and advertising the study on relevant online platforms such as LinkedIn. I also used convenience sampling by obtaining email addresses from public school and district websites in order to recruit participants. Snowball sampling was also used, in which participants are asked to suggest other prospective participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Reaching out to professional networks and groups representing Black women K-12 school leaders, snowball sampling was used to identify, contact, and recruit participants. Participants were contacted by phone or email and invited to participate in the research. They were given an information sheet outlining the purpose, involvement, and rights as participants in the study. Participants were offered the chance to ask questions before deciding whether to participate.

Instrumentation

This study's data collection instrument was a self-designed, semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix). Ten Black women K-12 school leaders in the United States will be interviewed. The interview questions were developed to investigate participants' perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. The interview protocol began with me introducing myself to the participants and the purpose of the study. I provided the informed consent, and the participant was notified that they may exit the study at any point without consequence. I asked the participants if they had any questions before beginning the interview. The interview began after the participants consented to the interview. To build rapport with the participants, I began with basic questions such as their name, their educational leadership role, details about the school that they work at, and the number of years that they have worked in educational leadership. Rapport building allowed the participant to feel comfortable answering the interview questions openly and honestly. A series of open-ended questions were posed to elicit rich and detailed responses, explore the complex topic, and reduce researcher bias. To conclude the interview, the participant was thanked for their participation. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim.

Interview Questions

The first interview question is: What is your experience as a Black woman seeking a K-12 leadership position? This question directly addresses the study topic by collecting firsthand stories of the experiences of Black women seeking positions of

educational leadership. I acquired valuable insights into the challenges and limitations that Black women encounter when seeking leadership roles in education by asking them about their personal experiences.

The second interview question is: What are the biggest challenges that Black women face in trying to obtain K-12 leadership positions? This question aids in identifying the specific challenges that Black women face when seeking roles in educational leadership. By identifying the most significant barriers, I gained a better understanding of the systemic issues that impede Black women from advancing to positions of leadership and establish plans to solve these issues.

The third interview question is: Have you faced any specific barriers or obstacles when seeking a K-12 leadership position? If so, can you expand on what they were? This question expands on the preceding one by requesting specific instances of obstacles that Black women experience. This data can be utilized to create focused initiatives to address these specific obstacles and increase the number of Black women in positions of leadership in education.

The fourth interview question is: Do you think your race and gender have affected your advancement to a leadership position? By investigating the relationship between race, gender, and access to leadership roles, this question directly answers the research issue. I gained insight into the ways in which institutional biases hinder the advancement of Black women in education by inquiring about the interviewee's personal experiences.

The fifth interview question is: Have you encountered bias or prejudice during your efforts to obtain a K-12 leadership position? If so, can you describe the context of

the situation? This question aids in identifying the precise ways in which bias and prejudice influence the employment paths of Black women. Understanding the setting in which bias and prejudice arise allows the interviewer to understand the perceptions of the biases and prejudices that the participants may have experienced.

The sixth interview question is: How do you think your experiences as a Black woman seeking a K-12 leadership position have influenced the trajectory of your career? This question directly answers the research topic by investigating the long-term consequences of the obstacles that Black women encounter while seeking positions of leadership in education. Understanding how these difficulties affect career trajectories allows for the development of solutions to address these issues and address the problem of the underrepresentation of Black women in education.

The seventh interview question is: In your experience, have you noticed any differences in how Black women in K-12 leadership positions are treated compared to non-Black or non-woman peers? This question aids in identifying the ways in which systemic biases influence the experiences of Black women in positions of leadership. Understanding the variations in treatment allows interventions to be developed to address these concerns and improve the educational experiences of Black women.

The eighth interview question is: How do you think the current political and social climate affects Black women seeking K-12 leadership positions? This question contributes to a better understanding of the broader social and political context in which Black women seek positions of leadership in education. Understanding the influence of

these factors allows for the development of solutions to address these difficulties and assist the advancement of Black women in education.

The ninth interview question is: Do you, or have you ever, experienced imposter syndrome when seeking a K-12 leadership position? If so, how did you overcome it? This inquiry aids in determining the personal experiences of Black women seeking leadership positions, as well as the psychological consequences of these encounters. Understanding how imposter syndrome affects Black women allows solutions to be designed to address these challenges and improve Black women's educational experiences.

The tenth interview is: Do you think diversity and inclusion initiatives have affected Black women's ability to obtain a K-12 leadership position? This question aids in understanding the interviewee's perception of the efficacy of present practices. The final interview question about the most significant change that needs to happen to ensure equal opportunity for Black women is important in identifying potential solutions to the issues identified in the previous questions.

Interview questions correlate with the conceptual framework of intersectionality. The interview questions were used to specifically address domains of intersectionality, specifically of how the intersection of race and gender identities shapes the perceptions of Black women leaders as well as that their perceptions cannot be fully understood without considering the broader societal and institutional contexts in which they operate. In the semi-structured interviews, the questions aim to gather information about the perceptions of Black women who are in K-12 leadership positions. By asking about specific barriers or obstacles, bias and prejudice encountered, and the impact of race and gender on

advancement, the questions help to explore the challenges that Black women encounter when seeking leadership positions.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

This study's recruitment methods include contacting potential participants via email, advertising on relevant social media platforms such as LinkedIn, leveraging professional networks including the National Coalition of 100 Black Women, and sororities like Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., and collaborating with school districts and education organizations. I will also use convenience sampling by obtaining email addresses from public school and district websites in order to recruit participants. Additionally, I can offer incentives to encourage participation and assure confidentiality and privacy protections for the participants.

I will use a combination of snowball sampling and purposive sampling methods to find potential participants. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who meet the study criteria of being a Black woman K-12 leader in the United States. In contrast, snowball sampling involves asking participants to recommend other individuals interested in participating in the study (Burkholder et al., 2019). Potential participants will receive an email invitation with a brief explanation of the research, participation requirements, and an attached consent form.

Before starting the research, participants will be asked to provide verbal informed consent. The informed consent form will describe the purpose, participation procedures, risks and benefits, and the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. The

participants will have the chance to ask questions about the study and the informed consent form before agreeing to participate in the study (Burkholder et al., 2019).

Data Analysis Plan

Thematic analysis is a versatile technique for finding and analyzing patterns in qualitative data. (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). This analysis finds patterns in the data pertinent to the research questions. Thematic analysis will be used to evaluate the data gathered through the semi-structured interviews.

The interviews will be transcribed verbatim as the first stage of the analysis (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Member checking will occur by asking the participants to review the transcripts for accuracy. A summary of the interview transcript will be sent to each participant to guarantee accuracy and validity to establish credibility. The dissertation committee and other experts in the area will be sought for peer review. The transcripts will be read and reread several times to determine preliminary codes and refined over time through analysis. These codes will be clustered into categories and labeled (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). The analysis process will be descriptive, with codes, categories, and themes reviewed and revised. Finally, themes will be derived from the codes and categories to portray overarching concepts.

In qualitative research, codes are words or short phrases that capture the essence of the data and help to organize it into meaningful units (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). In this study, the verbatim transcripts of the interviews will be analyzed to identify codes that represent the main ideas and themes emerging from the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The initial codes will be identified through a process of repeated readings of the

transcripts and will be refined over time as more data is collected and analyzed. The codes will be used to identify categories and themes in the data, which will be used to develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of Black female educators pursuing K-12 principal jobs (Burkholder et al., 2019; Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldaña, 2021).

Categories are broader groupings of codes that represent common themes or ideas in the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). In this study, the codes identified through the analysis process will be grouped into categories that reflect the key themes emerging from the data (Burkholder et al., 2019). These categories will be reviewed and revised over time as more data is collected and analyzed (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The categories will be used to organize the data and provide a framework for developing the themes that will be used to portray the overarching concepts.

Themes are overarching concepts that emerge from the categories and codes identified through the analysis process (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). In this study, the themes will represent the insights and findings that emerge from the data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The themes will be developed through an iterative process of reviewing and refining the categories and codes identified in the data (Burkholder et al., 2019; Saldaña, 2021). The themes will be used to provide a deeper understanding of how intersecting identities shape the experiences of Black female educators pursuing K-12 principal jobs, and to develop new insights that contribute to the broader literature on race, gender, and education. The thematic analysis process of codes, categories, and themes allows for a rigorous and systematic approach to data analysis that provides a rich and nuanced understanding of the research phenomenon.

The analysis will be conducted manually, with no data management tools used. Disputed cases will be presented as discrepant cases. The decision to conduct the analysis manually, without using data management tools, was made to ensure a more detailed and nuanced data analysis (Saldaña, 2021). While data management tools can be useful in handling large amounts of data, they can also lead to oversimplification and a loss of important contextual information (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). By analyzing the data manually, the researchers can engage more deeply with the data and identify subtle nuances and patterns that might otherwise be missed.

In the event of any discrepant cases, the researchers will present these as descriptive cases, providing detailed information on the context and circumstances surrounding the case (Saldaña, 2021). This approach allows for transparency in the analysis process and ensures that all aspects of the data are fully considered. By presenting these cases in a descriptive manner, the researchers can also invite further discussion and debate around the interpretation of the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The manual analysis approach with the use of descriptive cases reflects a rigorous and thoughtful approach to data analysis that prioritizes the richness and complexity of the data, while also ensuring transparency and openness in the analysis process.

The data analysis strategy for this research will use a thematic analysis approach to find and analyze patterns in the raw data. The analysis will be conducted manually, with no software used, and any discrepancies will be presented. The data's coding will be related to the research question and the analysis will be descriptive, with codes, categories, and themes reviewed and refined throughout the process.

Trustworthiness

The qualitative research approach and basic qualitative research design were chosen for this study based on their alignment with the problem, purpose, and research questions, as well as their ability to provide a nuanced understanding the Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. The interviews will be guided by a self-designed interview protocol based on current literature and research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The dissertation committee will evaluate the protocol for content validity.

A thick description will provide a detailed and contextualized account of the research method and findings to establish transferability (Saldaña, 2021). Variations in participant selection guarantee that the findings are applicable to the targeted setting and population. An audit record will be kept throughout the research process to document all decisions, procedures, and changes to establish dependability (Saldaña, 2021).

Dependability will be established through member checking. Member checking guarantees the data's consistency and accuracy (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Confirmability will be established through reflexivity. The researcher will employ reflexivity to recognize and address any biases or preconceptions that may influence the research process and results to establish confirmability (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldaña, 2021).

Because I will be the sole coder, intra- and intercoder reliability will not be applicable in this research. I will, however, perform a pilot test with a small sample of participants to refine the coding categories and ensure consistency in the code application to ensure the coding process's reliability. I will also perform ongoing reflexivity

throughout the coding process to identify and address any potential biases or interpretations that may impact the analysis.

Ethical Procedures

The treatment of human participants in this study will follow the ethical guidelines set by Walden University's IRB. Prior to beginning the study, IRB approval will be requested. IRB approvals will be obtained by submitting the proposal. Informed consent forms will be distributed to participants, outlining the research goal, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Walden University, 2023). Before collecting data, the researcher will acquire written permission from each participant. Participants will also be informed that they can withdraw from the study at any moment without penalty (Saldaña, 2021).

Ethical concerns about recruitment materials and processes will be addressed by ensuring that all recruitment materials accurately and honestly reflect the purpose and nature of the study (Rubin & Rubin, 2012; Saldaña, 2021). The researcher will not use deceptive or coercive language or methods to recruit participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The recruitment procedure will be done in a way that protects potential participants' privacy and autonomy.

Ethical concerns about data gathering will be addressed by ensuring the privacy and confidentiality of participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). All information gathered will be confidential and secure (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Interview audio recordings will be saved on password-protected computers and only available to the researcher. The participants' identities will be kept confidential throughout the study and

in any publications or presentations that may come from it (Saldaña, 2021). Participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the study in case of any predictable adverse events and will be provided with appropriate resources and referrals as required.

The IRB's ethical standards will also be followed in the treatment of data. All information gathered will be confidential and secure (Walden University, 2023). Password-protected computers and private cloud storage will be used for data storage (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The information will be accessible only to the researcher. Data dissemination will only take place in a way that safeguards participants' identities and privacy.

After the completion of the research, the data will be destroyed after 5 years (Walden University, 2023). Other ethical concerns that may emerge during the study, such as conducting the study in the researcher's workplace, will be addressed by ensuring that all participants are treated fairly and equitably (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Any conflicts of interest or imbalances of power will be identified and addressed. This research may require incentives, such as a small gift card as a token of gratitude for their time and involvement. However, I will ensure that the incentives do not influence or bias participants' decisions to engage in the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I explain the research methodology and design for the study, a qualitative approach based on semi-structured interviews. The data analysis strategy was outlined, and strategies for ensuring the credibility of the study were discussed. The data collection procedures were also described, including recruiting procedures, obtaining

informed consent, and data collection details. Finally, ethical processes were addressed, including institutional permissions and participant and data protections. In Chapter 4, the researcher will share the findings based on the data collected and analyzed using the methodology and procedures outlined in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Results

Black women face unique challenges when seeking K-12 educational leadership positions due to both their intersectional identities of be both Black and a woman. Progress has been made in recent years, yet Black women are still noticeably underrepresented in K-12 leadership roles. The purpose of this study was to explore Black women seeking leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a position. The research question was: “What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position?” The research question guided me to focus on the perceptions of these women of the challenges of obtaining a leadership position. The interviews with Black women K-12 leaders provide insight to both the trials and triumphs of Black women navigating their way to obtaining leadership positions.

This chapter is organized into several sections. The first section is the setting, which provides context for the research such as personal or organizational conditions that influenced participants or their experience at time of study that may affect the interpretation of the results and presented participant demographics and characteristics relevant to the study. The second section details the data collection, including the number of participants and how the data were recorded. The third section is data analysis with a detailed description of how the data were broken down, examined, and interpreted to generate meaningful responses to the research question.

The fourth section is results. In this section, the research question is addressed by theme, data are presented to support each finding, and discrepant cases are discussed. The

fifth section is evidence of trustworthiness where the implementation of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability strategies were described. The chapter concludes with a summary of the key findings and their implications. Through the participants' interview responses, the challenges that Black women face in their pursuit of K-12 educational leadership roles are illuminated.

Setting

The research was conducted in a virtual setting using the Zoom platform for video conferencing. Zoom was chosen as the mode of data collection due to its widespread use, accessibility, and its features that promote efficient and effective communication. Despite participants being geographically dispersed throughout the United States, the Zoom environment facilitated a sense of closeness and immediacy, similar to face-to-face interactions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). All the interviews were conducted in private, quiet settings, ensuring minimal disruptions, and fostering open, candid conversations. Participants joined the Zoom meetings from locations they felt comfortable and safe in, which may have contributed to the rich and personal nature of the data collected (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The virtual setting also allowed for the recording of these interviews, aiding in data accuracy during transcription and analysis (Saldaña, 2021). Within 1 hour of completing the interview, I listened to the recorded audio and manually corrected the transcripts for accuracy.

Data collection for this study was conducted over a period of 1 week, from August 1, 2023, to August 8, 2023, following a structured approach consistent with the principles outlined in Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Burkholder et al. (2019). All

interviews were scheduled according to the convenience and availability of the participants to ensure their full participation and comfort. Each interview session lasted approximately 1 hour, with the provision for follow-up sessions if further clarification or additional information was needed. The decision to span the interview process over 1 week was made to allow ample time for the transcription, review, and analysis of each interview before proceeding to the next, in accordance with the applied guide for the scholar-practitioner (Burkholder et al., 2019). This phased approach to data collection also helped in identifying emergent themes or patterns early in the process and allowed for the refinement of interview questions and techniques.

Demographics

The participants of this study were 10 women who identified as either Black or African American, with one participant specifically identifying as a Black American, descendant of enslaved Africans. Participants were selected based on specific criteria relevant to the study question (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The criteria for participant selection in this research were outlined and executed as described in the literature regarding qualitative research and participant selection (Merriam, 2009). These women served in various leadership roles in the K-12 education system, with representation from different tiers of educational leadership, reflecting the diversity within the field (see Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Two of the participants were principals or assistant principals with 6-10 years of experience in leadership roles. Four were teacher leaders with 0-5 years in leadership positions. There was also an assistant principal with 0-5 years of leadership experience and a superintendent with 11-15 years of leadership experience.

Their experiences and challenges were contextualized within various geographical locations in the United States, providing a broad perspective on the issues faced by Black women in leadership positions in different educational contexts (see Merriam, 2009). In terms of geographical distribution, the participants were from diverse areas across the United States, including North Carolina, New Jersey, Texas, Wisconsin, Missouri, and Washington, DC. One participant was from Wisconsin, and another participant, though retired, was from Colorado. This geographical diversity provided a broad perspective on the challenges faced by Black women seeking leadership positions in different educational contexts.

Data Collection

The data collection for this study followed the recruitment procedures detailed in Chapter 3, adhering to ethical guidelines provided by Walden University (2023). Potential participants were initially identified through various means, and recruitment involved a combination of snowball and purposive sampling methods, consistent with established qualitative research methodologies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). Convenience sampling was also employed, involving direct contact with potential participants through publicly available email addresses listed on school and district websites. Incentives were offered to encourage participation, and assurances of confidentiality and privacy protection were communicated to all potential participants.

The recruitment strategy involved a combination of snowball and purposive sampling methods. Purposive sampling involved the selection of individuals who met the specific criteria of the study: being a Black woman in a K-12 leadership position in the

United States. Snowball sampling was used as participants were asked to recommend other individuals who might be interested in participating in the study.

After potential participants were identified, they received an email invitation explaining the research, with consent forms designed in line with research ethics (Walden University, 2023). The informed consent form included a detailed explanation of the purpose, participation procedures, risks and benefits, and the participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were encouraged to ask any questions they might have about the study and the informed consent form before agreeing to participate in the study.

Following the attainment of informed consent, one-on-one interviews were conducted with each participant via Zoom, employing qualitative interviewing techniques described by Rubin and Rubin (2012). The interviews were designed to explore each participant's perceptions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position as a Black woman in the K-12 educational setting. These interviews were recorded with the participant's permission and then transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy in capturing the participant's responses. The transcriptions served as the primary data for the subsequent analysis.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process was planned and executed, adhering to the methods outlined in Chapter 3, involving thematic analysis and a deep engagement with the data (Saldaña, 2021). Thematic analysis, a versatile technique for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data, was employed as the primary method for evaluating the

interview transcripts. This approach allowed for in-depth exploration of the perceptions of the Black women K-12 leaders who participated in the study, as shared in their own words.

This process, including transcription, coding, categorizing, and thematizing the data, was conducted manually to ensure a rich and nuanced understanding of the perceptions of Black women seeking educational leadership positions (Ravitch & Carl, 2021; Saldaña, 2021). This initial step is crucial to thematic analysis as it provides the raw data that is subsequently coded and categorized. To ensure credibility, member checking was implemented whereby participants were asked to review their respective transcripts for accuracy. This strategy contributed to data validation, facilitating an open dialogue between the researcher and participants about the information collected.

Once the interview transcripts were verified for accuracy, the data analysis phase began. The process involved several rounds of reading and rereading the transcripts, through which preliminary codes were identified and refined over time. These codes, which are words or short phrases that symbolize the essential elements in the data, helped organize the data meaningfully. The identified codes were clustered into categories that represented common themes or ideas in the data.

The categories provided a framework for understanding the data and were subjected to continuous review and refinement through the analysis process. They served as the stepping-stone to derive themes, which were the overarching concepts extracted from the data. Themes, as a central part of thematic analysis, provided a deep

understanding of the participants' perceptions of the challenges they faced as Black women pursuing K-12 leadership roles.

The analysis was conducted manually, without the use of data management tools. This decision was taken to ensure that the analysis remained nuanced and contextualized, while facilitating a deep engagement with the data. The manual approach was consistent with principles of qualitative research and aimed to enhance the ability to identify subtle nuances and patterns within the data (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). It was deemed that manual analysis would prevent the potential oversimplification that can occur with software tools and would enhance the ability to identify subtle nuances and patterns within the data.

In instances where data were disputed or contradicted the identified themes, these instances were presented as discrepant cases. Discrepancies were reported, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the data, and maintaining a level of transparency consistent with rigorous research design (Burkholder et al., 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). By being open to discrepant cases, the analysis maintained a level of transparency and ensured all data points were considered. Discrepancies were reported, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of Black women seeking educational leadership positions. The nature of the analysis allowed for an in-depth exploration of the research question, with the goal of revealing themes that can contribute meaningfully to the broader discourse on race, gender, and education.

Results

The research question that guided this study was: "What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of

obtaining a leadership position?” I used a semistructured interview design and created 11 questions to ask Black women who seek educational leadership positions about their perception of the challenges of obtaining a leadership position. The interview questions are in Appendix, and the rationale of each question was described in Chapter 3. Through the conversation, I collected information from the Black women educational leaders to understand, interpret, and conclude my findings for the research question.

Codes

After transcribing the interviews verbatim and reading and rereading the transcripts for clarity, I began coding as suggested by Saldaña (2021). The first round of coding was conducted line by line to reduce the likelihood that my personal biases or attributes into participants’ responses. With the completion of each interview, I added to the existing codes or created new codes as needed. This resulted in 190 codes after 10 interviews.

The focus of the second round of coding was to make sense of the data. Referring to Saldaña (2021) as a guide, I condensed, collapsed, and reorganized the first round of codes while also referring to my journal. I reduced duplicate codes and similar codes. I repeated this process several times and identified 15 codes: imposter syndrome; racial and gender discrimination; microaggressions; lack of support and mentorship; code-switching; job rejection and career trajectory; influence of political and societal; perception of anger and communication style; stereotyping; systemic barriers; lack of promotion and representation; financial barriers; higher education and credentialing; career progress and aspirations; diversity, hiring, and inclusion initiatives; and power

structures. The next step was to make meaning of the codes by interpreting my participants' perceptions and categorized my codes by creating categories.

The code imposter syndrome captures feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt among Black women seeking leadership positions. Participants often expressed a sense that they were not truly qualified or deserving of their leadership roles, even when their qualifications and achievements clearly indicated otherwise. Participant 1 said, "I think as a Black woman, I've always had to prove myself twice as much." This feeling of being an imposter in their positions was a recurring theme, creating a barrier to fully embracing leadership roles.

The code racial and gender discrimination was formed because participants frequently mentioned instances of discrimination based on race and gender. This discrimination manifested in various forms, from overt bias in hiring practices to subtle microaggressions in daily interactions. Participant 6 asked, "Are they even gonna give this job to me? Without even looking at my resume and seeing all the credentials I have." The experiences with racial and gender discrimination were deeply intertwined, reflecting the unique challenges faced by Black women due to their intersectional identity.

The code of microaggressions revealed the subtle and often unintentional biases encountered by the participants. Examples include comments or actions that reinforce stereotypes or subtly undermine the participant's ability or credibility. Participant 5 said, "I've had colleagues who saw my assertiveness as being 'difficult' or 'bossy'." These microaggressions, though often minor in isolation, accumulated to have a significant impact on the participants' sense of belonging and self-worth.

The code lack of support and mentorship was another code that emerged from the interviews. Participants often felt isolated and unsupported in their leadership journey.

Participant 1 noted,

And from what I've noticed there doesn't seem to be. A very direct or a well-known pathway to do it. There's no mentorship program that I could tell of with the system I'm in. And it's kind of just, it seems like it's almost who you know, you know, as far as if you get it to that position or not.

Participant 2 said, "I feel lucky that I had mentors who were able to guide me." They expressed a desire for mentors who could guide them, particularly mentors who understood the unique challenges faced by Black women in leadership. The absence of such mentorship was seen as a significant obstacle in their professional development.

The code Code-switching referred to the need to change one's language, appearance, or behavior to fit in with different cultural norms or expectations. Participant 1 said, "I feel like I have to code-switch a lot, and it's exhausting." Participant 6 noted, "I've noticed and still notice a lot of something we call code-switching." Participants described having to code-switch in professional settings to align with the dominant culture, a process they found to be emotionally exhausting and often inauthentic.

The code Job Rejection and Career Trajectory captured the frustrations and disappointments related to job rejections and career progression. Participants shared experiences of being overlooked or rejected for positions, often despite having the necessary qualifications and credentials. Participant 3 stated, "Many of us have the credentials but are still overlooked." Participant 2 explained, "I was determined to make

it to a leadership position, and it took a lot longer than it should have.” Participant 1 reflected, “And now that I’m older, I’m really trying to move into a leadership position, but it’s a lot harder than I thought it would be.” These experiences were seen as indicative of broader systemic barriers hindering their career growth and aspirations.

The code Influence of Political and Societal was noted in the context that these factors shape participants opportunities and experiences in leadership, reflecting how broader sociopolitical dynamics and cultural attitudes can either facilitate or hinder their career progression and effectiveness in leadership roles. Participant 5 stated, “With the current political climate, I think there’s a lot more attention being paid to diversity, but it’s not enough.” Participant 6 stated,

Well, politically, you know, being that we have a woman of color in office. I think that’s a that’s a great thing to look up to but also it shows you the person and true power isn’t White male or a male.

Participant 3 noted that, “There are challenges that come with being a Black woman in a leadership position, particularly in our current sociopolitical climate.” This code includes both the positive impact of increased focus on diversity in recent times and the ongoing challenges posed by existing power structures and biases.

The codes Perception of Anger and Communication Style were used when participants expressed how their assertiveness was often misinterpreted as aggression or anger. Participant 6 said, “Yes, I think sometimes just because of our character and how sometimes we speak we may be perceived as being angry or hostile.” Participant 1 said, “I feel like I have to code-switch a lot, and it’s exhausting.” Participant 5 stated, “I’ve

had colleagues who saw my assertiveness as being ‘difficult’ or ‘bossy’.” This misconception impacts how Black women in leadership are perceived, sometimes casting them as difficult or bossy. The struggle to communicate authentically without triggering these stereotypes was a recurring theme.

Stereotyping emerged as a pervasive issue, influencing how Black women leaders are viewed and treated. Participant 1 said, “The angry Black women stereotype is still there.” She further explained,

The wrong way so like if I saw some injustices for example of students or even a colleague, I was very careful on how I addressed it because I didn’t to be honest, I didn’t want to be seen as the angry Black woman. And so, you kinda walk in on eggshells. With like in meetings and speaking up and share your truth.

Participant 8 said,

What I found is that again, as a Black woman, you’re in a space of mostly again, White men and...either you speak out and then you have a reputation of being and a critical angry Black woman and an aggressive Black woman or, you know just say what they want and all those things\, like you are placating, right? There are just these two roles that you have to play.

Whether concerning appearance, speech, or leadership style, participants were aware of these stereotypes and the pressures they create.

The code Systemic Barriers highlights structural and systemic obstacles that make it more difficult for Black women to ascend to leadership positions. Participant 4 stated, “So I had to leave the district I was in to get higher and promoted in another district.”

Participants identified barriers such as lack of promotion, underrepresentation, and financial challenges within the system.

The codes Lack of Promotion and Representation were formed because participants specifically discussed a lack of promotion from within and an overall lack of representation in top leadership positions. Participant 4 said, "They kept bringing in people from the outside rather than promoting from within. It felt like we were being overlooked." Participant 10 said, "Black women need opportunities that work. And I'm not sure exactly what, but a lot of people get positions because of who they know." The challenges of advancement within the systemic barriers further compound the challenges Black women face in obtaining K-12 leadership positions.

The codes Financial Barriers, Higher Education, and Credentialing were formed because participants emphasized the economic challenges faced in pursuing higher education and credentials necessary for leadership roles. Participant 7 shared, "I thought that I'll start looking at taking some professional development and what leaders do. So, you seek out and pay for yourself." This multifaceted barrier encompasses not only the direct costs but also the time and opportunity costs involved.

Career Progress and Aspirations encapsulates the ambition, hopes, and frustrations in the career trajectory of Black women leaders. Participant 10 shared, "I've had people tell me, 'We are not ready for you,' on more than one occasion." The journey is often marked by job rejections and constant questioning of their credentials, despite possessing necessary qualifications.

The codes Diversity Hiring and Inclusion Initiatives were formed by participants recognizing the positive intention behind diversity hiring and inclusion initiatives, yet participants often questioned their authenticity and effectiveness. Concerns were raised about tokenism and the lack of a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. Similarly, the Organizational Efforts for Diversity code was formed when participants acknowledged organizational efforts for diversity but were often skeptical of their depth and effectiveness. Participant 6 said, “I think yes, it has impacted it. For the good, especially if a company . . . has probably been in some sort of red. Flag trouble about diversity equity and inclusion.” Participant 3 said, “There’s a lot more talk about diversity and inclusion now, but it often feels more like box-checking than real, substantive change.” The tension between surface-level diversity initiatives and meaningful inclusion was a common theme.

Power structures within organizations were perceived as reinforcing existing biases and inequalities. Participant 9 stated, “I go to conventions and just go and drink because you need some market yourself. In those environments and it is still the White men that still have the most power.” Participants pointed to the challenges in shifting these deeply ingrained structures, even in the face of growing attention to diversity and inclusion.

The codes Lack of Representation and Representation are defined as the lack of representation at leadership levels and were seen as both a symptom and a cause of broader issues. Participant 6 said, “But then sometimes if I go to a particular hiring fair and I don’t see that many people of color during the hiring.” Participants emphasized the

importance of having diverse voices in decision-making roles, not only for the sake of equity but for the richness and nuance they bring to leadership.

Categories

I created categories based on both the similarity and relatedness of the codes. After the categories were established, I conducted several trials to establish themes from the data. Each trial consisted of referring back to the original transcripts so that the participants' meaning would not be lost, as well as referring to my own journal, to ensure an accurate interpretation of the data. I sorted the 15 codes into nine categories. I created Table 5 to illustrate my findings from this study.

The category Experiences of Discrimination and Bias encapsulates feelings of inadequacy, overt discrimination, and subtle biases encountered by the participants. Codes such as Imposter Syndrome, Racial and Gender Discrimination, Microaggressions, and Stereotyping were grouped under this category. These represent the daily struggles faced in personal and professional environments, where proving oneself becomes a constant effort.

The category Stereotyping and Communication Challenges focuses on how racial and gender stereotypes affect communication. It includes codes like Perception of Anger and Communication Style, illustrating how assertiveness or expressiveness might be misconstrued. The stereotypes held about race and gender often result in misunderstandings and unfair judgments about character and intention.

The category Systemic Challenges in Leadership Ascent covers the structural and systemic barriers faced in climbing the leadership ladder. Codes such as Job Rejection

and Career Trajectory, Systemic Barriers, and Lack of Promotion and Representation are included here. These codes reflect the various hurdles, both explicit and implicit, that often prevent or delay career advancement within organizational hierarchies.

The category Economic and Educational Challenges highlights the financial and educational obstacles faced by participants. It encompasses Financial Barriers, Higher Education, and Credentialing, emphasizing how economic and educational limitations can hinder professional growth. The codes in this category expose the underlying inequalities in access to resources and opportunities that shape career paths.

The category Navigating Identity and Lack of Support focuses on the complex process of navigating personal identity within professional settings. Lack of Support and Mentorship codes are grouped here, shedding light on the importance of guidance and encouragement in a professional journey. This category illustrates the delicate balance between staying true to oneself and adapting to the expectations of the workplace.

The category Negative Stereotyping and Communication Challenges examines how negative stereotypes may overlap with communication challenges. Participants' experiences reveal how being misunderstood or labeled can have a detrimental effect on communication and relationship-building within the workplace. This category calls attention to the need for greater empathy and understanding to foster positive communication.

The category Career Progress and Aspirations is centered on individual career goals and the desire to advance. The code Career Progress and Aspirations symbolizes the ambition and determination required to progress in one's career. The participants'

experiences in this category shed light on the personal motivation and resilience needed to overcome setbacks and achieve long-term goals.

The category Sociopolitical Context and Representation explores the societal and political factors that influence perception and opportunities for leadership and representation. Including codes like Influence of Political and Societal, this category reflects a broader context that shapes attitudes and policies towards diversity and inclusion in leadership roles.

The category Organizational Efforts for Diversity encapsulates efforts within organizations to foster diversity and inclusion. With codes like Diversity Hiring and Inclusion Initiatives, and Power Structures, it depicts the ongoing work and challenges in creating truly inclusive environments. This category emphasizes the need for organizations to move beyond token gestures and strive for substantive change. Table 5 shows how the codes were grouped into categories.

Table 5

Categories with Corresponding Codes

Category	Codes
Experiences of Discrimination and Bias	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Imposter Syndrome • Racial and Gender Discrimination • Microaggressions • Code-switching • Stereotyping
Stereotyping and Communication Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception of Anger and Communication Style
Systemic Challenges in Leadership Ascent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Job Rejection and Career Trajectory • Systemic Barriers • Lack of Promotion and Representation
Economic and Educational Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Financial Barriers • Higher Education • Credentialing

Category	Codes
Navigating Identity and Lack of Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of Support and Mentorship
Career Progress and Aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career Progress and Aspirations
Sociopolitical Context and Representation Organizational Efforts for Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Influence of Political and Societal • Diversity Hiring and Inclusion Initiatives, Power structures

Themes

After grouping the codes into categories, I condensed some categories into overarching themes based on their similarities. I grouped categories Experiences of Discrimination and Bias and Stereotyping and Communication Challenges to form Theme 1: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Learn to Hurdle the Intersectionality of Race and Gender. I grouped the categories of Systemic Challenges in Leadership Ascent and Economic and Educational Challenges to form Theme 2: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Traverse an Intricate Labyrinth of Systemic Barriers. I grouped the categories of Navigating Identity and Lack of Support and Negative Stereotyping and Communication Challenges to form Theme 3: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Defend Their Authentic Identity. The Category of Career Progress and Aspirations became Theme 4: Theme 4: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Concede to Biased Rejections. I combined the Categories of Sociopolitical Context and Representation and Organizational Efforts for Diversity to form Theme 5: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Yield to Over-scrutiny of Credentials. In the upcoming section, I will present the data around the research question. I narrate the data using quotes to evidence how the themes emerged. Table 6 illustrates the codes and categories, which merged into the broader emergent themes.

Table 6*Themes, Categories, and Codes for Research Question*

Themes	Categories	Codes
Black women K-12 education leaders learn to hurdle the intersectionality of race and gender.	Experiences of Discrimination and Bias; Stereotyping and Communication Challenges	Imposter syndrome; Racial discrimination; Gender Discrimination; Microaggressions; Hostile environments; Code-Switching; Communication Style
Black women K-12 education leaders traverse an intricate labyrinth of systemic barriers.	Systemic Challenges in Leadership Ascent; Economic and Educational Challenges	Systemic Barriers; Lack of Promotion; Lack of Representation; Financial Barriers; Higher Education; Credentialing
Black women K-12 education leaders defend their authentic identity	Navigating Identity and Lack of Support; Negative Stereotyping and Communication Challenges	Lack of Mentorship; Stereotypes; Code-Switching; Perception of Anger; Communication Style
Black women K-12 education leaders often concede to biased rejections. Black women K-12 education leaders often yield to over-scrutiny of credentials.	Career Progress and Aspirations Sociopolitical Context and Representation; Organizational Efforts for Diversity	Job Rejection; Education and Credentials; Career Trajectory Influence of Politics and Society; Power Structures; Lack of Representation; Diversity Hiring; Inclusion Initiatives; Representation

Theme 1: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Learn to Hurdle the Intersectionality of Race and Gender

The intersectionality of race and gender critically shapes experiences, frequently magnifying the hurdles these Black women K-12 education leaders face. The first theme that emerged from the data was that the intersectionality of race and gender critically shapes experiences, frequently magnifying the hurdles these Black women K-12 education leaders face (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991). Many participants described a profound sense of needing to overprove themselves, feeling overlooked, and encountering stereotypes and biases in their professional journeys (Bettini et al., 2022).

Participant 1 encapsulated this sentiment, stating, “I think as a Black woman, I’ve always had to prove myself twice as much.” This quote emphasizes the perceived need to work harder and achieve more to be considered at par with their peers, suggesting a perceived racial and gender bias in their professional environments (Collins, 1990).

Participant 6 shared a similar sentiment in the form of a question: “Are they even gonna give this job to me? Without even looking at my resume and seeing all the credentials I have.” This quote reflects the participants’ concerns about being dismissed due to their identity, despite having the necessary qualifications and credentials. It hints at a perceived systemic bias that discounts their professional capabilities, reducing their confidence in obtaining leadership roles (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022).

The theme of discrimination is also manifested in microaggressions experienced by the participants. Participant 5 shared, “I’ve had colleagues who saw my assertiveness as being ‘difficult’ or ‘bossy’.” Participant 8 shared a similar perception when she said,

The assumption that Black women don’t know or have the capability of leading. A lot of the stereotypes around like women and us as leaders being you know aggressive and instead of assertive you know and whether or not you’re in a space that will embrace you.

This statement points to the negative stereotyping and biased interpretations of the participants’ behaviors, which can hinder their progression towards leadership roles (Budig et al., 2021).

Moreover, some participants expressed the burden of having to navigate these biases and discrimination (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Participant 1 mentioned the toll of constant code-switching, saying, “I feel like I have to code-switch a lot, and it’s exhausting.” This quote underscores the emotional and mental stress of constantly adjusting their behaviors to fit into the dominant cultural norms in their professional spaces (A. Y. Davis, 1983). Participant 7 noted that, “I had a big afro and it’s just large and in charge, you know, I faced some scrutiny, about my hair.” This quote reflects the participant’s perception that they feel pressure to conform to White beauty standards to be accepted as a professional (Crenshaw, 1991).

The theme of Intersectionality of Race and Gender Critically Shapes Experiences provides significant insights into the perceived challenges and hurdles that Black women face in their pursuit of educational leadership positions. It highlights the need for more inclusive and equitable practices in the professional environment to support their leadership aspirations (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Curtis, 2017).

Theme 2: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Traverse an Intricate Labyrinth of Systemic Barriers

Black women K-12 education leaders must traverse an intricate labyrinth of systemic and societal barriers. The second theme that emerged from the data speaks to systemic hurdles in the advancement of Black women into leadership positions (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Curtis, 2017). This theme encapsulates the participants’ perceived experiences with systemic and institutional barriers that hinder their progression in their careers. Participant 3 shared, “I think there’s a number of systemic issues that make it

more difficult for Black women to ascend to leadership positions.” Participant 8 shared a similar sentiment of systemic barriers when she said, “Ultimately, I think our district is better. And there are more opportunities. And, I see Black women advance all the time in our district, but never to the top position.” Participant 9 added to this sentiment, expressing, “They have never in the district that I worked with never had first off a person of color and second I can’t even see a woman a Black woman specifically being a superintendent in that district.” This quote reflects recognition of historical and ongoing racial and gender biases that further reinforce systemic barriers in leadership ascent (Curtis, 2017).

Further reflecting on the systemic challenges, Participant 4 spoke about the lack of promotion from within their organizations, stating, “They kept bringing in people from the outside rather than promoting from within. It felt like we were being overlooked.” This perspective sheds light on the perception of unfair hiring practices that favor external candidates overqualified internal candidates, particularly affecting Black women seeking leadership roles (Bailes & Guthery, 2020).

The theme of Black Women’s Systemic and Societal Barriers and Experiences also emerged in the participants’ discussion about representation in hiring spaces. Participant 6 stated, “But then sometimes if I go to a particular hiring fair and I don’t see that much people of color during the hiring.” This quote underscores the lack of diversity in recruitment processes, further contributing to the systemic barriers faced by Black women aspiring for leadership roles (Curtis, 2017). This theme, Systemic Hurdles in Advancement, highlights the need for addressing and dismantling systemic and

institutional barriers that hinder the career advancement of Black women. It highlights the importance of equitable hiring practices, promoting from within, and increasing representation in hiring spaces as part of broader efforts to support Black women in their pursuit of educational leadership positions (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Curtis, 2017).

Theme 3: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Defend Their Authentic Identity

Black women K-12 education leaders struggle with a lack of support and mentorship, being forced to code-switch, and confronting stereotypes and expectations that suppress authentic identity and hinder leadership opportunities. The third theme pertains to the experiences of Black women as they negotiate their professional identities and navigate environments where support may be lacking.

Participant 1 shed light on the exhausting task of code-switching, stating, “I feel like I have to code-switch a lot, and it’s exhausting.” This sentiment was echoed by Participant 6, who noted, “I’ve noticed and still notice a lot of something we call code-switching.” Code-switching, the practice of altering speech, behaviors, or appearance to fit into different cultural contexts, reflects the identity challenges Black women face in professional environments (Crenshaw, 1991; A. Y. Davis, 1983).

Participants 1 and 8 both shared that they perceived an expectation to alter their appearances and that White beauty standards appear to be more professional than Black beauty standards.

Participant 1 said,

And I remember an employee that used to work at the school, the school was predominantly White, And, I remember her telling me, if you're gonna apply for this school, you're gonna have to get your hair blown out. It needs to be straight. You need to look very polished.

Participant 8 said,

I'm sure that I'm fitting the stereotype that's there for, people who wear, locks, you know, and so It's almost like the expectation of being a part of leadership almost in, you know, it encourages anti-blackness like, oh yeah, well, you can be a leader, but you need to look like this. So, you need to speak like this or dress like this or act like this. And it's like, leave your . . . leave these identities at the door and this is what we want you to embrace.

These quotes imply that Black women who are seeking leadership positions perceive it to be necessary to conform to White beauty standards to be perceived as more professional (Crenshaw, 1991; A. Y. Davis, 1983).

The role of mentorship, or a lack thereof, emerged as another aspect of this theme. Participant 2 said, "I feel lucky that I had mentors who were able to guide me." This quote implies that the availability of supportive mentors is not a given, making it a salient issue in Black women's professional journey. The theme Lack of Support and Mentorship for Black Women Educators emphasizes the challenges Black women face as they adapt to professional contexts that may not fully acknowledge or support their identities. It highlights the necessity for increased mentorship, support, and understanding

in these spaces to alleviate the pressure on Black women to continuously negotiate their professional identities.

Theme 4: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Concede to Biased

Rejections

Despite possessing necessary qualifications, Black women K-12 education leaders often confront a series of rejections and incessant questioning of their credentials, leading to frustrations and impediments in their career progression and aspirations. The fourth theme revolves around the challenges experienced by Black women in their career progression and aspirations (Alfred et al., 2019; Budig et al., 2021; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). This theme emerged from participants' accounts of job rejections, overlooked credentials, and struggles in their career trajectory.

Participant 6 expressed the frustration and disappointment of continuous job rejections by sharing, "I've been getting rejection after rejection with jobs and just different things I'm trying to do like getting an adjunct position." This quote encapsulates the experiences of many Black women who, despite their qualifications and endeavors, struggle to secure positions aligning with their career aspirations (Budig et al., 2021).

The issue of unrecognized credentials was highlighted by Participant 3 who stated, "Many of us have the credentials but are still overlooked." This quote underscores a critical barrier to Black women's career progression, that is, the disregard or undervaluation of their educational qualifications (Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021).

Participant 9 contributed,

So executive meetings or any type of conference and you show up with this badge that says your director of whatever, there's always this informal kind of question and like, okay, so. Really? Like, where'd you go to school? It's like this way of asking you who you are, your credentials.

This quote exemplifies the additional scrutiny faced by Black women in leadership roles, with implicit questioning of their qualifications and capabilities (Alfred et al., 2019).

Participants also shared their personal aspirations and the hurdles they faced along their career path. Participant 2 reflected, "I was determined to make it to a leadership position, and it took a lot longer than it should have." Likewise, Participant 1 shared, "And now that I'm older, I'm really trying to move into a leadership position, but it's a lot harder than I thought it would be." These quotes point to the tenacity and perseverance of Black women, even as they navigate difficult paths towards their career goals (Chance, 2022).

The theme, Challenges of Black Women to Attain Career Goals encapsulates the various systemic, institutional, and individual hurdles that Black women encounter as they strive to advance their careers and reach their professional aspirations (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022). It underscores the need for equitable opportunities and recognition of qualifications and merits to support Black women's career progression.

Theme 5: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Yield to Over-scrutiny of Credentials

In the midst of a changing political climate emphasizing diversity, power structures and superficial organizational efforts still perpetuate a lack of true representation, limiting opportunities for leadership and undermining the goal of inclusive progress. The fifth theme emerged from participants' reflections on how broader sociopolitical contexts influence their pursuit of leadership roles (Aaron, 2020). This theme was shaped by discussions around the influence of politics and society, power structures, and the lack of representation.

The current political climate was recognized by Participant 5 as both a potential advantage and an ongoing challenge, stating, "With the current political climate, I think there's a lot more attention being paid to diversity, but it's not enough." This quote suggests a recognition of some improvements in inclusivity but also showcases that these changes are perceived as insufficient (Aaron, 2020).

Participant 6 made a similar observation about the societal impact of representation in power structures,

Well, politically, you know, being that we have a woman of color in office. I think that's a that's a great thing to look up to but also it shows you the person in true power is White male or a male.

This participant points to the empowering aspect of seeing representation at higher levels, while also acknowledging the historical and ongoing dominance of White males in positions of power (Aaron, 2020). Participant 3 further noted the specific challenges for

Black women seeking leadership roles, “There are challenges that come with being a Black woman in a leadership position, particularly in our current sociopolitical climate.” This comment underscores the dual challenges of being Black and a woman in a society where leadership positions are predominantly occupied by White males (Aaron, 2020).

Taken together, the theme, Challenges of Black Women to Attain Career Goals demonstrates the participants’ perception of the societal and political landscape’s role in shaping their opportunities for leadership positions (Aaron, 2020). It signals a clear need for systemic change and greater diversity in leadership roles, particularly those roles traditionally dominated by non-diverse groups.

Discrepant Cases

Participant 3 highlights an intriguing perspective, attributing her challenges in obtaining a leadership position to systemic issues rather than racial discrimination. This contradicts common narratives around the intersectionality of race and gender influencing the opportunities and challenges for Black women in educational leadership (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022). She believes that her experiences and challenges are not tied to her being African American but rather the systemic requirements and the lack of clear-cut opportunities in her educational system.

Interestingly, while she dismisses the influence of race in her career advancement, she does acknowledge the potential role of gender, particularly in the elementary education domain, which she perceives as favorably disposed towards women. This distinction between the impacts of gender and race is an interesting nuance that may support a more complex understanding of the systemic barriers in play.

Her military background, and the associated advantages it may have provided, further complicates the narrative, introducing another variable that may have impacted her experiences. It could be an area of further investigation, considering how different backgrounds and experiences might interplay with race and gender. The specific context of her school, where all teacher leaders are African American, provides a contrasting view that could challenge the common perception of underrepresentation and barriers due to race. It is an example that there may be diverse experiences across different schools or educational systems.

The case illustrates the importance of considering individual experiences, local contexts, and additional variables like military service when interpreting the broader patterns of discrimination and barriers to leadership. This discrepant case can be compared to the broader literature, such as the work of Alfred et al. (2019), which has examined barriers related to systemic biases, and the work of Quillian and Midtbøen (2021) focused on hiring practices. It might also invite a reevaluation or further nuanced exploration of the complex factors influencing leadership opportunities for Black women in education.

The insights provided by Participant 3 offer a nuanced and multifaceted perspective that diverges from the broader themes of racial discrimination. Her experiences underscore the complexity of the issue and suggest that further investigation into individual circumstances, local context, and additional variables is warranted to fully understand the challenges and opportunities for Black women in K-12 leadership

positions. This case thus contributes valuable insight that can enrich the overall understanding and guide future research and practice.

Results in Terms of the Research Question

Theme 1: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Learn to Hurdle the Intersectionality of Race and Gender

The intersectionality of race and gender critically shapes experiences, frequently magnifying the hurdles these Black women K-12 education leaders face. This theme shows the perceived discrimination Black women face when seeking K-12 leadership roles. It highlights a range of barriers and biases that influence their perceptions. Participants described a sense of having to overprove themselves and navigate stereotypes and biases. These stereotypes may include being viewed as “difficult” or “aggressive” (Bettini et al., 2022). This can limit opportunities in educational leadership, where qualities such as collaboration and empathy are often highly valued.

Black women in educational leadership often face double discrimination due to both their race and gender. This can manifest in the form of biases during hiring, promotions, or even everyday interactions within the educational system. Discrimination is not always explicit, as participants noted both subtle and blatant biases in their professional journey. This can include a hesitance to consider Black women for leadership positions in education, even if their credentials match or exceed those of other candidates. Participants also talked about the exhaustion caused by code-switching and the pressure to conform to White beauty standards (Crenshaw, 1991; A. Y. Davis). In the

context of educational leadership, this reflects the complex interplay between personal identity and professional expectations that many Black women navigate.

Systemic Issues related to Theme 1 include microaggressions and lack of representation. Microaggressions are everyday verbal and nonverbal insults or dismissive looks, often unintentional, can create a hostile environment, hindering Black women from obtaining leadership positions in education. Participants' perceptions were also be shaped by the underrepresentation of Black women in leadership roles within the educational system, reinforcing the notion that these positions are not accessible to them.

In answering the research question, Theme 1 shows the need for an honest examination of the biases, stereotypes, and systemic barriers that Black women face in seeking educational leadership positions. The findings call for targeted interventions, policies, and support systems to ensure that Black women are provided with equal opportunities and support in educational leadership roles. Addressing these challenges not only fosters diversity and inclusivity but also leverages the perspectives and strengths that Black women can bring to educational leadership. This theme reflects a call to action for educational institutions to recognize these perceptions and actively work to dismantle the barriers that hinder Black women's access to leadership roles.

Theme 2: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Traverse an Intricate Labyrinth of Systemic Barriers

The systemic hurdles in advancement demonstrates the institutional barriers that Black women encounter when seeking educational leadership positions, addressing the research question, "What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational

leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position?” The theme reveals clear patterns of systemic obstacles that participants perceive as hindering their career progression (Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Curtis, 2017). This theme centers on institutional barriers preventing career progression, with participants pointing to issues such as lack of promotion from within organizations and the importance of fair hiring practices to support Black women in leadership roles (Participant 3; Participant 9; Participant 4; Participant 6).

The participants’ perceptions on the lack of representation in educational leadership roles, lack of promotion from within educational organizations, and possible unfair practices that overlook Black women even when they are qualified internal candidates. Participants reported this experience has been accompanied by a sense of feeling overlooked or undermined by the very systems they are trying to advance within. The theme also emphasizes the necessity for diversity in hiring practices within K-12 education systems, with participants pointing out the importance of representation during hiring processes. It also touches on institutional barriers that prevent access to essential resources such as mentorship, networking, and funding, which are critical to success in leadership roles in the education sector. The need for dismantling these systemic barriers comes to the forefront, with an urgent call for more equitable hiring practices and support for Black women in educational leadership positions. The participants’ perceptions highlight the importance of acknowledging and actively removing these systemic barriers, and fostering an environment where Black women can pursue and obtain leadership positions within educational institutions without bias or unfair challenges.

Theme 3: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Defend Their Authentic Identity

Black women who are seeking leadership positions in educational environments often face the complex task of navigating their identities. Participants' experiences describe the pressure to conform, lack of supportive mentorship, and the need for more comprehensive support and acceptance of diverse identities in professional spaces (Participants 1, 6, 8, and 2). This may include dealing with racial microaggressions, feelings of exclusion, and pressure to conform to predominantly White, male leadership standards. Participants' perceptions of these experiences are that they must juggle their authentic selves with the demands and biases of professional environments. The challenges become more than just professional hurdles; they are deeply personal and tied to the core of who these women are.

The theme also emphasizes a significant lack of support in professional spaces. The absence or inconsistency of supportive mentorship, the lack of understanding from colleagues and superiors, and the absence of a supportive network add to the challenges that Black women face in seeking leadership positions. For Black women seeking K-12 educational leadership roles, this lack of support manifests in a way that can make the journey to leadership lonelier and more daunting.

Participants described the pressures to conform to certain standards and expectations that may not align with their identity. This included aspects such as appearance, communication styles, and leadership approaches. This pressure to conform can undermine the unique perspectives and strengths that Black women could bring to

educational leadership roles, making the path to leadership more challenging and less authentic.

Within the specific context of educational leadership, these challenges are particularly poignant. Educational leaders play a vital role in shaping educational policies, nurturing inclusive environments, and influencing the next generation. The challenges in navigating identity and the lack of support not only hinder Black women's progression to these roles but may also limit the diversity of thought and experience in educational leadership.

Theme 4: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Concede to Biased Rejections

Black women pursuing leadership positions in educational settings face barriers that hinder their career progression. These barriers are often rooted in systemic biases and can manifest in different ways, such as biased hiring practices, limited opportunities for professional development, unequal pay, and lack of access to influential networks and mentors (Alfred et al., 2019; Budig et al., 2021; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021). Black women may face stereotyping that affects their career growth. Stereotypes related to gender and race can lead to doubts about their competence, commitment, or leadership style. For example, all 10 participants mentioned consciously navigating passionate emotions so that other genders and races did not label them with the “angry Black woman” stereotype. These stereotypes can impact both how others perceive them and how they perceive themselves, creating self-doubts or pressures to conform to certain expectations.

The underrepresentation of Black women in K-12 leadership roles was also cited as contributing to a sense of isolation and challenges in finding role models or mentors who understand their specific experiences and can guide them by participants (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022). This lack of representation might be perceived as a signal that leadership roles are unattainable or unwelcoming to Black women. Career progression and aspirations for Black women might be influenced by the need to balance multiple responsibilities, including family, community obligations, and societal expectations as cited by participants 1, 3, and 4. These challenges may be further intensified by the lack of institutional support or understanding of their unique needs and roles.

Black women's aspirations and ambitions in educational leadership are not only shaped by barriers. Their career paths are also driven by their passion for education, a desire to make a difference, resilience, and determination to overcome challenges (Chance, 2022; Participants 1, 2, 3, 5, 9, and 10). Recognizing and supporting these aspirations is an essential part of understanding the whole picture. The perceptions of Black women in this theme highlight a need for change in educational leadership structures. This includes addressing overt and covert biases, creating supportive networks, providing equitable opportunities for growth, and fostering an environment that recognizes and values the unique perspectives and strengths that Black women bring to leadership roles.

Theme 5: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Yield to Over-scrutiny of Credentials

Black women pursuing leadership opportunities in the education sector often encounter sociopolitical factors as significant barriers (Participants 3,5,7,9, and 10). These may include policies, laws, political climate, or societal attitudes that disproportionately affect them. For example, an environment that struggles with implementing strong antidiscrimination policies contributes to systemic biases against Black women in leadership roles (Aaron, 2020).

Changes in the political environment can directly or indirectly affect the opportunities available to Black women. Leaders who emphasize diversity and inclusivity may open doors, while those with contrasting priorities may create subtle or explicit hurdles. The current political discourse around race and gender can significantly shape the opportunities and challenges they face. The sociopolitical impact on leadership opportunities for Black women is not isolated from other factors but intersects with both racial and gender biases. The combination of being both Black and female often places them at the crossroads of multiple forms of discrimination, manifesting in specific challenges when seeking leadership positions.

The perceived impact extends beyond individual biases to structural and systemic issues. Policies or institutional practices may be set up in a way that implicitly disadvantages Black women. This may manifest in recruitment processes, professional development opportunities, or other aspects that affect career progression. Societal attitudes and prevailing stereotypes can shape both the opportunities and the perceptions

of those opportunities. Negative stereotypes about Black women's capabilities or suitability for leadership roles can affect how they are viewed by hiring committees, peers, or themselves, limiting opportunities or self-confidence.

On a positive note, some Black women may also perceive the potential for positive sociopolitical change. Through advocacy, mentoring, and building supportive networks, they may work towards altering the sociopolitical landscape to create more inclusive and equitable opportunities for future leaders. Depending on the specific context, sociopolitical factors can vary widely. Understanding the particular regional, national, or local sociopolitical dynamics is essential for fully comprehending how they impact leadership opportunities for Black women in different settings.

Theme 5 reveals a complex web of sociopolitical factors that shape the perceptions and realities of Black women seeking leadership positions in the educational field. The research question calls attention to how these factors intertwine with racial and gender identities, creating a multifaceted challenge that requires nuanced understanding and targeted strategies. It emphasizes the need to look beyond individual prejudices and recognize the structural and systemic forces that contribute to the perceived barriers. It also opens doors to further inquiry into how positive change can be fostered through policy, advocacy, and community engagement.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

In completing this study, attention was given to ensuring the trustworthiness of the research process and its findings. A qualitative research approach was employed with an alignment to the research problem, purpose, and questions. The approach was tailored

to afford a nuanced understanding of the perceptions of the challenges faced by Black women seeking leadership positions in education (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Merriam, 2009). The interview protocol was designed based on current literature and the research questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

To establish transferability, a thick description of the research method and findings was provided (Merriam, 2009). This detailed account presented a comprehensive overview of the research process, findings, and the context within which the study was conducted (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The variation in participant selection also contributed to the transferability of the study, ensuring that the findings are relevant to the targeted setting and population of Black women seeking leadership positions in education.

To demonstrate dependability, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process (Burkholder et al., 2019). This documented record details all decisions, procedures, and changes made during the study, thereby enhancing transparency and accountability. Member checking further reinforced dependability by guaranteeing the consistency and accuracy of the data (Merriam, 2009). This step ensured that participants agreed with the transcriptions and interpretations of their respective interview responses (Saldaña, 2021).

Confirmability was established through reflexivity (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). As the sole researcher, I engaged in ongoing reflexivity to identify and mitigate any personal biases or preconceptions that could potentially influence the research process and results. This reflexive approach was aimed at ensuring that the findings truly reflected the

perspectives and experiences of the participants rather than my subjective interpretation (Burkholder et al., 2019).

Intra- and intercoder reliability were not applicable to this study, due to my role as the sole coder, steps were taken to ensure the reliability of the coding process. A pilot test was conducted with a small sample of participants to refine the coding categories and ensure consistent application of codes (Saldaña, 2021). This practice, along with ongoing reflexivity during the coding process, was instrumental in identifying and addressing potential biases or interpretations that could have impacted the analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). This comprehensive approach to ensuring trustworthiness, through transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reliability, ensured the credibility of the study findings (Walden University, 2023).

Summary

This study sought to understand the perceptions and experiences of Black women seeking educational leadership positions and the challenges they face in obtaining such roles. From the narratives shared by the participants, six significant themes emerged—Perceived Discrimination in Leadership Aspiration, Systemic Hurdles in Advancement, Navigating Identity and Lack of Support in Professional Spaces, Experienced Challenges in Career Progression and Aspirations, Perceived Sociopolitical Impact on Leadership Opportunities, and Challenges of Balancing Professional Aspirations with Personal Life. These themes describe the intersectional challenges faced by Black women in their leadership journeys, touching upon systemic, personal, and sociopolitical issues.

Chapter 5 will discuss the implications of these findings, offering insights to inform institutional practices, leadership development programs, and policy decisions. The nuances within the experiences of the participants reveal the importance of continued and more expansive research in this area, with an aim towards fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational leadership landscape where Black women's aspirations and contributions are acknowledged and promoted.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

This qualitative research was focused on the experiences and perceptions of Black women seeking leadership roles in education, addressing an important gap in understanding the unique hurdles they encounter. Ten Black women in various stages of their leadership journey participated in semistructured interviews, their personal narratives providing valuable insights into the intersectional challenges at the heart of race, gender, and professional advancement. Key findings emerged around five salient themes: discrimination in leadership aspiration, systemic hurdles to advancement, the stress of navigating identity and lack of support within professional spaces, challenges in career progression and aspirations, and the influence of sociopolitical contexts on leadership opportunities. These encapsulate the multifaceted impediments faced by Black women in their professional pursuits within the educational sector, casting a spotlight on the need for systemic and institutional changes to foster greater inclusivity, equity, and diversity in educational leadership.

Interpretation of the Findings

In this section, I describe my interpretation of the key findings. I collected my findings from interviews with 10 participants. The participants of this study were nine women who identified as either Black or African American, with one participant specifically identifying as a Black American, descendant of enslaved Africans. These women served in various leadership roles in the K-12 education system, with representation from different tiers of educational leadership. Two of the participants were principals or assistant principals with 6-10 years of experience in leadership roles. Four

were teacher leaders with 0-5 years in leadership positions. There was also an assistant principal with 0-5 years of leadership experience and a superintendent with 11-15 years of leadership experience.

I organized the section according to the literature and conceptual framework. The five themes are as follows: (a) discrimination in leadership aspiration; (b) systemic hurdles in advancement; (c) navigating identity and the lack of support in professional spaces; (d) experienced challenges in career progression and aspirations; and (e) sociopolitical impact on leadership opportunities. I also used the literature from Chapter 2 to confirm, disconfirm, and extend the knowledge of my study's findings. Finally, I describe how the results relate to the conceptual framework.

Black women seeking K-12 leadership positions perceived both challenges and opportunities. Through a review of the research question, literature, and the conceptual framework, the complex interplay between historical context, systemic hurdles, identity, career progression, and sociopolitical impact are explored. This discussion is built upon five main themes, each of which is supported by both the literature review and participants' experiences, as outlined in the following sections.

Interpretations of Results in Terms of the Literature

The research question of this study was "What are the perceptions of Black women who seek educational leadership positions about the challenges of obtaining a leadership position?"

Theme 1: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Learn to Hurdle the Intersectionality of Race and Gender

The theme of discrimination in leadership aspiration shows the perceived discrimination Black women face when seeking K-12 leadership roles. It highlights a range of barriers and biases that influence their perceptions, echoing the findings of barriers and biases in leadership faced by Black women in various studies (Aaron, 2020; Bailes & Guthery, 2020; Chance, 2022; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Curtis, 2017). Participants described a sense of having to overprove themselves and navigate stereotypes and biases (see also Doharty, 2020). Black women in educational leadership often face double discrimination due to both their race and gender (Chaney et al., 2021). This can manifest in biases during hiring, promotions, or even everyday interactions within the educational system (Budig et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2019). Participants noted both subtle and blatant biases in their professional journey, resonating with the experiences documented in previous literature (Bertrand Jones et al., 2020; Blanck et al., 2021). Systemic issues related to Theme 1 include microaggressions and lack of representation (Cyr et al., 2021), which include verbal and nonverbal insults or dismissive looks, often unintentionally inflicted but having a substantial cumulative impact (S. J. Davis et al., 2022).

The experiences of discrimination and bias, stereotyping, communication challenges, and imposter syndrome among Black women in leadership roles are reflected in both the participant quotes and the existing literature. These experiences reflect the complex interplay between personal identity and professional expectations that many

Black women navigate (Collins, 1990; Erskine et al., 2021). Participants in the study exemplify the nuanced struggles that Black women leaders often face. For example, Participant 1's statement: "I think as a Black woman, I've always had to prove myself twice as much" echoes the notion of double discrimination and the need for Black women to continually validate their worth, (Chaney et al., 2021). Participant 6's uncertainty about being considered for a job even with strong credentials resonates with the research indicating implicit biases that often hinder the hiring of qualified Black women (Williams et al., 2020).

The theme of racial and gender discrimination is also prevalent in the literature. Participant 5's experience of being labeled "difficult" or "bossy" aligns with the pressures to conform to White, male leadership standards (Glass & Cook, 2020). This stereotyping, highlighted by Participant 8's quote, emphasizes the stereotypes faced by Black women regarding their capability to lead and the perception of them being aggressive rather than assertive. It draws parallels to the existing literature, such as the experiences of microaggressions faced by Black women in higher education (King et al., 2022; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021).

Participant 7's experience of scrutiny regarding physical appearance, specifically hair, brings attention to the intersectionality of racial and gender identities (Sales et al., 2019), which emphasizes the complex dynamics Black women navigate. The concepts of code-switching and perception of anger that arose in the findings are well-supported in the literature, reflecting the historical struggle of Black women for rights, inclusion, and against stereotyping and biases (Motro et al., 2022; Overstreet et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the findings align with the literature's emphasis on resiliency and the unique leadership styles adopted by Black women (Sales et al., 2019). This aspect, though not directly stated in the participant quotes, can be inferred from their perseverance and determination in aspiring to leadership roles despite the challenges faced. The experiences of participants confirm the understanding of the unique "double bind" of discrimination based on both race and gender, as predicted by Crenshaw's intersectionality theory and previous studies (Trzebiatowski et al., 2022). Black women in this study felt they were under more scrutiny, and their errors were judged more harshly due to their dual identities. This experience aligns with the findings of studies that noted feelings of self-doubt and impostor syndrome among Black women leaders (Nadal et al., 2021). Historical exclusion and marginalization have significantly shaped the leadership opportunities for Black women, limiting access to roles and opportunities (Motro et al., 2022; Nadal et al., 2021). This theme captures how discriminatory practices and biases, including implicit biases in hiring and promotion (Chaney et al., 2021; Tevis et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020), thwart Black women's leadership.

The findings on perceived discrimination in leadership aspiration among Black women provide insights on the multifaceted challenges they encounter in leadership roles. The participants' descriptions reveal discrimination in their pursuit of leadership roles, from having to overprove themselves to facing stereotypes, biases, microaggressions, and the emotional toll of navigating these biases. The experiences shared by the participants reflect and deepen the understanding of the historical context, identity influence, and specific obstacles and resilience factors documented in the

existing literature. The confluence of these insights emphasizes the need for systemic change in how society perceives and supports Black women in leadership, recognizing their unique experiences shaped by race, gender, and intersectionality. Future work must focus on tangible strategies to dismantle the barriers faced by Black women leaders, informed by the voices of those who live these experiences daily. This theme also underlines the need for a more equitable and inclusive professional environment.

Theme 2: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Traverse an Intricate Labyrinth of Systemic Barriers

This theme centers on institutional barriers preventing career progression, with participants pointing to issues such as lack of promotion from within organizations and the importance of fair hiring practices to support Black women in leadership roles (Participant 3, 4, 6, and 9; Bettini et al., 2022; Chance, 2022). The participants' perceptions on the lack of representation in educational leadership roles, lack of promotion from within educational organizations, and possible unfair practices that overlook Black women even when they are qualified internal candidates reflect wider trends (Carter et al., 2022; Fuller et al., 2019). Participants reported this experience has been accompanied by a sense of feeling overlooked or undermined by the very systems they are trying to advance within (Chaney et al., 2021; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020).

The theme also emphasizes the necessity for diversity in hiring practices within K-12 education systems, with participants pointing out the importance of representation during hiring processes (Bernstein et al., 2020; Blanck et al., 2021). It also touches on institutional barriers that prevent access to essential resources such as mentorship,

networking, and funding, which are critical to success in leadership roles in the education sector (Alfred et al., 2019; Bertrand Jones et al., 2020). The need for dismantling these systemic barriers comes with a call for a more inclusive and equitable approach to leadership, reflecting the broader discourse on intersectionality and equitable practice (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Bauer et al., 2021; Crenshaw, 1989). Participant 3's statement, "I think there's a number of systemic issues that make it more difficult for Black women to ascend to leadership positions," underlines the underlying systemic barriers obstructing Black women's advancement (Nadal et al., 2021). This sentiment echoes CRT's insights into how racism and racial inequality are embedded within institutions (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Black women leaders have emphasized the need for systemic change to manage bias and discrimination within organizations (Genao & Mercedes, 2021). They additionally noted the need for laws and procedures to facilitate their advancement (Troshynski & Bejinariu, 2021). These barriers include a lack of representation, funding, mentorship, and networking (Alfred et al., 2019; Chance, 2022; Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020; Shelton & Lugo, 2021), highlighting persistent inequality. Participant 6 noted, "Finances are sometimes a barrier because I know if you do want to be in a position of leadership, not only do you need maybe more credentials, you have to take more tests." This reflects broader issues of economic and educational inequality, often hindering Black women's opportunities (Wheaton & Kezar, 2021), and can be understood through intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1989; A. Y. Davis, 1983).

Participant 4's observation, "They kept bringing in people from the outside rather than promoting from within," and Participant 9's comment on never seeing a Black

woman as a superintendent, resonate with research revealing Black women's underrepresentation (Chance, 2022; Sales et al., 2019). This illustrates the "double bind" of being both Black and female and organizational cultures favoring masculine leadership standards (Trzebiatowski et al., 2022). Black feminist thought supports understanding these unique experiences through an intersectional lens (Collins, 1990; Watkins, 1981). Participant 7's statement, "Ultimately, I think our district is better. And there are more opportunities. And, I see, Black women advance all the time in our district, but never to the top position," emphasizes localized context and the glass ceiling phenomenon, adding complexity to the systemic challenges (Carter et al., 2022). It aligns with standpoint theory, recognizing how personal experiences shape understanding (Collins, 1990), and emphasizes context-specific solutions.

In conclusion, these findings provide profound insights into the multi-dimensional barriers hindering Black women's advancement into top leadership positions. From systemic and economic barriers to underrepresentation and the glass ceiling effect, the participants' experiences resonate with existing literature, emphasizing the intersectionality and complexity of these challenges. The need for systemic change and targeted, context-specific solutions is highlighted, calling for further research and action to dismantle the barriers faced by Black women in leadership.

Theme 3: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Defend Their Authentic Identity

For Black women seeking K-12 educational leadership roles, this lack of support manifests in a way that can make the journey to leadership lonelier and more daunting (Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). Educational leaders play a vital role in shaping educational

policies, nurturing inclusive environments, and influencing the next generation (Yamashiro et al., 2022). The challenges in navigating identity and the lack of support not only hinder Black women's progression to these roles but may also limit the diversity of thought and experience in educational leadership (Perrone, 2022).

Participants highlighted the importance of cultural competence and diversity in leadership for Black women in professional environments. They must navigate complex identity dynamics and often face racial microaggressions and exclusion (Glass & Cook, 2020; King et al., 2022; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021). This includes pressure to adhere to White, male leadership standards. Black women leaders emphasized the need for cultural competence and the capacity to manage diversity and equity issues within organizations (Cyr et al., 2021). They also stressed the significance of having diverse leadership teams representing their communities.

Implicit and explicit biases were identified as significant barriers by participants. These biases often manifest in perceptions of Black women as aggressive or overly emotional, leading to mistrust and hindrance in seeking leadership positions (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Participant 8's statement about stereotypes and appearance reinforces the intersection of race and gender in shaping leadership perceptions:

You know, my hair is in locks all of a sudden. I'm sure that I'm fitting the stereotype that's there for, people who wear, locks, you know, and so It's almost like the expectation of being a part of leadership almost in, you know, in,

encourages anti-blackness like, oh yeah, well, you can be a leader, but you need to look like this.

The absence of representation and lack of mentors were noted as challenges. Black women felt they had fewer opportunities for mentorship, a sentiment supported by existing research (Chance, 2022; Sales et al., 2019). Black female leaders emphasized the importance of mentors who could offer advice (Budig et al., 2021) and the creation of support networks with others who could relate to their experiences (Weiner et al., 2019). This lack of representation also compounded feelings of exclusion and isolation in their leadership roles.

Theme 3, Black women K-12 education leaders defend their authentic identity, delves into profound aspects of Black women's experiences. Participant 1's reflection, "I feel like I have to code-switch a lot, and it's exhausting," illustrates the practice of altering language or appearance to conform to different norms. This resonates with the idea of the "double bind" of being both Black and female, leading to feelings of fatigue and loneliness (Nadal et al., 2021; Trzebiatowski et al., 2022).

Communication challenges, perceptions of anger, and stereotypes were also revealed in the theme. The literature notes that Black women leaders might be seen as "too emotional" or "too aggressive," eroding trust and undermining effective leadership (Manongsong & Ghosh, 2021). Theme 3 underscores the complex intersection of identity, support, communication, and stereotypes that Black women leaders must navigate in professional spaces. Through the lens of various theoretical frameworks such as Black feminist thought, CRT, and social identity theory, the participant's experiences

illuminate the multifaceted challenges that arise from intersecting identities. They provide vivid examples of how systemic barriers persist and offer insight into the strategies and struggles of Black women as they strive to succeed in leadership roles. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive understanding of intersectionality and a concerted effort to foster more inclusive and equitable workplaces.

Theme 4: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Concede to Biased Rejections

Black women may face stereotyping that affects their career growth (Chaney et al., 2021). Stereotypes related to gender and race can lead to doubts about their competence, commitment, or leadership style (Cha & Roberts, 2019). For example, all 10 participants mentioned consciously navigating passionate emotions so that other genders and races did not label them with the “angry Black woman” stereotype (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020). This lack of representation might be perceived as a signal that leadership roles are unattainable or unwelcoming to Black women (Jang & Alexander, 2022).

Career progression and aspirations for Black women might be influenced by the need to balance multiple responsibilities, including family, community obligations, and societal expectations (Banks, 2020), as cited by participants 1, 3, and 4. These challenges may be further intensified by the lack of institutional support or understanding of their unique needs and roles (Collins, 1990).

The underrepresentation and frequent job rejection faced by Black women in leadership roles were evidenced by Participant 6’s expression, “I’ve been getting rejection after rejection with jobs and just different things I’m trying to do like getting adjunct position.” This struggle reflects the statistical reality of Black women occupying

a mere 2% of Fortune 500 CEO roles (Fairfax, 2019). Furthermore, the experience of Participant 6 resonates with research indicating the existence of implicit bias in hiring processes, often leading to the overlook of qualified Black women candidates (Tevis et al., 2020; Williams et al., 2020).

Regarding the education and credentialing of Black women, Participants 3 and 9 articulated sentiments that mirror scholarly findings. Participant 3's statement, "Many of us have the credentials but are still overlooked," and Participant 9's experience of being questioned about their credentials exemplify challenges commonly faced. The literature notes that Black women leaders are often subject to racial microaggressions and doubts regarding their qualifications and abilities (King et al., 2022; Peters & Miles Nash, 2021), hindering their career paths and contributing to feelings of marginalization (Nadal et al., 2021).

In exploring the career trajectory of Black women, the themes of exclusion and marginalization appear to shape their professional journey. This observation aligns with research findings, reflecting the historical challenges faced by Black women leaders, including double discrimination due to gender and race (Chaney et al., 2021) and limited access to crucial professional resources (Chance, 2022; Erskine et al., 2021; Page et al., 2022 ; Shelton & Lugo, 2021).

Understanding the historical context of Black women's fight for inclusion is essential in shedding light on their current challenges in leadership roles. The ongoing lack of representation (Motro et al., 2022; Sales et al., 2019) significantly informs their present-day professional experiences. Moreover, the critical role of racial and gender

identity in shaping Black women's leadership experiences is evident. The external pressure to conform to conventional White male leadership standards (Glass & Cook, 2020), combined with racial microaggressions and intersectional discrimination, creates a unique set of challenges. However, these challenges have also led to the development of leadership styles that emphasize collaboration and empathy, drawing strength from racial and gender identities (Cyr et al., 2021; Etherington et al., 2020; King et al., 2022; Sales et al., 2019).

Theme 4 provides comprehensive insights into the multifaceted challenges encountered by Black women in their professional advancement. Rooted in historical struggles and shaped by intersecting racial and gender identities, these experiences call for systemic changes. Recognizing implicit biases and fostering inclusive opportunities can lead to a more equitable environment for Black women leaders. The congruence between participant voices and academic literature emphasizes the urgency for transformation, considering the unique intersectional identities and historical context of Black women leaders.

Theme 5: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Yield to Over-scrutiny of Credentials

Changes in the political environment can directly or indirectly affect the opportunities available to Black women (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Banks, 2020). The sociopolitical impact on leadership opportunities for Black women is not isolated from other factors but intersects with both racial and gender biases (Crenshaw, 1989). The combination of being both Black and female often places them at the crossroads of

multiple forms of discrimination, manifesting in specific challenges when seeking leadership positions (Collins, 1990).

The perceived impact extends beyond individual biases to structural and systemic issues (Bailes & Guthery, 2020). Policies or institutional practices may be set up in a way that implicitly disadvantages Black women (Bernstein et al., 2020). This may manifest in recruitment processes, professional development opportunities, or other aspects that affect career progression (Budig et al., 2021). Societal attitudes and prevailing stereotypes can shape both the opportunities and the perceptions of those opportunities (Chaney et al., 2021). Negative stereotypes about Black women's capabilities or suitability for leadership roles can affect how they are viewed by hiring committees, peers, or themselves, limiting opportunities or self-confidence (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020).

Understanding the particular regional, national, or local sociopolitical dynamics is essential for fully comprehending how they impact leadership opportunities for Black women in different settings (Johnson & Fournillier, 2022). It emphasizes the need to look beyond individual prejudices and recognize the structural and systemic forces that contribute to the perceived barriers (Fuller et al., 2019). It also opens doors to further inquiry into how positive change can be fostered through policy, advocacy, and community engagement (Galloway & Ishimaru, 2019).

This theme encompasses aspects related to the sociopolitical context, representation, organizational efforts for diversity, influence of politics and society, power structures, and inclusion initiatives. Participants' insights emphasize the need for substantial systemic change and greater diversity in leadership roles. The results of the

thematic analysis reflect broader struggles related to equality and opportunity and emphasize the complexities of the sociopolitical impact on leadership opportunities for Black women (Participant 5, 6, and 3).

According to the participants, the current political climate significantly impacts leadership opportunities for Black women. First, Participant 5 stated: “With the current political climate, I think there’s a lot more attention being paid to diversity, but it’s not enough.” This observation resonates with the barriers and the “double bind” faced by Black women (Trzebiatowski et al., 2022) and emphasizes the lingering challenges in achieving true diversity (Sales et al., 2019). In a related sentiment, Participant 6 observed: “Well, politically, you know, being that we have a One of color in office. I think that’s a that’s a great thing to look up to but also it shows you the person and true power isn’t White male or a male.” This reflection aligns with intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991) and CRT’s examination of racial inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), further emphasizing the complexity of sociopolitical influence on leadership opportunities.

Participants highlight the growing awareness and efforts regarding diversity but question their adequacy. According to the insights provided, these observations align with the need to challenge restrictive social norms (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019) and reflect the importance of intersectionality in Black women’s experiences (Collins, 1990). Furthermore, participants’ perspectives suggest a superficiality in diversity hiring practices, underscoring the need for profound systemic change, consistent with standpoint theory (Collins, 1990). Participant 6’s comment about power not being limited to White

males indicates resistance against conventional power structures, resonating with Wheaton and Kezar's (2021) assertion regarding the challenges faced by Black women leaders. This sentiment emphasizes the importance of agency and challenges stereotypical expectations (Bettini et al., 2022; Watkins, 1981).

Theme 5 provides a comprehensive understanding of how sociopolitical factors influence leadership opportunities for Black women, engaging with diverse bodies of literature. CRT, feminist perspectives, implicit bias research, and structural barriers studies contribute to this understanding (Roumell & James-Gallaway, 2021; Quillian & Midtbøen, 2021; D. Thomas, 2019).

Interpretations of Results in Terms of the Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of intersectionality was employed as the lens to interpret the findings of this study. The essential premise of intersectionality is the intersection and interaction of social identities, such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability, which creates unique experiences of privilege and oppression (Agosto & Roland, 2018; Blanck et al., 2021; Fuller et al., 2019). It stresses how these identities and power structures do not exist in isolation but rather intersect to shape individual and group experiences (Guimaraes Correa, 2020; Misra et al., 2020). The following themes were derived from this conceptual framework, and their relevance to the study findings was explored.

Theme 1: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Learn to Hurdle the Intersectionality of Race and Gender

Within the intersectionality framework, the results reveal several aspects of discrimination that Black women face in leadership aspirations, such as racial and gender discrimination, microaggressions, and stereotypes. Participant 1's statement, "I think as a Black woman, I've always had to prove myself twice as much," encapsulates the doubled effort required due to the intersecting identities (Crenshaw, 1991). Moreover, Participant 8's perception of the stereotypes around Black women leaders further exemplifies the unique experience of intersectionality, including aggression rather than assertiveness (Nadal et al., 2021).

Theme 2: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Traverse an Intricate Labyrinth of Systemic Barriers

The second theme, systemic hurdles in advancement, aligns with intersectionality's emphasis on understanding how power systems function at intersections of identities (Bharat et al., 2021). Participants 3, 4, and 7 highlighted the systemic barriers, lack of promotion, and underrepresentation that limit the advancement of Black women. Participant 9's acknowledgment that no person of color, specifically a Black woman, had reached a superintendent position in the district, reinforces this theme (Montoya, 2021).

Theme 3: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Defend Their Authentic Identity

The third theme reflects the complexity of navigating multiple identities, as underlined in intersectionality (Simon et al., 2021). Participant 1's exhaustion from code-

switching and Participant 8's challenge with stereotypical perceptions of appearance are specific examples that reveal how intersectionality can be a burden in professional spaces. The contrast between Participant 2's luck in finding mentors and others' struggles reveals that varying experiences cannot be understood entirely without this conceptual lens.

Theme 4: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Concede to Biased Rejections

This theme resonates with the intersectionality framework by highlighting unique challenges in career progression and aspirations. Participant 6's experiences of repeated rejection despite having the credentials and Participant 9's observation of informal questioning about credentials at executive meetings underscore the intersection of race, gender, and professional status, creating a distinct pathway fraught with hurdles (C. Thomas et al., 2021).

Theme 5: Black Women K-12 Education Leaders Often Yield to Over-scrutiny of Credentials

Finally, the intersectionality framework connects to this theme by reflecting on the influence of politics, power structures, and lack of representation (Simon et al., 2021). Participants 5 and 6's observations on the current political climate and the symbolism of having a person of color in office provide a nuanced understanding of the sociopolitical impacts on leadership opportunities for Black women (Misra et al., 2020).

Conclusion

Therefore, intersectionality is congruent with the findings in this study, as it delineates the multifaceted experiences of Black women seeking leadership positions. It

provides insight into the discrimination, systemic barriers, identity navigation, career challenges, and sociopolitical influences faced by these individuals, affirming that these experiences are due to the intersection of various systems leading to unique forms of oppression and discrimination.

Limitations of the Study

The present research is not without limitations. These limitations arise primarily from the execution of the study and revolve around issues of access to participants, data security, and the cultural and social sensitivity of the study subject matter. One of the principal limitations to trustworthiness in this study is the challenge of access to a representative sample of Black women K-12 school leaders. As they represent an underrepresented group, securing a broad and varied sample of participants posed significant hurdles. Despite multiple recruitment strategies, including leveraging professional networks, collaborations with school districts, and online advertisements, there may be a skew in the selection towards those more inclined to participate due to various reasons, such as time availability or openness to sharing their experiences. This situation could potentially limit the generalizability of the study findings.

The scope of the study was also limited to a specific group - Black women principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, and superintendents from public schools in the United States - which further narrows the potential applicability of the findings. The experiences of Black women in other educational leadership roles or in private school settings, for example, are not necessarily captured in this study.

From an ethical perspective, this study required an approach sensitive to the social and cultural nuances of the participants. Despite gaining informed consent and approval from the IRB, any unintended oversight or insensitivity in managing these nuanced aspects could have affected the trustworthiness of the study and the participant's comfort and openness during the data collection process.

While these limitations are recognized, all measures were taken to minimize their impact, and they provide avenues for refinement in future research. Importantly, the findings contribute valuable insights into the experiences of Black women seeking leadership positions in education, providing a basis for positive social change in this field. Understanding of these limitations can guide more effective execution and interpretation of future studies on this topic.

Recommendations

As I reflected on the findings of this study, it became evident that there was essential knowledge to be unlocked regarding the experiences and perceptions of Black women seeking leadership positions in K-12 educational settings. This study's observations elucidate that while these individuals grapple with substantial obstacles, encompassing intersectional discrimination and scant representation, they exhibit resilience, employing their distinctive viewpoints for creativity and transformation within their institutions.

In an attempt to augment the knowledge within the educational leadership field, it became clear that further exploration is warranted. One potential avenue for extending understanding centers around the investigation of a wider, more varied collection of

Black women educational leaders. Future research can shed light on Black women leaders in alternative educational realms, such as private schools, charter schools, or higher education establishments, which may enrich and diversify our comprehension of the experiences of Black women in educational leadership roles.

Moreover, stemming from the insights of this study, I discerned that it would be advantageous to explore the sustained experiences of Black women who have occupied leadership roles. A focused examination of the longitudinal experiences of Black women in leadership positions, the mechanisms for enduring presence, and the outcomes of their leadership could yield critical insights. This exploration could significantly contribute to our understanding of the growth, maintenance, and efficacy of Black women leaders within K-12 education.

Furthermore, influenced by the finding of this study, I suggest the investigation into the role of mentorship and sponsorship in shaping the career paths of Black women in educational leadership. Since this study indicated that the absence of representation and mentoring opportunities forms a notable hindrance, the exploration can be directed towards understanding how these elements influence career advancement, and what forms of mentoring or sponsorship initiatives are most potent in aiding Black women's rise into leadership positions.

Another recommendation for future examination, also shaped by this study's findings, pertains to the assessment of particular interventions conceived to overcome the identified barriers. A future investigation may concentrate on assessing the efficacy of

strategies or schemes aimed at amplifying diversity in educational leadership, diminishing intersectional discrimination, or aiding Black women leaders in their roles.

Lastly, the outcomes of this research could spark dialogues on the formulation of policies or programs targeting the enhancement of diversity in educational leadership and reduction of intersectional discrimination. The impact of such interventions could be studied, focusing specifically on school districts employing particular strategies to support Black women leaders.

These research recommendations are anchored in the findings of this study and the broader literature as reviewed previously. Pursuing these areas for further research may continue to build on the understanding developed by this study, contributing additional layers to our comprehension of the experiences of Black women in educational leadership roles. By doing so, we might add depth and breadth to this vital area of study, creating avenues for more defined strategies to effectively evaluate, support, and empower Black women in the field of education.

Implications

The findings of this study elucidate significant implications on diverse levels, particularly focusing on the experiences of Black women striving for leadership roles in K-12 education, a vital yet inadequately explored domain. Through this study, I discovered the resilience and strategies employed by these women to maneuver through intricate systems, serving as motivation and direction for others.

At the individual level, the implications of this study offer empowerment to Black women aspiring to leadership roles in education. These insights can guide them through

the complexities, providing understanding of the unique strategies that others have successfully employed. It furnishes a blueprint of how resilience and innovation can navigate through the challenges and adversities faced.

On the organizational level, the findings from this study bring attention to the necessity for educational establishments to critically evaluate their traditions and methodologies. I implied that institutions should actively dismantle barriers that could obstruct Black women's progression into leadership roles. This could comprise the establishment of diversity and inclusion efforts, mentoring and sponsorship plans, and the cultivation of an environment that appreciates and respects varying leadership forms. With this structural implementation, schools and districts can make substantial strides in breaking down systemic barriers.

Furthermore, the results spotlights the societal and policy level, accentuating the value of representation in leadership. Policymakers must consider these findings when devising laws related to education and diversity, ensuring alignment and support for the growth of Black women in educational leadership. Moreover, the insights from this research can ignite broader conversations concerning racial and gender fairness in leadership across various sectors.

From a methodological standpoint, this study reveals the capability of qualitative research in articulating the voices of marginalized groups and investigating intricate, intersectional identities. Future research can draw from this approach, possibly focusing on different contexts and extending the knowledge in the fields of educational leadership and intersectionality.

The last implication at the practice level indicates the necessity for educational institutions to proactively pursue the creation of more inclusive surroundings. This could involve offering professional development opportunities targeted at understanding and combating intersectional discrimination, setting diversity targets, and initiating mentorship programs specifically designed for Black women. There is a need to recognize and value the unique perspectives brought by Black women and intentionally craft a more inclusive vision of leadership. Such interventions can lead to practices that are more innovative, responsive, and fair.

In summary, the findings from this study contribute to positive social change by offering insights on the individual, organizational, societal, policy, and practice levels. The three overarching implications include empowering individual women through insights and strategies, encouraging educational organizations to evaluate and reconfigure their practices, and prompting societal and policy shifts towards inclusivity. These insights not only enhance the understanding of Black women in educational leadership but also create structures that positively influence the organization, ensuring an inclusive, responsive, and equitable educational environment. Whether through policy-driven changes or professional learning activities, the organization and society at large should consider ways to improve the educational leadership landscape for Black women, paving the path for a more diverse and inclusive future.

Conclusion

In this study, I probed into the challenges encountered by Black women pursuing educational leadership roles in K-12 schools, deciphering an understanding of their

experiences. According to the analysis, the intersectionality of race and gender critically shapes experiences, frequently magnifying the hurdles these Black women K-12 education leaders face. Black women K-12 education leaders must traverse an intricate labyrinth of systemic and societal barriers. Black women K-12 education leaders struggle with a lack of support and mentorship, being forced to code-switch, and confronting stereotypes and expectations that suppress authentic identity and hinder leadership opportunities. Despite possessing necessary qualifications, Black women K-12 education leaders often confront a series of rejections and incessant questioning of their credentials, leading to frustrations and impediments in their career progression and aspirations. In the midst of a changing political climate emphasizing diversity, power structures and superficial organizational efforts still perpetuate a lack of true representation, limiting opportunities for leadership and undermining the goal of inclusive progress.

After developing my findings, novel insights led me to areas that merit exploration. Recommendations for future studies encompassed an in-depth analysis of the existing policies and a critical review of institutional practices to enhance diversity and inclusion. The implications of this research extend beyond academic boundaries, providing essential perspectives for practitioners and policymakers.

In summary, this study broadened the existing body of knowledge, emphasizing that leadership in education is a multifaceted construct that must reflect the diversity of the communities it serves. It urged the reformation of current systems, promoting diversity, inclusivity, and equity. Although the responsibility for fostering change is shared across different stakeholders, the primary focus is on empowering Black women

leaders, thereby leading to a more inclusive and equitable educational environment. The ultimate benefit is a more responsive and innovative leadership structure that can positively influence education and community well-being.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol will begin with me introducing myself to the participants and the purpose of the study. I will provide the informed consent and the participant will be notified that they may exit the study at any point without consequence. I will ask the participants if they have any questions before beginning the interview. The interview will begin after the participants consent to the interview. To build rapport with the participants, I will begin with basic questions such as their name, their educational leadership role, details about the school that they work at, and the number of years that they have worked in educational leadership. Rapport building will allow the participant to feel comfortable answering the interview questions openly and honestly. A series of open-ended questions will be posed to elicit rich and detailed responses, explore the complex topic, and reduce researcher bias. To conclude the interview, the participant will be thanked for their participation. Interviews are audio-recorded with permission, transcribed verbatim, and securely.

Interview Questions

1. What is your experience as a Black woman seeking a K-12 leadership position?
2. What are the biggest challenges that Black women face in trying to obtain K-12 leadership positions?
3. Have you faced any specific barriers or obstacles when seeking a K-12 leadership position? If so, can you expand on what they were?

4. Do you think your race and gender have affected your advancement to a leadership position?
5. Have you encountered bias or prejudice during your efforts to obtain a K-12 leadership position? If so, can you describe the context of the situation?
6. How do you think your experiences as a Black woman seeking a K-12 leadership position have influenced the trajectory of your career?
7. In your experience, have you noticed any differences in how Black women in K-12 leadership positions are treated compared to non-Black or non-woman peers?
8. How do you think the current political and social climate affects Black women seeking K-12 leadership positions?
9. Do you, or have you ever, experienced imposter syndrome when seeking a K-12 leadership position? If so, how did you overcome it?
10. Do you think diversity and inclusion initiatives have affected Black women's ability to obtain a K-12 leadership position?
11. In your opinion, what is the most significant change that needs to happen in order for Black women to have equal opportunity in obtaining K-12 leadership positions?