

A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American Female Principals and
Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South

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Heroyline D. Hatcher

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This dissertation, "A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American Principals and Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South," by Heroyline D. Hatcher, is approved by:

**Dissertation
Committee
Chair**

DocuSigned by:
Kathy Nobles
024E37B3E081494

Kathy D. Nobles, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor, Educational Leadership
Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development

**Dissertation
Co-Chair**

DocuSigned by:
James Pate
186E2CC431DE4D0

James L. Pate, Ph.D.
Professor
Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development

**Committee
Members**

DocuSigned by:
Jamie Workman
24D9C0C4F854DC

Jamie Workman, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development

DocuSigned by:
John Lairsey
E7082B2079CD46E

John D. Lairsey, Ed.D.
Assistant Professor
Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development

**Associate Provost
for Graduate Studies
and Research**

DocuSigned by:
Becky da Cruz
84AF86370439F

Becky K. da Cruz, Ph.D., J.D.
Professor of Criminal Justice

Defense Date

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ABSTRACT

K-12 public school systems in the U.S. show a notable underrepresentation of female educators in top leadership roles, such as principals and superintendents (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023; NCES - National Teacher and Principal Survey [NTPS], 2017; Public School Principal Data Files (Taie et al., 2022); School Superintendents Association [AASA], Tienken, 2020). The purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of an Organization (OD) and the stages of Feminist Theory/Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as it related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021).

I engaged in purposeful criterion sampling wherein the participants had completed the foundational credentialing programs and leadership development programs, participated in district-level mentor/mentee programs, and attended local and statewide professional development trainings/conferences. Interviews were collected and analyzed using a three-iteration coding system. I integrated the AI-assisted and In Vivo data sets in the discovery of key findings, themes, and patterns. The key findings are organized by RQs, theories, themes, and patterns. Overall, the participants identified the need for mentorship, formal, and informal support in their career advancement navigation journeys (RQ1). Additionally, perceived race and gender barriers highlighted the issues of disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders within the school district (RQ2). Key findings included the identification of ageism and politics as barriers and the participants' utilization of voice as a strategy or empowerment tool to develop resilience within the school district.

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Chapter One

Introduction to the Study

The world is far from the goal of equal opportunity for all: circumstances beyond an individual's control, such as gender, race, ethnicity, migrant status and, for children, the socioeconomic status of their parents, continue to affect one's chances of succeeding in life. Without appropriate policies and institutions, inequalities in outcomes create or preserve unequal opportunities and perpetuate social divisions.

– United Nations, *World Social Report*, 2020

Historically, there exists the concept referred to as an organization. The American Society for Quality (2024) defines an organization as “a group aggregated and combined under specific leadership to function as a single entity for a particular purpose” (para. 2). Two key elements of an organization are division of labor and hierarchy of authority. Organizations can have formal and informal structures. Therefore, it is important to define formal and informal leaders. Formal leaders obtain their authority from the hierarchy that has been established. For example, a leadership position grants power to a recipient to make decisions and delegate authority to others, and those employees are expected to accept such granted leadership authority and power. Conversely, informal leaders do not have this decision-making authority and power (Pielstick, 2000).

Bolman and Deal (2021) outlined the Four Frames of an Organization: structural, human resources, politics, and symbolic. The central concept of the structural frame consists of rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment. Note that the image of leadership consists of

a social structure within the structural frame. Likewise, the human resource frame's central concepts include needs, skills, and relationships with a goal of alignment of organizational needs and human skills. Bolman and Deal (2021) characterized the political frame as power, conflict, competition, and organizational policies. Within the political frame, there is a need for advocacy due to conflict and competition. Lastly, the symbolic frame includes culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes. Key intrinsic values are inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning. For my study, I utilized the understanding of the organization frames to better understand how female administrators in this study perceived structure, politics, human resources, and symbolic elements within the hiring process to advanced leadership. The participants' perceptions of the organization did not necessarily impact the culture of an organization. Participants' stories often help galvanize individuals who make up the organization to become change agents to challenge and reform the culture from within (Tyack & Cuban, 1995).

To elaborate further, an organizational structure is the process and framework by which an organization establishes its business of operation (Ahmady et al., 2016; Monavarian et al., 2007). The corporate world has its own distinct organization. Typically, it contains a governing board, CEO/President, and upper management, along with a protocol (i.e., an organizational chart) of how upper management will execute the hierarchy of authority and power with middle and lower-level management (e.g., directors, managers, and shift leaders). A governing board is comprised of several individuals who are legally obligated to preside over and orchestrate all business affairs of an organization. The governing board is responsible for the decision making and vote casting that guide the organization's CEO/President, middle and lower-level managers, and all other staff members.

Just like in the corporate world, there is an established educational organization and structure. The education system in Georgia operates under Georgia Code: Title 20. The state educational organization structure mirrors that of the corporate world, with the Georgia Department of Education (GADOE, 2024) governing entity, local school board, superintendent, district-level managers, school-level leaders (e.g., principals with decision-making authority and assistant principals with no decision-making authority), teachers, and non-instructional staff. Educational organization structures allow for organizational charts, which clearly depict the hierarchy of authority and power within a school system. They provide clarity by presenting well-defined job descriptions, positions, functions, roles, responsibilities, and authorities.

A factor my study addressed was organizational culture in a small rural school district in the South. Organizational culture generally consists of common determinants such as workplace missions, beliefs, assumptions, organizational structure, established norms, protocols, practices, relationships, and other determinants which can make up such a culture (Chalmers & Brannan, 2024). The study addressed the phenomena of organizational culture related to the placement of females in formal leadership positions. For clarity, I studied a single school district in the rural South for an understanding of the disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders.

Problem Statement

On the national level, K-12 public school systems have an underrepresentation of female educators securing the top-level leadership positions from principalship to school superintendent (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2023; NCES - National Teacher and Principal Survey [NTPS], 2017; Public School Principal Data Files (Taie et al., 2022); School Superintendents Association [AASA], Tienken, 2020). Underrepresentation has been quite evident for non-White school female educators and leaders pursuing advanced leadership

positions (NCES, 2023). Historically in the South, female African American and White administrators have not had enough representation, particularly within this study's rural school district (Human Resource Department & Principals, Fall & Spring 2023). According to national data (NCES, 2023), this continues to be the case for African American females who are less likely than their White female counterparts to obtain principal or superintendent positions. Figures have been included in Chapter Two to support this premise. There remains the lingering question of why readily available, professionally credentialed (i.e. GADOE) female educators have not been allowed more opportunities to perform in advanced leadership positions from principalship, district level positions, to superintendent.

The 2021 Georgia K-12 Teacher and Leader Workforce Report contains data related to the demographic makeup of the teachers and leaders; the breakdown of the data includes number of years of service, degree level, teacher mobility, teacher retention, and the school demographics. I found information related to ethnicity, gender, and mobility informative for this study (Flamini & Steed, 2022). In reporting the data, it is important to understand how leaders are defined within the report. Flamini and Steed (2022) defined leaders as “principals, Pre-K directors, alternative school directors, assistant principals, instructional supervisors, community school directors/coordinators, or CTAE directors” (Flamini & Steed, 2022, p. 17). Thus, the percentages of school leaders by race and ethnicity are as follows: Asian has 0.5%; Black has 38.7%; Hispanic has 1.7%; Multiracial has 1.2%; Native American has 0.1%; and White has 57.8% (Flamini & Steed, 2022, p. 18). Flamini and Steed (2022) reported that the “leader workforce” is “disproportionately female” in relation to the student population. The authors noted that although the percentage of the teacher workforce was high, this disproportionality “warrants further study” in examining the patterns of the “teacher to leader” transition (Flamini

& Steed, 2022, p. 18). After a review of the workforce report, I wondered about possible patterns or trends leading to underrepresentation of females advancing to higher levels of leadership.

As it relates to the small rural Southern district data, the leader workforce is comprised of the Board of Education, Board Office, superintendent, principals, assistant principals, and other school leaders. I noted that there was a drastic change that occurred within the hiring practices of the upper leadership, particularly in reference to the superintendent and the Board of Education members. In 2019-2020, the County Board of Education consisted of five males: four White males and one African American male. Additionally, the superintendent within that academic year was a White male (Southern rural school district - Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2019-2020). Within the 2019-2020 academic year; the make-up of principals and assistant principals was comprised of two White males and one African American male (Southern rural school district - Human Resource Department. & Principals, Spring 2019-2020). Thus, I can ascertain from this data that although the teacher population was 112, there were no females within the principal and assistant principal leadership roles within the county education system (Southern rural school district - Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2019-2020).

In the academic year of 2022-2023, the demographics of county leadership underwent a change as there was an increase in the number of female principals and assistant principals. There was a total of three principals: one White male and two African American females (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022). Additionally, there were two African American female assistant principals, one White female assistant principal, and one African American male assistant principal (Human Resource Department. & Principals, Spring 2022). Although there has been an increase in the number of females within the principal and assistant

principal positions, the gender makeup of the elected county Board of Education members and superintendent positions remains the same. Again, the issue of the underrepresentation of female leaders in advanced positions needs review. Similar to the state data, there is a disproportionality related to transitioning from leader to advanced leadership positions for females. This warrants further investigation to capture the authentic accounts of African American and White female leaders' experiences during their journeys of securing their leadership positions.

Organization for School District of Inquiry

The Southern rural school district makes available an organizational chart to ensure an understanding of the school district's organizational and hierarchical structure. The composition of the 261 total full-time faculty and staff of the Southern rural school district for the 2023-2024 school year consists of 56 male and 205 female employees. There are 176 Whites, 84 African Americans, and one Hispanic (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022). Based on the data from the Human Resource Department of the district, there has been a significant difference between the total number of male and female employees from the time of school integration in the 1970s to present. Female employees continue to outnumber the male employees. Despite this fact, White and African American males have performed in most advanced leadership roles and capacities (e.g., principal, assistant principal, district office positions, and superintendent) until 2022 (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022).

Whites and African Americans are the two main ethnic groups employed in this small Southern rural school district. This is a continuous trend for the school district and local community (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Data indicate there are approximately twice the number of White employees as the

number of African Americans. The Census Bureau's report (2021) on the local community's race and ethnicity percentages indicates that Whites made up 73% of the population; African Americans made up 21% of the population; and Hispanics made up 4% of the population. The census data on sex or gender notes 52% of the population within the school district's county are males and 48% are females.

In this small rural school district, there are African American and White female leaders who are professionally credentialed (Human Resource Department & Principals, Fall & Spring 2023). They have the necessary knowledge and skill sets to become school or district formal leaders, if desired. This involves years of continuous advanced education accomplishments, on-the-job classroom training, and acquired leadership skills for performance at the building level. These attributes prepare educators seeking advanced-level administrative positions (e.g., building-level principalship to superintendent). By the 2022-2023 school term, there were five African American female leaders (i.e., principal, assistant principal, and finance officer) and one White female assistant principal approved by the Southern rural school district board to perform as school principals, assistant principals, and district office personnel (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022). This was unprecedented for this school district. It appears that this drastic, but positive change of events warrants an in-depth investigation and provides a pool of potential participants for this study.

Conceptual Framework

According to Maxwell (2013), the conceptual framework allows the researcher an opportunity to reveal a specific system of concepts, beliefs, expectations, assumptions, and theories that will support and inform the study. Ravitch and Riggan (2017) stated that a conceptual framework is an argument about why the topic one wishes to study matters and why

the means proposed to study it are appropriate and rigorous. Additionally, they presented how the term conceptual framework has been referred to from three different perspectives by many of their colleagues and students: (1) A visual representation of a study's organization or major theoretical tenets; (2) A perception of conceptual and theoretical frameworks as essentially the same thing; and (3) A perception of the conceptual framework as a way of linking all the elements of the research process (Ravitch & Riggan, 2017).

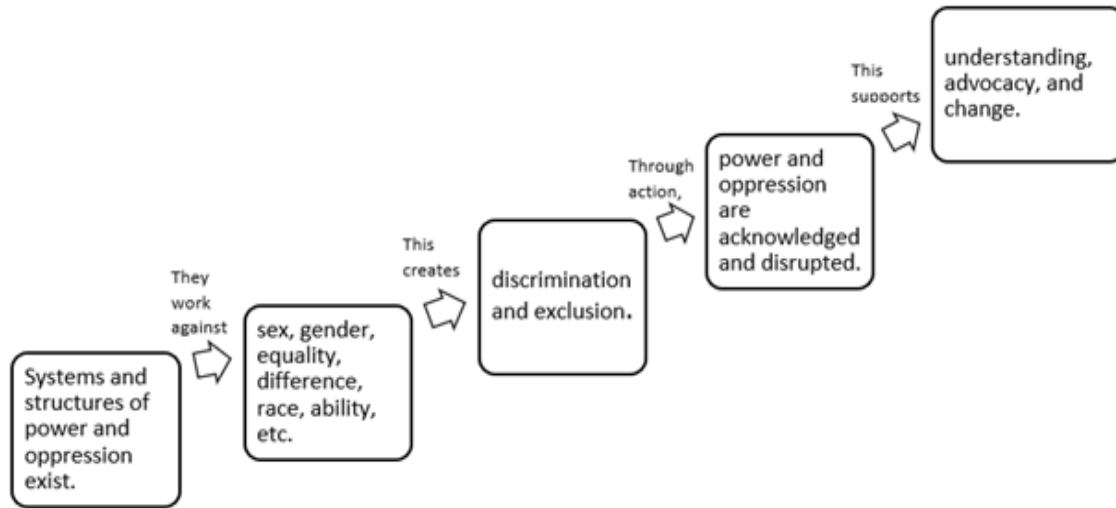
Because conceptual frameworks have three diverse definitions, my conceptual framework incorporates all three perspectives. It is based on the Four Frames of an Organization: structural, human resources, politics, and symbolic (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Additionally, I utilized the Feminist Theory to link all aspects of my study while encompassing the Feminist Thought and the Black Feminist Thought (BFT) (Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2015; Wollstonecraft, 2019). Researchers have become more interested in the Feminist Thought along with BFT as a particular focus (See Figure 1). The first step within the Feminist Theory is centered around the concept of organizational structure, which is indicative of the influence or possibly impact of the other three components: human resources, politics, and symbolic-culture within governing systems (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Thus, I determined that there are relationships between the stages of the Feminist Theory and the Four Frames of an Organization (See Table 1).

Within this preview, I review the three waves of feminism. Each wave showcases some aspects of the Four Frames of an Organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021); thus, the first wave has components of all Four Frames but especially structure, politics, and culture (i.e., fight for rights). The second wave is a continued fight for rights for personhood, ownership of body, educational and career opportunities, and rights within the workplace. The second wave is influenced by all four of the frames. Within the third wave, it is important that systems

acknowledge the intersectionality of oppression within various categories: gender, race, sexual orientation, age, and ability. Like the other two waves, this wave also reflects the Four Frames.

Figure 1

Feminist Theory



Note. Adapted from *Feminist Theory*, by J. A. Arinder, in J. Egbert and M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (para. 7), 2020, Pressbooks. Copyright 2020 by Joy Egbert and Mary F. Roe. Adapted with permission.

The time span of feminist events is frequently described in three waves (Freeman, 2019). First-wave feminism occurred from 1830 to the 1920s. This period pertained to women’s suffrage, the fight for equal rights, and the right to have legal protections to gain basic rights. Second-wave feminism occurred from the 1960s to 1980. Additional work was done to increase earlier efforts to ensure women received basic rights: increased number of women entering the workforce outside the home, pro-choice advocates, increased educational opportunities, and increased protest for protection against sexual harassment. During this wave, there were some notable changes for women such as Title IX and *Roe v. Wade* (Freeman, 2019). Third-wave feminism began in the 1990s and continues to the present day (2023). This period is referred to

as the intersectional wave because some feminist groups utilized Crenshaw’s (1991) concept of intersectionality to understand that there are multiple categories of oppression (e.g., gender, race, class, age, and ability) and multiple intersections of oppression. One cornerstone theme of Feminist Thought is the need for African American women to value having a voice. Collins (2000) emphasized this by saying, “the overarching theme of finding a voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women’s standpoint remains a core theme in Black feminist thought” (p. 100). For the scope of this study, the stages of the Feminist Theory were utilized to illustrate the stages of BFT. Although, Collins (2000) did not coin the elements of BFT as stages. BFTs also include the ideal of challenging oppressive systems, self-identification/validation, interconnected elements of oppression (gender and race), and the intrinsic value of African American women’s networks which serves as sources for self-advocacy. Thus, I value the operationalization of the ideals via the stages.

Table 1

Feminist Theory/BFT & The Frames of an Organization

Stages	Feminist Theory/BFT	The Four Frames of an Organization
Stage 1	Systems and structures of power and oppression exist	Structural, politics, culture
Stage 2	Sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc.	Human resource, structural, politics, culture
Stage 3	Discrimination and exclusion	Human resource, structural, politics, culture
Stage 4	Power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted	Structural, politics, culture
Stage 5	Understanding, advocacy, and change	Human resource, structural, politics, culture

Note. Feminist Theory data adapted from Feminist Theory, by J. A. Arinder, in J. Egbert and M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (para. 7), 2020, Pressbooks.

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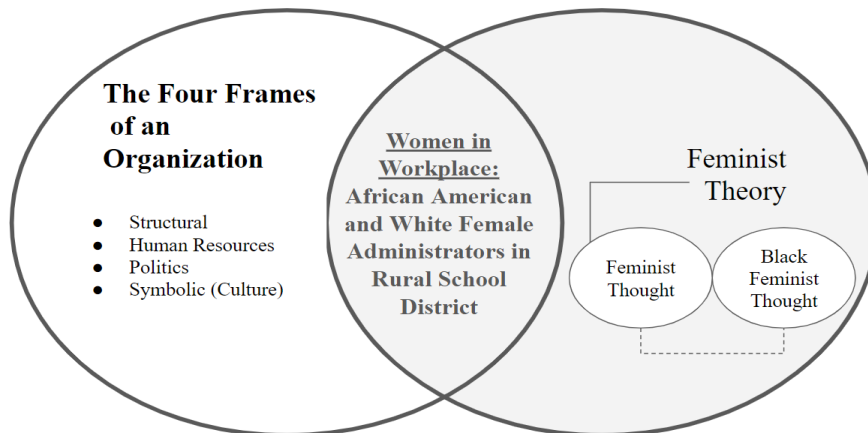
Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership (7th ed.), by L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal, 2021, Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2021 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

To ensure clarity, I present Figure 2 as a visual on how the Four Frames of an Organization and the Feminist Theory (i.e., to include the Feminist and BFTs) are possibly embedded directly and indirectly in the study’s school district. Likewise, the illustration provides a delineation of the Feminist Theory into the two subcategories: the Feminist Thought and the BFT. Both thoughts helped me examine the perceptions of both participant groups through those lenses.

Figure 2

Venn Diagram – The Four Frames of an Organization & Feminist Theory

Venn Diagram - The Four Frames of An Organization & Feminist Theory



Note. Feminist Theory data adapted from Feminist Theory, by J. A. Arinder, in J. Egbert and M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (para. 7), 2020, Pressbooks.

Copyright 2020 by Joy Egbert and Mary F. Roe. Four Frames data adapted from *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (7th ed.), by L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal, 2021, Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2021 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of an Organization (OD) and the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT as it related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021). I sought to capture the authentic, lived experiences of African American female administrators in an identified Southern school district. This study's primary focus was on female leaders who have performed as principals, assistant principals, or superintendents in the school district. By conducting this inquiry, I explored African American female administrators' perceptions of the elements of the rural school district's organization, which included structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames as well as the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT within the hiring practices (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is multi-faceted. It is important to acquire greater understanding of formal female leadership; it could allow an opportunity to acquire new knowledge on female leaders' strengths, contributions to their school districts and all other places of employment. Additionally, acquired knowledge could help rising female leaders navigate the hiring process for advanced leadership positions. The study is relevant to allow for an opportunity to explore and discover possible root causes of historic underrepresentation of African American and White female leaders. Acquired knowledge could possibly empower female leaders and assist them with breaking the glass ceiling (*Women in the Workplace, 2022*). According to the *Women in the Workplace* annual report (2022), female respondents indicated that there was limited access to readily available resources showcasing female leaders' personal experiences, assets, and contributions. Notably, an extensive investigation into these topics was

appropriate at the time of the study. I captured the meanings perceived by each participant in their own words on how they have managed to persevere during their career journey to advanced leadership positions. I asked participants to describe how they personally perceive themselves as a leader in a small rural Southern school district.

By using a case study approach as a design of inquiry along with a basic interpretive approach for data analyses (Maxwell, 2013), I captured the participants' authentic accounts of their lived experiences. As a researcher, I was cognizant of the need to allow each participant an opportunity to freely tell their story and not make it my story (Maxwell, 2013). The inquiry allowed participants an opportunity to recognize that they have a voice (Bianco, 2023; Collins, 2000; Hooks, 2015) to help advocate for themselves and others if ever warranted. Qualitative research inquiries must be conducted to help raise awareness on any perceived issues (e.g., race, gender, race and gender intersectionality, sex, and age) if identified (Mertens, 2010). After data collection, data analysis allowed for an opportunity to capture any useful strategies the participants utilized while maneuvering through the different leadership levels within the field of education. This information was reported in the findings and discussion sections later in the research process.

Personal Experiences

I was a key player advocating for positive change and fair recognition of all females aspiring to elevate themselves to various levels of leadership roles and positions in my last school system prior to my retirement in June 2022. I took every opportunity possible to advocate for the African American female educators and administrators. Many thought the efforts were time consuming and never properly addressed by those in authority to potentially make decisions to result in positive change. This is one reason I had the motivation to seek out six female leaders

as participants from the small Southern rural school district to share their lived experiences. I provided additional details on my individual experiences in Chapter Three as deemed appropriate. I was aware of biases and controlled for those in the study. I had to modify the intended participant number to four to complete data collection in a timely manner. The next section includes research questions about my study.

Research Questions

The overarching research goals of this study were to (a) illuminate the participants' derived meanings from their own lived experiences of organizational culture and hiring practices within the rural Southern school district; (b) capture strategies used by participants on navigating the hiring process for advanced leadership; (c) investigate through interviews; and (d) properly document the data collected to capture accurate accounts of the experiences of four female school and district administrators in the rural South. Therefore, I propose two research questions to guide further exploration of the goals for this qualitative study:

RQ 1. How do African American female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?

RQ 2. How do African American female administrators perceive the impact of race and gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in a rural school district in the South?

Methodology

I engaged in a single qualitative case study design to describe authentic accounts of lived experiences from four female leaders. Specifically, I investigated the lived experiences of females who have served or are serving in formal leadership positions in a school system located

in a small, rural Southern community. I captured their paths to securing and performing in leadership roles.

I gained institutional approval from Valdosta State University (VSU) to implement data collection at the site of my study (see Appendix A). I selected the participants through purposeful criterion sampling (Maxwell, 2013). The criterion was that each female participant must be serving or have served in a formal leadership position within the small rural school district of the study. Data collection methods included a survey for demographics and three in-depth interviews. I sent a recruitment e-mail that contained information related to the study, informed voluntary consent, and the link to the survey. The interview protocol was designed utilizing Seidman's (2019) Three-Interview Series. I recorded and transcribed each interview within Microsoft Teams, Ver. 1.7.00.3653. I uploaded the transcripts into Intellectus Qualitative for data analysis, where I engaged in two forms of data analysis AI-Assisted and In Vivo (Intellectus Qualitative, 2019). During the In Vivo data analysis, I conducted three iterations of coding to address (1) RQs, (2) theories, (3) components of theories, and the discovery of themes and patterns. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) outlined five different methods by which to represent the data, and I utilized three of them: tables, charts, and figures. I worked to ensure trustworthiness as outlined in Table 9. Lastly, I adhered to all ethical standards outlined by the VSU Institutional Review Board in conducting human research (see Appendix A).

Delimitations and Limitations

The study had several delimitations and limitations. For the scope of this study, participants must be or have served as a principal, assistant principal, or higher authority position. The site of the study was another delimitation as it occurred within one small school district in the South. The limitations of the study consisted of the transferability and exclusion of

various populations who contributed to the study of this phenomena. The researcher conducted the study within a single small school district, and it had limited transferability. The issues of transferability related to both site and participant selection. By way of the selection process, the study had a number of exclusions such as currently serving superintendents who could speak to the career navigation within this small school district. Additionally, the exclusion of teachers who are aspiring to principalship and beyond served as a limitation. Lastly, the exclusion of quantitative data to assess the relationships of underrepresentation and disproportionality statistically served as a limitation. The researcher utilized triangulation as a method to ensure accurate data as a means to support reliability, validity, transferability, and confirmability.

Operational Definitions

The operational definitions that are necessary to understand this study are as follows:

Administrator – A formal leader who has been given power or authority to make decisions for an organization or business (e.g., Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent/Human Resource Officer, Chief Finance Officer, Special Education Director, Curriculum/Student Achievement Director, Principals, and Assistant Principals) (Pielstick, 2000).

African American – A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Used interchangeably with the shortened term Black (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Black Feminist Thought (BFT) – Focusing completely on the understanding of how Black females free themselves and shield themselves from further discriminative or oppressive practices. Bold claims are made about the integrity of Black women’s intellectual production as a force for social change (Collins, 2022). Throughout this study, I utilized the stages of the Feminist Theory to illustrate key concepts of BFT, including but not

limited to self-identification/validation, interlocking oppression (gender and race), and African American women's network (self-advocacy).

Disproportionality – Henderson (2017) defined disparity and disproportionality as interchangeable concepts in which to describe a phenomenon of how one portion of a population is either underrepresented or overrepresented.

Diversity – Refers to the incorporation of group social differences, such as race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual-orientation, country of origin, disability, religion, or other group associations (National Association of Colleges and Employers [NACE], 2024).

Equality – An ideal of uniformity in treatment or status by those in a position to affect either, providing the same to all (Nolen, 2024).

Equity – Recognizing that we do not all start from the same place and must acknowledge and make adjustments to imbalances. Identify and overcome intentional and unintentional barriers arising from bias or systemic structures. Acknowledging and making adjustments to address the negative consequences of prejudice and discriminatory treatment toward Black, Brown, Indigenous, and marginalized communities (NACE, 2024).

Feminism – An act or struggle to end sexism or sexist discrimination, exploitation, or oppression (Hooks, 2015).

Feminist Thought – A feminist standpoint grounded in an understanding of gender, race, and class, as well as the formation of an intellectual environment to allow opportunities for dialogue and critiques (Hooks, 2015).

Formal Leaders – Leaders with the power to influence hiring, firing, promotion, and career advancement opportunities, along with warranted disciplinary measures. They obtain

their authority from the hierarchy that has been established. Examples of formal leaders could be school and district level administrators (Pielstick, 2000).

Four Frames of an Organization or Four Frames – Model or tool to use in organizations to help enhance leadership skills and performance: structural; human resource; political; and symbolic – culture (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Glass Ceiling – An “unseen, yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements” (Glass Ceiling, 1995, p. 4).

Informal Leaders – These leaders do not possess the authority to make policy decisions as formal leaders. Thus, informal leaders do not have decision-making authority and power. They must rely on authenticity rather than power. Examples of informal leaders could be the school librarian and the speech therapist (Pielstick, 2000).

Rural – All people, housing, and territory that are not within an urban area. Any area that is not urban is rural. Usually 2,500 to 5,000 people, but less than 50,000 people (U.S. Census Bureau, 2023).

South – Referring to states such as Alabama (AL), Florida (FL), Georgia (GA), Louisiana (LA), Mississippi (MS), South Carolina (SC), and Texas (TX) (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Underrepresentation – Inadequately represented (Merriam-Webster, 2024).

White or Caucasian – A person having origins from the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2021).

Summary

Organizations are social constructs created to enable a group to function and fulfill the purpose for which it was created. Within organizations, there exists a structure that bestows

authority to make decisions for various aspects of the organization, one of which is the placement of personnel into positions of leadership. Through the historical review of the educational organization of the school district of this study, it is noted that women have been underrepresented in leadership positions (Chalmers & Brannan, 2024).

Furthermore, I conducted my study to build on current literature and contribute to the prevention of history repeating itself where women continue to overperform without the proper recognition for promotions and advanced career opportunities (*Women in the Workplace, 2022*). For example, results from the *Women in the Workplace* report (2022) indicate that women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of management when compared to their male counterparts, even with significant gains evident. Professionally credentialed and uniquely qualified women should be promoted to the highest levels of leadership in small and large businesses and organizations to really embrace a holistic approach of improving our workforce (McKinsey & Company & LeanIn.Org, 2023).

Lastly, the aim of this study was to investigate the lived experiences of African American females in formal leadership positions to secure first-hand accounts of their career experiences, make meaning of those shared experiences, and then derive emerging themes. I analyzed the findings to determine if there were important implications that may add to the body of knowledge about formal female leadership. Chapter Two provides an essential literature review as helpful background information for a thorough understanding of my study.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

In this chapter, I provide a review of the literature and expand my discussion on the conceptual framework. I examine how theory and practice frame the understanding of underrepresentation and disproportionality of females in leadership in P-12 environments. This exploration is relevant to my completed study. The purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of an Organization (OD) and the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT as it related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021). This chapter does discuss research framed within Four Frames and the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2015; Ryan, 2022; Wollstonecraft, 2019). Please refer to Table 2 as an organizational guide.

Literature Exploration

The literature review is an abridgment of significant historical and empirical events of women in the workplace. I have examined studies that highlight issues of underrepresentation and disproportionality of females in formal leadership. My research approach utilized an array of literature consisting of keywords to help guide the search. I input basic words and phrases such as *underrepresentation, race, gender, African American, White, female, leader, formal, informal, organizations, organizational structure, rural, small school district, hiring practices, and career opportunity / advancement*. I used ERIC, ProQuest, Sage, and EBSCOhost as research databases for my data sources. The sources consisted of national and local statistics, peer-reviewed

journals, published books, and available dissertations. The date range for sources was from 1905 to present (i.e., 2023). The dated sources served as background information toward understanding historical perspectives in relation to my topic of study.

Table 2

Time Frames, Political Movements/Policies, Feminist Theory/BFT Stages, and The Four Frames

Timeframe	Political Movement or Policy	Feminist Theory/BFT Stages	Four Frames
1700 - 1920	Personhood & Suffrage	Stages 1-5	Structural, culture, and politics
War World II (1941 - 1945)	Women enter workplace	Stages 1-4	Structural, human resources, culture, and politics
1964	Civil Rights – Sex Discrimination Act	Stages 1-5	Structural, human resources, culture, and politics
2023	Fair Pay Act of 2023	Stages 1-5	Structural, human resources, culture, and politics
1970(s) - present	History of women in education k-12	Stages 1-3	Structural, human resources, culture, and politics
1970(s) - present	History women in education k-12 rural district	Stages 1-3	Structural, human resources, culture, and politics
2019 - present	Current Trends of women in K-12 within the school district	Stages 1-3	Structural, human resources, culture, and politics

Note. Data adapted from Feminist Theory, by J. A. Arinder, in J. Egbert and M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (para. 7), 2020, Pressbooks. Copyright 2020 by Joy Egbert and Mary F. Roe. Data were also adapted from *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (7th ed.), by L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal, 2021, Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2021 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission.

Women in the Workplace and the Fight for Rights

In this section, I present legislation that historically paved the way for greater protection for women in the workplace. There is a specific focus on basic civil rights and sex discrimination practices. It is important to note sex discrimination was not included in the original Civil Rights Act legislation.

Personhood & Suffrage

Three of the Four Frames of an Organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021) held true for personhood and suffrage: structural, culture, and politics. The topics of personhood and suffrage fall within the context of the first wave of the feminist movement. The topic of personhood (e.g., self-awareness of oneself, ability to think, reason, and make wise decisions for self-preservation and on societal needs) is worth noting even as it continues to be a subject where there is no consensus of its meaning (White, 2013). History has recorded efforts of courageous women advocating for fair employment, equal pay, and citizenship (Machovec, 2023).

From the 1860s, during the beginning of the Suffrage movements, until 1900-1910, women fought for the right to vote (National Archives and Records Administration, 2023). Women's voting rights provided women access to policymakers and allowed them to become a part of the decision-making process (National Archives and Records Administration, 2023). However, male leaders and general society did not support women performing in roles and duties traditionally designated for males (National Archives and Records Administration, 2023). The resistance was recognizable, especially in leadership roles within the workplace and the fight for women's voting rights. During the 1800s, the fight for rights was synonymous for personhood as women were not perceived as humans. Their value was akin to that of property because of societal norms at the time (National Archives and Records Administration, 2023).

However, in 1917, things began to change in women's favor. After over 40 years of advocating for voting rights, the states ratified the 19th amendment in 1920 to allow women the right to vote. African American women and other women of color (i.e., nonwhite) were not included in the original victory. It would take many years until women of color received a similar victory through the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (National Archives and Records Administration, 2023). The fight to gain rights was a slow process for all women. As women and feminist movements evolved over the decades, all five stages of the Feminist Theory/BFT were at play in some form (Arinder, 2020):

- Stage 1 - where discrimination (i.e., systemic and power structures) and oppression existed;
- Stage 2 - where there were disparities in regard to sex, gender, equality, differences, race, and ability;
- Stage 3 - where more discrimination and exclusion occurred;
- Stage 4 - when power and oppression were apparent through the policies and practices instituted by people in key decision-making roles; and
- Stage 5 - when women began to seek out advocates (i.e., men and women) to be a voice for them on issues like basic human rights and voting rights.

Women were considered less than human; therefore, they were not eligible to cast votes (Wollstonecraft, 2019). Due to the systemically discriminative, oppressive policies and hiring practices during this timeframe, women found it most challenging to make significant and broad changes. As they fought to make changes in the culture, advancement occurred through policies within the early stages of the feminist movements (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2015; Wollstonecraft, 2019).

Women Enter the Workplace

The United States declared war on December 8, 1941, and officially entered World War II (National Archives, 1941; Vergun, 2020). All Four Frames of an Organization (i.e., structural, human resources, culture, and politics) applied during the time frame when women began entering the workforce (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Structurally, organizations were formed with male dominance in mind as most women were not in the workforce prior to World War II. Various workplaces generated goals and hierarchical protocols to ensure teams met their objectives and overall professional goals. From the structural, human resource, and cultural aspects, the focus was not on individual feelings, personal preferences, or needs that resulted in job inconsistency (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Women did not have a platform to advocate for equal rights and pay on the job during this era of male superiority. As there were neither established civil rights laws nor the establishment of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), individuals did not have policies by which to address grievances or issues related to discrimination and marginalization (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Bolman and Deal (2021) stressed the importance of recognizing the uniqueness of culture in an organization. Undoubtedly, leaders working toward building conducive, positive work environments can empower employees to make known their needs while recognizing organizational norms, missions, and established workplace objectives.

There were tremendous changes taking place during this time in history. The roles of women changed as they were needed to fill the gaps in the workforce while men were fighting during World War II (Brunell & Burkett, 2024). These changes forced women into the workforce, and the workplace culture was one with challenges and conflicts. Employers required women to learn new skill sets with questionable prior training. Women had to adjust to being in

the workforce while experiencing counter-resistance from male coworkers and supervisors, along with significant discrepancies in pay (Brunell & Burkett, 2024). Due to the array of changes and needs that manifested as the war continued (e.g., a rapid influx of women in the workforce during the men's absence; the need for an extension of basic rights in the workplace to women as afforded to male employees; companies stopped producing many products for domestic use such as automobiles; many produced supplies and materials to support the war effort; and people were spending money on basic needs items during the war), the political climate changed as well (Boleman & Deal, 2021; Brunell & Burkett, 2024). Politically speaking, power was at the root of the fight for rights when it came to decision-making. The bottom line for the key stakeholders of companies and organizations was that mass production of products was the main priority (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Additionally, recruitment experiences arose for women from the Women's Army Corps and in diverse civilian employment occupations. World War II brought about unthinkable economic and social changes abroad and in America (Bellafaire & Center of Military History, 1993). After the war ended in 1945, many women returned home from the civilian workforce to maintain the household and care for their families. Reportedly, the majority of women in the workforce had a desire to remain; however, men squeezed women out of the workplace as they returned from war, and the demand for products for the war effort drastically decreased (National WWII Museum, 2024). There were still many women who remained in the civilian workforce, especially those who served in the Army Nurse Corps (Bellafaire & Center of Military History, 1993). Table 3 displays the data on women in the workforce from the 1940s to 1963 along with the Occupational Groups.

Table 3*Major Industry Groups of Employed Women, March 1963 (Women 14 years of age and over)*

Industry Group	Number	Percentage Distribution		
		1963	1950	1940
Total	23,186,000	100	100	100
Services	9,852,000	42	36	45
Professional and related	5,438,000	23	16	17
Personal	3,793,000	16	18	26
Business	407,000	2	1	1
Entertainment and recreation	214,000	1	1	1
Manufacturing	4,526,000	20	23	21
Retail trade	4,291,000	19	20	17
Finance, insurance, real estate	1,450,000	6	5	4
Public administration	953,000	4	4	3
Transportation, communications	782,000	3	4	3
Agriculture	645,000	3	4	5
Wholesale trade	439,000	2	3	2
Construction	207,000	1	--	--
Mining	41,000	--	--	--

Note. Adapted from *Background Facts on Women Workers in the United States* (p. 23), by

United States Women's Bureau, 1970, U.S. Department of Labor. Copyright 2024 by

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Over a period of time, women in the workplace realized that they were not being equally compensated (i.e., same wages and benefits) as their male counterparts while performing the same jobs (Bellafaire & Center of Military History, 1993). As women feared losing their jobs and lacked advocacy, there was no structural push for reformation of workplace practices and policies. By 1962, women obtained nearly the same level of education as their male counterparts in the workplace (Library of Congress, 1970). Women continued to be underrepresented and marginalized. They earned less pay across the Occupational Groups (See Table 4).

Table 4

Years of School Completed by Employed Women and Men, by Occupational Group, March 1962 (Persons 18 years of Age and Over)

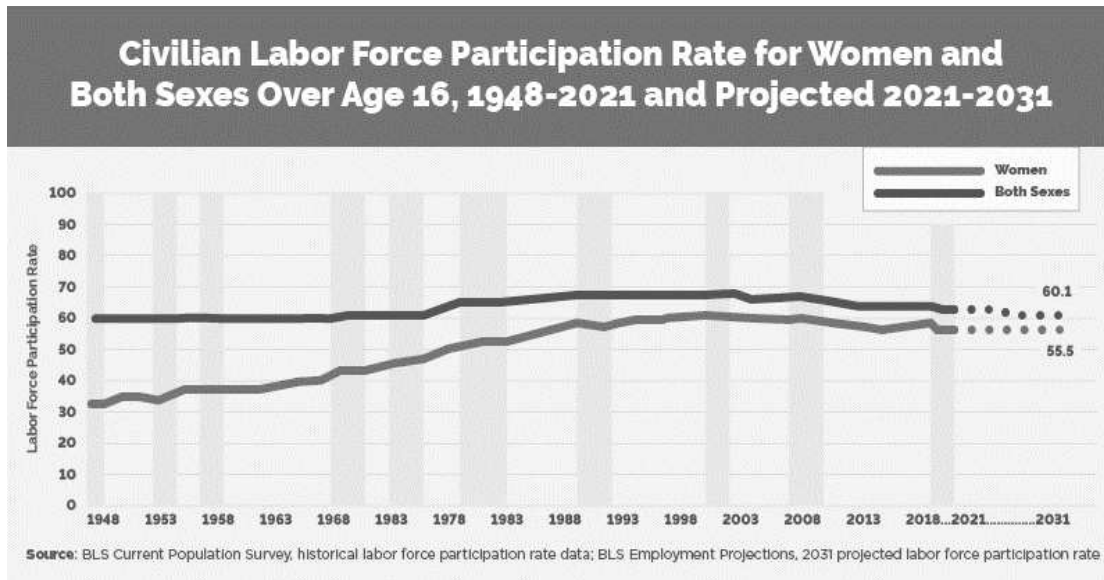
Occupational group	Median years of school completed	
	Women	Men
All occupational groups	12.3	12.1
Professional, technical, kindred workers	16.1	16.4
Managers, officials, proprietors (except farm)	12.4	12.5
Clerical workers	12.5	12.5
Sales workers	12.1	12.7
Craftsmen, foremen, kindred workers	9.2	11.2
Operatives and kindred workers	9.9	10.2
Services workers (including private-household)	10.2	10.3
Laborers, except farm and mine	10.0	8.9
Farm workers	8.9	8.7

Note. Adapted from *Background Facts on Women Workers in the United States*, by United States Women’s Bureau, 1970, U.S. Department of Labor. Copyright 2024 by HATHITRUST. Adapted with permission.

The continued increases of women in the workforce and in higher education were examples of ongoing personhood and advocacy for increased rights, equal pay, and equal benefits. These circumstances were part of the second wave of the Feminist Movement, which included the following events: the continuous influx of women entering the workforce, demands for basic rights, advancement in education, more decision-making opportunities, and the beginning of addressing different forms of harassment (Freeman, 2019). To further illustrate women’s presence in the workforce in comparison to men, Figure 3 depicts the increase and decline of women in the workplace from 1948 to 2021. Figure 3 also displays a projection for 2021-2031 with no significant change for females other than a projection for both female and male workers to slightly decrease.

Figure 3

U.S. Department of Labor - Women & Men in the Workforce



Note. Adapted from *Background Facts on Women Workers in the United States*, by United States Women’s Bureau, 1970, U.S. Department of Labor. Copyright 2024 by HATHITRUST. Adapted with permission.

Civil Rights & Sex Discrimination Act

In addition to women entering the workforce, which presented unique challenges and opportunities, the country was recovering from very serious global and home front events: The Civil War (1861-1865), World War I (1914-1918), The Great Depression (1929-1939), The Dust Bowl (1939-1940), and World War II (1941-45). Two landmark pieces of legislation were signed into law in the 1960s with the aim of protecting civil rights of American citizens to include sex discrimination. On July 2, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the first comprehensive Civil Rights Act into law (i.e., Civil Rights Act of 1964). Although it was a positive milestone, many people did not think it reached far enough to protect all people in America. The perceived discrimination in the workplace based on race and gender was alarming. Initially, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 did not include sex discrimination. However, by July 1964, Title VII

was amended to include sex discrimination (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration & Management, n.d.).

To further elaborate, the legislative safeguards noted above were in line with the second wave of the Feminist Movement (Freeman, 2019). The legal safeguards protected citizens from discriminative practices in the workplace to ensure greater employment opportunities, gain fair treatment in the workplace, and develop pathways for more women to attend higher education on the collegiate level. One primary focus of the Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was to prohibit discriminatory practices (i.e., based on race, gender, sex, or national origin) for those seeking employment. Sex was added to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 as protections for women's rights in the workplace to ensure just hiring, promotions, and career advancement practices (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration & Management, n.d.).

Overall, an understanding of the Feminist Theory and the Four Frames throughout major movements such as the Civil Rights Movement can aid both individuals and organizations in understanding the fight for and the protections of human rights (no matter the gender of the person). During a period of conflict, the use of the Four Frames of an Organization could prove to be a viable option to help organizations establish or revisit set goals and make any warranted changes to the hierarchical plan (Bolman & Deal, 2021). Such a proactive approach could help address employees' needs, ultimately improving the workplace climate. In school settings, for instance, the process of building capacity to promote effective leadership skills and practices throughout an organization helps balance the demands from key stakeholders with decision-making power. The Four Frames give increased flexibility to administrators in the school district. Lastly, underrepresentation and disproportionality in hiring and promotion practices can result

when effective leadership skills and efforts are not displayed at all levels of leadership in an organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Fair Pay Act of 2023

The Fair Pay Act, which evolved from the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, helped women with wage discrimination (Library of Congress, 2023). After WWII, approximately 32% of women were in the workforce, and roughly 16% of those women were married (National Archives, 2023). Many women remained in the workforce after the men returned home from the war to reclaim previously held jobs. By this time, most women had acquired specific skill sets and desired to remain in the workforce. Eventually, women realized that their male counterparts were earning more pay for the same jobs they were tasked to complete (Khan Academy, n.d).

Moreover, some findings by the Library of Congress (2023) indicated that wage differences did exist among comparable jobs set apart by one's race, gender, sex, and national origin with participants in government employment and other industries dealing with goods or the production of goods for distribution (as cited in U.S. Department of Labor, 2023a, 2023b). Knowingly or unknowingly, discriminative practices can foster ongoing segregation within places of work. The make-up of the workplace employees (e.g., women and people of color) can often resemble those in leadership roles and positions (e.g., matching race, sex, gender, and national origin). There were significant differences noted in wage rates across occupational fields with males generally paid higher than females, regardless of education and skill sets (U.S. Department of Labor, 2023a, 2023b).

Since the Fair Pay Act was enacted in 2023, wage differences remain a national issue. Wage discrimination could impact the participants within the study. White women are paid less than their male counterparts, and Black women are paid less than their White counterparts. In

education, however, there is a salary schedule where all employees are paid in accordance with the number of years they have worked in a position, taking into account domain and education level. It should be noted that the bill outlines a type of segregation within the workforce, which can be indicative of underrepresentation and disproportionality. The issue of fair wages evolved during the second and third waves of the Feminist Movement to ensure fair treatment regarding equal pay and benefits for women performing in the same or similar job conditions as male employees (Freeman, 2019). Table 5 shows the median wage and salary income different genders, sorted by occupational group.

Table 5

Wage and Salary Income of Year-Round Full-Time Women and Men Workers by Occupational Group, 1962 (Persons 14 Years and Over)

Occupational group	Median wage and salary income	
	Women	Men
Professional, technical, kindred workers	\$4,863	\$7,357
Managers, officials, proprietors (except farm)	\$4,311	\$7,454
Clerical workers	\$3,832	\$5,589
Sales workers	\$2,699	\$6,193
Operatives and kindred workers	\$3,157	\$5,319
Services workers (except private-household)	\$2,283	\$4,406

Note. Adapted from *Background Facts on Women Workers in the United States*, by United States Women’s Bureau, 1970, U.S. Department of Labor. Copyright 2024 by HATHITRUST. Adapted with permission.

Organization - Informal and Formal Leadership

For my study, I examined the perspectives of female participants as they navigated organizational systems whereby formal leadership shapes hiring practices. The hiring practices within the school district of study could directly or indirectly contribute to the

underrepresentation of females in formal leadership positions. The operationalization of leadership is layered within organizations. Both formal and informal leadership may occur on the same level (McKinsey & Company, 2024). School districts employ both formal and informal leaders. For example, all principals have formal leadership authority over their schools. However, principals do not have formal leadership authority as it relates to the hiring practices of the superintendent and other district leaders. The formal leadership authority for hiring superintendents and other district leaders lies with the school board of education (GA Department of Education, 2024). Informal leadership in the school district of my study is held mostly by female teachers. They do not possess the authority to make hiring decisions.

Bolman and Deal's Four Frames of an Organization

The primary focus of this study was to understand how participants make meaning of the organization in which they work and how they navigate advancement within leadership. Therefore, this section includes an examination of research related to the Four Frames of an Organization (Bolman & Deal, 2021). In brief, the organizational structure is the configuration of a set organization, and it highlights the hierarchy narrative and its authority limits (American Educational Research Association, 2009). Due to stipulations in the U.S. Constitution, the federal government has little interference with state and local educational matters. Day-to-day operations, budgets, and curricula are managed by the state and local school systems since the United States has a decentralized education system (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Educational organization structures allow for organizational charts, which clearly depict the hierarchy of authority and power within a school system. They provide clarity by presenting well-defined job descriptions, positions, functions, roles, responsibilities, and authorities.

Structural

An organizational structure can be quite versatile depending on the demands of different entities within an organization. Organizational structure provides for a distinct approach to separate specific taskings for job duties and responsibilities, and it is utilized to divide tasks, determine duties, and make necessary coordination decisions (Bolman & Deal, 2021; Monavarian et al., 2007). A structure provides for the exchange of information, domains, dispute resolutions among entities, reports, and reporting obligations (Ahmady et al., 2016).

Politics, Human Resources, and Structural

The governing board has specific roles and responsibilities. This includes the following: making policies, making a variety of impactful decisions, being responsible for operations of the organization, addressing programs and services, overseeing financial needs, working on keeping realistic vision and mission statements, ongoing monitoring of an organization's purpose, recruiting and hiring the CEO/President for the organization, securing resources for the organization, creating a strategic plan, ensuring legal and ethical compliance, and working to avoid any liabilities to the organization. To ensure a constant information flow within the organization, it is imperative to develop and maintain an updated organizational chart to ensure clear understanding and clarity at all levels of employment.

In the state of Georgia, the educational organization and structure are guided and monitored by Georgia Code: Title 20. The specific code helps ensure ongoing academic achievement and safety for all students attending Georgia schools in some capacity or format. There are 18 Chapters in the code that cover early care and learning, elementary and secondary education, local boards of education, local school superintendents, students, teachers and other school personnel, school buses, postsecondary education, and other topics relevant to education.

The organizational structure in place allows for assurances that the GADOE provides accountability measures for school systems to follow in terms of state guidance, ethical rules, and regulations. Additionally, all available federal funding will funnel down to the local school system level through the state agency (U.S. Department of Education, 2023).

Symbolic-Culture

As previously noted, Bolman and Deal (2021) presented symbolic-culture as one of the Four Frames of an organization. The symbolic frame includes culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes. Additionally, some key intrinsic values are inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning (Bolman & Deal, 2021, p. 15). For this study, I focused on meaning, stories, and values.

Key Studies

I examined research to understand how other women in educational leadership perceive their organizations and their career navigation within formal leadership. In this section, I present summaries of five studies that help anchor my study. Four of the studies are situated in P-12 educational environments. The fifth study is situated within a higher education institution.

My first key study is Howard (2022), and it serves as an example of women's perceptions of their environments, their career navigation, and the ways in which they have overcome perceived barriers to leadership obtainment. Howard conducted a qualitative study that had a sample size of five female superintendents. There were two sampling methods: purposeful and snowballing. The approved site was a P-12 district within Georgia. Much like my study, Howard utilized the Feminist Theory to help understand and explore the aspects of gender disparity, disproportionality, and underrepresentation within leadership in a P-12 school district. She highlighted gender disparity within the superintendency as there remains a significant gap

between male and female superintendents both statewide and nationally. Thus, the purpose of the study was to obtain authentic accounts of female superintendents' career pathways while they performed as educators in the Georgia public education systems (i.e., P-12). Howard's key findings consisted of the underrepresentation of females within the superintendency (Glass, 2020; Howard, 2022).

Howard (2022) also discovered the track for advancement for women into superintendency. It included the following: teaching in the classroom, building leadership, and central office leadership. This finding is significant to my study as there has been some migration from teaching into principalship, but this has not resulted in females gaining superintendent positions as aforementioned. Howard attributes levels of disproportionality and underrepresentation to the culture of superintendency. The culture of superintendency has been deemed a male-oriented position or male domain. Thus, along with cultural barriers, the participants reported that they faced other challenges such as family obligations. However, it should be noted that participants reported positive experiences and familiar support.

The second key study is Odum (2010), which is also situated within the P-12 environment (i.e., superintendency level); however, participants were selected from more than one state (i.e., Alabama, Florida, and Georgia). It illustrates the resilience of female leaders as they navigate to senior leadership positions. Odum found resilience to be the most suitable theory to anchor this inquiry. The study incorporated the concept of resilience to explore and understand the personal and professional accounts of 16 female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia (Odum, 2010). Odum utilized both purposeful and random sampling approaches to select participants for a qualitative phenomenological study. They had a participant size of 16 female superintendents. Odum's objective was to seek out the personal and

professional experiences of current female superintendents to explore how they make meaning of their lived experiences. Caucasian and African American females were the two distinct ethnic groups selected for participation. Odum noted that there were more Caucasian female participants than African American female participants. The larger number of White female participants was due to a limited number of available African American female superintendents for the participant pool. The disproportionality and underrepresentation of African American superintendents versus their White female counterparts reflect the national data (See Figure 7).

Odum's (2010) study further mirrors my study because it addresses the issues of disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders ascending from building level leadership positions to superintendency. The study contained a comparison of female advancement versus the advancement of their male counterparts. Odum obtained a diverse participant population to include age, race, and marital status. I observed connections and key aspects between the Resilience Theory and the Feminist Theory as I read about the study. The main aspects of Feminist Theory were obviously present: the need to respect women and their self-worth; recognize and compensate women for their personal and professional accomplishments; respect the need for women to address home obligations without retribution; and embrace the inclusion and affirmation of women in the workplace at all professional levels (Collins, 2022; Elder, 2022; Hooks, 2015). Odum's phenomenological study portrays a symbolic-culture frame, which is one of the Four Frames of an organization.

Odum (2010) found that gender discrimination is a factor to sustain the current gap between males and females performing in superintendent positions. However, the findings indicated that challenges set by career and family commitments were significant. The participants reported that networking was one of the most advantageous strategies for female

leaders seeking superintendency. In addition, Odum discovered some commonalities; the reporting of high job satisfaction and the inclusion of mentors, which the participants relied upon throughout their career navigation. Odum stated that the participants possessed other qualities, such as effective communication, problem-solving, critical thinking, and risk management skills.

The third key study is Brown (2014). Brown conducted a phenomenological narrative design to address issues related to the recruitment and retention of African American women in the superintendency. The study contained eight participants and a cross examination of race, gender, and social-politics that each faced during their hiring or retention process. Brown stated that there are a number of challenges that the participants related to “racism, sexism, and oppressive sociopolitics” (p. 573). It should be noted that Brown stated that the participants were learning and teaching throughout their experiences. As a result, each became transformational leaders within their respective school districts. The study had one central research question: “How do race, gender, and social politics affect the recruitment and retention of African American women to the public school superintendency” (Brown, 2014, p. 576). Black Feminist Theory, which highlighted the Intersectionality of the participants, served as the theoretical framework for the study (Guy-Sheftall, 2000, as cited in Brown, 2014, p. 590).

Brown (2014) noted that all the participants had obtained their doctoral degrees. They had educational leadership experience prior to assuming the role of superintendent. All the participants stated that race, gender, and social politics impacted them throughout their recruitment and retention processes, as noted by Superintendent Cameron:

It is not the actual process of recruitment and retention that are barriers to the superintendency because they are in and of themselves concrete processes (being

certified in school administration, applying, interviewing, and etc.). The problem lies in the decisions made by those in power. (Brown, 2014, p. 577)

Additionally, a number of participants discussed having to contend with stereotypes and misconceptions of African American female leaders. Such stereotypes concerning their appearance and demeanor was outlined in several archetypes by Cox (2017): Mammy (caregiver), Jezebel (sexual and promiscuous siren), Sapphire/Matriarch (angry Black woman), Sara Baartman (exploitation, dehumanization), and Queen (welfare mother). Brown (2014) and her participants highlighted how African American females are perceived as a machine, animal, or less than human: “I remember thinking that they think I am a machine and I’m not human, cause you know we’re animals-we’re not human animals-we’re to be used and what not.” (Brown, 2014, p. 577). In Superintendent Reed’s description, she also highlighted the variation in the fight for rights between White and Black women as she stated Black women are perceived as “beasts of burden.” (Brown, 2014, p. 577).

Overwhelmingly, the participants thought that race, gender, and social politics were barriers; however, all agreed that race was the most prominent barrier within the recruitment and retention phase. Superintendent Peter’s description of her recruitment process underlined race as a barrier: “He told me, he said you were the best candidate and I couldn’t in good conscious not vote for you, but others did not and they did not because of the color of your skin” (Brown, 2014, p. 578). As noted by the participants’ education and leadership experience, all of the candidates were qualified; however, Brown (2014) stated that Black women are denied access to leadership due to race. Additionally, most Black women only gain access by way of having a “powerful mentor/advocate” assisting them throughout the recruitment and retention process (Brown, 2014, p. 578).

Gender also served as a barrier. The participants thought that there was a bias associated with females in leadership. Superintendent Reed's description exemplifies the opposition:

I still have the issues of White men who want to challenge me and they never do it overtly but the challenge is always there. They would rather see a White man in front of them talking than a Black woman and I understand that and I'm not going to make it my problem. (Brown, 2014, p. 580)

Overall, the participants felt as if they were not viewed as intelligent or capable of leading or serving in the superintendency. Both race and gender barriers are known as "double jeopardy" through the recruitment process (Brown, 2014, p. 581).

Lastly, social politics served as a barrier as the participants stated that they were not inherently grafted into the preexisting social network, the "Good ol' boys relationships" (Brown, 2014, p. 581). The participants expressed a level of frustration as they noted that they could be released from their jobs not because of poor work performance but solely because of politics. Thus, the participants stressed the importance of building good relationships with the school boards, county officials, and the media; as some of them provided accounts of political fights with one or more of the aforementioned groups. Overall, the participants felt that it was essential to build support networks, gain the support of a mentor (strong White male), and engage in self-advocacy (self-recruitment tactics). Brown's (2014) study aligns with stages 1-5 of Feminist Theory/BFT and the Four Frames of OD.

The fourth key study is Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022). Kingsberry and Jean-Marie explored the intersectionality of race and gender for Black women in the superintendency. Much like Brown (2014), Kingsberry and Jean-Marie believed that Black women were "overworked, undervalued, and overlooked in the workplace" (p. 360). They also examined how Black women

overcame the barriers. Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) highlighted the structural and cultural parameters of some of the race and gender barriers as some organizational practices and policies are rooted in racism. The researchers emphasized how racial policies in the workplace create a hostile environment wherein Black women feel isolated and silenced. The development of resilience served as a mechanism for which to overcome these barriers. Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) believed that resiliency is the ability to overcome hardship and is characterized by good problem-solving skills, good interpersonal skills, and a drive for self-development.

Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) outlined ways in which to develop resiliency:

1. Provide guidance, opportunities to engage meaningfully, help in decision-making;
2. Maintain high and real expectations for achievement; and
3. Encourage strong relationships (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, as cited in Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022, p. 364).

The participants noted that resilience is needed when faced with disappointment and rejection despite education, qualifications, and training (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022). Learning how to adjust is important and necessary throughout both the recruitment and retention process as noted by Superintendent Charles:

In general, we [Black women] are not even typically looked at. The first barrier is getting in the door. I was told very early on that it would not be likely that I'd be a superintendent in the Southern state. [This was] based strictly on that I was a black female. You've seen the numbers, it's pretty accurate. You also found out that most of the African American females that are in the Southern state were in their district or from their district, whereas I'm not even from this Southern state. (Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022, pp. 369-370)

The participants believed that it took just as much resiliency to remain in the positions as it took to obtain them. A number of candidates stated that familial support was a factor of their resilience; as well as motivation, mentorship, and self-belief. A major strategy in overcoming barriers to the superintendency included forming strong relationships with gatekeepers. The participants in Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) much like Brown's (2014) participants, believed that it was important to establish positive relationships with board members, engage in mentorship, and establish strong support networks. Ultimately, the participants thought it was important to understand and determine their self-worth outside of the negative impacts of social, racial, or gender-related politics. Similarly to the other studies related to the P-12 education systems, Kingsberry and Jean-Marie's study highlights all of the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT and the Four Frames of an organization.

The fifth key study is McAllaster (2023). McAllaster conducted it at the collegiate level. Underrepresentation and disproportionality in hiring and advancement opportunities can be an issue at the higher level of academia (McAllaster, 2023). McAllaster engaged in a qualitative narrative inquiry with a sample size of three Black females, two White females, and one genderqueer member on the faculty. The frameworks employed during the study consisted of Intersectionality, Critical Whiteness Studies, and Critical Human Development Resource Development Theory (McAllaster, 2023).

McAllaster's (2023) main focus was on examining the perspectives of tenure-track Black women, White women, and White genderqueer faculty to uncover the realities of critical incidents of whiteness in the workplace. Nevertheless, McAllaster's objective was "To amplify tenure-track Black women faculty's counternarratives of critical incidents of whiteness, and to encourage racial reflexivity among white women and genderqueer faculty" (pp. 23-24). The

study underscored the structural and cultural frames by describing the perceived hostile and oppressive acts toward the African American faculty member participants by the non-African American faculty member participants (i.e., White females and the White genderqueer female). The African American female participants desired a level of acknowledgment and empowerment. The hardships of career navigation for African American women serve as examples of how underrepresentation and disproportionality can occur in academia. The African American female faculty members looked to their White female and genderqueer co-workers to interrupt perceived power and oppressive actions and behaviors (Arinder, 2020). Lastly, the African American faculty members sought advocacy and positive change through empathetic policies and practices (Arinder, 2020).

Marginalization, Inequity, and Inequality

A striking notation on marginalized people was noted by Delgado (1995): “As marginalized people we should strive to increase our power, cohesiveness, and representation in all significant areas of society. We should do this though, because we are entitled to these things and because fundamental fairness requires this allocation of power” (p. 110). It is imperative that all people are clearly informed on their rights, responsibilities, and personal expectations in society while on their jobs or attending specific learning institutions. The Right to Know Laws are particularly important for minorities, especially Black females (Hadden, 2021). Hooks (2015) positioned that African American women are generally at the lowest level of the job and career spectrums, and their social status is at a lower level than any other identified group.

Educational level and inadequate education can play a significant role in people’s advancement and decision-making authority. Thus, for marginalized or excluded groups, the fight for their rights would parallel Stages 1-3 within the Feminist Theory/BFT (Arinder, 2020).

Additionally, as the fight is indicative of the political frame, there is also an impact to the other Four Frame components (i.e., structure, human resources, and culture) through enacted laws or policies (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

In 2015, Leanin.org along with McKinsey & Company conducted one enormous study on women in the workplace. The study aimed to capture the state of women in corporate America, then utilize the findings as a possible tool to help companies and organizations increase gender diversity. Information about education was included in the study. Over 7 years (2015-2022), at least 80 participating companies with greater than 400,000 employees interviewed. In 2022, there were at least 333 participating companies with over 40,000 employees interviewed. The participants interviewed were of diverse identities, especially women of color, women with identified disabilities, and LGBTQ women. There are some distinct study outcomes to note (McKinsey & Company, 2024):

1. Women continue to be underrepresented in corporate America, and notably, this continues to be true for women of color.
2. At the C-suite level (e.g., senior executives and Chief Executive Officers), just 1 in 4 of the leaders were found to be women, with 1 in 20 for women of color.
3. There were two pipeline challenges (i.e., lack of availability and workplace exits) that made gender equality unobtainable for current and future companies and organizations.

To further elaborate on the challenges, McKinsey & Company (2024) noted that many times there simply may not be any available women to advance into the senior level positions. For instance, the problem is thought to begin at the entry-level. For every 100 men advanced to manager from the entry-level, fewer women are promoted to the managerial level (McKinsey &

Company, 2024). With this initial imbalance, the women are at a disadvantage and never catch up with the men. For every female director who gets elevated to a higher level of leadership, two female directors leave their company (McKinsey & Company, 2024). Some other unique findings noted regarding African American women in leadership positions are as follows (McKinsey & Company, 2024):

1. African American women were found to be quite ambitious with less support (i.e., 59 percent rose to top management levels versus 49 percent of female leaders in totality), but they faced greater barriers than other female leaders at their level.
2. African American women found that colleagues questioned their skills and intellect more often than non-African American leaders.
3. Denial of career advancement opportunities was found in 1 in 3 African American female employees due to personal identities.
4. African American women shared that they must deal with more biases and possibly less support at work.
5. African American women reported on a lack of support from managers for ongoing career development opportunities, sponsorship opportunities, recognition, and support teams.

Data captured from the annual survey(s) noted that the participants represented many disciplines and entities. This led me to reflect on notable scholars in the field addressing the topics on women, women in the workplace, career opportunities, feminism, feminist movements, feminist thoughts, BFT, racism, marginalization, intersectionality, equity, inequality, and other relevant issues (Collins, 2022; Freeman, 2019; Hooks, 2015; Wollstonecraft, 2019).

There is an argument worth quoting from Muñoz et al. (2012) that summarizes the thoughts of many concerning disproportionality and underrepresentation:

Consequently, having minimal voice in school district decisions occurs when most of the district superintendents are male, there is a perception from the general public that females in the superintendency are an anomaly, when in actuality this conclusion may be but a consequence of a perpetuation of status quo. Unsurprisingly, a patriarchal society does not perceive, and therefore, does not expect women to aspire towards the school superintendency. (p. 118)

Angel et al. (2013) also acknowledge that there has been a noticeable advancement from principalship to superintendent level for females to include minority women. Though at the time of this argument, men still outpaced female educators in North America advancing from the classroom level to the advanced leadership level positions of principal to superintendent. Yet Brunner and Grogan (2007) argued that female educators seemed to be working and surviving in a man's world of work or profession. Even then, as now, women were able to secure higher-level positions like curriculum director, human resource officer, or special education director (Grogan & Brunner, 2005), but they rarely secured a position of superintendency. Hill and Ragland (1995) pointed out that many authors have shared their expertise on the topics of educational administration and leadership, but they lacked the most crucial aspect of ensuring gender diversity: addressing the possible barriers or challenges of these female educators while attempting to aspire increased responsibilities and advanced leadership opportunities. They advocated for increased preparation for aspiring educational leaders, especially at the principalship level and higher, to help ensure school district reform. After continued research by Chase (1995) and Brunner and Grogan, there was more clarification on relevant results about

female advancement. There were still those researchers (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011) who strongly weighed in on the effectiveness of the feminist movement due to the obvious challenges that females as a group must deal with on the path to principalship and the position of superintendent.

Addi-Racah (2006) surmised, “men are expected to be promoted at school, as this conforms with the dominant male culture and preserves their advantage in society. This pattern of sponsorship may alter, as women in school leadership increases” (p. 297). Blount (1998) recognized that many women get complacent in roles that will not provide a path to leadership and rewarding career advancement, regardless of their work ethics and job performance. It would be worthwhile to explore if this trend still holds true in the 21st century for professional women. Shakeshaft (1989, as cited in Skrla et al., 2001) adds to the support of these ideas: “although women constitute 75% of the educational work force and are awarded over half of advanced administrative degrees, less than 10% of superintendents are female” (p. 117). Finally, Glass et al. (2000) said, “two likely reasons for the paucity of women in the superintendency are that women are discouraged from preparing for the superintendency and that school boards will not hire them” (p. 1).

Disproportionality and Underrepresentation in Hiring Practices

Through the framing of my study with the selected theories (i.e., The Four Frames and Feminist Thoughts), I sought to understand both sets of participants (i.e., African American and White female administrators). However, BFT framed my understanding of the African American female participants. Local data from the school district of interest are provided in the next section. For greater clarity, figures and tables depict the generated data.

National Data

The following data include information on national, state, and local percentages of African American and White female leaders performing in the capacity of principal and superintendent. This data expands from the 1970s to the present (2023). It should be noted that for some of the categories, there were no data available. The lack of data may be indicative of both the gap as it relates to available data as well as the gap in female administrators within the national, state, and district levels. Similarly, these gap(s) warrant further research. An examination of older databases are not currently available.

I used several sources to accumulate the data:

- American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2009);
- National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 1987-2023);
- Miceli and Near - Whistleblowing (2005);
- Longitudinal studies (Blount et al., 1998);
- National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), Public School Principal Data File;
- U.S. Department of Education (2020-2021; 2017-2018);
- Decennial Study of the Superintendent – AASA (Tienken, 2020).

The tables and figures in this section represent some of the pertinent highlights from the accumulated data. Table 6 depicts the first 80 years of women in public schools. Please note the positions: teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members. The table is a good representation of disproportionality since women hold more teacher positions than formal leadership positions.

Shakeshaft (1989) collected this data from sources (e.g., NEA) accessible at the time of the study. As of today (i.e., 2023), study data are generated according to the needs of the

researchers or government officials. Survey data or questionnaire data can have limited combinations of variables to consider (e.g., male, female, Black, White, other races, percentages, and total of each) because of its convenience. This practice has created a gap of readily available data related specifically to African American and White female leadership over decades, which makes it difficult to accurately make comparisons.

The data in Table 7 highlight the issue of underrepresentation between the number of principals and teachers between 1987-1991. More female principals led at the elementary level than at the middle and high school levels during the period of 1987 through 1991. State data are available; however, this data have not been aggregated to distinguish between genders. I excluded that data from the visual representation.

Table 6

Eighty Years of Women as Workers in Public Schools – 1905-1985

Percentages	1905	1928	1950	1972-73	1982-83	1984-85
Female Elementary School Teachers	97.9	89.2	91.0	84.0	83.0	83.5
Female Elementary School Principals	61.7	55.0	38.0	19.6	23.0	16.9
Female Secondary Teachers	64.2	63.7	56.2	46.0	48.9	50.1
Female Secondary Principals	5.7	7.9	6.0	1.4	3.2	3.5
Female District Superintendents	UK	1.6	2.1	0.1	1.8	3.0
Female School Board Members	UK	11.0	12.0	12.0	28.3	38.3

Note. UK = Unknown. Adapted from *Women in Educational Administration* (1st ed.), by C.

Shakeshaft, 1989, Corwin Press. Copyright 1989 by Corwin Press. Adapted with permission.

Table 7

Percentage of Public School Women Principals and Teachers, by Level of School

	Principals		Teachers	
	87-88	90-91	87-88	90-91
Female Elementary	30.0	36.5	82.8	83.2
Female Secondary	9.4	11.0	52.1	53.2
Combined	21.6	31.2	66.6	68.3

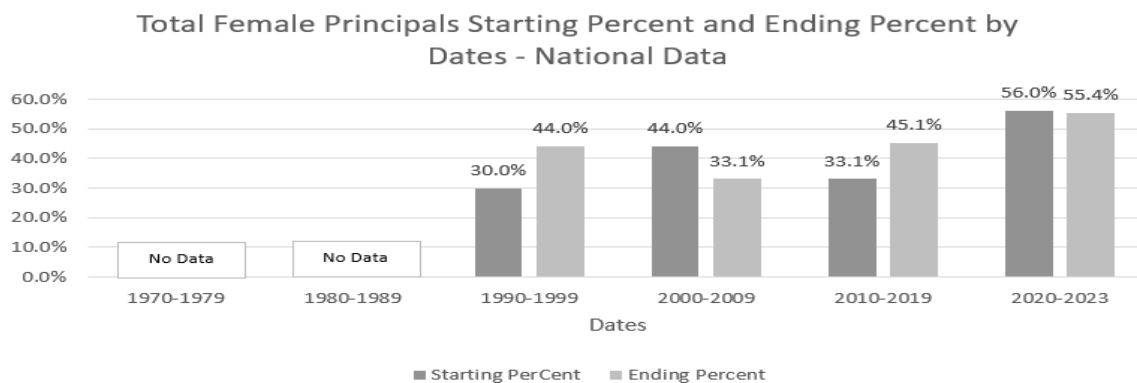
Note. Adapted from *Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS)*, by National Center for Education

Statistics, 1987/1990, U.S. Department of Education. Copyright 1987/1991 by U.S. Department of Education. Adapted with permission.

In Figure 4, the data highlight the total percentage of African American and White female principals only from 1990 to 2023. There was a 26% increase in the starting number of females over the 33 years. It should be noted that there was a slight decrease of 0.6% at the end of the period of 2020-2023. The factors of this decrease are unknown. However, COVID-19 had a significant impact on structures and organizations at that time.

Figure 4

Total Female Principals - National Data

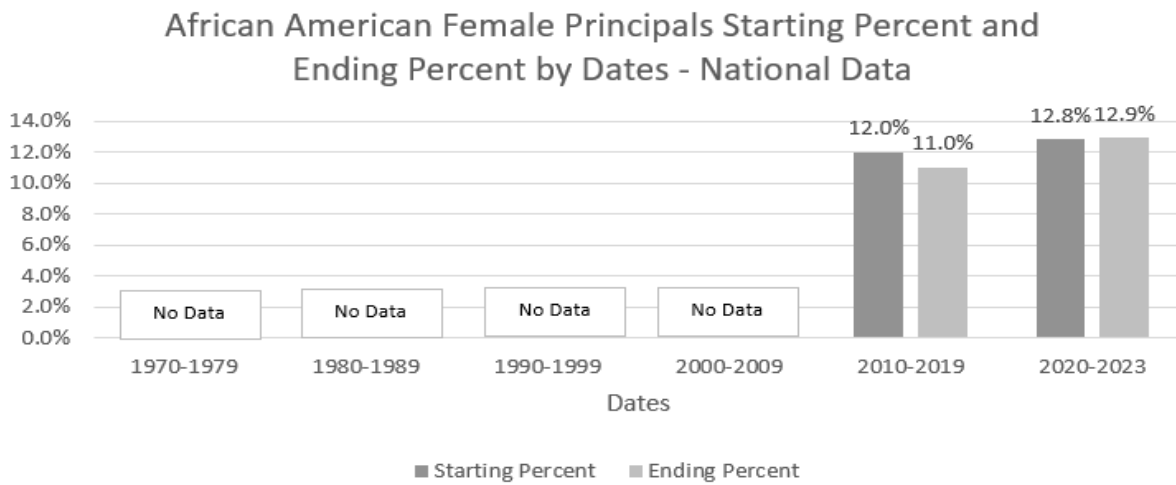


Note. Representation of total female principals according to national data.

The data in Figure 5 show some stagnation as it relates to the group of African American females in principal positions. The starting percentage in 2020 is just 0.8% higher than 10 years prior in 2010. Thus, we can note that African American females may be underrepresented in principalship.

Figure 5

African American Female Principals – National Data



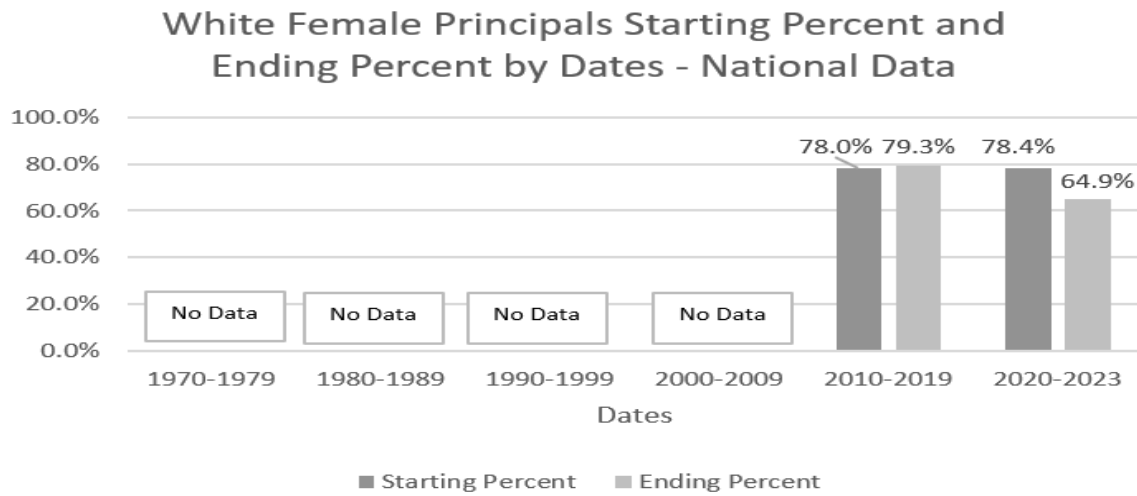
Note. Representation of African American female principals according to national data.

The percentage of White female principals increased by 1.3% during the 2010-2019 timeframe (See Figure 6). I noted that while the African American female starting percentage was 12%, the White female principals’ starting percentage was 78% with a 66% difference in favor of White female principals. However, the data indicate a 13.1% decrease for White female principals over a 13-year interval. The factors for this decrease are unknown.

I noted that between 1990-1999, 10.1% was the largest increase in female superintendency (See Figure 7). Over the period of reported data, there has been a 27.8% increase in female superintendents. During the last 3 years of reporting, there seems to be some degree of stagnation as there was only a 1.8% increase.

Figure 6

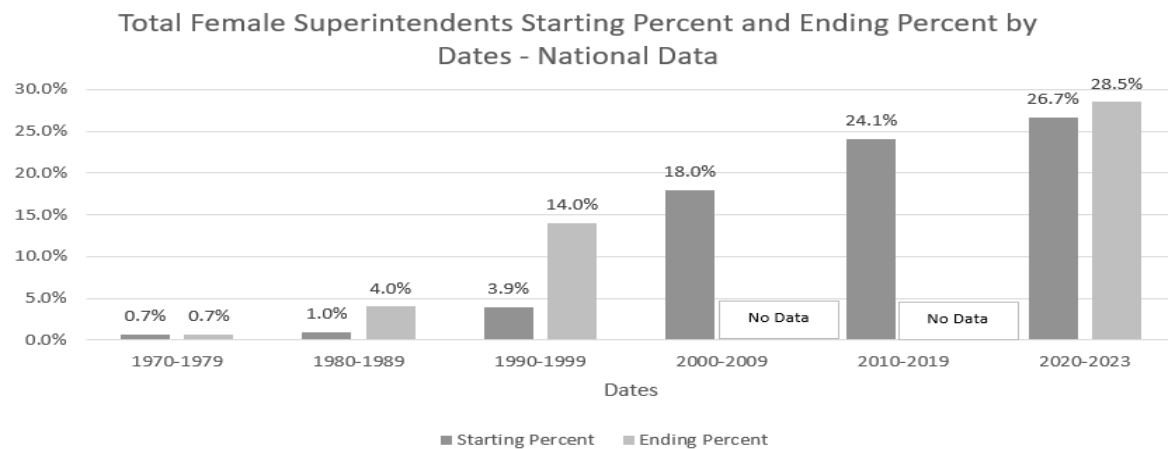
White Female Principals - National Data



Note. Representation of White female principals according to national data.

Figure 7

Total Female Superintendents - National Data



Note. Representation of female superintendents according to national data.

While comparing national data of female principals and superintendents during the 2020-2023 period, there was a decrease in principalship and an increase in superintendency (See Figure 7). There are limited data related to African American and White female superintendency, with the first recorded data being made accessible in 2023. The report showed that 6.7% of African American and 85.91% of White females served as superintendents. Thus, there is a

79.21% difference between the number of African American and White female superintendents.

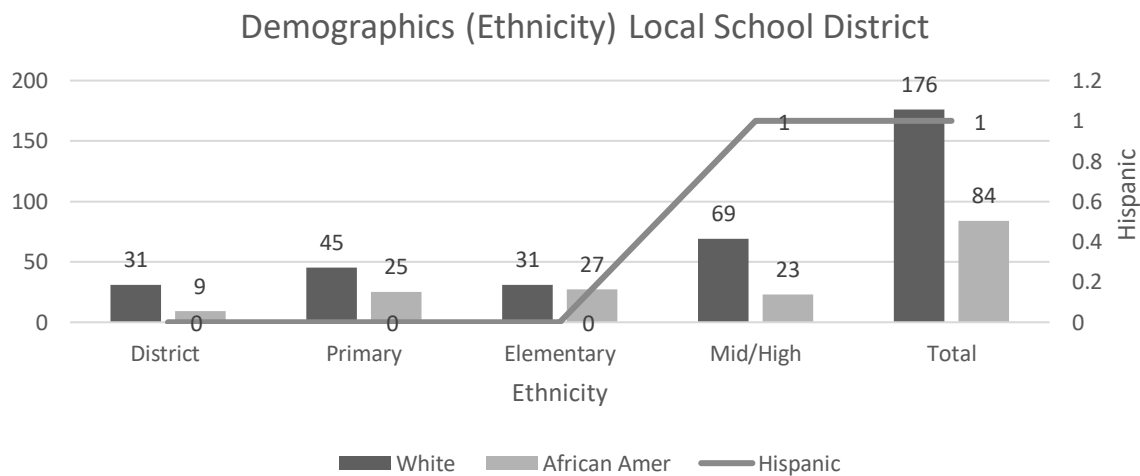
The low percentages denote disproportionality and underrepresentation of African American females within both superintendency (6.7%) and principalship (12.9%).

Organization for School District of Inquiry

The school district of my study ensures that all employees have access to the organizational chart to support their understanding of the hierarchical structure. In Chapter I, I described all of the positions within the school district, and I noted both the employees’ genders and ethnicities. Figure 8 represents both data sets.

Figure 8

Demographics (Ethnicity) - Local Data

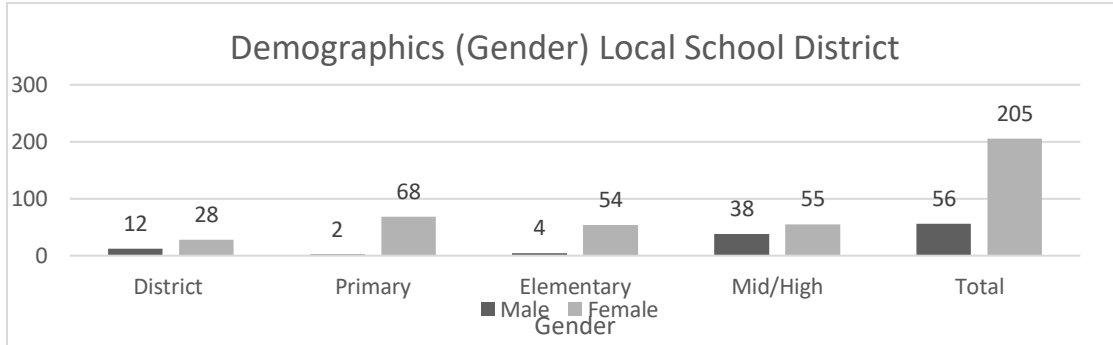


Note. Representation of ethnicity according to local data.

White employees double the number of African Americans. Whites and African Americans are the two main ethnic groups employed in this Southern rural school district. The high employment of the two ethnicities is a continuous trend for the school district and local community (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). The following bar chart (Figure 9) represents data of employment based on gender.

Figure 9

Demographics (Gender) - Local Data



Note. Representation of gender according to local data.

The data in Table 8 represent the historic change of leadership from predominately White and Black male principals to females. In 2022, there was a shift in principalship as 80% were Black females (i.e., principal or assistant principal) while 20% consisted of one White female assistant principal (Human Resource Department & Principals, Spring 2022). The shift in principalship was unprecedented for this school district. The local data contrast with the national data as there seems to be an inverse where White females hold a higher percentage of principal positions.

Table 8

African American and White Females Performing as Principal (by 2022/23 Term)

Female Leaders	PP	PAP	EP	EAP	CP	CAP	Total
African American	1	1	1	1	0	0	4
White	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Total	1	1	1	1	0	1	5

Note. Table displaying local data for African American and White female principals. PP = Primary Principal; PAP = Primary Assistant Principal; EP = Elementary Principal; EAP =

Elementary Assistant Principal; CP = Combined Middle and High School Principal; CAP = Combined Middle and High School Assistant Principal.

International Women's Day

March 8th of each year has been designated as International Women's Day (International Women's Day.org, 2024). The International Women's Day Organization's (2024) focus continues to be on advocating for women's basic rights, prohibiting discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, promoting inclusion in the political make-up at all levels of leadership, and being a voice for all women across the globe to identify and advocate on women's issues. The history of Women's Day ran parallel to the struggle for women's rights. The first National Woman's Day was held in 1909 in New York. The timeframe is pivotal as its inception, which occurred prior to the first wave of feminism (Internationalwomensday.org, 2024). Thus, the need for recognition of rights serves as benchmarks for the progress of recognition by nations. In 1975, the United Nations recognized and declared March 8th as the *United Nations Day for Women's Rights and World Peace* (Internationalwomensday.org, 2024).

Summary

On a more micro level, my study aimed to give more voice to women. By conducting this study, select female administrators had an opportunity to share their lived experiences and make meaning of their career navigations. The study's significance lies in the exploration of disproportionality and underrepresentation of female administrators in a small rural school district. One additional reason I conducted this study was to address pervading structural issues that may aid in patterns of underrepresentation and disproportionality for women in a small rural district.

As the literature has indicated, there have been major movements and policies for which to address inequality, inequity, marginalization, underrepresentation, and disproportionality. The laws and movements have enabled all of the stages of the Feminist Theory/BFT, as in the progression from exclusion to advocacy and empowerment (Arinder, 2020; Collins, 2022). Ultimately, the movements would have failed without the adjustment, amendment, and development of elements of the Four Frames (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Chapter Three

Methodology

This chapter describes and explains the qualitative case study method that I engaged in during my research inquiry. The main purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of an organization and the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT as they relate to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021). This exploration was related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South. By conducting this inquiry, I obtained authentic accounts of each participant's lived experiences and their career navigation from educators to formal leadership. Therefore, I explored African American administrators' perceptions of hiring practices within the rural school district through the lens of the Four Frames, which included structural, human resources, political, and symbolic-cultural and the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021).

As a researcher and interviewer, I listened for counter stories and possible strategies used on the path to leadership at various levels. Most importantly, I documented two key aspects: the meanings and connections participants made and how they might use their insights in the future (Maxwell, 2013; Merriam, 2002; Patton, 2015). The all-encompassing research goals of this study were to (a) illuminate the participants' derived meanings from their own lived experiences of organizational culture and hiring practices within the rural Southern school district; (b) capture strategies used by participants on navigating the hiring process for advanced leadership;

(c) investigate through interviews; and (d) properly document the data collected to capture accurate accounts of the experiences of female school and district administrators in the rural South. I had two research questions to guide further exploration of the goals for this qualitative study:

RQ 1. How do African American female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?

RQ 2. How do African American female administrators perceive the impact of race and gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in a rural school district in the South?

I conducted a single case study to describe authentic accounts of lived experiences from female leaders (Yin, 2018). Specifically, I investigated the lived experiences of four African American females. They were in formal leadership positions in a school system located in a small, rural Southern community to capture their paths to securing and performing in leadership roles.

Research Design

After reflecting on the literature in the field relevant to my study and the three approaches to research (i.e., qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods), qualitative research was most appropriate to answer the research questions. Creswell (2014) explained how these approaches are seen as plans and protocol for research and extend from generated assumptions to methods of data collected, analyzed, and interpreted. With qualitative research, case studies can be used as a specific strategy.

Qualitative research allows for deep, intuitive, and contextual interactions to take place that help researchers discover and understand meanings about a particular phenomenon (Patton,

2015). Patton (2015) elaborated that qualitative research is personal; we are the instrument of inquiry; and whatever we bring to the research study (e.g., life stories, experiences, intellect, skills, and training) will somehow have some type of impact or bearing on the credibility of our study. It can provide the rigor needed for a reputable research process while accounting for time, cost, budget, and the scope of the study. For my study, I did not draw conclusions that applied to all female administrators, nor did I try to test scientific hypotheses. I did, however, need to generate themes that aggregated the experiences of female administrators in ways that are purposeful.

As previously noted, my research consisted of gathering the perceptions of current or former female leaders. Therefore, the most appropriate research design of inquiry for my goals and questions was the case study. My research approach addressed Maxwell's (2013) Interactive Model of Research Design: Goals, Conceptual Framework, Research Questions, Methods, and Validity. By monitoring subjectivity during the data collection process, I generated rich and deep-rooted data during the interview process as participants shared and made meaning of their unique, authentic experiences. Design choice in qualitative research is primarily based on focus (Merriam, 2002). In my study, I sought to understand the perspectives of African American female administrators and their perspectives on hiring and employment practices, along with promotions and career opportunities within this southern rural school district. I analyzed all collected data for patterns and themes, and I accurately reported the findings.

Narrative analysis has been identified as a logical and functional approach for interpreting text having some type of story component (Merriam, 2002; Saldaña, 2021). I did not focus on narrative analysis as my primary approach, but the content of my interviews included language about life history and life experiences. A story format for each interview was optional,

where a narrative lens was only used to sort and code data. I used original transcriptions to answer my research questions, and the transcriptions contained biographical data that are part of the larger whole.

Maxwell's (2013) Interactive Model of Research Design was most appropriate for my study. He posited that an interactive, qualitative research design is the foundation of any quality research study. Maxwell argued, "A good design, one in which the components work harmoniously together, promotes efficient and successful functioning: a flawed design leads to poor operation or failure" (p. 2). Creswell (2014) postulated that the five components in the model (i.e., Goals, Conceptual Framework, Research Questions, Methods, and Validity) build on and inform one another. It is possible for components to be revised according to how the study develops, and this happened within my study. I proposed new procedures that were accepted before the interviews took place. The conceptual framework helped in the interpretation of what was said, but it also informed research goals and research questions. This ongoing reflection, development, and discovery was what encouraged me to play an active part in the whole process.

Yin (2018) described five important elements of a case study research design to consider when conducting qualitative research. The five elements include case study questions, notation of propositions, specific cases, logic linking the data to the propositions, and criteria for interpreting findings. In examining case study questions, it is important to note that these questions help in the selection of the best methodology to use when conducting a study (i.e., form or type of questions- "who," "what," "how," and "why") (Yin, 2018, p. 34). The second element is the notation of propositions, which includes proposal statements and expressions. The notations signal topics or subjects warranting further inspection throughout the inquiry. Yin identified the third element as specific cases; thus, I identified cases and defined the unit of the

case study. The fourth element is understanding how to logically link the data to the propositions to create a data analysis scheme that addresses the research problem and questions. The fifth element is to design criteria for interpreting the findings when conducting a case study.

Researcher Worldview

A worldview, also known as a paradigm, is “a basic set of beliefs that guide action” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). My research pertained to female administrators’ perceptions of career navigation in a small rural school district in the South. I needed to interact with others because they made their own meaning individually. I cannot say that the understanding I have from my leadership experiences is the same understanding that my participants possess. Context, culture, and historical background all play a role in how individuals understand the world around them. Creating an open, safe space to talk about problems was beneficial for my study because it helped me learn about others in ways that allowed for exploration of issues. Since my research was qualitative in nature, the process leaned heavily on induction and intuitive processes. Based on the beliefs I have outlined here, my worldview is social constructivism. Social constructivism posits that people make subjective meaning out of their lives, and the goal of research is to understand their points of view (Creswell, 2014). The methods selected for my research process endeavored to understand how African American female administrators have seen the world and how they have experienced it in terms of leadership and advancement.

Participant Selection

Prior to study implementation, VSU reviewed and granted IRB approval to proceed with the research study (see Appendix A). Additionally, I completed and adhered to the CITI Program (2024) for required research training (see Appendices B, C, and D). For this single-case qualitative study, I utilized purposeful selection when selecting the participants and setting.

Purposeful sampling requires information-rich cases, such as those found within settings, people, or activities. This sampling strategy allows for understanding of issues central to the research purpose (Maxwell, 2013; Patton, 2015). The number of participants needed to conduct a credible and unbiased inquiry varies from study to study. Additionally, Criterion sampling (i.e., selecting participants based on criteria related to the research questions) and Convenience sampling (i.e., selection that saves time, budget, and resource costs) were suitable for the sampling approaches (Maxwell, 2013).

All participants were serving at the time or had served in the past as a principal, assistant principal, or superintendent. Prior leadership experience outside the proposed school system was acceptable. The potential participants must have completed the foundational credentialing programs positioning for the pathway to principalship, which should lead to the pathway of superintendentship for those individuals with a desire to pursue advanced leadership positions, complete recommended leadership development programs, participate in district-level mentor/mentee programs, and attend local and statewide professional development trainings and conferences.

The specific selection process for the study was as follows: I generated participants from a list of current and past female African American leaders performing as principals, assistant principals, district office leaders, or superintendents in the small, rural school district in the South. I utilized the school district's current and past website directories in order to generate a list of potential participants. I contacted the district's human resource office for necessary information on potential participants.

Once I completed the identification process and verification of contact information, I contacted the potential participants and presented them with an opportunity to participate in this

study. I initiated contact with potential participants via email. I included a survey link within each recruitment email to gather their demographic information and to find out if they were interested in participating in the study (see Appendices E, F, and G). The correspondence stated the research study's purpose, noted expectations for both the researcher and potential participants, and explained the data collection process. Within a one-week period, I followed up with a telephone call to any respondents to the initial e-mail. Fifteen days after the initial contact attempt, I scheduled a face-to-face appointment to meet with any potential participant listed on the established respondent list to share further details on the study (see Appendices H and I).

Setting

The setting for data collection involved virtual interviews (see Appendix J). This setting was conducive for all parties during the data collection process. Virtual interviews allowed more flexibility for both the participants and the researcher (e.g., home, an administrator's office, a designated area in a public library, a local college or university setting, or other conducive locations). There were generally no plans to request any formal documentation from potential participants to guard against causing any undue anxiety; however, I did provide documentation relevant to participants when appropriate. I collected basic contact information verbally and in writing, such as names, phone numbers, and emails, to schedule appropriate interview sessions.

Data Collection

Upon the completion of securing potential participants, I began the data collection phase of the research process. The method that helped me gather and collect data was interviewing, specifically the use of the Three-Interview Series (Seidman, 2019) for data collection. Seidman's (2019) interviewing strategy was appropriate for my data collection approach. Each scheduled interview added to the findings as participants had opportunities to present examples that

subsequently helped each individual recount experiences that otherwise may not have surfaced if I utilized less strategies. Hence, I conducted structured interviews. I generated pre-established questions on the topic of interest and ordered questioning prior to each interview session.

To elaborate further, three in-depth interviews and a demographic survey were the data collection methods used. I included a survey link within each recruitment email to gather their demographic information and to find out if they were interested in participating in the study. The recruitment email included the link to the survey, information about the study, and the informed voluntary consent. Within a one-week period, I followed up with a telephone call to any respondents to the initial e-mail. Fifteen days after the initial contact attempt, I scheduled face-to-face appointments to meet with potential participants listed on the respondent list. I designed the interview protocol utilizing Seidman's (2019) Three-Interview Series. I recorded and transcribed each interview within Microsoft Teams. I also uploaded the transcripts into Intellectus Qualitative for data analysis, where I engaged in two coding iterations (Intellectus Statistics, 2019). The first iteration of coding served to answer the research questions while the second iteration examined the framing of the theories to better connect them with the research questions.

The Three-Interview Series allowed for development of authentic meaning and greater understanding of the topic. Each interview required interview guides that had open-ended questions. I created them based on recommendations by Seidman (2019) and Patton (2015). The purpose of the first interview was to gain insight into the participant's life history. The second interview provided an opportunity for an in-depth interviewing session with details of lived experiences. Each participant was able to reconstruct what their life journey had been like for them. They told a story about their life journey or a typical day in their life. Lastly, the third interview allowed time for a reflection on the meaning. The concluding interview tied to

participants' meaning construction after they reflected on their life history and lived experiences in previous interview sessions (Seidman, 2019).

Each participant had three interview sessions. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes. I explained all protocol, including any ethical issues, to participants before the start of my study and each interview session. With permission from each participant, I recorded and transcribed each session utilizing Microsoft Teams, Ver. 1.7.00.3653. I utilized pseudonyms to protect the identity and privacy of all participants. After each session, I reviewed the recording and transcript to ensure accuracy and clarity.

I scribed memos and field notes as needed. Also, I scheduled each participant for one week of individualized interviews and follow-up sessions. I decided all dates, times, and locations according to the availability of participants. I scheduled sessions as early as possible to meet all involved parties' personal and professional needs.

Data Analysis

After the completion of the data collection, I began data analysis. I coded all interviews and memos promptly to ensure the most accurate account of data collected (Saldaña, 2016). The Intellectus Qualitative software program helped with the transcriptions and analyses (Intellectus Statistics, 2019). This ensured increased accuracy and helped lower the threats to validity.

It is important to note that the four coding methods appropriate for my study are labeled Concept, Emotion, In Vivo, and Pattern (Saldaña, 2021). Concept Coding, according to Saldaña (2021), assigns meso (i.e., cultural, national, or mid-range) or macro (i.e., conceptual, global, or universe) levels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress. A concept is a word or short phrase that symbolically represents a suggested meaning that is broader than a single item or action. It suggests a big picture idea rather than an object or observable behavior (Saldaña,

2021). It is appropriate for many different types of data, including information within studies for numerous participants, studies with various sites, and any studies having an extensive variety of data forms (e.g., grounded theory, phenomenology, and critical theory).

Concept Coding can be used as a standalone method. Since it is considered a first cycle method, it can utilize codes that are conceptual in nature. These first cycle codes can be condensed further, and second cycle methods also establish concepts (Mihás, 2014; Saldaña, 2015).

Emotion Coding is associated with participants' feelings within life experiences or during the interview process itself (Saldaña, 2016). The interviewer can create word or sentence clusters that embody emotions found within a transcript. The interviewer can jot down memos or notes indicating any additional feelings or emotions not fully expressed within the transcript. This can include feelings seen face-to-face or heard on recording that are apart from the actual worded response. Anything during the interview sessions that provided clarity about feelings was coded if it was relevant to the research questions and overarching goal within this study design. Sometimes participants labeled and made their own emotional codes and meaning for those codes without the interviewer actually starting the coding process for analysis. Any codes generated inductively by the participants were noted during the coding process.

From the codes generated, I developed categories and themes from those categories. According to Saldaña (2021), when categorizing themes, the data provides descriptive details about the patterns observed and constructed by the analyst. Instead of using a short code or category label, a theme expands on the major ideas through the use of an extended phrase or sentence. I coded for categorical themes as an inductive, open-ended approach to theme construction (Saldaña, 2021). It is more aligned to interview transcripts, participant-generated

documents, and artifacts than standalone field notes (Saldaña, 2021).

In Vivo Coding is the favored coding method to utilize as it allows opportunities to have access to participants' own words and brief phrases in their own unique language while giving honor to each participant's voice. Pattern Coding refers to the recurrence, steadiness, or unchanging incidents of activity or data (Saldaña, 2021). I understand there is not any definitive way to code, categorize, and theme the data. However, there are sound suggestions and examples to use as guides (Saldaña, 2021). I engaged in two forms of data analysis: AI-Assisted and In Vivo. During the In Vivo phase of data analysis, I used a three-iteration coding system to address: (1) RQs, (2) theories, and (3) components of theories in the discovery of findings, themes, and patterns patterns (see Appendix J).

Because I conducted a case study, I generated qualitative narratives from the interview data to reveal patterns and themes identified from the series of scheduled interviews. I developed and utilized an informal interactive methods matrix as an instrument to help stay focused on my specific selected topic (Maxwell, 2013). It helped me identify threats to validity and allowed opportunities to address any threats in an appropriate manner. These procedures helped avoid compromising the integrity and credibility of my study while demonstrating trustworthiness.

Presentation

The researcher presented a descriptive interpretation of each participant's meaning construction for their lived experiences that pertained to the path for securing leadership roles and positions in the field of education. I described developed themes from codes and categories, and I used quotes from the interviews to support how I presented the data. Creswell and Guetterman (2019) listed these methods as ways to represent data: comparison tables, hierarchical trees, figures, and maps. Comparison tables are visual images, tables, or matrices

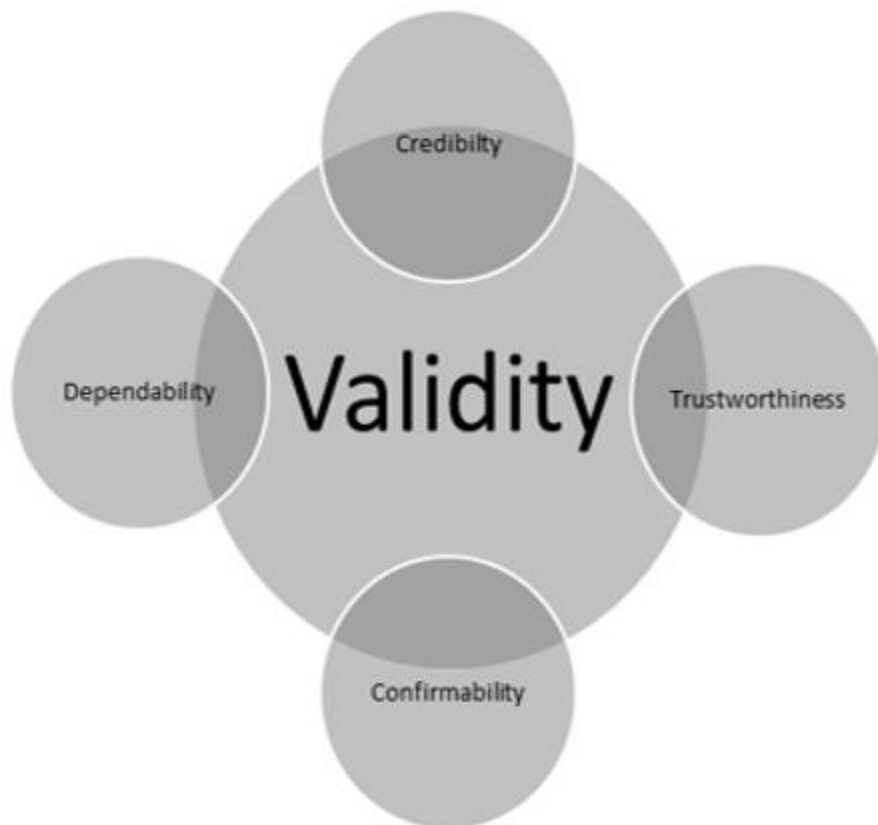
that compare groups and their themes. Hierarchical trees are diagrams that represent themes and connections in a way that is from general to specific. Figures with boxes showed the connections among themes. Maps displayed physical layouts of a setting or demographics of a particular population.

Validity and Trustworthiness

In my qualitative research inquiry, I am highlighting validity and trustworthiness to show that the study is meaningful and worthy of being investigated. At a minimum, a qualitative study must present the determinants in Figure 10. Later in this section, I present the four criteria of trustworthiness. I utilized the criteria to ensure validity in my inquiry.

Figure 10

Qualitative Research - Addressing Validity



Note. Diagram addressing validity determinants.

When conducting qualitative research, there is no guarantee that all threats to validity can be avoided (Patton, 2015). However, it is possible to develop operational strategies to avoid or minimize the number of threats to ensure trustworthiness of one's study (Shenton, 2004). Validity can be defined as the degree to which data and its meaning are found to be credible (Maxwell, 2013). Validity has been referred to by different names by well-known authors (Creswell, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Maxwell, 2013) in the field of qualitative research. Case in point, Lincoln and Guba (1985) have referred to validity as trustworthiness. Creswell (2014) used the term validation, and Maxwell (2013) preferred validity as the proper term. Additionally, they sometimes used subordinate topics to refer to their preferred terms for validity. I utilized Lincoln and Guba to define the four relative terms for validity in my study.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) are credited with presenting four Criteria for Trustworthiness for completing a qualitative research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The four criteria for trustworthiness are depicted in detail within Table 9, along with my planned actions under the researcher's Assuring Task tab. Overall, Lincoln and Guba define the four criteria as follows:

- Credibility – when the findings can be believed;
- Transferability – when findings can be relevant in comparable situations, circumstances, and population;
- Dependability – when the study can be repeated and the same or similar findings are consistently evident; and
- Confirmability – when one ensures that the results are solely based on data collected, the analyses are free of the researcher's bias and assumptions, and findings are based only on the participants' responses.

Validity issues within qualitative research often involve threats concerning bias and reactivity (Maxwell, 2013). Subjective I's must always be reviewed to keep personal bias at a minimum, which should help decrease any threats to validity (Peshkin, 1988, 1991). I created memos about my personal experiences and Subjective I's in order to document any possible biases and personal influences that may have affected the research process. The fact that I am part of all aspects of the research process indicates both validity and reliability. Using different types and levels of coding and categorization helps to verify that I can accurately map the content.

Table 9

Guba's Four Criteria for Trustworthiness

Quality Criterion	Possible provision made by researcher	Researcher's Assuring Tasks
Credibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adoption of appropriate, well recognized research methods • Development of early familiarity with culture of participating organizations • Random sampling of individuals serving as informants • Triangulation via use of different methods, different types of informants and different sites • Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants • Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues • Negative case analysis • Debriefing sessions between researcher and superiors • Peer scrutiny of project • Use of "reflective 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On going literature reviews throughout the process • Use qualitative method for collecting rich data • Aware of operational culture of proposed district • Fully explain the phenomena presented • Triangulation by using open-ended questions, prepared questions as a guide, debriefing process- among researcher, committee chair, and researcher, along with dissertation coach • Clear roles of

Quality Criterion	Possible provision made by researcher	Researcher's Assuring Tasks
	<p>commentary”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of background, qualifications and experience of the researcher • Member checks of data collected, and interpretations/theories formed. • Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny • Examination of previous research to frame findings 	<p>researcher and participants</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protocol for member checks after data collection, interpretations, and possible theories • Researcher's profile • Iterative interview questioning and during data analyses for deeper insight and making meaning • Subjective Is- Be mindful!
Transferability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provision of background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early on, clearly describe the phenomena proposed to study so comparisons can be made after data collection and analyses are completed. • The term Transferability is preferred over Reliability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985)- a specific concept in qualitative research
Dependability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employment of “overlapping methods” • In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Semi to structured interviews and questionnaires will be widely used during the data collection process to cross-validate data.
Confirmability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation to reduce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Triangulation and

Quality Criterion	Possible provision made by researcher	Researcher's Assuring Tasks
	effect of investigator bias <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions • Recognition of shortcomings in study's methods and their potential effects • In-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinized • Use of diagrams to demonstrate "audit trail" 	over-lapping methods to avoid researcher's bias <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware of my Subjective-Is once assumptions and beliefs are acknowledged to reduce the threat to validity • Reflective journal to record all aspects of the research process • Acknowledge any limitations and impact on credibility of study • Ensure clarity for throughout the study

Note. Detailed table listing the explanations and research plans about the four criteria.

My selection process provided more opportunities for data support because there was more than one way to determine participants and appropriate avenues for exploration. I created memos about reactivity, specifically how my actions and background influenced participants' dispositions and responses to my questions. A credible expert in qualitative research, such as a committee member or another professional researcher, checked my work after all interviews and during the analysis process. I utilized an informal validity matrix when addressing my research questions. I made sure that participants were able to view and verify their interview responses after I had transcribed them. I included opportunities for participants' verification on any narratives I created from the analysis process. This activity, known as member checking, is a valuable tool for verifying the accuracy and consistency of how participants are portrayed

(Maxwell, 2013).

Ethical Considerations

To address ethics in my research, I followed the VSU rules and guidelines during the entire research process when interacting with human participants (VSU Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration, 2023). As the researcher, I ensured that all participants were completely informed on the nature of my research study. At the beginning, I clearly explained that participation was voluntary. Whenever a participant desired termination of participation, there was no pressure to continue in the process. I explained privacy safeguards (e.g., interview transcripts, other personal paper trails, or digital artifacts) along with information on how I need to store participants' data for at least 3 years after the completion of the research process as per Federal IRB regulations. I also explained the final disposal of information.

To further ensure clarity, I had a one-on-one conversation with each of the participants prior to the first interview session and followed up with a brief written summary of my study and our roles during the process. I specifically explained the purpose for my study, the significance of my research, time commitments, along with any potential benefits and risks (VSU Office of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration, 2023). As I worked with participants, I was able to guard their identity and privacy before, during, and after the data collection process had ended. I have electronic copies of data on a password-protected computer and hard copies in a locked storage case. I am the only one who has access to my computer and the keys to the storage case.

Confidentiality is a must. As I worked with the participants, I required mutual respect to guard against any ethical violations. I only shared or reported participants' data with their permission. Ethics guidance was put in place for credible reasons to safeguard both the study

participants and the researcher. The guidelines and mandates must not be taken for granted. Compliance can ensure safeguarding of individuals' identities and their shared information because it often prevents negative repercussions about sharing specific topics. Data formatting and reporting protocols are recommendations from the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) Manual, 7th edition.

Summary

With this Methodology chapter, I have described what data I collected for my case study. The paradigm used to guide my actions was social constructivism. I engaged in a case study methodology. I utilized purposeful and criterion sampling for the selection of potential participants. I decided to utilize Seidman's Three-Interview Series (Seidman, 2019) approach to gather information about my research questions. I used three 60-minute interviews as the data collection method. I explained how I analyzed and presented the information. Saldaña (2021) recommends the use of different techniques, including Concept Coding, Emotion Coding, and Categorical Theming. I analyzed the data utilizing the noted four coding methods: Concept, Emotion, In Vivo, and Pattern (Saldaña, 2021). I developed narratives when warranted, and I developed patterns and themes based on what I found during my analysis.

Moreover, I reported the themes and patterns I found from the data. I represented them through profiles, tables, and figures. I have discussed validity threats, and I addressed them before, during, and after the research process. I ensured validity and trustworthiness by adhering to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) four Criteria for Trustworthiness for completing a qualitative research study: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lastly, I adhered to a strict set of ethical considerations in safeguarding the participants' confidentiality, informed voluntary consent, data-collection, storage, management, and deletion. I based my ethical

considerations on recommendations from the IRB and the APA manual. The study's design interests those who want to know about the perspectives and experiences of underrepresented females in leadership positions. It is also of interest to those who face systemic oppression and who would like to hear from others with diverse life experiences.

Chapter Four

Results

In this chapter, I present the findings of the data analysis process, including the related data: demographics, coding, research questions, theoretical framework, and themes and patterns. Additionally, this chapter includes participant profiles and a summary of interview question responses, all of which are relevant to RQ1, RQ2, Organizational Development (OD), and Feminist Theory/BFT (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2015; Wollstonecraft, 2019). Lastly, this chapter includes the discovery of emergent themes and patterns as they are related to research questions and theories.

Demographics

The participants received an email with a link to an anonymous demographic survey. The participants also received a participant code to ensure their confidentiality. At the time of the interview, I gave participants an opportunity to submit a pseudonym. However, since some of the participants are known by their pseudonyms, I have included the selected names in the chart (see Table 10). The information contained with the demographic table reflects the participants' choices or statuses at the time of the study. The participant pool was reduced from six to four because of time, criteria, and budget constraints, but the data gathered from the four participants sufficiently answered the research questions.

Table 10

Participant's Demographic Data

Name	Position	Aspiration	Job Status	Education	Years in District	Years as Admin	Age
Quintessa	Principal	Central Office	Retired	Ed.D.	20	20	52
Petra	Principal	Principal only	Retired	Ed.S.	45	19	71
Mia	Superintendent	Superintendency	Semi-Retired	M.Ed.	30+	16.5	70
Trinity	Principal	Central Office & Superintendent	Active	M.Ed.	16	2	45

Note. Pseudonyms are in place of actual names. All participants within this table are African American females. Admin = Administrator.

Profiles of Participants

The participant profiles are an extension of the demographic information along with demographic verification that occurred during the first interview. The profiles contain self-reported data from the participants. The participant profiles contain information related to the participant's aspirations for advanced leadership positions and perceived barriers to promotion within the school district.

Quintessa

Quintessa self-identified as an African American female who worked as a principal at the time of the study. Her highest level of education was a Doctor of Education degree. She was employed within the district for approximately 20 years and served in an administrator role for 20 years. Quintessa was an assistant principal throughout her career in the district; she aspired to take a position within the Central Office. Her plan for advanced leadership included principalship and then a pursuit of a position such as Curriculum Director, Human Resource Director, or Special Education Director in the Central Office. Early on in her tenure an opportunity for a principalship became available; however, she was not selected to be interviewed for the position. During the later years of her tenure, another opportunity for

principalship arose and she successfully obtained the position. She held the position until her retirement (2024). Please note that her Central Office aspiration was not obtained throughout her 20 years as an administrator with a doctoral degree. When asked about her aspirations for a superintendent position, Quintessa responded “No, my desire would have been to retire at the district office.”

Prior to her administrative work, Quintessa taught in the elementary school system for Grades 1-3. She taught in two different counties for 10 years: 6 years for one county and 4 years for the other. Thus, all her prior work experience was in an elementary school environment. Overall, she has served as an educator and an administrator for 30+ years.

Petra

Petra self-identified as an African American female who performed as a principal at the time of the study. A Master of Education degree was her highest level of education. Petra was employed in the district for 45 years, and 19 years of that was spent as an administrator. As an administrator, Petra was a high school assistant principal for 17 years and an elementary school principal for her last 2 years prior to retiring (2024). For years, Petra was content performing as an assistant principal at the high school level until she realized that she was highly qualified and skilled to perform in a more advanced administrative level. She aspired to seek a principalship, but initially she did not receive an interview. Two years prior to her retirement, a principalship vacancy opened, and she was approved for the role. Petra had no aspirations to seek advanced administrative roles in the central office.

Prior to becoming an administrator, Petra was a veteran middle school science teacher of 26 years in the school district. Briefly before entering the field of education field, she had an opportunity to work in an agency in another county that dealt with young female offenders. Petra

shared that this early experience working with hard core young offenders actually helped prepare her for the role of high school principal.

Mia

Mia was self-identified as an African American female who was semi-retired at the time of the study. Her highest level of education was a Master of Education degree with a leadership certification. She was employed within the district for approximately 30 plus years, and she served in an administrator role for 16.5 years. Mia taught at the elementary level for 14-15 years. During her tenure, Mia performed as an assistant principal for 6 years, principal for 8 to 9 years, and superintendent in the district for 2.5 years. Indeed, this was the first time the district's school board had ever approved the hiring of a Black individual as superintendent, especially a Black female. It was a historic event in this small rural community in the South.

Mia had a unique pathway to leadership as she began her teaching career in this school district, taught at the elementary level, got married to a military soldier, and relocated. She later returned to the local area but worked in another school district as an assistant principal. After 2 years, she returned to this school district and taught at the elementary level until she was hired as an assistant principal at the high school level. After years of performing as an assistant principal at the high school level, Mia became the middle school principal. With the coaxing and mentoring from a White female superintendent, Mia found herself enrolled in the necessary preparation courses/programs to prepare her for future hiring opportunities for more advanced administrative positions such as that of the superintendency. Currently, Mia is employed in another local school district as a 49% employee. In Georgia, 40 hours per week is the standard for full time status; however, retired educators can return to work in a 49% capacity which is less

than full time. She has no plans of seeking any leadership-type position in education any time soon.

Trinity

Lastly, Trinity was self-identified as an African American female who performed as a principal at the time of the study. Trinity became principal of the local elementary school on June 1, 2024. A Master of Education degree with a leadership certification was her highest level of education. Trinity was employed in the district for 16 years, including 2 years serving in the role of an administrator. Of those 16 years performing as an administrator, Trinity was the assistant principal for 2 years at the same elementary school where she began serving as principal on June 1, 2024. Prior to becoming a principal, assistant principal, and the school's academic coach at the elementary school level, Trinity performed as a middle school social studies and science teacher. For 2 years, she was a middle school science teacher in another school district.

Initially, Trinity's focus was mainly on the daily classroom responsibilities. Due to her informal mentors over the years, she found herself being coaxed to pursue administrative or leadership roles beyond lead teacher, to academic coach, to assistant principal, now to the principalship. Trinity sees the value of the pathway she has taken, which has prepared her for the current role as principal. She is leaving the possibility of seeking a central office position and even the role of superintendent open to future career advancement considerations.

The profiles of the participants provided an overview of their aspiration for career advancement along with the reported time in the district and their time as an administrator. The next section contains a breakdown of the data analysis process for both the AI-Assisted coding and In Vivo coding processes.

Summary of AI-Assisted Coding & Thematization

I engaged in two methods of data analysis: AI-Assisted and In Vivo coding. With AI-assisted coding, I was able to do both deductive coding and thematization (see Tables 11 and 12). The data analysis summary contains the illustrations of AI-Assisted thematizing (see Figure 11) and In Vivo (see Figure 12). The coding within the data outlines the overall themes made during the discovery phase of data analysis.

Table 11

AI-Assisted Coding & Thematization

Coded Segments	RQ1	RQ2	Feminist Theory/BFT	OD	Themes & Patterns
141	17	12	105	84	17

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). AI-Assisted Coding & Thematization

In coding In Vivo, I engaged in three iterations of coding and a fourth for the discovery of themes and patterns (see Table 12). When engaging in In Vivo coding the breakdown of RQ1 (101) and RQ2 (76) equals the total number of coded segments (277). However, it should be noted that within the disintegration of data related to theories, there can be duplicates based on embedded coding for instance one coded segment may have all five stages of Feminist Theory/BFT and all four components of OD. Thus, for every coded segment (277) there can be a total of 1,385 (Feminist Theory/BFT) responses and 1,108 (OD) responses. Nevertheless, there are only 313 Feminist Theory/BFT responses and 413 OD responses across the dataset (see Table 12). Lastly, with In Vivo coding I was able to identify the number of coded segments within each participant transcript and note the discovery of themes and patterns (see Table 12).

Figure 11

AI-Assisted Themes & Patterns



Note. AI-Assisted Coding & Thematization

Table 12

In Vivo Coding & Thematization

Coded Segments	RQ1	RQ2	Feminist Theory/BFT	OD	Themes & Patterns
277	101	76	313	413	17
Coded Segments by Participants	<i>Quintessa</i> 101	<i>Petra</i> 124	<i>Mia</i> 84	<i>Trinity</i> 112	

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). In Vivo-Assisted Coding & Thematization.

Figure 12

In Vivo Coding & Thematization



Note. In Vivo-Assisted Coding & Thematization

Introduction – Why Connecting AI-Assisted Themes to In Vivo Themes

It is crucial to understand the importance of connecting AI-Assisted Themes to In Vivo themes. In research, AI is considered an Artificial Intelligence (AI) qualitative analysis tool which means it can become an assistant or partner to qualitative researchers (Hitch, 2024). Though AI is found to be a credible tool to assist with data analysis, it can never replace or take away the unique personal attributes required by the human researchers to address the issues of subjectivity and other human nuances (Hitch, 2024). Human researchers engage in InVivo coding, delving deeply into the data to uncover recurring patterns and themes, gaining insights from human interactions that AI cannot match.

Additionally, this can be true during both the interview and data analysis processes when other personal connections are required when attempting to draw common patterns and themes

(Hitch, 2024). Utilizing AI-Assisted Themes and In Vivo themes can be considered part of the triangulation process. By using both approaches to find common patterns and themes, this serves to strengthen some trustworthiness components (see Table 9). As a researcher, I was able to note the nuances that AI-assisted coding was not; thus, I am also able to cross-compare to discover the connections and outliers of the dataset (see Table 13).

Table 13

Connecting AI-Assisted Themes with In Vivo Themes

AI-Assisted Themes	In Vivo
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Navigating themes (Navigating Advanced Leadership in Education, Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion, Navigating Leadership Amidst Power Dynamics, and Navigating Leadership through Political Challenges). • Leadership Journeys and Systemic Challenges 	Politics
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and Leadership Development • Personal and Professional Evolution in Leadership • Leadership Pathways and Personal Narratives • Symbolic Leadership Journey • Leadership Challenges and Triumphs • Leadership Journeys and Systemic Challenges • Navigating Leadership through Political Challenges • Daily Leadership Dynamics • Advanced Leadership Journey and Structural Context • Pathways to Leadership • Leadership Journeys and Systemic Challenges • Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion • Navigating Leadership through Political Challenges • Symbolic Leadership Journey • Understanding Leadership and Organizational Dynamics • Making Meaning of Leadership Experiences 	Encouragement for Professional Development & Advancement Commitment for Home, School, and Community Challenges Building Administrator Race & Gender Barriers (School Districts) School Climate Hierarchical Understanding Making Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership Challenges and Triumphs • Personal and Professional Evolution in Leadership • Leadership Journey Narratives • Leadership Pathways and Personal Narratives 	Resilience & Persistence Reflection

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). Connecting AI-Assisted Themes with In Vivo Themes.

The AI-assisted tool was not capable of uncovering unique and impactful outliers such as: Informal and Formal Mentors (Family & Friends), Encouragement for Professional Development & Advancement, Making Connections, Working Conditions (Overworked),

Commitment for Home, School, and Community, Familial Support, Work-Life Balance, and Mentorship. After conducting In Vivo coding on the four participants, I was able to discover 18 themes being associated with most of the 23 interview questions. As the instrument of data collection and data analysis, I was able to capture some of the nuances that AI was not able to detect. This occurred both during the interview process and data analysis.

Research Questions

This research questions section contains data from both the AI-assisting coding as well as the In Vivo coding. Both AI-Assisted and In Vivo coding consist of both codes and themes. As noted above within In Vivo coding, there were 101 code segments for RQ1 and 76 coded segments for RQ2; however, the number of codes and themes is examined within this section (see Table 14). This case study design contained the following research questions, which were correlated with interview response data:

RQ 1. How do African American female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?

RQ 2. How do African American administrators perceive the impact of race and gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in a rural school district in the South?

Table 14*Research Rationale for AI-Assisted & In Vivo Coding*

Type of Coding	RQ	Themes	Themes
AI-Assisted	RQ1 27 codes	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leadership and Professional Journey • Navigating Professional and Personal Growth in Educational Leadership • Leadership Development and Career Advancement • Comprehensive Educational and Professional Journey
In Vivo	RQ1 18 codes	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ 1: How do female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?
AI-Assisted	RQ2 None	None	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • None
In Vivo	RQ2 12 Codes	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RQ2: How do African American and White female administrators perceive the impact of race and gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in a rural school district in the South?

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). Research Rationale for In Vivo & AI-Assisted Coding.

Table 15*AI-Assisted Research Question Rationale*

Codes		Themes	Description
Number of Excerpts by Code		Leadership and Professional Journey	The theme of "Leadership and Professional Journey" is crucial in answering the research question by allowing me to understand how female administrators perceive and interpret their experiences throughout their career progression. By exploring this theme, I can gain insight into the challenges, motivations, and successes of female leaders as they navigate their journey towards securing leadership roles. This theme provides a holistic view of the participants' careers, shedding light on their development as leaders and how they make sense of their professional experiences within the educational context.
Code	Excerpts		
AI: Leadership Experience	4		
AI: Professional background and experience	13		
AI: Career Background	3		
AI: Professional Background	3		
Number of Excerpts by Code		Navigating Professional and Personal Growth in Educational Leadership	The theme of Navigating Professional and Personal Growth in Educational Leadership directly addresses the research question by providing insight into how female administrators interpret and make meaning of their experiences on the journey to securing leadership roles. This theme sheds light on the challenges faced by female leaders in navigating both personal and professional growth, as well as the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges. By exploring how female administrators reflect on their experiences, leverage past learnings, and develop their leadership styles, this theme helps to uncover the nuanced ways in which women in educational leadership roles approach their leadership journeys.
Code	Excerpts		
AI: Diversity of Experiences	1		
AI: Importance of Listening and Understanding	3		
AI: Understanding Others' Experiences and Perspectives	8		
AI: Overcoming Biases and Assumptions	2		
AI: Leveraging Past Experiences	1		
AI: Personal Experiences Shaping Perspective	1		
AI: Reflecting on Experiences and Personal Growth	50		
AI: Self-Awareness and Directness	1		

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). AI-Assisted Research Question Rationale

Codes		Themes	Description
Number of Excerpts by Code		Leadership Development and Career Advancement	The theme of Leadership Development and Career Advancement helps answer the research question by providing insight into how female administrators navigate and interpret their experiences in relation to advancing their careers in educational leadership. This theme sheds light on the various factors that influence women in securing leadership roles, such as the importance of mentorship, continuous learning, recognition of achievements, and aspirations for higher positions. By exploring how female administrators perceive and engage with these elements, I can gain a deeper understanding of their journey towards leadership roles and positions.
Code	Excerpts		
AI: Assertive Leadership Style	4		
AI: Openness to Stepping Up if Needed	1		
AI: Mentorship, Support, and Career Progression	95		
AI: Positive Accomplishments in Current Role	2		
AI: Continuous Learning Mindset	3		
AI: Continuous Growth and Aspiration for Higher Roles	1		
Number of Excerpts by Code		Comprehensive Educational and Professional Journey	The theme of Comprehensive Educational and Professional Journey is instrumental in answering the research question as it provides a detailed understanding of the trajectory that female administrators have followed to secure leadership roles. By exploring participants' educational backgrounds, professional experiences, and personal interests, I can unearth the factors that have shaped and influenced their journey towards leadership positions. This theme helps shed light on the significance of qualifications, experiences, and personal motivations in guiding women through their career progression to leadership roles in education administration.
Code	Excerpts		
AI: Educational Background	1		
AI: Educational and Professional Experience	2		
AI: Personal Interests and Hobbies	2		
AI: Participant Background and Educational Attainment	6		
AI: Educational and Career Path	4		
AI: Educational and Professional Background	4		
AI: Passion for Science	3		
AI: Importance of Certification and Qualifications	3		
AI: Participant Background and Research Process	51		

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). AI-Assisted Research Question Rationale

Table 16*Code Frequencies for RQ1 & RQ2*

RQ	Interview Question	Code	Theme and Theme Description
RQ1	Describe the most “current” typical day while on your leadership seeking journey from wake up to bedtime.	Typical Day	Working Condition (Overworked) Early risers, last one to leave daily> Full day from no later than 5 a.m. until 4:30 to 8 p.m. (afternoon/evening activities).
RQ1	Share some details on juggling work, private/family life and completing the requirements of your professional duties and responsibilities.	Juggling Roles	Familial Support / Work-Life Balanced Grateful for family support/being organized and disciplined individuals.
RQ1	Challenges, if any, and how did you overcome them?	Overcoming Challenges	Challenges “Self-evaluation & Validation” Core Beliefs & Values Never lost sight of one’s own personal moral compass, values, & belief.
RQ1	What are some celebrations/things that you are most proud of accomplishing (e.g., promotions, successful implementation of a school program/initiative) .	Celebrations and Accomplishments	Building Administrators Professional Accomplishments Able to build sound working relationships in their buildings as building leaders which improve moral and build positive school culture.
RQ1	In your words, describe your school district’s culture.	School District’s Culture	Race & Gender barriers School District’s Culture Low moral Continuous instability due to ongoing leadership changes. Perceived unfair hiring practices for local professionals, especially African American females at the advanced leadership levels
RQ1	In your words, describe your school’s culture.	School Culture	School Culture Continue to witness improved school culture: more positive environments and ensured safety measures

RQ	Interview Question	Code	Theme and Theme Description
RQ1	Describe the organizational structure of your school district.	Organizational Structure	Hierarchical Understanding Organizational charts are being put on paper and digital versions, though with the constant changes of leaders in need of updating, though the desire is there to ensure all personnel know and understand the chain of command at all levels.
RQ1	Is there anything else you would like to share as a woman navigating to your current or highest level of advanced leadership?	Former Perspective	Mentorship Mentors could play a positive role for aspiring female leaders.
RQ1	How did you as an administrator make meaning of experiences throughout your journey to secure leadership roles and positions?	Administrator's Making Meaning	Making Meaning Being able to realize where you have been to effectively navigate one's future. Realizing the positive impacts of their contributions to their school district.
RQ1	After reflecting on what you shared about your life history in Interview #1 and your experiences as you navigated to become an administrator in Interview #2, what does your <u>advanced leadership journey mean to you</u> ?	Reflection	Reflection It takes a village for females to navigate and advance through the various leadership roles/positions
RQ1	In your own words, can you make meaning of the lived experiences you shared during Interview #1 and Interview #2?	Making Meaning	Resilience _Persistence Advanced education Professional skills Barriers/ challenges Stay focus, maintain professionalism "Self-evaluation & Validation"
RQ1	What has your advanced leadership journey meant to you in the context of where you have been, your current status, and your foreseen future aspirations?	Aspirations	Reflection Participants expressed gratitude for the ability to have their voice heard and their stories of challenge and triumph recorded for posterity.

RQ	Interview Question	Code	Theme and Theme Description
RQ1	Is there any final comment you would like to share on anything shared during our third interview session?	Final Comments	Reflection Participants were given an opportunity to share their final comments and thoughts from the interview series.
RQ1	What are some things that your academic and professional background did not prepare you for in pursuit of advanced leadership positions?	Academic and Professional Background	Politics The political nature of the job determines the level of access to professional development and career advancement.
RQ1	How would you describe or present your life story leading up to becoming an administrator?	Life story	Reflection Participants were given an opportunity to reflect on their lives and their body of work prior to serving as an administrator.
RQ1	How do you make connections between your life journeys and becoming an administrator?	Making Connections	Race & Gender Barriers Administrators Making Connections In most instances, greater challenges/barriers than males (both African American and White males) and non-African American female leaders/counterparts.
RQ1	Reconstruct what your navigation journey to advanced leadership has been like for you.	Navigation Journey	Working Condition (Over worked) Seemed to have worked above and beyond the call of duty, though obvious career opportunities and job offers were never in their reach until the issue was finally aired and addressed (hesitantly in some instances).
RQ1	Tell me a story about your leadership journey. I would like for your story to be on your unique experiences while working through the different chapters of your journey to securing leadership.	Tell Your Story	Commitment for Home, School, and Community Love for the field of Education, advanced leadership roles, student achievement/improvement, the love of school, home, community relationship
RQ2		Several interview questions were listed under the RQ2	Race and gender barriers Race and Gender barriers were board and also unique as determined by the political era

RQ	Interview Question	Code	Theme and Theme Description
			of time in which the participant entered the workforce. The political battle for rights has changed and the legislation and culture of the nation has warranted policy changes. It should be noted that policy changes do not necessarily impact the culture as embedded culture will find ways to circumvent policy.

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). Code Frequencies for RQ1 & RQ2. In Vivo Research Question Rationale.

This section contains another level of discovery for the themes and patterns for *RQ 1*. *How do African American female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?* Please note that each description contained the interview questions and the exploration of the associated themes. The participants provided authentic accounts of their personal lived experiences and any impact on their journeys to advanced leadership.

Typical Day: Juggling Roles, Work-Life, Working Conditions – RQ 1

I posed the following interview question to the participants “*Describe the most “current” typical day while on your leadership-seeking journey from wake up to bedtime,*” and the responses served as data for RQ1. Please note that the following themes are highlighted within these responses: juggling roles, work-life balance, working conditions (overworked), and serving as a building administrator.

Quintessa’s Typical Day

Quintessa stated that her morning starts early at around 5:00 a.m. She stated that she is in communication with her employees as she receives both phone calls and text messages. The phone calls and text messages consist of calling out sick or reporting a problem. She stated that although the morning starts really early, sometimes the workday does not end until much later in the evening as there are events and activities to attend. Quintessa highlighted how other elements of the job may also cause delays, such as a late bus or the lack of a guardian at home to receive the children.

Maybe about once a month and then if you have a late bus because we were short, we’ve been short of bus drivers for the last 3 or 4 years on a day without any late events at the school. Your day could end. I’ve been at school. Umm. As late as about 6:30, because

what with us having a little one and you know, legally they can't get off the buses and be home by themselves without appearing. And oftentimes, parents are not at home. Umm, sometimes the bus drivers have to bring them back to school or we have to stay here until all of the students are home.

Quintessa stated that the call does not stop at the end of the day: "it's just nonstop because it is busy." She stated that the "busy" included bus duty, teacher evaluations, parent meetings, general busy within the building, and conferences outside of the building. Quintessa includes the difference between the role of a teacher and an administrator. She stated that her time as a teacher was mainly within the building; however, her time as an administrator encompasses every aspect of the building including but not limited to all the students, staff (teacher, bus driver, lunchroom workers, custodians), and central office needs.

As an Assistant Principal, Quintessa had a lot of extraneous responsibilities such as bus duty, lunch duty, and reorganizing staff to accommodate any areas of staff shortages: "And it's even worse when you're short-staffed like we are, but you have to make it work." As Assistant Principal, staffing and staffing concerns were pivotal components of the job. Quintessa alluded to the fact that the multiple roles and responsibilities make a day go fast as well as dealing with students' issues such as tantrums and other student disciplinary issues. Overall, a typical day for Quintessa starts at 4:45 a.m. or 5:00 a.m. and may end as late as 8:00 p.m. to 8:15 p.m. As demonstrated, Quintessa's account highlights the theme of juggling roles, working as a building administrator, the impact of work on work-life balance, and the understanding that serving in this role means that working conditions may warrant an individual to overwork.

Petra's Typical Day

Petra's typical day began at 4:00 a.m. and sometimes even 3:00 a.m. depending on if she had school projects to prepare for the next day. She was the high school girls' cheerleader coach, and sometimes she would not return home until almost midnight. Sometimes, she would sleep on the bus as they returned home from games. Petra was responsible for more than just the cheerleading practice aspect:

You know, going on TRIPS had to coordinate those trips and everything, and even before the TRIPS practices, I would, you know, get home like during the day I get home at 7:00 o'clock, which is pretty good. 6:37 o'clock during the regular day. So, I would say from at least five in the morning until 7:00 at night I was on the move every day and then Saturday. Sunday, I'm a person that gets up early as well. But now, if you had games and the cheerleaders have to go back, could have been 5 to 11:30 p.m. when you got home 12.

Petra shared that on one occasion, the bus arrived back at school at 2:00 a.m. in the morning, which was very unusual. She never missed a game because she sought out a replacement if ever needed, if she occasionally fell ill. She felt obligated to attend all games as many adults just really did not want to commit to such demanding tasks. It took a lot of time and energy to juggle work, family, and community involvements activities. For the most part, her own children tagged along with her to school activities as her husband served on the local school board, and he has always been very active in both school and community activities. Petra is very proud and grateful for the unwavering support received from her husband and children as she performed as both a middle school classroom teacher and as an administrator.

Petra shared how she became that parent of children who never had parents to show up for many, if any school events. She noted how she made a point to treat students at school and during extracurricular events as she would want adults to treat her own children. Petra shared an example:

We don't do boys. I mean, everybody had a boyfriend. I like know who the boyfriend was, but you at the game when went out of town, there were no get in the car with the boyfriends and they boyfriend and parents, they come home. No, ma'am. You wasn't gonna do it. And then so they have to wait for me to give him the OK, you know, for them to go with the, I gotta see the parent and I send them to them. The parents knew they didn't like that because they know that if they try or their daughter wanted to get with their boyfriend, they had to be with their get, pick him up and let him go like that. Because I didn't. I didn't play that cause I know how I am, but my children and that's the way whatever I would want for my kids. That's the way I treat the somebody else's kids.

Petra proceeded to elaborate on how people wondered how she spent so much time with others' children when she had three daughters and a son to raise, and they were such polite and studious students. Her response was as follows: "They knew not to come acting crazy at school. Now you act crazy at home. If that's the case, but you don't do it at school, you know so and get and get to listen."

Petra recalled how she had to deal with her own son's challenges as he had a stuttering condition, which caused his beginning years teachers to request testing for learning disabilities. Petra and her husband knew that their son was a very intelligent young child, though he just stuttered. He needed the necessary attention to address the stuttering and not automatically think he was a little slow Black boy. Therefore, the request for special education testing in the district

of study was refused by the parents. Petra made arrangements for someone in the community to transport their son to a nearby Christian school (outside the district) every day for a period of time to allow him ample time to develop and grow as he aged/matured. She explained how it caused a financial burden on the family because even back then (1980s), it cost her \$400 a month to secure an arrangement for someone to transport her son back and forth to school daily. Petra knows it was worth it, as this same son is now an Oral Surgeon practicing in Atlanta, GA. Petra commented on the fact that since she has been in the school district for many decades, she has witnessed ups and downs. She also explained how after a while one can possibly end up thinking that nothing will change. This is mainly because so many people in the position of leadership have been repeatedly apprised of so many injustices, inequities, and unfair treatments toward those not in a unique clique or circle of privileged leaders, faculty, or staff members in the school district with no evidence of anything positive or constructive evolving to improve the climate in the school district and at the building levels. Petra stated the following:

That's OK, but here those are the kinds of things that I've been exposed to and kind of helped shape me because I saw that the system would not do anything to Caucasian men. They do anything they want to do and it was OK. Umm, it was. Those are just a few things. During our interview, number one, that's a clear example of how a person's morale can be the Minish shed, and especially when you see going on over and over again. And you report it and nothing happens. These white men allowed to do what they want to do, and then a black person, a black man, couldn't do that, you know? So that's why I never recommend a black male to come across the county. I never did because I knew they would not be treated fairly. So, you know, energy efficient operates, that's just

it. It helped shape me right now. And by the way, that man married that girl. The girl he was going with, the high school girl.

Mia's Typical Day

For Mia, a typical day as a principal began incredibly early each morning. Mia noted that even when you have protocol established for when faculty and staff would need to be absent, so many things could go wrong or unexpectedly. The protocol was to alert the principal as far in advance and as soon as possible when emergencies or short notice events required an employee to be absent to allow for coverage as much as possible. Even though the employees were required to contact the school secretary so she could relay the absence to the principal, however, there were some faculty and staff members who just felt comfortable contacting the principal directly, which could consume quite a bit of the principal's time since securing coverage was imperative. Mia noted that during her career, she too had contacted her principal directly to alert them to the fact that she needed to be absent as an assurance that she was still on the job and not just goofing off. In Mia's opinion, that commitment to personally contact her supervisor came from her work ethics aspect.

Mia proceeded to share that her typical day as a principal began early around 5:36 a.m. It was not unusual for her to have school personnel calling her to report that they woke up with a sick child from the night before and they must take them to the doctor. Of course, Mia wanted to show administrative support by wishing the employee the best of luck with caring for their sick child. As an administrator, one never knows which employee will be honest about missing work, but Mia acknowledged that cannot be an issue at the moment of receiving the notice of an absence. She would always be positive with them and wish them well too and thank them for the notice so she could help secure a substitute.

Mia maintained a sub list at home, so she could immediately begin seeking out a sub for the vacancy for that day. She noted that in the current school district that she works in part time, they do have a new modern sub finder system. However, she still chose to continue using the old-fashioned protocol: "If they called, I would get on the phone and try to call and secure a sub for that day." After ensuring there was adequate coverage for the day, Mia would go to the school building:

The first thing I would do, see if I had messages on my phone. First things that I would check. Uh, the next thing was, uh, buses and parents were beginning to come in, dropping students off. I'm there to greet them at the door to say OK, you need to go into the lunchroom right now. The cafeteria and wait. If you're going in for breakfast, go on in for breakfast. Uh, my day got started with me monitoring breakfast, getting all of the students through the breakfast. Rush back to my office because other people could make Announcements, but we were required to go on and make those announcements so that the students could see us and I would take care of that. Then I would begin walking the halls, making sure that instructional time. I'm because, you know, we use the phrase teaching from Bell to Bell. Well, on the elementary level, you didn't necessarily teach from Bell to Bell, but you taught as that schedule provided. So I was making sure that was done, putting out other little fires as I went along the way. Uh, you're gonna always have someone come up to you with something going on.

After a few brief free (uncommitted) moments between morning duties and lunch, Mia would attempt to return to her office to regroup to see if everything overall was proceeding along in a positive manner in the building for the day. Then, it would be time for the daily lunch time rituals. Daily, Mia would monitor the cafeteria activities. She walked around greeting students

while encouraging them to eat, and she reminded them that they must quickly return to their classrooms after lunch.

Even while on lunch duty, Mia was busy handling multiple other taskings to include any scheduled for her by her secretary. Actually, there was some type of taskings throughout most days. For instance, Mia would have meetings outside the school district; however, she would manage to return for school dismissal. She was adamant about being present for the afternoon bus duty to perform as a model for others required to show up for the same duty. After school dismissal and bus duty, Mia would then return to her office and prepare for the next day of business. She made it a habit to meet every day with her school secretary.

When she performed in the role/capacity of superintendent, she also made it a habit to walk in and have a conference with her secretary to be prepared for each day and the next day. She stated the following words:

As the Superintendent, I was out a lot. I even in [School district of study] had three schools to take care of. You know you're not stuck at an office, so I'm out at those three schools monitoring the day-to-day activities. Rush to other important meetings meeting with important groups of people. Individual people? Ah, having a conference session? A pretty busy job, that particular job has a lot. Let's see you deal with a lot of politics as far as the superintendent's position is concerned. And again, you prepared for the next day based on what your assignments were.

While sharing on her typical day as a principal in the school district of study, Mia thought it was quite relevant to share on her typical day while performing as an AP in an adjoining school district prior to returning to this district. Mia noted that her AP role helped sharpen her leadership skills which subsequently helped prepare her to become principal and superintendent.

Mia perceived the AP experience to be like a real-life boot camp experience. According to Mia, her principal wanted to see 100% output from her an AP. Mia shared these comments:

It was like a boot camp and it was like you definitely got exposed to all of those aspects of being an AP and principal because some principles, all those things that you were saying, you know, depending on the school district that you'll probably smaller school district where you just don't have that personnel.

Mia took one statement to heart from her principal: "You could take it and his thing was you could be a successful administrator if you did what he instructed you to do."

Trinity's Typical Day

Trinity's typical day begins with a 5:00 a.m. wake up time. She gets up and grabs a cup of coffee and takes care of anything she needs to do prior to heading off to the school building by 6:30 a.m. each morning. Even though she is not expected to sign in until 7:30 a.m., Trinity noted that from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 a.m., she uses that time to check her emails and make sure everything is in place to get the school day started off in good fashion. Additionally, she gets there early enough to ensure that she has coverage for the day and coordinates for substitute teachers if needed. At approximately 8:00 a.m., she proceeds to the front of the school to meet and greet students getting off the bus and parents drop-off. Trinity noted that after making sure the kids get to their classrooms on time, she then proceeded to the office to answer phone calls and resolve issues parents may have from the previous day. After that, she goes to each grade level and peeks in the classrooms to ensure that everything is going well, making sure that she does not bother teachers or interrupt classroom activities: "I just watch and sometimes I take over instruction and then I'll go to lunch from 1:30 to 2:00 p.m. That is my time to about 2:15 p.m."

Trinity handles discipline, if needed, from 2:15 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. She then goes back to the classroom for the remediation period. She pulls kids and helps them with single or individual academic needs during testing or sometimes a group of kids to test if needed. Therefore, the academic coach is free to handle other duties, and the classroom teachers don't have to lose instruction time. Additionally, she does weekly assessments for Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS). At 3:05 p.m., Trinity proceeds to the bus ramp to monitor students loading the bus and stays there until about 4:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. to ensure all students have left and that there are no issues. She finally goes home around 5:00 p.m. When she performed as school program coordinator, her workday was extended until 6:00 p.m. Sometimes, there were emails to answer but she waited until the next day to take care of all emails. Trinity ended by stating that is a "typical day and some time, I get knocked off my routine and may have to spend a bit more time on discipline. But I am in someone's classroom every day."

Overall, the participants described their typical day as one of early mornings and late evenings as assistant principals and principals. Each noted how they valued and respected their staff, faculty, and students by ensuring their well-being was addressed daily. This approach was accomplished by securing adequate personnel daily, prioritizing safety, and constantly encouraging healthy work and learning environments.

Professional Accomplishments & Aspiration – RQ 1

I posed the following interview questions to the participants: "*What are some celebrations/things that you are most proud of accomplishing (e.g., promotions, successful implementation of a school program/initiative)?*" and "*What has your advanced leadership journey meant to you in the context of where you have been, your current status, and your foreseen future aspirations?*" The responses served as data for RQ1. Please note that the

following themes are highlighted within these responses: professional accomplishments and aspirations. The section also contains a number of subcategories or subthemes, such as parental relationship, academic achievement, retention, school culture, academic initiative, strong leadership (see Table 17).

Table 17

Achievements, Aspirations, and Subcategories

Categories	Participant's Excerpts
Parental Relationships & Involvement	<i>Trinity- So I feel like parents feel like they can come to school and talk to administrators, but it's just the successes or small successes that we're having to pull all together to build our school. And I think the enjoyment, the laughter, the love the family that we have built for that school is our biggest success.</i>
School Culture	<i>Quintessa - Did not get a lot of have a lot of complaints from parents this year because they do not mind blowing you up on that discussion page. So my name is school was not up there a whole lot, so I can still consider that to be something to celebrate. There was a slight increase. It was not where I wanted it, but it was better than it was. So, I got pretty good support from the parents as a whole.</i> <i>Trinity - Like I said, the first week of school, I was attacked. Now they kind of know me and it's like you don't attack cause she's not the one. So that changed. Another success is that we've built a place. If, real change, significant change last and change, it is gonna take that around time and you can see the growth and if you're saying in 2 years if you go from a scale of zero to 10 and you're seeing nine and moving upward, I think you're doing very good.</i>
Good relationships with staff	<i>Trinity - I have a great relationship with 99% of my teachers</i>
Open Communication	<i>Trinity - I take the time to talk to every individual teacher to explain everything to them. I do listen to them. If they say hey, like it, I think I did that. I said, hey, just show me the evidence. I don't mind changing anything.</i>
Student Engagement	<i>Trinity - Everybody has built a place where children love to go to school. When I have parents calling me and say, what did you do to my baby and I'm seeing her thinking something wrong? She was like, no, she doesn't want. She don't want you to be out of school tomorrow. We've built a place, a safe haven where students love to come on. We are consistently working on school improvement.</i>
Academic Achievement	<i>Petra - I was at everything, you know, they have a program. I was there. I may sit to the back when I was there, you know, a lot of times.</i> <i>Trinity - We've seen some growth in both math and reading and a little bit in science.</i>

Categories	Participant's Excerpts
Strong Leadership Development	<i>Trinity - So I would been able to build a leadership team and we've discussed some things and we're gonna make a few changes for next year. But my leadership team is is not composed of jet leaders. My leadership team is composed of it, one of every individual in the in the school. So I have a custodian on my leadership team. I have a parapro in my leadership team. Have spared people on my leadership team. I have a parent there and you know one big thing with parent was like, you know what it should we, I feel like we spending too much money.</i>
Aspiration – School Goals	<i>Trinity - My vision is to see proper counted be one of the top elementary schools in our in our state and what is the mission? The mission is to get everybody on board. I need everybody on the boat at the same time. I don't want anybody hanging off the boat. I wanted children's students, parents and the community to be all in the same boat and that way when we dock, we dock together and nobody's and jumped off the side.</i>
Aspiration – Advancement	<i>Trinity - They can perform the same job that some people that you've brought in to do, but we gotta give them a chance. I'm thankful that they gave me a chance. But I really worked really hard for this chance. You know the IT wasn't. It wasn't given to me. I had to work for it. So yeah, that's right. I had to work</i>
Strength	<i>Trinity - My strength and size of social studies, but my biggest strength is instructional strategies. Going back to one of the biggest strengths is if teachers can see you do it, they're probably gonna be more willing to do it. So I don't ever want them to think that this is something we are great. Example we we have this eight House Bill 538, this structured literacy that came out that they pay us in the last couple of weeks. I mean the last couple of months and it's all caught structured literacy and it's kind of going back to you're kind of focused on K3 and making sure they have the basics and foundations and or science of reading. And so we have a everybody has to take a class and it's the basically the the, you know, foundations and structure literacy in inside the rating.</i>
Professional Learning	<i>Trinity - I got my certificate. don't know, 22, maybe 16. I had to do it on the structure Leadership, class and all 16 have completed it. So it's a blessing, but it was it was lead by example</i>
Safety and Security	<i>Quintessa - I haven't had anybody to wander off from the school, so to me that's something to celebrate. Ohh, haven't had any children to get lost every day even though we had to stay here 630 sometimes with all of our students arrive at home. Like I said, nothing major</i>
Retention	<i>Quintessa - We didn't have a a lot of Student, a lot of teachers to leave. I think we had what maybe you know, retirement. Those are things you know that we go through with. I didn't have anybody to leave the system. We didn't have to go out looking for interviewing for any teachers this year, so I consider that to be a celebration. Yeah, that speaks volume right there. Yes. Yeah, our coach. You know he left right here at the end. The progress that our students made on their map assessment. Ah, teach your teacher of the year. Last year was one of our own [her colleague]. I mean, she was selected district teacher of the year, so I consider that to be a celebration</i> <i>Mia - I've had a lot of accomplishments. I guess along the way, but I do want to mention this one. UM, this one kind of stuck out for me my first year as an. Some of you first, I feel like I had gone through boot camp that year, made it to my second year in [Local School district]. In the [School district of study], people were saying, hey, come back to [School district of study], come back home</i>

Categories	Participant's Excerpts
Professional Awards and Recognition	<p><i>Mia - So I knew the road was pretty set for me to go back home and was thrilled about that. But at the end of my second year in [Local School district], uh, we had a ceremony and this one just you know, it touches me. Even today. Ohm and the uh administrator of the year was always recognized. That was their thing in [Local School district]. It was. It was really big, you know? So, we had gone in and after luncheon was over and all of these people were there. All of the politicians, official people were there all of the various entities. People from [Local College]), were there because after all, [Local School district] County had a great big partnership, you know, going on with (Local College). So they started to read UM, this what I called A resume of whatever about the leader of the year and I was... Who's listening, Some of the things that were being said, I was just sitting there. So gosh, that you know, that sounds like something that I've done or whatever. And at the end, the Superintendent said we'd like to announce the leader of the year and he said the leader of the year, for whatever that year was, was Mia.Even get up because I couldn't even think about, you know, being honored that way. And all of these people standing because after all, I had gone through boot camp and I wanted to quit.</i></p>
Academic Initiatives	<p><i>Mia - I helped to implement. But I was a part of read 1A reading program. That was going on in the [Local School district 2]. I was a part of that for about 2 years. Uh, that I think I gleaned a lot of experience and it was successful. There were four of us that handled that program. Like a plaque or anything. But we were recognized for the hard work that we had done with the program.</i></p> <p><i>Quintessa - We had magnetic reading just for this 1 year, so, I don't know if they're gonna keep it for next year or get something different. Yes, we be if we had to read and program magnetic read it. It's a read and slash phonics program that we use here. Umm 2 yes, I'm pre K through two. Oh, yes, You know, they have to have those phonic skills in place to be able to blend those words You know, over the years I've participated in in many programs and I guess that's the one that came to mind as far as being a part of when you talk about school improvement.</i></p>
Discipline Practices	<p><i>Petra - Being fair, firm, and consistent. My motto, and I had one of my teachers last year. He comes to me, he said. What? What do you do Miss Petra to be so successful in all this? Because the kids bad. Before I left, he said. Give me them three things now before you leave so I can write them down. I said you be fair, firm, and consistent to all of them.</i></p> <p><i>I will be honest with you, if I didn't desire to be a principal, I would not have left the high school cause I love the high school. I did because I you know you can tell. I mean, you could tell me and I you know, you get things from this system. You get things from that system and you implement it. Now that with that discipline, I knew exactly what I was doing. I knew, but I was fair. My motto.</i></p>
Personal Accountability	<p><i>Petra - I treat the kids the way I would want somebody to treat my kids, so that's what kept me straight. One day I talked to this little boy. I talked to him so ugly because he was so mean and hateful to his teacher and talking back. I talked so ugly to that boy I couldn't even sleep that night. I had to go back the next morning, an apology. That's the only official apology that I can remember, because that kind of kept me straight. And so I had to apologize to him because I couldn't sleep that night. You know when it gets to the point where you mistreat somebody kids you know.</i></p>

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). AI-Assisted Research Question Rationale.

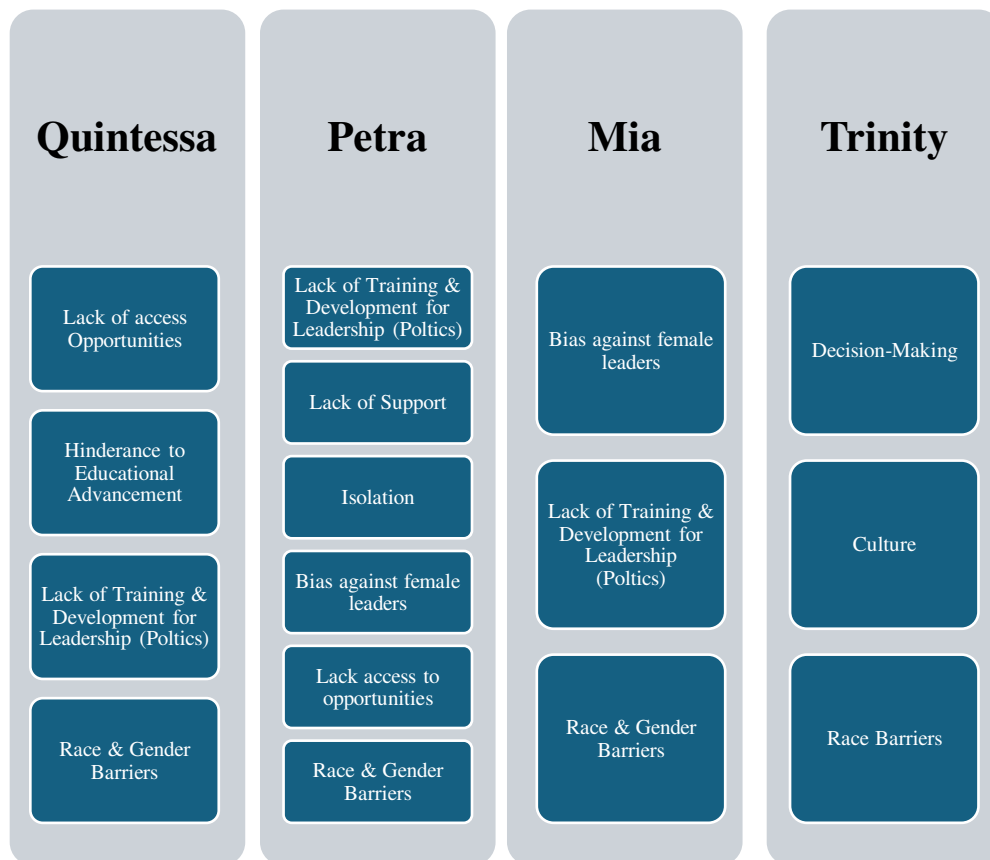
Barriers, Challenges, and Politics - RQ 1

I posed the following interview question to the participants: *“What are some things that your academic and professional background did not prepare you for in pursuit of advanced*

leadership positions?” The responses served as data for RQ1. Barriers, challenges, and politics are the themes highlighted by this response data. In examining the response data, I discovered a number of subcategories to barriers, challenges, and politics (see Figure 13). This section contains a cross-comparison of the participants’ responses and subcategories (e.g., Race and Gender Barriers, Lack of Access to Opportunities – see Figure 13).

Figure 13

Political Barriers & Challenges (subcategories)



Note. Political Barriers & Challenges (subcategories)

Race & Gender Barriers – RQ 1

In discussing leadership or teaching preparation, all the participants observed that race and gender were a barrier or a challenge (see Figure 13). The participants stated that race or their gender impacted the following subcategories: access or lack of access to opportunities, lack of

training and development specifically to address the political nature of their positions, encounters of bias against female leaders, and lack of support that often led to feelings of isolation. Trinity highlighted how her training did not prepare her for how politics impacted her ability to influence culture. She stated that she had some diversity courses but was not properly trained on how to deal with racism directed at her. She described the racism as undermining her within her leadership role as an Assistant Principal. She was being evaluated on “race instead of about the education,” and race was more important than what she “can bring to the school.” Additionally, she stated that her coursework did not prepare her to handle racial issues within the school. Several of the administrators stated that race and gender played a role in their access to career advancement opportunities. While several participants stated that gender bias was a factor in the lack of perceived respect in their roles and decision-making abilities, it could prove beneficial to explore more in-depth discussions on the lack of access of opportunities as it relates to race and gender.

Lack of Access to Opportunities/Hindrances to Educational Advancement

Two of the four participants discussed the lack of access to opportunities. Quintessa seemed to presume several factors for inclusion including race, gender, and personality.

Quintessa stated the following:

The political, the politics that's in education, as opposed to being prepared academically, because I think academically the colleges, they pretty much prepared me for leadership. But I just did not receive the opportunities that were out there. I don't know whether it was just me as a person. I don't know whether it was my gender. I just don't know whether it was my race or what it was, but I just don't feel as if you know, I had been given equal playing ground, as some of my colleagues.

Very similar to Quintessa, Petra also speculated that race may have hindered her access to opportunities as she provided an account of sending a complaint about her treatment from her then-principal. She noted that she felt that race was a factor. She also discussed faulty interview practices:

I interviewed but nobody called me back. But see, they didn't do my interview right? But I didn't even know it then. I had two people interviewing me. It was supposed to be more than two, but the only thing about it is they just doing that for formalities.

She stated that she followed up with her interviewers but also stated that “they wouldn't even, they didn't even tell me anything.” Overall, both administrators conveyed that they perceived that politics, race, and gender limited their access to opportunities. Additionally, Quintessa highlighted how politics also impact student success. She stated that her educational background did not prepare her for politics, and she stated that politics is harming or hindering academic achievement in the broader sense: “There's so much politics, you know, it's huge in the world of education and in my opinion, I think that is what's hurting education.” She thought that removing politics would be beneficial as she felt that education and politics are not congruent. Quintessa was not the only administrator who believed that their training did not prepare them for the politics of leadership. The participants perceived politics in education as a negative influence for accessing the required training and development for leadership opportunities and assignments.

Lack of Training and Development for Leadership (Politics)

Quintessa, Petra, and Mia all stated that their academic training did not prepare them for the politics of leadership. Additionally, several felt that the on-the-job training also was lacking; however, Petra did receive some extraneous on-the-job training via her supervisor, and she

considered it to be a boot camp. Additionally, she attended an Assistant Principal Leadership (APL) course, but all of the other attendees of the APL dropped out:

I went through this class. Somebody else was supposed to go from the Regional Educational Service Agency (RESA). It was a year-long class and I'll never forget you had several people who signed up ...one Saturday I sat out in that in front of the high school and now I'm not a quitter at all. Not by a long shot, and I sat there and a few tears dropped out of my eyes because everybody has stopped. Then nobody wanna go through the program. I'm the only little old thing that stayed in it and I had nobody to work with.

Moreover, I noticed that Petra's narrative is an indicator of isolation and lack of support.

The participants understood that to ensure positive outcomes, the training and leadership development must be adequate and job specific for all genders. This should prevent future bias toward females and their decision-making processes.

Bias Against Female and Decision-Making – RQ 1

Petra shared that she was not afforded access to advanced leadership opportunities for many years after working in the school district of study. With limited professional support, Petra acquired the required academic credentials and professional skill sets. According to Petra, she was continuously told that she had not been properly trained for advanced leadership positions. Petra shared that a new, young White principal appeared to have issues with her due to her being a veteran administrator and a Black female. Her observations of his performance made her think that he was not knowledgeable in his new position. She felt like she was not considered a vital part of the decision-making process. She was just there to manage the student discipline.

As superintendent, Mia experienced biases against her as being a Black female. Mia acknowledged that her college work and professional training prepared her very well to perform

as an educator and leader in various roles, but she was not prepared for politics. Mia faced opposition from those who wanted to maintain the status quo and they usually did not budge. This was an awakening for Mia, and it really made her decision-making and policy implementations challenging. For instance, Mia expressed the following:

Things would come up at board meetings that I didn't have any knowledge of. You know, they had never been discussed with me, but here I am sitting in the position and I'm expected to address some things. So, I think the political arena is pretty heavy, pretty heavy.

Trinity noted that her academic courses and professional training both prepared her for advanced leadership positions/roles. However, Trinity did not think that she was fully prepared for the politics that come along with being a principal. She noted, "You are the head of the school. But because of politics that's played, there are several ways that individuals have kind of . . . made it about Race."

She stressed that the number one eye opener dealt with the matter of decision-making, where a principal must make decisions about the most demanding aspect of her job to the least demanding. Trinity prides herself for aiming to treat all students, faculty, staff, family members, and all others with respect and fairness. However, in her new role as principal, she has been confronted with the fact that some people do look at the color of her skin and make assumptions about her and her decision-making capabilities:

There's a lot of politics that surrounds this position. Just even down to the minimal decisions that you have to make that influence the whole culture, it has, you know, we've had courses on cultural diversity or, you know, poverty, but it never prepared us for or

prepared me for. The ethnic, ethnic problems that arises in schools I know here at our school, we do have.

Bias against females can potentially cause mistrust and falsehoods toward female leaders' decision-making abilities. Sometimes, such acts could create a lack of support and isolation in their work environments.

Lack of Support and Isolation

Petra shared how she felt very isolated while performing as a high school assistant principal when it appeared that managing the discipline aspect of the school day was the most important component of her role. According to Petra, she was denied any support from her White male principals when it came to professional development or advancement. It was noted that the other assistant principal who was a Black male did routinely reach out to her with offers of sound advice and suggestions. In Petra's words,

You know what they wanted me to do was what I was doing, taking care of that discipline. Keep everything going like it was supposed to, but they didn't say. OK, Petra, come in my office and let me show you how to do this...One thing I could say, is (a Black male) colleague always did that. He said, Petra. Let me show you this. You'll do that? I have that question. I call a male colleague.

All participants agreed that resilience and persistence, along with informal and formal support, helped them during times of loneliness and periods of isolation. They credit the challenging times and perceived barriers as stepping stones to help them ascend to their positions of principal. In addition, the participants reflected on how their lived experiences prepared them for addressing the OD aspect of leadership at their respective levels to ensure positive district and school climates.

OD: School District Culture, School Culture, Organization Structure – RQ 1

I posed the following interview questions to the participants: “*In your words, describe your school district’s culture, school’s culture, along with the organizational structure.*” and the responses served as data for RQ1. Themes related to culture are highlighted by the response data: school district culture, School Culture, and hierarchical understanding. Each participant provided rich descriptions about the school district’s culture as well as the School Culture (see Table 18). Additionally, participants provided details concerning their hierarchical understanding and role in developing, updating, maintaining, or disseminating the organizational chart (see Table 19).

Table 18

School District Culture & School Culture

Types	Quintessa	Petra	Mia	Trinity
School District's Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change agent: Impact of new leadership on culture • Lack of respect • Disregard of talents and capabilities for outside candidates • Unfair hiring and promotion practices (gender could be an issue) • Position as stepping stones for promotion • Turnover and loss of capable staff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack accountability • Lack of support and enforcement of standards • Terrible culture • Lack of positive recognition (race and gender) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pleasant School District Culture • School District & School Culture or Morale Needs Improvement • Team Effort • Point of contact influence on culture (secretary and administrator) • Impact of influence beyond the school 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change agent: Incoming superintendent's impact on school district's culture • Turnover and loss of capable staff • Need for stability in leadership • Indicators: Possibly moving in the right direction • Educators' voice need to be heard and respected
School Culture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrespect of leadership • Accountability • Creating accountability culture and climate • Better environment for the upcoming leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive School Culture and culture • Respect for leadership • Differences between high school and elementary culture • Passion for school culture and environment • Inadequacies of the School board • Employee Compensation • Lack of Recognition (race) • Problematic student behaviors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relationship building essential for culture development • Student engagement and comfortability (student teacher relationship) • Development of a good report with building staff, parents, and the community (open door) • Accountability • Public perception • Staff support & Morale • Retention 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change agent: Incoming superintendent's impact on school culture • School culture: enjoyable learning environment, safe, inviting to all stakeholders, respect for others is a priority • Outside influences • Cohesiveness among faculty and staff • Resurfacing of Racism (by kids and adults)

Note. Adapted from Intellectus Qualitative (2019), School District Culture & School Culture.

School District Culture

When discussing the school district's culture, two of the four participants were optimistic that the incoming superintendent and other district office personnel would perform as change agents. Mia and Trinity perceived the school district culture as in need of tweaking to help bring about positive change and stability in the district. Mia's perception was that the district's culture was pleasant but warranted some tweaking to help improve morale throughout the district. She reflected, "You know, morale, yeah, down. You have to work on that with your staff. I feel that no administrator is good over here by him/herself. You're only as good as the people that you surround yourself with." Mia was keen on perception, and it could be used as a tool to influence others to be accountable for their actions. Mia relied on her secretary/receptionist to set the stage for all who entered the district office, and she shared with district administrators on how perception and/or tone could impact any type of organization.

Trinity's optimism emanated from the fact that the new superintendent extended his support to school level leaders along with other district level leaders (some newcomers) to assist them with performing their job. This was Trinity's initial response:

I don't know what the district culture is like right now because of so many changes. I know we're trying to lean towards positivity, but until we have stability, I think the culture is going to remain the same. But I think if we just keep some people in place for a little while, it'll be okay. I think we're on the right path where we have found leaders who want to be positive.

Trinity's desire is to have district office leaders and board members resume the scheduled visitations in the classrooms throughout the district plus better management of the human resources. Then, there should be noticeable stability pertaining to personnel in the district:

“We’ve had a new principal now for 2 years, and we’ve only had a stable principal 2 years. So, again to the changes that consistently come down, and once we get all that together, we’ll be okay.”

Quintessa and Petra desired to see positive and noticeable change in the culture. Yet, lack of respect was a deep concern for Quintessa as she did not believe that she was valued for the work she performed. Though still hopeful, Petra held the same sense of skepticism as Quintessa due to their past experiences in the district. Quintessa often questioned why new/incoming people continued to be hired from outside the district for advanced leadership positions. Likewise, Quintessa viewed the hiring and promotion practices as questionable when it involved females, especially African American females. From her perspective she said, “The level of respect is not there. Oftentimes, the superintendent does not look at the qualities and the capabilities of the people that’s already in place.” Consequently, there was a significant turnover and/or loss of capable staff in the district. As noted above, Trinity was concerned about the current instability that past hiring and promotion practices has created for school district personnel.

Quintessa seemed to think that by these “Good ol’ boys” securing these advanced leadership positions, the positions were used as stepping stones for higher promotion later either in the district or elsewhere:

Our past Superintendent brought an assistant principal on, and he was only an assistant principal. Maybe what? 1/2-year to 1 year and placed him over a person who had shown great leadership skills and capabilities in place. That particular person that was in place (Petra), who should have rightfully been given an opportunity to advance in her career with probably about 10-15 years of experience as an assistant principal. No, he brought in

one of the Good ol' boys that only had about 1/2 year to a year experience as an assistant principal and promoted that person to principal over the person that had put her time in. That person probably only served in that position maybe a year, year and a half, then he was up and gone. It's kind of like they come through, use this place as a stepping stone to help build their resumes, or still overlooking the people that are here that have put their time in and they move on, move on to bigger things, and higher places. So that ... goes along with those on. ... Is it unfair hiring practices?

For Petra, she perceived the school district as having a terrible culture. In her words, "You were sharing these things that have been brought to your attention, well, repeatedly, nothing was done! Nothing was done! Overlook, overlook. Nothing was done, and that's what you saw in the district as a whole." This illustrates a lack of accountability and lack of support and enforcement of standards. Petra also stated the following:

I had a rough time and that's why I didn't feel good. Inwardly, because I did what I was supposed to do. But the men! The . . . men didn't do what they were supposed to do. A lot of times, those people were supposed to be out of there, called the police to do all those kinds of things. No, but they did nothing! They were allowed to do it over, and I guess that's why it was repetitious because it happened a lot.

Petra elaborated on the lack of any recognition (i.e., race and gender) she (new Black female elementary school principal) and Quintessa (new Black female primary school principal) received versus when White males and White females were approved for various advanced leadership positions. Petra's and Quintessa's bio and picture were never published in the local media outlets. Petra did acknowledge that a very small article and photo of her replacement (Trinity- onboarding Black female elementary principal) as the incoming principal was noted in

the local newspaper, along with a large size write-up and accompanying large photo of the incoming White replacement principal (out of district hire) for the retiring primary principal (Quintessa). This seemed to be another form of disrespect. Petra's expressed her perspective of the event:

We have 4 black female administrators, and I said this is history. They didn't put my name. They didn't put me in the paper. They didn't! They didn't do that! I noticed they put ... (Replacement Black incoming Principal) in the paper and that's good. She deserves it! They put her picture in the back of the White incoming replacement principal. But when I got the position, do you think they put me in the paper. Nor did they put the principal (Quintessa) at the primary school.

School Culture

Two of the four participants perceived their School Cultures to be positive and enjoyable. Petra and Trinity expressed that they worked in positive schools, and Petra expressed a passion for her school and was able to identify the differences between the elementary school and high school cultures. She felt that within the elementary school environment there was a respect for leadership. However, a number of participants felt it essential to create and maintain a culture of accountability. Quintessa, when entering her role, felt that some of her subordinates were disrespectful and earlier on. She had to establish a standard of accountability. She stated that initially teachers were not operating according to standards, at which time she confronted the misconduct. Quintessa expressed, "I don't do disrespect well and we just had to call a couple of them to the carpet." Likewise, Mia expressed the need for collective accountability whereby everyone's actions or inactions reflected back to the building or district staff:

Level as far as the school was concerned, I still stressed that if we wanted to do good things, we had to know that we were accountable for any actions that went out of the district . . . building what have you? We are accountable for those things.

Additionally, Mia expressed how the community perspective warranted the need to ensure that everyone is doing those jobs properly:

We don't have lots of time to correct ourselves. It's on us. I don't care what you do. . . . those eyes are on you, and if you do it right the first time, then you won't have problems, and you won't be perceived as . . . a district that is so bad . . . don't go up to the school.

When considering the elements that make up a positive School Culture, Mia stated that relationship building is an essential component of culture development. In working with teachers, Mia stressed the importance of good teacher-student relationships. Thus, teachers are encouraged to develop ways in which the students can engage while being aware of students' comfortability. Therefore, teachers should be approachable, and students should not be afraid to ask questions or engage. Mia expressed, "conveying information to students . . . , them asking you questions or whatever. They shouldn't ever feel fearful of doing that." Mia did not relegate relationship development to just the building staff with students; she felt it important to build a relationship with the building staff, parents, and the community through the open-door policy. In Mia's role, she felt that when building relationships with the building staff, that staff members felt supported as it aided in establishing good morale. Ultimately, good morale aided in the retention of teachers as she expressed, "you've got some teachers that have been there 30 years." Thus, understanding her teacher audience, veterans vs. new hires, helped her convey information in a way that was conducive for both groups.

Both Quintessa and Trinity thought they served as change agents in that they were leaving their schools better for the incoming leadership. Trinity accomplished this through the understanding that there should be cohesion (support for cohesiveness) among the faculty and staff. Trinity also stressed that unity could be threatened by outside influences and had also saw the resurgence of racism among her students and their parents.

Right. But you know, it was so undercover for so long, you know? And I got some that don't like black people ... my thing is I have such good relationship with our white grandparents that they believe that I I'm not trying to be there to hurt their kids and this is what I say about our town. We have so many people coming from other states, other cities moving to Crawford County because it's a peaceful place and y'all are the ones that's bringing the problems with you. We know there's undercover racism ... our, in our, in our city.

Overall, the participants felt that culture was bigger than one person, one position and that it takes a collective staff and community to develop a good school culture. As students and staff are influenced by outside sources, cohesion is important. Thus, it is essential to have or create cultures of accountability wherein everyone is esteemed and understands the values and standards of the culture. Relationship building has served the participants well as they seek to leave legacy (leaving it better for incoming leadership).

Organization Structure – Hierarchical Understanding

In examining the participants' organizational or hierarchical understanding of the school district, a number of subthemes and subcategories arose, such as a documented hierarchical chart; status of the chart; adherence or lack of adherence to roles and responsibilities of positions within the hierarchical chart; and participant's role in developing, updating, maintaining, or

disseminating the hierarchical chart or understanding of roles and responsibilities and the status of the hierarchical chart (see Table 19).

Table 19

Organization Structure – Hierarchical Understanding

Participant	Documented hierarchical chart (yes/no)	Status of hierarchical chart	Adherence or lack of adherence to roles and responsibilities within the hierarchical chart	Participant’s role in developing, updating, maintaining, or disseminating the hierarchical chart
Quintessa	Yes	Being updated	Lack adherence	No role in developing, updating, maintaining, or disseminating
Petra	Yes	Updated	Lack adherence	*Was responsible for developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the hierarchical chart–building level
Mia	Yes	Updated	Lack adherence	Was responsible for developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the hierarchical chart – district-wide
Trinity	Yes	Updated	Adherence	*Was responsible for developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the hierarchical chart–building level

Note. By nature of their roles (Principal and Assistant Principal) they were responsible for building level development, maintenance, and dissemination of the building organizational chart.

All of the participants acknowledged that the school district and school organization had hierarchical charts, and most were either updated or in the process of being updated. It should be noted though that only one participant, Trinity, stated that her organization adhered to the roles and responsibilities of the chart. By virtue of their positions as principal and assistant principal, Petra and Trinity were responsible for building level development, maintenance, and dissemination of the building organizational chart. However, Mia was tasked to develop, update, maintain, and disseminate the school district hierarchical chart. Her responsibilities also included school visits in which she informed and ensured that every employee understood the school district’s organization.

Mentorship: Informal and Formal Mentors – RQ 1

I posed the following interview questions to the participants, “*What support systems, if any, have you had in place?*”, and the responses served as data for RQ1. Themes related to mentorship and familial support are highlighted within the data response: Informal and Formal Mentors, Encouragement for Professional Development & Advancement, Familial support and Mentorship. In examining informal and formal mentorship and support, a number of subcategories were developed, I delineate in this section the support levels with the overarching formal or informal categories (see Table 20).

Table 20

Informal and Formal Mentorship and Support

Informal mentorship and support	Number of Participants
Familial Support	4
Positive college classmates and professional colleagues	1
Informal Mentors from district leadership team members	2
Building level support (informal team support)	1
Formal mentorship and support	Number of Participants
Sought out networking and formal mentorship	2
College support and local college community	1

Note. Intellectus Qualitative (2019). Informal and Formal Mentorship and Support

Informal Mentorship & Support

All four of the participants indicated that familial support was paramount to their personal and career success. Even though Quintessa’s Mom did not earn her high school diploma, she always stressed advanced education for Quintessa and her siblings. Petra’s Mom graduated from high school, and her Dad received his GED later in life. Trinity’s Mom was not born in the United States, however, she stressed education at the highest level for all of her

children in order to secure a better standard of living and personal success. Mia's mother and father completed high school, and her Dad served on a school board in the South for 20 years. Education excellence was always stressed in Mia's household.

Likewise, all four participants expressed how beneficial it was to have both professional colleagues and/or college classmates to confide in over the years during their pathways to advanced leadership. Trinity and Mia shared how they received informal mentoring from some district level leadership team members. Trinity noted that she received support from district level leaders who believed in her professional skills and leadership abilities. She concluded that they saw leadership capabilities in her that she had not recognized herself. At the building level, Trinity presented how the faculty and staff have become one huge informal support group to help make the School Culture more inviting and welcoming for all. The school has become a place where both students and adults enjoy going to daily to learn and teach. Mia insisted that a White female superintendent informally mentored her in a manner which encouraged her to complete skill specific courses and training programs that prepared her for advanced leadership positions. She had support from colleagues and other leaders in advanced leadership positions in the local school district.

Formal Mentorship & Support

Formal support starts earlier on in our academic and professional journeys. Although two participants noted that classmates and colleagues provided a level of support and guidance; one stated that she established formal mentorship and support groups. Mia stated that she received both support from her peers as well as guidance. Additionally, she stated that the college administrators and surrounding college community provided support.

Two of the participants stated that they sought out formal networking and mentorship. Quintessa stated that she sought out networking to garner some support or to create a support system as she felt as if she did not have support when entering her leadership role. Here is Quintessa's response to the question of what support systems did she have if any:

Not a whole lot, just trying to network and partner with people that had walked, you know, in the in the shoes or in the professions that I desire to go when I really didn't have any support system in place.

Unlike Quintessa, Trinity did have a formal mentor who encouraged her to participate in federal programs. Her mentor showed high levels of intentionality when coaching Trinity for advancement and professional development as exemplified here:

[Trinity's formal mentor], was the federal program coordinator here at [within the district that Trinity worked], who was really my, umm, other push, she was a really, really big mentor for me. She did a lot of inclusion for me to be to participate in a lot of the federal programs, Information, Budgeting, title one. When I first became an assistant principal back in 2022, at that time, we did not have a principal in place. So, I can I consider myself if she consider myself as an interim principal, and I kind of led the school from opening until probably about three 3 1/2 weeks before we received our principal and she was the one that I would pick up the phone and call and say, hey, what do I need to do because I had never done this before. I had never opened a school before. Umm, she was one that just believed in me when I didn't believe in myself.

Trinity's mentor empowered Trinity and pushed her to overcome challenges and develop confidence and character.

Both informal and formal mentorship and support provided participants with encouragement and elements of fortitude when facing the challenges of pursuing and retaining an advanced leadership position with the study's district. Thus, family, peers, colleagues, and mentors aid/aided the participants through the application, hiring, and evaluation phases of their chosen professions. Additionally, some of the participant's family members/mentors believed in the participant's potential and tried to help instill confidence in the participant's capabilities to perform the job requirements effectively.

Making Connections & Meaning – RQ 1

I posed the following interview question to the participants *“How did you as an administrator make meaning of experiences throughout your journey to secure leadership roles and positions?”*, and the responses served as data for RQ1. Making connections and making meaning were the themes highlighted by the response data. Several subcategories emerged throughout data analysis: opposition to access for career advancement, inequities in hiring practices, hindrances to the education process, certification (qualification) vs. performance, political and structural impacts, district cultural influence on the hiring practices, practitioner's reflection, self-determination/valuation (role model), and faith as strategies. In this section, I examine certification (qualification) vs. performance and a practitioner's reflection.

Certification (Qualification) vs. Performance

In reflecting on her journey to career advancement, Petra highlighted a concern in that she felt that certification and qualification did not correlate to good job performance. She stated that the administrators that she worked with were qualified for the position through their certifications but often did not perform well: “those people in my environment, those administrators, they were certified ... that means they were qualified, but they just didn't do a

great job.” Petra believed that some hiring decisions were in the best interest of the school district, schools, and students; however, there was some doubt as to the hiring decision of the aforementioned administrators who were perceived as not doing their jobs properly.

Practitioner’s Reflection

Trinity emphasized that educators are considered reflective practitioners. Trinity showcased a depth of introspection when reflecting on her journey from classroom teacher, lead teacher, academic coach, and assistant principal to principal. She was grateful for the confidence that the district leadership had in her professional abilities and recommendations for advanced leadership positions. She noted the following:

I even said, am I really principal sometimes you know, you know what I did? Somebody really believed in me, and then I really go through that interview and I was able to answer those questions to the best of my ability. Somebody believed that I could lead, a whole school!

Trinity truly believed it’s paramount for an individual to believe in oneself. This serves as a method of self-validation. She shared, “I believe that we have to be who we are in order for people to really, truly respect and trust us.” Trinity is determined to be a role model for those she leads from teachers, students, and other school personnel. She believed that classroom teachers should be the ones at the forefront, and not necessarily her always. Trinity believed that teachers will take her lead and be that person to lead in their classrooms:

I don’t have to be in the forefront, you know, I firmly believe that the people that need to be in the forefront are those teachers in the classroom ... They follow on the principal, so they get their job done and if they get it done, it’s a reflection of my Leadership with

them. But they also believe in our children and our school, and if they want to give them 100 hundred and 20% a day and for them to, you know, put forth that effort.

For overall success, the participants developed coping strategies, utilized their professional credentials, and hands-on skillsets to help them during their journey to leadership, and once they secured advanced leadership positions. Uniquely, as the participants reported on their challenges and perceived barriers, there were several unexpected discoveries made which promoted four distinct lessons that will be discussed in the next paragraph.

Resilience and Persistence – RQ 1

I posed the following interview question to the participants: “*In your own words, can you make meaning of the lived experiences you shared during Interview #1 and Interview #2?*”, and the responses served as data for RQ1. The resilience and persistence themes were highlighted by the response data. The participants have learned a number of lessons about the need to develop resilience in an effort to persist within their pursuit or retention of their advanced position with the study’s school district. Overall, during this time of reflection, the participants made a number of discoveries that could be deemed lessons learned. Here are the overarching lessons: challenges help develop resilience and persistence; you cannot do it alone; challenges can be political, and character matters.

Lesson 1: Challenges Help Develop Resilience and Persistence

Quintessa and Mia emphasized that it is the challenging moments in life that foster resilience, enabling them to persist in their pursuit or maintain their advanced position. Quintessa reflected on her time and stated that it was the pivotal moments, challenges, and influences that defined who she became. She reflected on those times and expressed the idea that those difficult times provided a context for which she developed or maintained her “values, beliefs, and

motivations.” In Quintessa’s description of those times, she was able to do self-assessments and recognize her strengths and vulnerabilities as an administrator. Most importantly, she learned to grow and adapt, which underscores both her professionalism and her perseverance as she learned from her triumphs and failures. Much like Quintessa, Mia also learned to move forward and choose the direction she felt was best in challenging times.

Lesson 2: You Cannot do it Alone

A number of participants expressed how support enabled them to persist. Some, like Petra, stated that it was the advice of a colleague, while others like Trinity relied on familial support. Petra described the feelings of rejection and possible pushout due to age, but she resolved to stay. She relied strongly on a colleague’s advice, as she too was experiencing some Ageism on the job: “just wanna tell you don’t let anybody cause you to just leave this profession because we need experienced, wise administrators.” The colleague encouraged Petra to stay and help prepare new professionals, and she stated that Petra would intuitively know when it was time to leave: “You stay here as long as you need to stay, and you will know when it’s time.”

Trinity described how her achievements were a product of the investment made by her family. She stated that without her family’s support, she would never have achieved her achievements: "I can say that I would have never achieved the experiences that I’ve achieved ... if it were not for ... the family background, the family support." She stated that her family background honed her for advanced leadership as her parents and siblings were all focused on her success and advancement. Similarly, Petra’s husband also encouraged her to adjust her manner so that she too could be successful at work.

Lesson 3: Challenges can be Political

A number of the participants had to face what they perceived to be unfair hiring practices or unfair workload demands. Participants like Mia felt that the struggle itself was a necessary component of her journey: “I feel necessary and some of them were not, and I guess. But somethings, uh, some of those things that happen politically.” During her tenure, Mia expressed instances where she believed challenges were intentionally designed to increase her workload and potentially cause her stress. She had added pressure as she had the “camera” of “being from a small community small school system.” Ultimately, she made decisions that she felt were for the best.

Lesson 4: Character Matters

Although the participants faced a number of challenges, some were natural consequences of the role and their job, while others faced orchestrated challenges. Nevertheless, each participant expressed through their descriptions of how they overcame these challenges that character matters. Each participant made a conscious decision about their identity while tackling the tasks at hand. Overall, each participant showcased a level of grit and tenacity; some relied on the support and encouragement of others, and all at some point had to rely on an inner strength to persist. Terms such as growth, adaptation, steadfastness, staying the course, and confidence in their performance demonstrate the participants’ strength and endurance.

Overall, the participants learned a number of lessons that could inspire female administrators who may perceive the hiring or working conditions as unfair and challenging. Foremost, a support system and possibly mentors are necessary, and the underpinning or anchoring of familial support can make the difference in developing resilience and grit (Duckworth, 2016). Ultimately, there is a need for an internal strength that is born from

confidence in the ability to perform the task and also maintain character and professionalism.

This is further explored within the next section, which discusses home, school, and community commitments.

Commitment for Home, School, and Community – RQ 1

I posed the following interview question to the participants *“Tell me a story about your leadership journey. I would like for your story to be on your unique experiences while working through the different chapters of your journey to securing leadership”* and the responses served as data for RQ1. Commitment for home, school, and community is the theme highlighted by the response data.

Trinity, Petra, and Quintessa shared how their leadership journeys have afforded them many unique experiences which helped strengthen the home, school, and community bond. Whether it was while they performed as classroom teachers, academic coach, assistant principal, or principal, they all made a positive impact on students, parents, other guardians, school district personnel, and the local community. Trinity shared that her most unique and memorable leadership experience was unquestionably the charge to open up a new elementary school. As the assistant principal, she served as interim principal until the onboarding of the new principal 6 months later. Trinity recalls her experience:

The interim Superintendent called me and said, “We hadn’t found the principal yet. So, you’ll be interim principal for a while. School opens tomorrow. Are you ready?” Tell me what I need to have, to have it ready. He said, “You got to have schedules ready, your master schedule, student schedules, teachers’ to do list, bus schedules, your CPI ... , and your letters home to parents. I said, all of it is done! He said, well, you’re ready to open up a school! That was the biggest unique experience and introduction to leadership of my

life because I was given a hat that I did not know I was ready for. So, in the process of going for those six weeks without a principal, there was a lot of things that I had to maneuver. However, district leadership gave me the opportunity to lead while they watched and the first day of school went off without a hitch.

Like Trinity, Petra and Quintessa shared how their leadership journeys allowed them opportunities to display their leadership abilities while performing their daily administrative duties as assistant principal and principal. Their overall responsibility included ensuring that students received a quality and meaningful education and securing their safety daily while being transported to and from school. As warranted, they were in constant communications with home and the community to ensure an open communication flow. They all viewed their administrative roles as a privilege. Likewise, they recognized the importance of support systems and relationship building while they lead in their different capacities. Quintessa shared how there is such a vast difference in demands being a principal or assistant principal than when performing as a classroom teacher. As a principal, you are in charge and being held accountable for everything that happens or does not happen in regard to the school's business. Quintessa further states, "I tell people the difference in being a classroom teacher and an administrator, at least when you are classroom teachers, you only have to worry about those 18 to 22 students on your roster, whereas the administrator, I mean it's the entire building."

Commitment to student success requires hard work, dedication, and practical experience. It is not just about leadership success but also the success of everyone involved, working together inside and outside of the school. To understand more about participants' experiences and how they reflect on them, the next section discusses additional comments and elaborations about their leadership journeys (see Table 21).

Reflections – RQ1

I posed the following interview questions to the participants, “*After reflecting on what you shared about your life history in Interview #1 and your experiences as you navigated to become an administrator in Interview #2, what does your advanced leadership journey mean to you?*”, “*What has your advanced leadership journey meant to you in the context of where you have been, your current status, and your foreseen future aspirations?;*” and “*Is there any final comment you would like to share on anything shared during our third interview session?*” The responses served as data for RQ1. Reflection is the theme that is highlighted by the response data.

Quintessa

In reflecting on the three aforementioned questions, Quintessa expressed a range of ideas, including her genesis within the profession as well as the gratitude for having a “voice.” Earlier on, Quintessa had a desire to have a profession within service, preferably nursing. Her path to becoming an administrator in her words was “profound.” Quintessa discussed how each stage or step of her career has served to build and shape her understanding of leadership and her role as an administrator. The journey has been one of transformation and signified significant growth and learning. A pivotal strategy for Quintessa was the ability to “embrace challenges and learn from setbacks.” The challenges and setbacks aided in her honing her skills and moving beyond management to be a transformational leader, “not just in managing task and people, but in inspiring and empowering others.” Throughout her journey, Quintessa learned wisdom and developed inner strength as expressed here:

This journey has taught me the importance of empathy. Resilience again, and integrity in leadership is about making tough decisions while staying true to my values and the well

being of those I lead. It's also about fostering a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement where everyone feels valued and motivated to contribute their best, above all by advanced leadership. Journey represents a commitment to personal and professional development. It's about striving for excellence and making a positive impact in the lives of others and the students and families in the community we serve. And that's a reflection of my journey.

The struggles and the challenges warranted strength and resilience. Although Quintessa worked with a standard of excellence, she stated that she had no future desires to return to education full-time. She expressed this thought; at the time of the interview, she had been approached by the interim Superintendent as there was a shortage. She was asked her interest in returning to help. Although Quintessa stated that she had no desire to return, she would consider returning to work in the Central Office part-time if given an opportunity. There was a thread of disappointment at the failed acknowledgement of her talents and abilities during her tenure:

You know, they couldn't see my worth in my value simply because they didn't want to see it. You know, it, wouldn't it be something if someone else in a different system, you know, gets an opportunity to see? Truly what I'm able to do.

Quintessa was so very grateful to have her voice heard, but in her utterances there is anguish:

And you know, just real. Just give us an opportunity. You know, just ... put on your blind folders to my sex, you know, to my skin complexion and just look at what I can do and just, well, not for me, but for the people that's coming after me

Quintessa was so keen in participating in this study as she felt that her story would be in the "right hands" held by someone that can "see the worth and the value."

She advised future superintendents to get to know the board members and to try to get rid of the politics that do not serve the students well. Quintessa also stressed the importance of having the right people serving on the board. She felt that the study would be of benefit for those aspiring advanced leadership positions. She alluded to the thought that the study may even have an impact on policy changes for hiring practices. As those in leadership can seek individuals who are competent with skills that could potentially promote the organization. Ultimately, her advice to those who make hiring decision is to “promote from that, not from who you are and who you know and who you over owe a favor to, and all of that mushy stuff.”

Petra

Petra was similar to Quintessa when reflecting on the posed questions. Petra, like Quintessa had a range of responses showing personal acknowledgement of her accomplishments, faith, and the empowerment of having a “voice.” She expressed gratitude for obtaining the principalship, and it showed her tenacity as it took her a long time:

It means a lot, because that’s what I’ve always wanted to be, a principal. I was able to attain that even though it took me 40 something years to get that, most people would not have liked. They would have been gone. A lot of people I see, they say, why are you still here? Well, I’m here because I love my job, but I have reached my goal. But in the process of reaching my goal, I was able to teach so many students about life, about things that you do and things that you don’t do in life, how you succeed, you know, goals and what have you. I was able to do that, so I’m very satisfied with how I did and the things that I did during my tenure. So, I don’t have any regrets about what I did. The time that I spent.

Petra, seemed to have some familial responsibilities that aided in her decision to leave her position, but overall, she felt that she had fulfilled her “calling.” She shares the following:

I met my calling when I went to the high school, I knew exactly what I was doing and I loved those kids. Most people don't like those bad kids, they said. They're bad and I don't see how you do that. How you love something like that? Well, somebody gotta like them. And I did.

Her passion and empathy for students can be felt in her statements of love and advocacy. Petra truly had a passion for her role as she sought to be extraordinary, “Well, uh my advanced leadership has meant everything to me, his, me, everything I didn't. I didn't want to just be an ordinary principle. I didn't wanna do that.” Along with being exceptional at her job, Petra strove to maintain her integrity. She wanted to be competent and knowledgeable within her role: “I wanted to be one that, umm, that knew what she was talking about and with no doubt can handle whatever situation that there was.” Petra's faith was such an integral part of her identity, values, and inner strength:

One thing I always did is I always pray, always pray before situation sometime when I get into certain confrontational meetings and I said, my Lord, I don't know what to do with this. You show me God, I don't know what it is. Sometimes I'll be talking and some things come out of me. I don't know where it come from ... he Holy Spirit. Something I said, I don't know because I didn't know what to do, but He always gave me the answer to my situations.

Conversely, Petra discussed the times when she was angry when facing racial perceived challenges or barriers:

When I came out of high school, I was angry. I was angry because of how I was treated. I was angry because of the situation that was going on. I was angry because white people excuse me by saying it like that, but this is where I felt had more opportunities than I felt like. They were trying to keep me from striving forward, but I broke that barrier. I was able to get it in school and it wasn't as easy for me, so I used to have to ask questions of people I don't like not knowing. So, I asked a lot of questions even throughout my life to right now.

Her inquisitiveness aided her well as she developed a strong academic work ethic wherein she would wake up at 3:00 a.m. to get her work done. The 3:00 a.m. habit stuck with her throughout her adulthood and tenure as a principal. Petra, moved from the student perceived as lacking potential to a teacher charged with acknowledging and developing the potential of her students: "I was a very good science teacher."

Petra had a desire to inspire females (both Black and White). She desired to inspire and encourage female leaders to pursue advanced leadership within education beyond the assistant principalship. She hoped that females would aspire to work in the principalship, superintendency, as well as positions within the Central Office. She stated that in order to assist people you had to be socially aware. Petra stated that when working with subordinate assistant principals she want to aid them; however, some are deemed unteachable as "they know everything." She did state that there seems to be a difference in those who are teachable and those that are not. In her description, she described a White male administrator. Petra stated that she tried to share what she knows and also solicited information from the administrator as she felt as he could provide valuable suggestions and contributions. Ultimately, it was up to the administrator whether they will accept her advisement.

Petra stressed the importance of active listening and interpersonal communication skills and noted that the tenure as a teacher does not prepare one for leadership:

You've got to be able to ... listen ... because being a teacher don't really prepare you for the leadership. ... I mean discipline wise, if you have good a great disciplinary policy, you can buy see yourself through some of the problems. However, there's other problems that you're going to come in contact with when you become a leader of the school, and then when you become a principal. ... in time fall ... it's on you.

In advising, she stated that sometimes she has to be firm and relay the expectations. Petra also stressed that if assistant principals have the expectations to hold teachers accountable then they too should be held to the same or higher standard. Thus, assistant principals should be receptive to advisement. She stated that when working with Black female teachers aspiring to be an assistant principal, they "soak that stuff up." Additionally, she stated that Black female teachers aspiring to be assistant principals, are nurturers and have a desire to "take care of the kids." Conversely, she stated that White female teachers much like their male counterparts have a sense of entitlement and feel as if they "don't have to learn this." She stressed that is not a blanket statement, "not all of them ... but some of them." She stated that the White female teachers that are teachable are "sweet and want to learn." Petra stated that they are "really good" and try to "soak in everything." She stated, overall, she was thought to be "fine, firm, fair, and consistent."

Petra believed that there was a track to principalship, mostly males serving as P.E. teachers or coaches were able to become assistant principals. She highlighted that their ability to coach students was a desired skill set. It was presumed that coaches could handle disciplinary issues. Petra discussed the academic or training requirements such as leadership certification and

stressed that aspiring leaders be prepared to get certifications within leadership as well. Overall, Petra knew that her strengths lied in her approach to discipline; however, if she had a do-over she would have also focused more on the academic aspects of her role:

I would dig more into the academic aspects more than what I did. I could have done more, but hey, I did the best I could with four kids and all these other responsibilities that I had, but I would probably dig a little bit deeper into academics and but I did good a...

Requirements for leadership training can vary from place to place. Unfortunately, not all requirements are solely based on policies, procedures or fairness. There are, however, those who are willing to take their position seriously so that they can overcome any perceived or practical barriers with leadership positions.

Mia

Mia perceived her advanced leadership journey to be one of great joy and knowledge building. The pathway to advanced leadership took on a new meaning for Mia. She would like her journey to be shared for generations to come:

I gained a lot of knowledge throughout the journey. ... Knowledge that I'm grateful for that even, you know, like at this point, I'm glad I'm having an opportunity... They will know that it can be done. I often say that my journey will help to inspire others that haven't even been born yet. ... I like to do or research history, and I would be thrilled to ... you know, have someone read not just because it's about me, but ... There is a struggle, so I would be happy that someone would be able to read about the journey.

Mia realized this opportunity to share on her leadership journey gave her a voice that she had not had prior to participating in my research project: "No one has really talked to me about it or had an interest in, you know, wanting to know what it, what it was like, you know." After

some self-evaluation and validation, Mia reflected on her gratitude for the opportunities and knowledge that the journey had presented. It is equally important to note how important Mia's faith is pertaining to both her personal and professional life successes and achievements ... "every everything hasn't been pleasant now, but even through the darkest moments, I feel that God helped me through."

Mia was not just centered on her own career advancement opportunities at this point in her life. Mia indicated that she had no aspiration for any future leadership roles. Currently, she performs in a 49% role in an adjoining school district. Mia shared that her advanced leadership journey prepared her for her part-time position. She was confident that her past experiences were valuable and noteworthy. They equipped her with the skills to better assist struggling students, and encouraged her to show more empathy for others. Mia had plans to complete the doctoral program that she had begun many years ago.

Trinity

Trinity held very strong convictions on the importance of familial support and that of others in leadership roles. However, she did not dismiss the importance of having the ongoing support of building level faculty and staff. She credited all informal and formal support received over the past 17 years as a testament to her personal and professional successes and accomplishments. Likewise, Trinity holds her religious faith and beliefs at the forefront of all that she does. She stressed that aspiring leaders must not become complacent for they must stay true to their beliefs, values, and always focus on their goals in spite of challenges.

Trinity realized that professionalism, qualifications, and skills do not automatically ensure access to advanced leadership opportunities. She concluded that it could be due to who

you know or which circle you may find yourself in. In Trinity's words, she states her realizations:

Keep the faith and have people in your circle that believe in you and that journey that I've taken and continued to take ... has been filled with ups and downs and highs and lows. ... I do know that if it wasn't for people within the community of the school, I probably wouldn't have gone that far. I ... believe ... that it's who you know sometimes Sometimes your background should speak for yourself, but it doesn't ... over these years where we have had ... qualified people and they were passed over just because they weren't in the right circle. I don't think that's fair. But I will say that, you know, bringing in people that visually sees your leadership and that you can be a leader is a big advantage. You just have to be in the right place at the right time sometimes.

Trinity hopes her promotion to advanced leadership position would be inspirational for others, regardless of their race and gender, with a desire to advance their career in leadership roles. Likewise, she believed that more female leaders would perform at the high school level if only given access to that opportunity to acquire such an advanced leadership position. Trinity does not intend to become complacent in being a principal. Her aspiration is to elevate herself to the district office level, and superintendency is not off the list as an option to consider. Lastly, Trinity communicated this response on making meaning of her lived experiences:

I will say that the meaning of it all is that it all prepares you for the next level. If you choose to pursue that level, yeah, I could be stagnant and say this is my dream to be just a principal. No, that's just not my final dream. I think God is placing me on the path to be able to help out district in more ways than just being a principal, and I think my journey

continues and I will keep working to see how far I can get with it. But everything, all of it really just ties together.

Reflections (Theme) – IQ 17

The reflection section has been divided into perceived barriers, strategies, and recommendations that the participants have engaged in for pursuit of advanced leadership positions. I define barriers as structural or organizational restrictive elements beyond the participants' control and oversight. Within this section, I define strategies as initiatives that the participants can implement and are under their preview or control. Additionally, I define recommendations as suggestions directed towards individuals within the organization or structure responsible for hiring, evaluating, and recognizing leadership within the study's district.

Table 21 is a summary list of barriers, strategies, and recommendations as they relate to this study. Barriers include perceived discrimination, favoritism, higher expectations for females, and inconsistent decision-making for positions. Strategies for addressing the issues found may involve more studying, relationship building, faith, downplaying of achievements, believing in oneself, knowing about the systems in place, staying focused and authentic, as well as having mentorship opportunities. For those who want to have leadership positions, it is important to encourage and look for equity, innovation in hiring practices, and value in all leaders within school district. The next section discusses more about how race and gender are perceived in leadership positions.

Table 21

Barriers, Strategies, and Recommendations

Barriers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impact of perceived discrimination towards black female at a young age• Favoritism toward some can lead to low morale, creating a negative school and district climate• Higher expectations for female leaders (positive results and outcomes)• An overwhelming number of qualified female leaders are overlooked for advanced leadership positions in favor of equally qualified male candidates (not within the district).• Being professionally qualified and skilled do not always ensure advanced leadership positions
Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Study as a beacon of hope• Relationship building with both adults and students in the school building: win-win situation• Christian faith as a support• Funding resources• Occasional downplaying of academic achievements and professional skills• Breaking the glass ceiling/must believe in oneself• Importance of male leaders' support/Good ol' boys system• Stay focused on personal and professional goals, stay true to personal values/beliefs• Importance of mentorship
Recommendations
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equity for all• A Cultural Shift that Influences the Hiring Practices• Recognize all leaders' worth in the school district

Note. The Barriers and Recommendations are organizational-centric, while the strategies are suggestions for aspiring leaders.

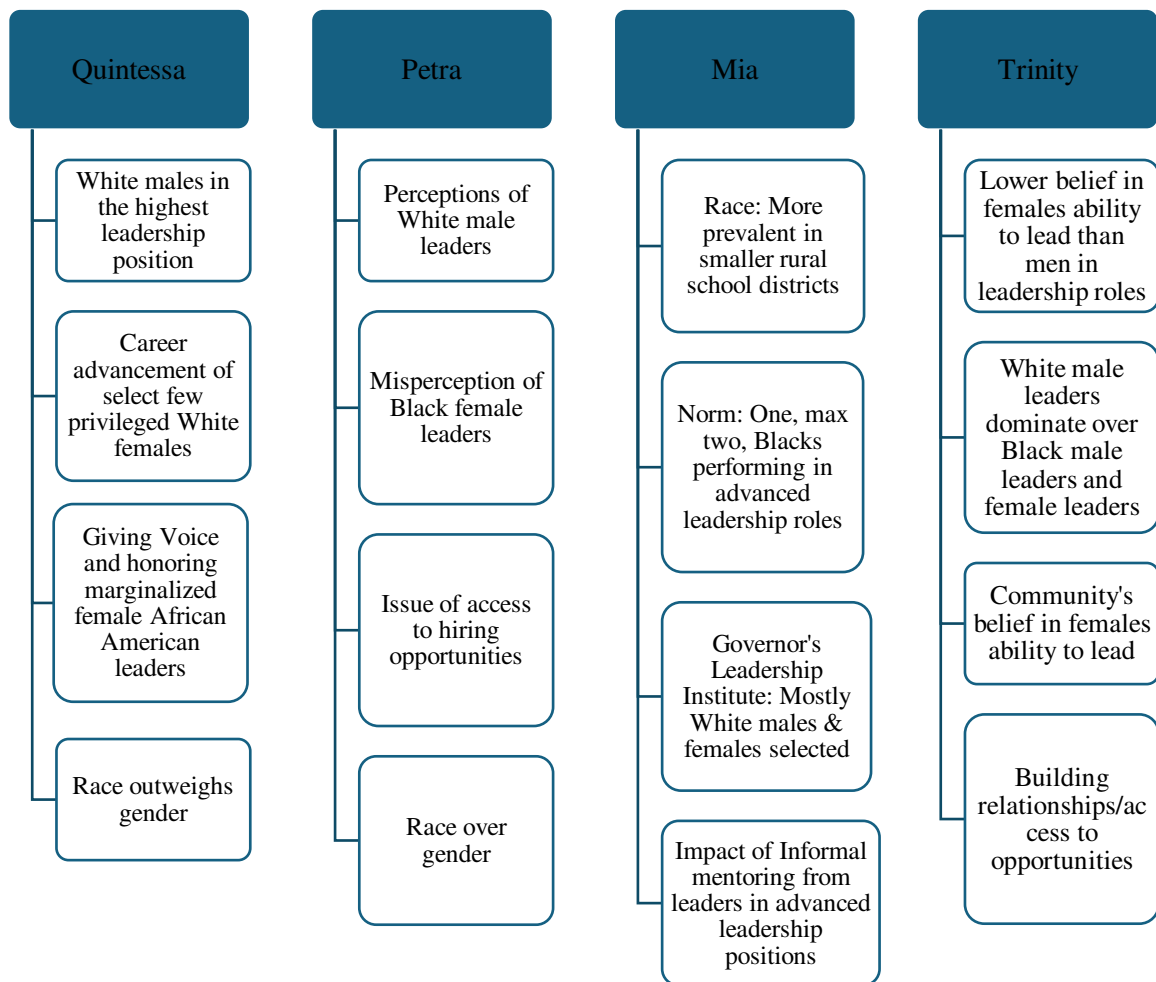
In summary, some participants, like Quintessa, expressed gratitude for a space in which to have a voice. While other participants, like Petra, expressed no regrets about her decision to stay in the district. Petra believed that her work was similar to a calling; likewise, Trinity felt that faith was an integral component of her advancement journey. Lastly, Mia seemed to be legacy-minded, as she wanted future generations to know her story. In answering IQ17, the participants outlined some organizational-centric barriers and recommendations, as well as strategies that can be implemented by aspiring female leaders.

Race & Gender – RQ2

I posed the following interview question to the participants, “*If any, how did you perceive the impact of race and/or gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in this rural school district in the South?*” The responses served as data for RQ2. RQ2 is more related to perceived race and gender barriers. A number of subthemes and categories emerged during the data analysis process.

Figure 14

Perceived Race and Gender Barriers to Career Advancement



Note. RQ2: Perceived Race & Gender Barriers to Career Advancement

Quintessa

Quintessa was asked how she perceived the impact of race and/or gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions. She shared that Caucasian males were usually recommended and approved to perform as assistant principal, principal, operations director, assistant superintendent, and/or superintendent. For instance, she stated the following:

The Caucasian males have been just placed in positions over African American females. One instance where there was one African American male, but the others have been Caucasian. At least four Caucasian males from one...There has been four to five Caucasian males placed in advance positions. One African American male and one Caucasian female.

During Quintessa's tenure in the district, she did witness one White female be elevated to a district office position. Her account of the event was as follows:

I do know of one female (White) that was in the political arena, I guess, and was given an opportunity. She moved from the elementary level over to the high school level, straight to the board office, in a position that had not been advertised. But that was only one Caucasian female, but normally the males. Preferably, more so than African American?

In Quintessa's opinion, race was more prevalent than gender in regard to decision-making. Quintessa's expressed her desire for my research study to be used as a tool to shed insight into what has transpired in the school district. She wants the study to be an instrument to help bring about lasting positive change and equity for all employees in the district regardless of race or gender.

Petra

In discussing the perceived impact of race and gender in career advancement, Petra had four overarching thoughts: perceptions of White male leaders, misperception of Black female leaders, issues or opposition to access to hiring opportunities, and how race more than gender impacted her advancement process. Petra stated that her work environment consisted of a larger number of White males in leadership. She fought the misconception that as a Black female leader, she was ill-prepared for the position. The internal question that she posed was one to the questioning party: “Where did you get your preparation from?” Additionally, she expressed that there was a level of hypocrisy and nepotism in the district as she felt that the senior decision-making party for the district (White male leader) was more interested in getting his wife promoted to an advanced leadership position.

Mia

When responding to the interview question pertaining to the impact of race and/or gender on navigating the pathways to advanced positions, Mia stressed that race played a prevalent role in the smaller rural school district more so than in the larger school district she is employed in now. Mia further indicated that she experienced more racial issues in the smaller rural district than in the larger neighboring school districts. In particular, she shared how it seemed like the norm for the smaller rural school district to have in place a maximum of one or two Blacks (usually males) performing in advanced leadership roles at any given time. During Mia’s reflection on the impact of race and gender while navigating her pathway to advanced leadership, she recalled her initial exposure to leadership preparation training was during her participation in the Governor’s Leadership Institute (i.e., 3-year program) around 1994. It was obvious that most of the educators selected to attend the leadership training institute were White males & females.

Mia only remembers seeing two or three other Blacks in attendance: “The Governor’s Leadership Institute. I will make mention out of 159 counties, there were few African Americans in that program. There were very few, but I can’t remember how many, but it compassed 159 counties.” Additionally, this opportunity came available due to the encouragement and informal mentoring of the White female superintendent at the time demonstrating that she recognized leadership qualities in Mia. I recorded these reflections:

She said there is an opportunity for you to be a part of this Governor’s Leadership Institute. I want you to go, she said. It’s a 3-year commitment, and she was a very strong-minded person so I knew not to say I didn’t want to go. But mainly the people that were selected from other counties were white males, white females, but not a large pool of African American. I was the only one from [School district of study] at the time. I believe each county could have two people going through. I was selected or I was instructed that I was going to do it by the Superintendent in my county at the time.

I think about superintendents who were females for clarity. There were two female superintendents that I did work under in [School district of study]. My mother was born in 1925. I’m talking with her about the schooling that they received as children, and she said that there was a White woman at that time who was over all of the schools, but I just don’t know. I don’t even know a name. She would have been the third White female superintendent, if the lady performed in the role of superintendent. Mom said that this lady would come out sometimes to the rural schools, you know they did a lot in the church buildings. If this was the case, Mia would have been the 3rd or 4th female and first Black female to perform in the role of superintendent in the school district of study; two White female superintendents Mia accounted for in the district, the one Mia’s Mom referenced (if served in role of superintendent), and Mia’s superintendency.

Trinity

Trinity's response to the question concerning her perception of the impact of race and gender barriers to career advancement highlighted her concerns: lower beliefs in females' ability to lead than males; lower belief in females' ability to lead than men in leadership roles; White male leaders dominate over Black male leaders and female leaders (Black & White); community's belief in females' ability to lead; and building relationships/access to opportunities. Trinity believed that race and gender equally impacted her advancement journey. As it relates to gender, she believed that within education there was a lack of confidence in females' ability to lead as effectively as their male counterparts. She stated, "in the educational realm, that ... the belief that females can lead is much lower than what the male can do."

As a result, the district is served mostly by male building leaders. Trinity stated, "I've been in the district ... for about 17 years where males dominated as the building leader (s). We've had just recently in the last 2 years a couple of Black female leaders." Trinity did note that she did not think that the hiring practices were indicative of racism:

I don't think it has anything to do with racism, *so to say*, but we work in a district that has been dominated by White males or White females. I'm going back to not having a Black Superintendent. We did have a black female superintendent, but she was only there for 24 months or so. But outside of that, we haven't had any. In the last 17 years, we did have one Black building leader who was a male. Since I've been here, and even grew up and gone through the school district, it has been dominated by males, Black or White.

Trinity reflected on her time as a student within the district and noted that she did not have any black principals within her district. She felt that a mindset shift needs to occur for such changes to occur in the school district and community culture. As she alluded to the impact that

it could have on the district's hiring practices, Trinity stressed the importance of building relationships as to aid in gaining access to career opportunities as she engaged in reflection. In understanding the balance of belief in one's ability and performance, Trinity stressed the importance of being afforded the opportunity: "you know the thing about it is, is it- if you give somebody an opportunity, they fail ... but how would you even know if you didn't give him the opportunity."

In order to understand how the participants' responses apply to my theoretical framework, I summarized examples in Table 22. In Table 23, I also give examples of how participants' responses connect to OD. Additional themes and patterns are explained in the next section.

Theories

Within the data analysis process, each interview question was evaluated to ascertain its connection to one or both of the theories within the theoretical framework (Feminist Theory/BFT, Four Frames of an Organization). The Feminist Theory/BFT contained five stages: (1) systems and structures of power and oppression; (2) sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc.; (3) discrimination and exclusion; (4) power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted; and (5) understanding, advocacy, and change (Arinder, 2020). As previously illustrated, within AI-assisted coding, there were a total of 105 coded segments and within the In Vivo coding analysis, there were 313 coded segments identified as Feminist Theory/BFT (see Tables 11 and 12). The participants' narratives provided an example of each stage (see Table 22). When examining Stage 1: systems and structures of power and oppression exist; the participants' accounts of the school district culture served to identify their perceptions of oppressive power within the school district. Quintessa's account is particularly conducive for

Stage 1 as she highlighted the unfair hiring and promotional practices due to race and gender.

In examining Stage 2: sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc. the overarching theme of race and gender barriers along with subcategories such as lack of access to opportunities, hindrance to educational advancement, lack of training and development were all stated as examples of discriminatory practices. Most of the participants perceived that race impacted their work within the school district. Additionally, Quintessa, Petra, and Trinity highlighted the issues of disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders within the district.

Stage 3: discrimination and exclusion were highlighted in the participants' accounts of barriers, strategies, and recommendations as they pointed out organizational-centric barriers and recommendations. Such barriers included the marginalization of African American female leaders and the lack of honor for their voices and contributions. In Mia's description, she highlighted the need to dumb down her expertise so as to be more palatable for leadership within her subsequent school district. Petra and Trinity discussed discrimination against females; Petra highlighted the impact that it can have on black female students; while Trinity felt that an extra burden or expectations of performance were placed on female leaders. Please note that stage 3 has recommendations for leaders within the school district organization and strategies for aspiring female leaders.

Stage 4: power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted; stage 4 most aligned with school culture as it is a time in which the participants were in the seat of authority whereby, they could act as change agents. The participants discussed ways in which they shifted or enacted new culture within the schools under their oversight. Stage 5: understanding, advocacy, and change; the participants most notably captured a level of advocacy within their conversations

about voice, aspirations, and Lesson 2 (you cannot do it alone). Overall, the participants described systems of oppression and their perceptions of discrimination or exclusion (hindrances) to career advancement opportunities. Additionally, participants' descriptions also illuminated how they disrupted culture to advocate (for others and themselves).

Table 22

Feminist Theory/BFT

Stages of Feminist Theory/BFT	Description of Stage	Examples			
Stage 1	Systems and structures of power and oppression exist	In examining systems and structures of power and oppression that exist, an examination of the school district culture along with the participants hierarchical understanding can highlight Feminist Theory/BFT stage 1.			
		<p>Quintessa – within her examination of the school district culture, Quintessa highlighted lack of respect and her perception of unfair hiring and promotion process (gender related issue) as well as high turnover due to devaluation of staff. Quintessa had a firm hierarchical understanding of the school district.</p>	<p>Petra – felt that the school district had “terrible culture” and was a not a structure of accountability. She also had firm hierarchical understanding of the school district.</p>	<p>Mia – thought that there was a need for morale improvements within the school district culture. Mia had in-depth hierarchical understanding as she was responsible for developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the organizational chart.</p>	<p>Trinity – highlighted the need for stability in leadership as result of high turnover. Trinity did have a firm hierarchical understanding of the organization of the school district and school building.</p>

Stages of Feminist Theory/BFT	Description of Stage	Examples			
Stage 2	Sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc.	In examining of sex, gender, equality, difference, race, and ability, etc., the examination of race and gender barriers within RQ1 and especially RQ2 provide examples of Feminist Theory/BFT stage 2. RQ1 yield subcategories such as lack of opportunities, hinderance to educational advancement, lack of training and development, race and gender barriers, isolation, and bias against female leader. RQ2 yielded subcategory such as: perceived race and gender barriers to career advancement.			
		<p>Quintessa- believed that there was a disproportionalit y number of White males in leadership position as opposed to the number of males in gender that served in smaller leadership (teacher, not central) office roles and promotion of White female leaders.</p>	<p>Petra – like Quintessa Petra also highlighted White males in leadership and the misperception of Black female leaders.</p>	<p>Mia – Mia highlighted the small number of Black serving in advanced leadership positions and highlighted the issue of race within the school district.</p>	<p>Trinity – Like the other participants Trinity highlighted the predominance of White male leadership and the lack of confidence in female leadership.</p>

Stages of Feminist Theory/BFT	Description of Stage	Examples			
Stage 3	<p>Discrimination and exclusion (not afforded an opportunity) career advancement due to race and/or gender)</p>	<p>After exploring issues of discriminatory and exclusionary hiring practices, an examination of IQ17 which captured the participants' perspectives contained subcategories barriers, strategies, and recommendations. The barriers and recommendations are organizationally centered and exemplified Feminist Theory/BFT Stage 3.</p> <p>Quintessa – believed that female African American leaders were marginalized and needed to have a voice to be honored for their contributions.</p> <p>Recommendation: equity for all and cultural shift that will positively influence hiring practices.</p>	<p>Petra- believed that young black female students may be impacted by perceived discriminatory practices. Petra also believed that favoritism toward some can lead to low morale, creating a negative school and district climate</p> <p>Recommendation: recognize all leaders' worth within the school district.</p>	<p>Mia – felt the need to downplay her academic or professional skills within the study's school district.</p> <p>Strategy: acquire funding resources as way to support building operations and educational endeavors.</p>	<p>Trinity – believed that there were Higher expectations for female leaders. Trinity also believed that there was an overwhelming number of qualified female leaders overlooked for advanced leadership positions in favor of male candidates</p> <p>Strategy: Stay focused on personal and professional goals, stay true to personal values/beliefs</p>

Stages of Feminist Theory/BFT	Description of Stage	Examples			
Stage 4	<p>Power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted</p> <p>While examining the issue of how power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted, I noted that when the participants obtained positions of authority they were able to enact new cultural norms as seen in the examination of School Culture. School Culture is a representation of Stage 4.</p>	<p>Quintessa created a culture of accountability to address perceived disrespect of leadership. Additionally, she believed that her efforts created a better environment for the incoming leadership.</p>	<p>Petra – developed a positive School Culture and culture wherein there was respect for leadership.</p>	<p>Mia- believed that relationship building was essential for culture development and work to establish relationships with students, building staff, parents, and the community through an open-door policy.</p>	<p>Trinity – helped to create an inviting safe environment for all stakeholders but also understood outside influences such as racism’s impact on the in-school dynamics.</p>
Stage 5	<p>Understanding, advocacy, and change</p> <p>The topics of understanding, advocacy, and change were explored, and the examination of voice, aspirations, and lesson 2 provided aspects that highlighted Feminist Theory/BFT Stage 5. Please note that the examples contain elements of self-advocacy.</p>	<p>Quintessa believed that she experienced empowerment of having a “voice.” She expressed gratitude for obtaining the principalship, it showed her tenacity</p>	<p>Petra - described the feelings of rejection and possible pushout due to age, but she resolved to stay. She relied strongly on a colleague’s advice, as she too was experiencing some Ageism on the job:</p>	<p>Mia - realized this opportunity to share on her leadership journey gave her a voice that she had not had prior to participating in my research project</p>	<p>Trinity- believed that her self-confidence and self-advocacy aided her in obtaining principalship. “I’m thankful that they gave me a chance, but I really worked really hard for this</p>

as it took her a long time.

“just wanna tell you don’t let anybody cause you to just leave this profession because we need experienced, wise administrators.”

chance. It wasn’t given to me. I had to work for it. So yeah, that’s right. I had to work.”

Note. Feminist Theory/BFT (Stages) & Participant’s Examples.

OD is the second theory in the theoretical framework. The Four Frames of an Organization consist of: politics, structural, human resources, and symbolic (culture). The AI-assisted coding contained 84 coded segments and within the In Vivo coding analysis, there were 413 coded segments identified as OD (see Tables 11 and 12). Narratives are presented for participants as examples of each frame (see Table 23). The political frame is described as power, conflict, competition, organizational policies, and the need for advocacy due to conflict and competition. The participants revealed that they were unaware of the influence politics played within their leadership roles. The structural frame consisted of rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment. It aligned with the participants' hierarchical understanding of the district. The participants relayed their roles in developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the organization chart. The human resources frame included needs, skills, and relationships with a goal of alignment of organizational needs and human skills. The data categorized under the Organizational and Development theme (In Vivo thematization) served as examples of the human resources frame. The participants discussed the perceived unfair hiring practices, the lack of recognition, and the need for training and mentorship. The symbolic (culture) frame included culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes, and intrinsic values (e.g., inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning). The inclusion of the In Vivo thematization yielded examples of the symbolic (culture) frame. The participants' perceptions of the school district's cultural changes were on a spectrum as some had doubts while others were optimistic. The descriptions provided by the participants demonstrated how the four frames were complex elements that influenced their ascension into leadership and their day-to-day administrative tasks

Table 23

OD & Participant’s Examples

Components of OD	Descriptions of component	Examples			
Politics	<p>Bolman and Deal characterized the political frame as power, conflict, competition, and organizational policies. Within the political frame, there is a need for advocacy due to conflict and competition.</p>	<p>Bolman and Deal (2021) characterized the political frame as power, conflict, competition, and organizational policies, an examination of IQ 3 helped to capture a key surprising finding, the political nature of the participant’s leadership roles.</p> <p>Quintessa believed that politics had a profound impact on the field of education. Quintessa perceived politics as being more of a hindrance to securing advanced leadership positions and promotions as opposed to being prepared academically and skillset wise. She persisted that the lack of access to opportunities was a major barrier.</p>	<p>Petra perceived politics as being the force behind her performing mostly in isolation and with limited support from school and district leaders during her tenure as a high school administrator. Petra sought out any training sessions she was allowed to attend, and she noted how one particular training scheduled was cancelled by her school principal. Petra never received a mentor to help assist during her leadership journey.</p>	<p>Mia was equally amazing at the impact of politics in education, and she noticed it more blatantly upon securing the position of superintendent. One thing that really stuck out to Mia, personnel at the district level would say one thing while in her presence, then once out of her sight they would attempt to do their own thing. This type of behavior from her subordinates did cause some undermining of her authority and a certain level of disrespect.</p>	<p>Trinity, like the other three participants, stated that her academic preparation did not prepare her for the political arena of advanced leadership positions. Trinity elaborated further that college “never prepared me for the ethnic problems that arise in schools...how to work with others who didn’t necessarily see me as an assistant principal or didn’t see me being an assistant principal as a best fit for our school. Just because of the color of my skin.</p>

Components of OD	Descriptions of component	Examples				
Structural	<p>The central concept of the structural frame consists of rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment. Note that the image of leadership consists of a social structure within the structural frame</p>	<p>When examining the central concept of the structural frame which consists of rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment, the review of the response data from IQ16 wherein participants provided their understanding of the district’s organizational structure including the status and their roles in developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the organization chart.</p>	<p>Quintessa noted that the school district does generate a district wide organizational chart, in need of tweaking, then building administrators are tasked to ensure all employees are made aware and they understand the organizational structure and the chain of command in the district. The school administrators would cover the building level. She questioned whether the district policies are followed.</p>	<p>Petra was very aware of the organizational structure for both the school district and at the school level. There was a current organizational chart in place for the school, yet the district level chart was being updated. Petra believed there was a communication issue in the district, though it was ignored. Like Quintessa, Petra became frustrated at the lack of accountability in regards to the actual hiring & promotion practices.</p>	<p>Mia, as superintendent, was tasked by the school board to develop an organizational chart, then distribute and explain it throughout the district so everyone was knowledgeable of its content. Mia realized that in spite of the fact she ensured that district wide personnel were informed on the organizational structure and chain of command, there were those who chose to do their own thing.</p>	<p>Trinity spoke on the school’s structure which included having a current organizational chart. She was optimistic that the new leaders will become change agents; noting for even greater change “district people come back in the classroom; whether ... board members are just people that work at the district”</p>

Components of OD	Descriptions of component	Examples				
Human Resources	Likewise, the human resource frame's central concepts include needs, skills, and relationships with a goal of alignment of organizational needs and human skills.	In a review of the human resource frame's central concepts which include needs, skills, and relationships with a goal of alignment of organizational needs and human skills, several IQs response data were categorized under the Organizational and Development theme (In Vivo thematization) serves as examples of OD: Human Resources.	Quintessa questioned the practice of hiring from outside the district for advanced leadership positions, especially when it involved females, especially African American females. There was a significant turnover and/or loss of capable staff in the district. She juggled multiple duties; there were staff shortages and long days.	Petra recalled the lack of recognition of Black females' value, worth, and achievements versus White male and female colleagues by school and district leaders in advanced leadership positions. She perceived such action as a degree of disrespect.	Mia's perception of her AP experience was one of a real-life boot camp experience. Mia shared "It was like a boot camp ... you definitely got exposed to all of those aspects of being an AP and principal ... Mia was informally mentored on how to access opportunities to attend courses and training programs that prepared her for advanced leadership positions.	Trinity received informal mentoring from some district level leadership team members who believed in her professional skills and leadership abilities. The district's federal program coordinator "was a really, really big mentor for me. She did a lot of inclusion for me to be to participate in a lot of the federal programs, Information, Budgeting, title one.

Components of OD	Descriptions of component	Examples			
Symbolic (culture)	The symbolic frame includes culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes. Key intrinsic values are inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning.	While considering the symbolic frame which includes culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes, and intrinsic values (e.g., inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning), the inclusion of the In Vivo thematization yielded examples of OD: symbolic (culture). Quintessa’s opinion was that the “Good ol’ boys” secured these advanced leadership positions, the positions were used as stepping stones for higher promotions later either in the district or elsewhere.	Petra perceived the school district as having a terrible culture. In her words, “You were sharing these things that have been brought to your attention, well, repeatedly, nothing was done! ... and that’s what you saw in the district as a whole.” This illustrates a lack of accountability and lack of support and enforcement of standards.	Mia stated that relationship building is an essential component of culture development. Mia stressed the importance of good teacher-student relationships: being aware of students’ comfortability, being approachable, and students should not be afraid to ask questions or engage.	Trinity’s optimism emanated from the fact that the new superintendent extended his support to school level leaders along with other district level leaders (some newcomers) to assist them with performing their job. This was Trinity’s initial response, I don’t know what the district culture is like right now because of so many changes. I know we’re trying to lean towards positivity, but until we have stability, I think the culture is going to remain the same. But I think if we just keep some people in place for a little while, it’ll be okay.

Note. OD & Participant’s Examples.

Themes & Patterns

The AI-assisted thematization process within Intellectus Qualitative produced a total of 17 themes. However, I conducted another iteration of analysis on the AI-assisted coding and thematization and discovered four key additional themes. Thus, I will describe and support the following themes: Understanding Leadership and Organization Dynamics, Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion, Leadership Challenges and Triumphs, and Career and Leadership Development. The chosen AI-assisted themes mostly align with the RQs and the theoretical framework. Additionally, as previously noted there were a total of 18 themes within the In Vivo Coding and thematization, I will highlight the following four In Vivo coding themes: Politics, Race & Gender Barriers, Mentorship, and Resilience and Persistence. The selected In Vivo coding themes also align with the RQs and the theoretical framework. Overall, the AI-Assisted thematization and In Vivo thematization provide depth in creating connections across the datasets (see Table 24). Additionally, the themes can be connected to the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT (Arinder, 2020; Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2015; Wollstonecraft, 2019) as well as the OD theory (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo)

In combining *Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion* and *Race and Gender Barriers*, both themes highlight the participants' perception of discriminatory or exclusionary practices throughout the hiring and promotion process. Several participants stated that they perceived that either their race or gender (and sometimes both) served as barriers to obtaining their aspired position within the study's school district. As a retired principal of 12 years (with 20 years of experience), Quintessa exemplifies the difficulties in navigating

leadership advancement when faced with perceived discrimination. Unfortunately, Quintessa did not obtain her desired position throughout her tenure within the district. Both themes align with Feminist Theory/BFT Stages 1-3; as there are systematic structures (Stage 1) of power governed by people who have beliefs that inform the hiring and promotion processes. Additionally, the participants perceived that race and gender (Stage 2) served as factors for exclusion (Stage 3).

Leadership Challenges and Triumphs (AI- Assisted) and Resilience and Persistence (In Vivo)

In combination, Leadership Challenges and Triumphs and Resilience and Persistence underscore how the participants prevailed despite the perceived challenges they encountered. The participants reported how the challenges helped them develop increased resilience and persistence to reach their career goals. One way of staying focused on their aspirations was to showcase their contributions in any format (formally or informally) as they perceived that the school district was not valuing their accomplishments and contributions. Quintessa and Petra shared how they were not recognized as new principals 2 years ago in any media outlet, however, the incoming new White female principal was recognized immediately in the local media outlets. Trinity (incoming Black female principal) was recognized along with the White principal, though less visible along with a smaller photo and article. Consequently, both themes align with Feminist Theory/BFT Stage 5; as the participants developed a greater understanding of what was happening to them in their school district, through self-advocacy they were able to become more resilient and persevered, and they worked on being more optimistic about future changes in the district.

Understanding Leadership/Organization Dynamics (AI-Assisted) and Politics (In Vivo)

The combination of *Understanding Leadership and Organization Dynamics* and *Politics* was a surprising finding discovered during the IQ3. As noted by the participants, politics colored their working experiences. The participants thought that their educational background did not prepare them for the political nature of the job. Some participants felt that politics impacted their access to opportunities and also served as a factor in their intentional (organizational) training and development. Mia and Trinity did have some formal training, with Mia having a leadership training intensive that spanned 3 years. Trinity serves as an example of possible changes in school district culture. Quintessa, Petra, and Mia noted that there was a lack of respect and bias towards them as female leaders. Conversely, their examples may persist in need for shifts in mindsets and culture to address and correct the issues of disproportionality. The two themes closely align with OD components (structural, human resources, and politics) as well as Feminist Theory/BFT Stages 1-3: Within the K-12 education system (*structural, Stage 1*), training and development falls under the preview of *human resources* as well as protection from discriminatory practices (*Stage 2*) and access to opportunities (*politics, Stage 3*).

Career and Leadership Development (AI Assisted) and Mentorship (In Vivo)

By combining Career and Leadership Development and Mentorship, they align because it illuminates how formal Mentorship was lacking for leaders aspiring toward advanced leadership roles. Yet, it drew attention to the positive impact informal mentorship had on the participants. Mia and Trinity detailed how district-level leaders played intricate roles during their pathways to advanced leadership positions. Mia shared that a White female superintendent was instrumental in guiding her on the right paths to secure appropriate training and entry into a leadership institute which carved a path to principalship and superintendency. Trinity elaborated on how the male Assistant Superintendent/Human Resource Director and female Federal Program

Director/Curriculum Director, along with her male principal recognized her leadership skills and assisted her informally on how to navigate the pathways to advanced leadership positions. The two themes closely align with one OD component (Culture) as well as Feminist Theory/BFT Stage 5. All four participants stayed true to their personal values, beliefs, and aspirations. They developed a greater understanding of their school and district cultures (Culture). Through self-advocacy, they were able to develop more optimism for future change in the district (Feminist Theory/BFT 5: Understanding, advocacy (self-advocacy), and change).

This section delineated the pairing of themes produced by the AI-assisted thematization process in Intellectus Qualitative with those corresponding to the In Vivo Coding and thematization process, thereby illustrating the descriptions of the four key themes and their theoretical connections. The previously discussed AI-assisted and In Vivo themes predominantly correspond with the research questions and the theoretical framework, and the themes can be connected to the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT and OD. From the results, many themes and connections were derived from coding procedures. These themes, which pertain to leadership positions, navigation, organization dynamics, politics, and mentorship highlight the challenges and opportunities that the participants experienced as well as hope for more progress in the future. My study helped to provide a voice for their concerns which connect the harsh realities of practice with the coherent ideas presented within my framework.

Table 24

Paired (AI & In Vivo) Themes and Theory Connections

Combination of AI-Assisted Coded Themes & In Vivo	Descriptions	Theory Connections		
AI Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion	In Vivo Race & Gender Barriers	<i>Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination</i> closely ties with <i>Race and Gender Barriers</i> as both race and gender with factors of perceived discriminatory hiring and promotion practices.	Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion and Race and Gender Barriers both align with Feminist Theory/BFT Stages 1 – 3	<i>Feminist Theory/BFT: Stage 1:</i> Systems and structures of power and oppression exist <i>Stage 2:</i> Sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc. <i>Stage 3:</i> Discrimination and exclusion (not afforded an opportunity) career advancement due to race and/or gender)
AI Leadership Challenges and Triumphs	In Vivo Resilience and Persistence	<i>Leadership Challenges and Triumphs</i> and <i>Resilience and Persistence</i> align as the participants stated that it was the challenges that helped them develop resiliency and persistence. Additionally, even when the school district or external agencies did not recognize their accomplishments, they voiced their contributions and celebrated them independently.	Navigating Leadership Challenges and Triumphs and Resilience and Persistence aligns with Feminist Theory/BFT – Stage 5 in a unique way as it is a level of self-advocacy that is achieved through the triumphs and persistence of the participants.	<i>Feminist Theory/BFT: Stage 5:</i> Understanding, advocacy, and change

Combination of AI-Assisted Coded Themes & In Vivo	Descriptions		Theory Connections	
AI Understanding Leadership and Organization Dynamics	In Vivo Politics	<p><i>Understanding Leadership and Organization Dynamics</i> align with politics as participants perceived <i>Politics</i> to hinder the access to opportunities. Additionally, participants thought they lacked training and development specifically to address the political nature of their positions. Participants reported that they encountered bias as female leaders and lack of support that often led to feelings of isolation.</p>	<p>Understanding leadership and Organization Dynamics and Politics has cross-theory alignment as it has some OD components (Structural, Human Resources, and Politics) as well as exemplifies some Feminist Theory/BFT stages 1-3.</p>	<p><i>OD: Structural</i> - The central concept of the structural frame consists of rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment. Note that the image of leadership consists of a social <i>Human Resources</i> - Likewise, the human resource frame's central concepts include needs, skills, and relationships with a goal of alignment of organizational needs and human skills.</p> <p><i>Political</i> - Bolman and Deal (2021) characterized the political frame as power, conflict, competition, and organizational policies. Within the political frame, there is a need for advocacy due to conflict and competition.</p> <p><i>Feminist Theory/BFT: Stage 1</i>: Systems and structures of power and oppression exist</p> <p><i>Stage 2</i>: Sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc.</p> <p><i>Stage 3</i>: Discrimination and exclusion (not afforded an opportunity) career advancement due to race and/or gender)</p>

Combination of AI-Assisted Coded Themes & In Vivo	Descriptions	Theory Connections	
AI Career and Leadership Development.	In Vivo Mentorship	<p><i>Career and Leadership Development</i> is anchored by <i>Mentorship</i> or lack of mentorship. Most of the participants lacked formal mentorship but did acknowledge the importance of informal mentorship and familial support as factors in their decision to pursue advanced leadership.</p>	<p>Understanding Career and Leadership Development align with mentorship at Stage 5, along with the frame of Culture.</p> <p><i>OD: Culture</i> - The symbolic frame includes culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes. Key intrinsic values are inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning.</p> <p><i>Feminist Theory/BFT: Stage 5</i>: Understanding, advocacy (self-advocacy), and change</p>

Summary

Chapter Four is a representation of the data analysis conducted in pursuit of answering the research study's research questions, examining the perceived problem (s), and reporting on unexpected findings or discoveries. Intellectus Qualitative was employed to perform AI-assisted data analysis and thematization, as well as In Vivo data analysis and thematization, as previously mentioned. Within Chapter Four, the data and findings were arranged and illustrated in a variety of tables, figures, and matrices. There was a total of 17 themes associated with AI-assisted coding and thematization and 18 themes associated with In Vivo coding and thematization. The data analysis was organized with the reporting of findings for RQ1, RQ2, Feminist Theory/BFT, OD, and themes and patterns. Additionally, a cross-comparison of AI-assisted themes and In Vivo themes was presented and narrated. The cross-comparison helped to illuminate how themes were connected to the theoretical framework (Feminist Theory/BFT and OD). In the next chapter, I discuss and interpret the findings from Chapter Four. I also provide recommendations concerning future research designs and highlight the implications for research and practice.

Chapter Five

Discussions, Implications, Limitations, and Recommendations

This chapter includes a review of the purpose, research questions, and key findings. Additionally, this chapter includes a discussion on the connections of key findings to previous literature as well as possible implications of the study's findings for females aspiring and/or currently serving in advanced leadership positions in similar school districts. Lastly, this chapter includes a review of limitations and recommendations for future research.

Purpose

The purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of an Organization (OD) and the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT as it related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021). The researcher sought to capture the authentic, lived experiences of African American female administrators (i.e., principals, assistant principals, or superintendents) in an identified Southern school district. I sought to understand the connection among the Four Frames of an Organization (Bolman and Deal, 2021), the five stages of Feminist Theory/BFT, and the hiring practices that led to the disproportionality of female teachers versus female leaders within the rural district.

Research Questions

The goals of the study were to (a) illuminate the participants' authentic accounts of how they made meanings from their own lived experiences of organizational culture and hiring practices within the rural Southern school district; (b) capture the strategies participants used to

navigate their advanced leadership journey; (c) conduct three semi-structured interviews; and (d) analyze the data to capture accurate accounts of the experiences of four female school and district administrators in the rural South. Two research questions guided the exploration of the goals for this qualitative study:

RQ 1. How do African American female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?

RQ 2. How do African American administrators perceive the impact of race and gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in a rural school district in the South?

Methodology, Data Collection, and Data Analysis

I sought to answer the above RQs through the case study research methodology (Yin, 2018). I utilized Seidman's three-series interview protocol to capture the history, detailed experiences, and participants' meanings of their perceptions of the impact of race and gender on the hiring practices within the study's school district (Seidman, 2019). Thus, I conducted three 60-minute interviews utilizing an interview protocol (see Appendix J). The electronic transcripts from the virtual interviews were ready for data analysis. I expanded the interview protocol into a master coding document, outlining the three iterations of coding: RQs, theories, components of theories, and the discovery of themes and patterns. Additionally, I utilized Intellectus Qualitative software (Intellectus Statistics, 2019) to conduct both AI-assisted data analysis and thematization as well as In Vivo data analysis and thematization (see Tables 11, 12, and 24). The data and findings were organized and represented in tables, figures, and matrices within Chapter Four.

Key Findings

Through data analysis, specifically the three coding iterations system (RQs, theories, components of theories, and discovery of themes and patterns), I was able to identify key findings for RQs (1 and 2), theories (Feminist Theory/BFT & OD), and discoveries by AI-assisted and In Vivo themes. Please note that I discovered some of the key findings while analyzing the data for RQs; however, those findings are best suited as examples of components of the theories. In this section, I streamline and highlight the most impactful findings for each of the following: RQ1, RQ2, Feminist Theory/BFT, OD, and themes and patterns.

RQ1

The response data for RQ1 focused on several key areas; however, there were seven that were most noteworthy: politics, professional accomplishments, mentorship (informal and formal), familial support, Ageism, resilience, and persistence. Several of the key findings have alignment and are presented together. Mentorship (informal and formal) and familial support align together, as most participants blended the categories within their description of mentorship. Additionally, professional accomplishments, resilience, and persistence align; several participants noted that without challenges they would have been able to achieve their professional accomplishments through resiliency and persistence.

Politics

All four participants perceived that there were political implications for hiring practices and career advancements in the school district. The participants described a political undertone in the decision-making processes of the school districts, which resulted in racial and gender barriers. These barriers included limited access to opportunities, inadequate training and development aimed at addressing the political nature of their positions, bias against female

leaders, and a lack of support that frequently led to feelings of isolation (see Figure 13).

Quintessa, Petra, Mia, and Trinity shared their experiences of encountering racial biases during the hiring and promotion processes as African American female leaders. However, Quintessa and Petra discussed how, despite having the necessary professional credentials and leadership skills, they perceived that they did not have the same access to hiring and promotion opportunities as their white male colleagues.

In response to IQ3, all participants reported that they lacked training in navigating the political nature of their positions. Petra, Mia, and Trinity reported experiencing bias against women due to a lack of confidence in their decision-making abilities. Mia faced challenges from her subordinates, who frequently undermined her authority as the superintendent of the school district. She revealed how her subordinates withheld information that would have been beneficial before scheduled board meetings. Similarly, Trinity came to understand that in advanced leadership roles, people prioritized her race and then evaluated her decision-making skills and abilities. Lastly, Petra was the only participant who reported that she felt a sense of isolation while performing as a high school assistant principal. Petra felt that she lacked support from her leadership in the area of professional development.

Mentorship (Informal and Formal) and Familial Support

Both familial support and mentorship served as factors of encouragement for participants in their pursuit of advanced leadership. Table 20 illustrates that all the participants stated that they had some level of familial support. The need for support serves as one of four lessons unveiled through the participants' reflections, "*Lesson 2: You cannot do it alone.*" Several participants stressed that they did not believe that they would have experienced the level of academic and professional achievement without the support and guidance of their families. In

examining pivotal factors for advancement and retention, networking and mentorship were found to be essential (Brown, 2014; Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022). However, it should be noted that two of the participants (Quintessa and Trinity) stated that they sought out formal networking and mentorship. Mia had a type of embedded formal mentorship through her work with her faculty members at her university. Overall, as reported in *Lesson 2: You cannot do it alone*, the immense support from family, mentors, and sometimes colleagues helped the participants face perceived barriers and challenges.

Professional Accomplishments and Resilience and Persistence

Professional accomplishments and aspirations were linked with resilience and persistence as they aligned to represent the intersectionality among the themes, subcategories, or subthemes, such as parental relationship, academic achievement, retention, school culture, academic initiative, and strong leadership (see Table 17). Additionally, four distinct lessons were ascertained from the participants' reflections on how they built resilience and persistence to successfully navigate through the pathways to advanced leadership positions:

- Lesson 1: Challenges develop resilience and persistence
- Lesson 2: You cannot do it alone
- Lesson 3: Challenges can be political
- Lesson 4: Character matters

Of the four participants, Quintessa and Mia presented straightforward accounts of how challenges helped them develop resilience. Additionally, Petra, Trinity, Quintessa, and Mia gave accounts of how support empowered them to endure. As previously stated, most participants were not prepared for the political nature of their leadership positions. However, upon reflection of Duckworth's (2016) work, there may come a time when individuals must rely on their inner

strength to overcome trials, challenges, or problems in order to achieve their established goals. Ultimately, it has to do with a person's ability to persevere and commit to becoming successful or reaching their goals.

Ageism

Examining the race and gender barriers, along with the challenges the participants faced in pursuing advanced leadership, revealed a surprising barrier: Ageism. Petra's description of the bias she received as a result of race and gender aligns with the other participants; however, her account is unique in that she stated that age may have been a push-out factor. Lesson 2 was a strategy for Petra as she developed a determination to remain in her position until she decided to leave. From Petra's account, she expressed a passion for school but at times felt a sense of rejection and devaluation. The lack of recognition served as an example of devaluation and strongly contributed to Petra's perceptions of being disrespected. Please note that Petra was the most senior participant with over 45 years of experience. Again, Petra believed that race, gender, and age served as barriers within the hiring and promotion processes.

RQ2

Race and gender barriers were the overarching theme for RQ2. There were four subcategories within this theme as well. They were the following: disproportionality in leadership, perceived unfair hiring practices, lack of confidence in female leadership, and voice.

Race and Gender Barrier

Quintessa, Petra, and Mia observed that race significantly influenced their navigation of pathways to advanced leadership positions more than gender; however, they also identified a number of gender-related barriers as well. Trinity considered gender and ethnicity to be equally influential barriers in her path to advanced leadership. Consequently, she determined that the

prevailing mindset of individuals regarding how things used to be in the district (and should continue to be) posed a unique challenge.

The four emergent sub-themes of race and gender barriers were as follows: disproportionality in leadership, perceived unfair hiring and promotion practices, lack of confidence in female leadership, and voice (self-evaluation and self-advocacy). In examining disproportionality, overwhelmingly the participants described a White-male dominated leadership and expressed that there was a high number of qualified teachers who aspired to advance to higher levels of leadership. Throughout Quintessa's 20-year tenure, she observed only one White female transition from the classroom to the district office. According to several participants, it was customary for only one or two African Americans to occupy advanced leadership positions at any given time. It is probable that an African American male would have been one of the recipients. Additionally, the participants perceived unfair hiring and promotional practices occurring within the district. Quintessa, Petra, Mia, and Trinity discussed the prevalent practice of promoting or hiring White males to advanced leadership positions (e.g., assistant principal, principal, operations director, assistant superintendent, and superintendent). This perceived practice impeded the career advancement of African American females and males, as well as White females, within the district.

Once the participants were able to obtain a position within leadership, they were often faced with leadership, subordinates, and or communities that did not have confidence in their leadership capabilities. Petra and Trinity spoke on the stereotypes surrounding Black female leaders, including the low expectations placed on their talents, knowledge, and experience for positions of authority. However, in order to combat some of the challenges, the participants all identified the need to have a voice. Several participants expressed gratitude for their participation

in this study as it provided an avenue of acknowledgment and a safe space for which they could use their voices. Overall, most participants utilized their voices to advocate for their students, their staff, and most importantly themselves (self-advocacy). Self-advocacy during their times of reflection can be described as self-validation and self-recognition as the participants were able to celebrate their contributions to education.

Feminist Theory/BFT

Feminist Theory/BFT served as a component of the theoretical framework for this study. Within the three iterations of the coding system, the data were originally coded for RQs, so key findings discovered within the first iteration of coding (RQS) are best suited as examples for one or more of the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT. Three key findings were identified: challenges, voice (self-identification/validation), and self-advocacy. A number of challenges were identified across the interview data: IQ7, IQ12, IQ14, IQ17, IQ19, and IQ21. Most of the accounts spanned more than one stage of Feminist Theory/BFT. In addressing challenges, key strategies were self-advocacy and self-empowerment/validation (voice).

A number of the participants' perceived challenges were related to hiring and promotion practices within the district (see Table 25). Quintessa, in response to IQ7, felt that there was a lack of access to opportunities due to unfair hiring and promotion practices. Those challenges align with Feminist Theory/BFT, Stages 1-3. Likewise, Petra, Mia, and Trinity noted race and gender barriers within the hiring practices. Petra, in her response to IQ19, reported that there was a bias and lack of confidence in female leadership; those challenges and her account align with Feminist Theory/BFT, Stages 1-5. Petra noted that she worked in a male-dominated district; however, she has seen changes over the years. Her last statement of "giving them an opportunity" is a form of advocacy for aspiring female leadership within the district. Similarly,

Mia, in response to IQ19, stated that she believed her district's leadership to be male-dominated. The challenge and her response also align with Feminist Theory/BFT, Stages 1-5. Mia stated that changes are happening within the district and more female leaders are being incorporated within the district. Lastly, Trinity, in response to IQ21, was faced with racism as challenge, and her account aligned with Feminist Theory/BFT, Stage 2. Trinity within her extended response discussed how she fought for herself. She displayed a level of self-advocacy. Much like Trinity, the other participants on some level during various components of their journeys enacted a level of self-advocacy either in the obtainment of the position or the retention of it.

Table 25*Identified Challenges and Stages of Feminist Theory/BFT*

Participant	IQ	Stages	Challenge	Excerpts
Quintessa	IQ7	Stage 3	Unfair hiring and promotion practices and lack of access to opportunities	when other opportunities came about and I would express interest in them, the Superintendent at the time would only say you were not properly trained...if I can add the people that actually went through the training, they still were not chosen for promotions. I mean, still you know that select few, that's why I said earlier politics, you know, it's pretty much killing education. They would still handpick those one or two and overlook people that look like me.
Petra	IQ19	Stages 1-5	Race & Gender Barriers and Bias/lack of confidence in female leaders	I am going to say equally race and gender have had an impact...The belief that females can lead is much lower than what they male we've dominantly had males as building leaders... I've been in my district and that's been about 17 years. In the last 2 years we've had a couple of female leaders. It has been dominated by White individuals, I don't think it has anything to do with racism <i>so to say</i> , but we live in a district or our work in a district that has been dominated by White males or White females. Humongous mind shifts for them. But and I don't see it changing. But I think that that is we have to shift they both mindset and it's hard for people to shift that mindset sometimes the whole idea of a of a female, a black female, especially in my district, good to show our not just female, but our females and males that females can work at all different levels and ... A lot of it is just giving them the opportunity.
Mia	IQ19	Stages 1-5	Male-dominated leadership	Yes. Uh. I, uh, feel that race played an important part and I would. I would have to say because. Leadership positions that I did in the smaller county...Uh, yes, because often I know you hear a lot, but you were not going to have. Three African leadership roles. Top leadership roles. recently, I would say in the last 2 to 3 years that did happen, but I was rather surprised, rather shocked... so definitely race played an important part. You were gonna usually. .. most of the time that's there would be a White male, a Black male most of the time ...Now, in these latter years, the females, the black females, have had an opportunity., there were very few African American females in leadership roles there. I can't even remember one person that. During my 2 years, assistant uh females, but not uh principalship the Superintendent was a white male.
Trinity	IQ12	Stage 2	Race and Gender Barriers (Racism)	You know the biggest challenge I had with the profession. Was when we named our Assistant Principals 2 years ago. Unfortunately, well, fortunately for us, we were all African American. Unfortunately, people have problems with it... The principle in the system principles of the district at that time we were bashed. We were really based heavily online..., you can't get mad because I'm black female and I got a job that you probably wanted someone else to get...my biggest challenge of how to combat the racism that was really being displayed Online...

Organizational Development - OD

OD was the second component of the theoretical framework. Reflecting on data from the three iterations coding system, several findings serve as examples of one of the Four Frames of an organization (see Table 26). The analysis revealed six key findings: politics, hierarchical understanding, typical day, lack of training, school district culture, and school culture. Politics aligns with the political frame, while hierarchical understanding serves as an example of the structural frame. The participation reports provide some insight into the human resource frame through their descriptions of the typical day and lack of training. Lastly, each participant described the school district and their impact on school culture within the district; these serve as examples of the symbolic-culture frame. The example reflects responses for IQ3, IQ10, IQ12, IQ16, IQ14, and IQ15. Quintessa's response to IQ3 politics aligns with the political frame. She believed that politics negatively impacted education and reduced access to career and advancement opportunities. Mia's responses to IQ16 hierarchal understanding align with the structural frame. As noted previously, Mia had a more intricate role in the development, maintenance, and dissemination of the organizational chart within her school district. Petra's responses to IQ10 (typical day) and IQ12 (challenges – lack of training) align with the human resource frame. Petra concluded that those in positions of authority undervalued her professional achievements and contributions. As a result, she was unable to access professional development and training opportunities. Lastly, Trinity's responses to IQ14 (school district culture) and IQ15 (school culture) exemplify symbolic-cultural frames. Trinity promoted putting teachers at the forefront and the development of solid ties between the community, home, and the school district.

Table 26*Identified Examples of the Four Frames of OD*

Participant	Frames	Excerpts
Quintessa	Politics	We would just be given an equal opportunity. And I just don't understand this. How or if they would ever be able to get rid of the politics out of education, and then if you're going to tell the person that they weren't properly trained, by all means, train them if they're trainable. They will just be willing to give us an opportunity. Especially when you have women, you know, with a darker tan. If I had been in a different community or if the board members had a different mindset. I would have been given the opportunity much sooner, but it was. It just seems like there was just something about women being in leadership positions within this system. It's OK for us, you know, pretty much to stay beneath and assist the males, but they don't. They had an issue with women actually being in the driver seat.
Mia	Structural	When I went into the superintendent's position, ...The school board had asked that I look at the organizational chart. ... I did create the organizational chart with people knowing where they were. ... I was charged with conveying this to each school....Everybody knew where they were on that organizational chart. I did run into some obstacles there. Presenting and accepting was, you know, wasn't always easy. ... It was received that day when it was presented and complimented on great job and make sure that everybody knows. But I will be honest, that did not always happen because there was some people that did not and were determined at central office level, not to work from that organizational chart, and I think it was because there were somethings they did certain ways, and they didn't want to depart with that. Now, as an African American female, when I really think about it, that's where I ran into some problems. because, I could present it. I was told that, OK, this is it. They know what to do, but OK. And that didn't happen all the time. When you get to, I would say the superintendent position, it can be very challenging.
Petra	Human Resources	There were some things that I wanted to do, but not allowed to do. Ok, one day I was supposed to attend a RESA meeting to learn a different way. My boss said, Petra even though you know I was just going to go, you don't need to go to this. I've already gone to it before. It's not going to help you. It's not helping me. He called RESA and cancelled. I didn't go. These are the kind of things that I have had to go through. I didn't go to that meeting nor training, yet they expect for you to do other things, even with that training, they expect for you to know it, but you have not been trained to do it. I would say to my older Superintendent, not the one now. He wasn't prepared. Oh yes, I was just as much prepared as anybody else who took the job. As an assistant principal to be the principal, I just needed the same thing. Everybody else needed guidance. Now when you come on the scene as a principal, you're going to have a mentor. I did not have one. The Superintendent did not give me a mentor
Trinity	Symbolic (Culture)	I really do think once district people come back in the classroom, whether they are board members are just people that work at district, if they come back in and see that and we do the same thing. They'll see why it's so hard in education nowadays. Your relationship with teachers and your relationship with parents will make you a great assistant principal. You got to bring education to forefront. You keep teachers first, Students, ...right next to the teachers assistant.

Themes and Patterns

Through AI-assisted data analysis and thematization as well as In Vivo data analysis and thematization, a number of paired themes emerged: Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo); Leadership Challenges and Triumphs (AI-Assisted) and Resilience and Persistence (In Vivo); Understanding Leadership and Organization Dynamics (AI-Assisted) and Politics (In Vivo); as well as Career and Leadership Development (AI-Assisted) In Vivo Mentorship - In Vivo (see Table 24). The following paired themes are essential to answering RQ1 and RQ 2:

- RQ1: Career and Leadership Development (AI-Assisted)-Mentorship In Vivo
- RQ2: Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo)

RQ1: Career and Leadership Development (AI-Assisted) In Vivo Mentorship - In Vivo

The two overarching themes of Career and Leadership Development (AI-Assisted) and Mentorship (In Vivo) closely align as repeated participants expressed the importance of formal and informal mentorship within the pursuit and obtainment of advanced leadership positions. Trinity provided clear examples of her career journey as well as the impact of her informal mentorship and familial support. Trinity consistently discussed career trajectory plans with her family, and her family would suggest both academic and career initiatives for her. As her siblings also worked within education, they would help her evaluate her skill set as it relates to the requirements of the positions of interest. She relayed her sister's vote of confidence in her level of professionalism: "Oh, that's my sister. She can do it this way." She was able to have difficult conversations and ensure fair treatment of everyone.

Trinity noted that a big asset for her was mentorship: “The only reason that I am on the path that I am is because of informal mentorship,” Trinity stressed the importance of having good relationships with other females. She stated that no matter the race, it is very difficult to navigate leadership as a female. Additionally, she expressed that “clicks” have an adverse impact on the ability to collaborate with other female leaders. She stated that collaboration is essential when establishing a support system and developing trustworthy relationships. Trinity experienced this with her informal mentor:

God placed a female in my life who was at the district, who said it to me when I became an academic coach, I don’t know you, but I know you got something in you and I’m gonna be here with you. You pick up the phone whenever you need me.

Trinity ascribed to embedded mentors on the job and stated that everyone should have a mentor: “If you put that mentor in your pocket and know that you gotta on speed dial, nobody can stop you.” She stated stepping out of one’s comfort zone is required to develop a good mentor-mentee relationship. Additionally, she noted that mentorship can help mentees develop or take advantage of their mentor’s experiential knowledge, which moves beyond their academic understanding of their position. Overall, Trinity thought it pivotal for females to have other female mentors to help identify and hone necessary skills for current and advanced positions. Lastly, she stated that female leaders do not have to be in formal leadership positions to serve as mentors. As a leader mentor, she stated that she would help to highlight and showcase her staff’s strengths and stressed the importance of “You can’t do it by yourself. There’s no way possible. You can’t get anything done by yourself. ... And I believe in giving people chances because, you know, somebody had to give me a chance.”

RQ2: Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo)

The themes of Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo) are closely related because they both elicit and generate similar information from the interviewees. Trinity articulated the challenges faced by herself and three other African American women in navigating leadership roles within the context of discrimination and exclusion. She observed that her tenure as an Assistant Principal and Principal presented social challenges requiring prompt intervention. The presence of multiple African Americans in key leadership roles, particularly African American females, was uncommon in this district, where White males typically occupied the more senior positions. Trinity was stunned to see school district and community opposition to leadership changes (i.e., approval of four African American female leaders), along with academic curriculum threats and calls for more school library censorship.

Hate emerged as a byline between Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo). Trinity noted that because of the district's customary ethnic positioning of senior leaders (i.e., hiring and promotion of White males) many people found it difficult to accept the approval (i.e., 2 years ago) of two African American principals and two assistant principals. This significant change presented challenges for leaders at every level within the district. Trinity was taken aback by the public vilification of all four newly approved African American female leaders across various media outlets. It is important to highlight that Trinity adhered to her personal and professional principles and refrained from engaging in the conflicts that arose. She focused on fostering constructive relationships among the students, staff, parents, and the community.

Interpretation of the Findings

The section contains a discussion of the key findings as related to the literature review. Therefore, the major themes and subthemes that were identified during the data analysis will serve as examples for RQ1, RQ2, Feminist Theory/BFT, OD, and other major themes and patterns. The following themes related to RQ1 require further discussion: mentorship & familial support, resilience and persistence, politics, and professional accomplishments. In the discussion of RQ2, I explore the following themes and sub-themes: race and gender barriers, disproportionality, unfair hiring and promotion practices, and lack of confidence in female leadership. As the theoretical framework includes both Feminist Theory/BFT and OD, I discuss in this section the Feminist Theory/BFT stages in light of literature related to the waves of feminism. As noted previously, the stages of the Feminist Theory served as the stages for BFT. Lastly, this section includes a discussion of OD as it relates to the frames and how they influence or impact the hiring practices of African American female leaders in advanced positions within education.

RQ1

Findings after data analysis presented the following themes: mentorship & familial support, resilience and persistence, politics, and professional accomplishments. This section contains the findings from the study that align with the literature, however, professional accomplishments was identified as a stand-alone theme. The professional accomplishments narrative combines the overarching themes (open communications, school culture, strong leadership development, and professional awards and recognition) with their subthemes.

Mentorship & Familial Support

All the participants expressed the importance of mentorship (formal or informal) and familial support in their pursuit of advanced leadership. Within the literature, Odum (2010), Brown (2014), and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) noted that mentorship and support networks (family, friends, etc.) were essential components or strategies utilized by African American women seeking advanced leadership. Odum highlighted networking as a strategy for her participants, noting that those who had mentors reported higher job satisfaction. Additionally, both Brown and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie noted that without mentorship, in particular from a strong white male leader, most African American women did not gain access to advanced leadership positions. Brown noted that there were very few Black women leaders, and thus her participants did extensive research to find Black women role models/mentors, as most were not permitted within pre-existing networking opportunities. Their exclusion from the pre-existing “Good ol’ boys” networks often led to feelings of isolation similar to Petra’s (Brown, 2014; Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022). As previously stated, Petra also felt a sense of isolation and exclusion from the familial support for a number of my participants, which served as a form of informal mentorship and served as a catalyst for participants’ pursuit of opportunities.

Resilience and Persistence

Every participant articulated that resilience and persistence were the fundamental elements contributing to their success while navigating their leadership journey. As exemplified in Odum’s (2010) and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie’s (2022) studies, resilience was a key characteristic within the literature. As Kingsberry and Jean-Marie noted, resiliency is the ability to overcome hardship and is characterized by excellent problem-solving skills, excellent interpersonal skills, and a drive for self-development. Both Odom’s (2010) and Kingsberry and

Jean-Marie's studies demonstrated the capacity of female leaders to effectively maneuver through the challenges associated with attaining advanced leadership roles. Additionally, the participants of Kingsberry and Jean-Marie highlighted the importance of resilience during the retention phases of their tenure, particularly when faced with disappointment and rejection due to factors such as race and gender.

Politics

The analysis of IQ3 revealed an unexpected theme: politics. However, politics, in general, seems to precipitate any marginalized group's access to rights, as captured in the literature on women in the workplace and Brown's (2014) study of African American women's ascension to the superintendency. Freeman (2019) documented an extensive examination of women's fight for access to the workplace, equal pay, and protection from harassment over the years. A component of the fight for rights also included a desire for women to hold positions of leadership where they could influence or implement decision-making within the workplace. Much like the participants in my study, the participants in Brown's (2014) study noted that politics served as a barrier to accessing job opportunities or persisting in acquiring advanced leadership positions. The participants within my study shared some of the frustrations of Brown's (2014) participants, as they too had political fights with school boards, school officials, and the media. Overall, it is imperative for African American females serving in advanced leadership positions to develop good working relationships in order to access and remain in these positions (Brown, 2014).

Professional Accomplishments

Professional accomplishments are unique to my study and not previously used in my literature review. The participants deemed the professional accomplishments worthy of

celebration or acknowledgment (see Table 17). The participants believed that the following actions, initiatives, or ideas were noteworthy: open communication (parental relationships and involvement, good relationships with staff, student engagement), school culture (aspiration-school goals, academic achievement, safety and security, retention), strong leadership development (aspiration-advancement, strength, professional learning), and professional awards and recognition.

All four participants stressed the importance of building strong relationships with their parents, students, and staff through open communication. For example, if a potential crisis arises, the participants believe there will already be an in-depth level of trust and confidence in their ability to provide a reasonable solution for parents, students, and staff. The participants described several components of school culture, including aspirational school goals, academic achievement, safety and security, and retention. As Trinity noted, creating goals around school achievement and documenting the school's success is a move in the right direction. Likewise, Quintessa stressed the significance of safety and security and the importance of every student leaving and arriving back home safely. Additionally, a good indicator of school climate and culture would be the retention of both students and staff, as noted by Quintessa and Mia.

The category of strong leadership development encompassed aspiration-advancement, strength, and professional learning. Trinity engaged in professional learning, which enabled her to develop a strong leadership team. In terms of aspiration and advancement, she held the belief that proper training could equip individuals with the necessary skills to become leaders. Overall, the participants noted initiatives and ideas as accomplishments; however, Mia received a professional award and recognition. This was truly unique for the study, as most participants reported not receiving recognition (i.e., Petra—lack of media acknowledgment). Although

acknowledged by Trinity, strength was a belief or idea that was demonstrated by all four participants through their persistence within the school district.

RQ2

During the data analysis, the overarching theme was race and gender barriers, with subthemes including disproportionality, unfair hiring and promotion practices, and the lack of confidence in female leadership. This section contains a highlight of the data's alignment with the literature. Key studies that highlighted race and gender barriers include Brown (2014), Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022), and Odum (2010). My participants also discussed key issues related to women's fight for access to opportunities, fair pay, and protection from harassment.

Race and Gender

Results of the data analysis showed that the participants faced perceived obstacles related to race and gender as they pursued career advancement and promotional opportunities. The data was obtained through analysis of RQ2 aligned with the literature related to women in the workforce and race and gender barriers for female educators (Brown, 2014; Freeman, 2019; Kingberry et al., 2022; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Odum, 2010). The literature contains an examination of the fight for women's rights and the development of legislation that enabled women to enter the workforce and later get paid fair wages (Freeman, 2019). The literature also includes other key legislation and initiatives, such as the EEOC, wherein grievances of sex, gender, or racial discrimination could be addressed (Office of the Assistant Secretary for Administration & Management, n.d.).

Brown (2014), Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022), and Odum (2010) conducted studies to examine how African American women confront potential barriers or challenges to achieving greater responsibilities and advanced leadership positions. The three studies include participants

who were trying to obtain or remain within the superintendency. The participants in each of the studies highlighted the racial, gender, or social-political barriers along with possible strategies to utilize when faced with them. Brown's participants stressed that both gender and race are barriers; however, racial discrimination is a more prominent or apparent barrier. Some strategies suggested by the participants were to develop positive relationships with gatekeepers and establish strong mentor-mentee relationships (Brown, 2014; Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022; Odum, 2010). Hill and Ragland (1995) championed enhanced preparation for those aspiring to leadership roles in education, particularly at the principalship level and beyond, as a strategy to facilitate meaningful reform within school districts.

Disproportionality

The study's participants reported a perceived disparity in the school district's recruiting and promotion practices for White males and the elevation of female teachers to advanced leadership roles and positions. The data aligned with research conducted by Howard (2022), the Library of Congress (1970), and Muñoz et al. (2012). The Library of Congress documented the issues of underrepresentation and disproportionality in 1970, as noted in the literature. A published report illuminated the fact that women had equivalent education but no access to higher levels of responsibility or pay (see Table 4). Muñoz et al. also documented the continued issues of underrepresentation and disproportionality among female education leaders. Females within leadership were thought to be an anomaly; this echoes some of the sentiments of my participants as they stressed the lack of confidence in their leadership capabilities (Muñoz et al., 2012). Likewise, Howard documented accounts of disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders.

As Howard (2022) found, the participants paid close attention to their workplace hiring and promotion practices on their pathway to leadership. Howard documented how women navigated their careers, their perceptions of their surroundings, their perceived obstacles to achieving leadership, and how they circumvented leadership hurdles. Howard, like my qualitative case study, used Feminist Theory to examine gender disparity, disproportionality, and underrepresentation in P-12 school leadership. She noted a statewide and national gender gap in superintendents. The study sought authentic accounts of Georgia's P-12 female superintendents' career paths. In the superintendency, women were underrepresented (Glass, 2020). Teaching, building, and central office leadership were the paths to superintendency for women, according to Howard. Since migration from teaching to principalship did not increase female superintendent representation, this finding was important to the study. Howard blamed the superintendency's male-dominated culture for disproportionality and underrepresentation.

Unfair Hiring and Promotion Practice

A shared perception held by the participants was that of unfair hiring and promotional practices in the district. This was similar to Brown's (2014) participants, who perceived that challenges related to recruitment and retention were often attributed to "racism, sexism, and oppressive sociopolitics" (p. 573). The current study's participants knew the school district's hiring protocol was clear, straightforward, and within federal hiring guidelines. However, the decision-makers' actions and inactions were problematic, especially with the recruiting and advancement of African American women for leadership roles. This was noted by Superintendent Cameron within Brown's study:

It is not the actual process of recruitment and retention that are barriers to the superintendency because they are in and of themselves concrete processes (being

certified in school administration, applying, interviewing, and etc.). The problem lies in the decisions made by those in power. (Brown, 2014, p. 577)

In the literature review, various authors' perspectives on unjust employment and promotion practices affecting female leaders, particularly African American female leaders, were gathered (Addi-Racah, 2006; Angel et al., 2013; Blount, 1998; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass, 2010; McKinsey & Company, 2024; Skrla et al., 2001). Addi-Racah (2006) believed that men were expected to gain school promotions to fit the prevailing male culture and maintain their social advantages, although this sponsorship pattern may have changed as more women became school leaders (p. 297). Blount (1998) noted that many women became complacent in roles that did not lead to leadership and career progression, regardless of their work ethics or performance. Despite women comprising 75% of the educational workforce and earning over half of advanced administrative degrees, Shakeshaft (1989), quoted in Skrla et al., 2001, observed that less than 10% of superintendents were female (p. 117).

Glass et al. (2000) suggested that the low numbers of women superintendents resulted from discouragement from training and school boards' unwillingness to hire them (p. 1). Angel et al. (2013) noted that minority women had advanced from principalship to superintendent, yet women still lagged behind men in North America in transitioning from classroom to leadership roles. Brunner and Grogan (2007) claimed that female educators thrived in a male-dominated field, holding positions such as curriculum director, human resource officer, and special education director (Grogan & Brunner, 2005), but rarely attaining superintendency posts.

McKinsey & Company (2024) identified a significant challenge: the lack of available women for advancement into senior-level positions. The issue is believed to originate at the entry level. For every 100 men promoted to managerial positions from entry-level roles, fewer women

are promoted to managerial status (McKinsey & Company, 2024). The initial imbalance (at the entry level) places women at a disadvantage, preventing them from catching up to men. For each female director promoted to a higher leadership position, two female directors exit their organization (McKinsey & Company, 2024).

Lack of Confidence in Female Leadership

Petra, Mia, and Trinity reported that a byproduct of the race and gender barriers was a lack of confidence in female leaders. The data align with the literature in that Brown (2014), Hooks (2015), and McKinsey and Company (2024) also reported a lack of trust in female leadership in the workplace. According to Hooks (2015), compared to other identifiable groups, African American women often held the lowest social standing and occupied the lowest positions in work and professional hierarchies. Quintessa, Petra, and Trinity expressed that they had both credentials and training but still faced leaders, subordinates, and communities that lack trust in their abilities to lead. Brown's participants expressed a similar sentiment as they felt as if they were not viewed as intelligent or capable of leading or serving in the superintendency. Overall, McKinsey and Company outlined the challenges and how they impact African American women in leadership:

1. Although they faced greater obstacles than their counterparts, African American women had a high level of desire, with 59% of them achieving top management positions, compared to 49% of all female executives.
2. Colleagues questioned their intelligence and abilities more often than they did non-African American leaders.
3. One in three female African American workers said they were passed over for career progression because of their personal identities.

4. At work, they encountered more prejudices and got less assistance.
5. Managerial assistance for African American women's career advancement, sponsorship possibilities, recognition, and support networks is conspicuously lacking.

Thus, overall the data aligned with the literature as the participants in the study felt overlooked, unsupported, marginalized, and not fully recognized for their potential and capabilities.

Feminist Theory/BFT

As the participants in this study experienced “double jeopardy” with race and gender as barriers (Brown, 2014, p. 581), understanding the waves of the feminist movement framed this study. This section contains a concise summary of the three waves, with a highlight of the third wave as it is ongoing and most relevant to the participants of this study. Freeman (2019) categorized the feminist movement into three waves. The first wave (1830-1920s) focused on women's suffrage and equal rights. The second wave (1960s-1980s) aimed to build on these efforts, leading to increased workforce participation, pro-choice advocacy, educational opportunities, and protections against sexual harassment, marked by significant developments like Title IX and *Roe v. Wade* (Freeman, 2019). The third wave, starting in the 1990s and continuing today, is known as the intersectional wave, which applies Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality to explore various forms of oppression, including gender, race, class, age, and ability. A key aspect of Black Feminist Thought is the empowerment of African American women to find their voice. As highlighted by Collins (2022), "the overarching theme of finding a voice to express a collective, self-defined Black women's standpoint remains a core theme in Black feminist thought" (p. 100).

All four of the study's participants attended public schools in the mid-to-late 1970s. They each reported experiences of perceived racial and gender discrimination in both educational institutions and local communities during that period. Unbeknownst to them, the Feminist movement was transitioning into its second wave (1960s to the 1980s) and third wave (1990s-present) as they completed high school, attended college, and began their careers in education. Similar to the third wave, which saw African American female leaders strive to find their voice, the participants also aimed to utilize their voices by securing advanced leadership roles.

According to the four participants, voice allowed for greater opportunities for self-evaluation and valuation. In pursuit or retention of leadership positions, the participants engaged in self-recruitment tactics as outlined by Brown's (2014) participants. Brown's participants stated that in order to be considered for positions, they had to develop support systems and get strong mentors. Additionally, some of Brown's participants engaged in mobility as a retention (self-recruitment) tactic; several participants stated that they frequently faced requests to relocate or commute to another school district in order to remain in the superintendency. The participants saw these as self-advocacy/self-recruitment tactics. Additionally, Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) stated that African American women interested in leadership should develop strong relationships with the gatekeepers. Relationships are key in overcoming the barriers outlined in Stages 1-3 to get to an empowered state in which to challenge oppressive systems (Stage 4) and move into spaces of advocacy (Stage 5).

Organizational Development - OD

The purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of OD and the stages of Feminist Theory/Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as it related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the

South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021). Bolman and Deal's (2021) Four Frames of an Organization were used in conjunction with research study findings from other authors to better understand how participants navigated leadership advancement and interpreted their organizational environment (Flamini & Steed, 2022; McKinsey & Company, 2024). I will align the literature with the Four Frames. One of the Four Frames of an Organization is structural, and it has functioned as hierarchical understanding for the study's participants (Bolman & Deal, 2021). The structural frame is not often operationalized alone but in conjunction with some elements of the cultural and political frames. When examining the impacts of structure, politics, and culture within the P-12 education systems, customarily formal leaders (e.g., principals, assistant principals, and superintendents) have primarily been male, while informal leaders (e.g., teachers, office administrators, counselors, etc.) have been female. Additionally, those in authority normally reinforced the cultural standards within their hiring and promotional practices. The study's participants perceived that flawed hiring and promotional practices presented challenges for them while on their leadership journey. They inadvertently experienced the impact of structural, cultural, and political influences of those in authority within the school district. The participants experienced a number of structural, cultural, and political ramifications such as lack of access to opportunities and lack of support and isolation. Two of the four participants, Petra and Quintessa, elaborated on their frustrations of being overlooked for positions in favor of their White male counterparts. Petra also expressed that she lacked support, and this led to feelings of isolation. Petra's sense of isolation and lack of support can possibly serve as indicators of a hostile work environment. All participants were cognizant of the perceived disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders in the school district versus the total number of female teachers at the school level as supported by Flamini and Steed

(2022), where the data showcase more female teachers than female leaders. Flamini and Steed believed that an exploration of pathways from teacher to leadership was warranted.

Additionally, the human resources frame may also work in tandem with the symbolic (culture) frame. Some human resources policies, practices, or procedures can have a positive or negative impact on school district, school culture, or climate. The participants experienced a number of issues that are human resource adjacent. Such issues included but are not limited to working conditions, hiring and promotional practices, professional development, and avenues for which to address grievances. Several participants within the study noted that working conditions often led to them feeling overworked, as exemplified in their “typical day” narratives. Some participants even described how personnel shortages led to longer hours on the job.

Several of the participants discussed unfair hiring and promotional practices. Once the participants obtained positions of leadership, the lack of training and professional development was problematic. Both hiring practices and training would fall under the preview of human resources; however, there are cultural influences in how human resources is empowered to serve or not serve educators. Three of the four participants expressed that they experienced disrespect and in turn had to create cultures of accountability under their preview. Petra’s account of lack of support and isolation closely aligns with Kingsberry & Jean-Marie’s (2022) description of how African American women are often isolated and silenced within educational leadership. Thus, it is important for the participants and female leaders in general to have a voice as their voices serve to empower self-advocacy. Overall, the four frames rarely work in isolation but in conjunction with one another as structure is reinforced by culture and vice versa. Likewise, human resources are organized by structure but driven by culture and politics. Thus, it is

important for organizations and individuals working in or pursuing positions within an organization to understand the impact of the Four Frames (Bolman & Deal, 2021).

Themes & Patterns

The study yielded 17 AI-Assisted themes and 18 In Vivo themes. I was able to align the AI-Assisted and In Vivo themes and identified four combination themes (see Table 24).

Additionally, the two combination themes were identified for RQ1: Career and Leadership Development (AI Assisted) In Vivo Mentorship - In Vivo and RQ2: Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo). A number of studies within the literature review examined both concepts within RQ1 and RQ2; as the participants shared how they navigated race, gender, and social politics barriers along their journey to advance leadership (Brown, 2014; Howard, 2022; Kingsberry & Jean-Marie, 2022; McAllaster, 2023; Odum, 2010).

RQ1: Career and Leadership Development (AI Assisted) - Mentorship (In Vivo)

Howard (2022) and McAllaster's (2023) studies depicted the career navigation of female leaders. Both studies highlight pathways to advanced leadership; with McAllaster's (2023) study focusing on the collegiate level and Howard's (2014) study illustrating the teacher-to-superintendency process. As previously noted, McAllaster's (2023) study illuminated the structural and cultural frameworks by articulating the perceived antagonistic and oppressive behaviors directed towards the African American faculty member participants during their career journey by their non-African-American colleagues. Participants such as Quintessa, Petra, and Mia discussed working within environments wherein they felt disrespected and isolated. Their examples align with Feminist Theory/BFT Stages 1-5 and all Four Frames of OD (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022).

The African American female participants in McAllaster's (2023) study demonstrated resilience and determination through self-advocacy and mentorship. Similarly, Trinity and Mia indicated that informal mentoring was crucial for their advancement to the role of principal. Quintessa and Petra perceived a necessity to self-advocate for support from the school district; consequently, any professional mentoring they received was informal. Similar to the participants in McAllaster's study, these individuals sought acknowledgment and empowerment in response to the barriers encountered in their career journeys. The examples align with Stages 1-3- Feminist Theory/Black Feminist Thought and the structural, human resources, and cultural frames of OD (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022).

As previously mentioned, Howard's (2014) research examined the teacher-to-superintendency pathway and noted the perceived barriers that the participants faced. Her study aligned with some descriptions of the study's participants as there is not an assured path from teacher to principal to superintendency. Additionally, Howard (2014) identified the "culture of superintendency" as a male-oriented position, which she argues is the primary factor contributing to the ongoing disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders in advancing to the superintendency. Participants such as Quintessa, Petra, and Trinity also noted that the district's leadership was primarily White males. The examples most align with Stages 1-3, Feminist Theory/BFT, and the structural and cultural frames of OD (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022).

RQ2: Navigating Leadership Amidst Discrimination and Exclusion (AI-Assisted) and Race and Gender Barriers (In Vivo)

The Brown (2014), Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022), and Odum (2010) studies included the examination of the accession of African American women into superintendency.

The intersectionality of race and gender barriers are highlighted by the researchers as well as the study's participants. An interesting point of reference is the dehumanization of African American female leaders as depicted in Brown (2014) and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie's (2022) studies; the participants discussed working conditions that often made them feel overworked, undervalued, and overlooked. The examples align with Feminist Theory/BFT Stages 1-3 and highlights all of the Four Frames (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021; Collins, 2022). Overall, the race and gender barriers reported by the participants in the study are very similar to those within the literature; the surprise finding of politics in IQ3 was well documented in Brown's (2014) study. Brown's participants outlined the politics and the battles among school boards, school officials, and the media; Petra discussed a battle concerning her promotion that played out in the media. Both examples traverse several stages of Feminist Theory/BFT (1-3) and highlight the political frame of OD.

Implications for Theory and Research

According to the study's findings, African American women were still underrepresented and disproportionately represented in principalship and superintendency positions. In this section, I explain how the results connect to the conceptual/theoretical framework. I also discuss the Black Feminist Theory, OD, and Implications for Practice.

Feminist Theory/BFT

Reflection emerged as a theme when participants discussed their experiences as females navigating to their current or highest levels of advanced leadership (IQ17). Findings indicated that race and gender barriers (RQ2) were evident in the lives of all participants, which align with Stages 1-3 in the Feminist Theory/BFT (Arinder, 2020, Collins, 2022; Hooks, 2015;

Wollstonecraft, 2019). For clarity, it was necessary to display the participants' experiences in a table (see Table 21) that contains the categories of barriers, strategies, and recommendations.

To reiterate, organizational or structural constraints that were outside the participants' control and supervision were recognized as barriers. Initiatives that were within the participants' sphere of influence and those they could carry out were referred to as strategies. For the purpose of the study, recommendations were defined as suggestions aimed at those in the organization or structure in charge of recruiting, assessing, and rewarding leadership in the district under review.

These were some of the barriers reported by the participants: Impact of perceived discrimination towards Black female at a young age (i.e., Petra shared how Black female high school students were already experiencing race and gender discrimination which caused her to reflect on her high school experiences during integration in the 1970s); Favoritism toward some can lead to low morale, creating a negative school and district climate, higher expectations for female leaders (i.e., net positive results and outcomes; countering the stereotype of low confidence in African American females' ability to lead); An overwhelming number of qualified female leaders are overlooked for advanced leadership positions in favor of equally qualified male candidates (i.e., those not within the district, all participants made this observation); and Being professionally qualified and skilled do not always ensure advanced leadership positions (i.e., perception of all participants).

I identified nine notable strategies during the data analysis process: Let the research study serve as a beacon of hope (i.e., participation in the study gave participants a voice, opportunity for self-evaluation, and validation); Highlight the potential for positive outcome in the school district of study (i.e., participants noted the need for stability in the district: less onboarding of outside advanced leaders; Relationship building with both adults and students in the school

building: win-win situation; Christian faith as a support (i.e., all participants fostered resilience and persistence); Funding resources; Occasional downplaying of academic achievements and professional skills (Mia spoke on how she had to downplay her credentials to get hired and blend in within her environment); Breaking the glass ceiling/must believe in oneself; Importance of male leaders' support/Good ol' boys system (Trinity found that you can have countless women supporting and believing in you, but a White male can help you access opportunities to reach your career goals); Stay focused on personal and professional goals, stay true to personal values/beliefs; and Importance of mentorship (i.e., informal and formal). Three actions were recommended for review by individuals responsible for hiring, evaluating, and recognizing leadership within the study's district: equity for all; cultural shift that influences the hiring practices, and recognition of all leaders' worth in the school district.

Voice

As aforementioned, race and gender barriers served as the overarching theme for RQ2, which included four subcategories: disproportionality in leadership, perceived unfair hiring practices, lack of confidence in female leadership, and voice. Three key findings were identified within the first iteration of coding (RQS) that aligned with one or more of the stages of Feminist Theory/BFT: challenges, voice, and self-advocacy. Voice was an unexpected finding that proved to be quite significant in this study as participants shared authentic accounts of their pathways to advanced leadership roles. Quintessa, Petra, Mia, and Trinity perceived any opportunity to share their lived experiences to be beneficial for them or for generations to follow. Similar to the participants' revelations revealed in Brown (2014) and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie's studies (2022), all participants indicated that at some point, they felt a sense of being unworthy, undervalued, not acknowledged, and disrespected. Voice allowed opportunities of self-

empowerment evaluation. Likewise, they expressed gratitude to use their voice to reflect on the perceived disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders versus female teachers across the district, which they linked to the inconsistent district's hiring and promotion practices. For Quintessa, having a "voice" was a source of strength and independence. It took her a long time to earn the principalship, however, she was appreciative because it displayed her persistence. Hence, a self-empowerment evaluation was deemed a sound strategy for tackling perceived challenges on the leadership pathway or in retention.

Self-Advocacy (Self-Recruitment)

Self-advocacy (self-recruitment) was considered an effective strategy for addressing challenges stemming from perceived questionable administrative practices by decision-makers in the district of study. Similar to Brown's (2014) participants, all participants considered seeking employment outside the study district (i.e., self-advocacy/self-recruitment) due to perceived barriers that hindered their ability to secure advanced leadership positions.

The participants elaborated on how they perceived self-advocacy as a strategy to help become more resilient and persistent. Two of the four participants actively pursued outside employment, and one successfully obtained a position at a local school district. All of the participants realized that they displayed some types of self-advocacy. Quintessa showed inner strength, resilience, and persistence as she never gave up on her goal of becoming a principal even after performing as an assistant principal for approximately 18 years. Together with a former coworker, Petra determined that the timing of her retirement would be her decision, not others, after facing the issue of Ageism and a feeling of not belonging. Trinity stated that her self-assurance and self-advocacy contributed to her securing the position of principal. She expressed gratitude for the opportunity to take on an advanced leadership role but emphasized

that the job was not simply handed to her. Trinity emphasized her years of hard work in preparation for the principalship.

OD Implications: Structural and Cultural

In this section, I describe the data and implications for both the structural and cultural frames as they are operationalized within my study. They are interconnected concepts. Bolman and Deal (2021) categorized the structural frame as one that encompasses the idea of rules, responsibilities, objectives, policies, technology, and the environment of an organization. Additionally, Bolman and Deal (2021) categorized the symbolic (culture) frame as an organization's culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, heroes, and intrinsic values, all of which are considered important. It was common practice to operationalize the structural frame alongside parts of the cultural and political frameworks rather than operating independently.

Data related to the structural frame were gathered from IQ16 as participants described their hierarchical understanding and responsibilities in developing, updating, maintaining, and disseminating the organizational chart. The cultural frame was examined in observation of data from IQ14 and IQ15; questions related to the school district culture and the school climate/culture provide an account of the participants' cultural understanding. Several participants identified the problematic aspects of the school district culture, while also expressing their ability to adapt or establish a new culture within the schools they were responsible for within their positions. Participants highlighted issues of race, gender, and social politics in their descriptions of bias within the school district. As described by one participant, Trinity, change will not occur within the district until there have been tremendous mindset shifts within the governing members of leadership. Therefore, it may be necessary to delve deeper into the structural and cultural implications of how organizations alter culture, particularly those deeply

ingrained in the governing bodies and the broader communities. Initially, bias awareness training appears to be the ideal solution; however, after scrutinizing the data and engaging in discussions, it becomes clear that bias training is merely a preliminary measure, as policy can never override an individual's heart and mind.

Human Resources

The human resource frame will be discussed next. Its main ideas are needs, skills, and relationships, with the aim of bringing people skills and organizational needs into alignment. A key finding related to the human resource frames is the highlight of working conditions. Two participants described their typical day, wherein their morning starts at 5 am or earlier and sometimes ends well after 8:00 p.m. Both Brown (2014) and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022) have noted the theme of overwork as it has been identified among the participants. In Brown's description, the participant felt a level of dehumanization as if her leadership did not perceive her as being human but a machine, or worse, an animal for usage. Brown noted the concept of the "beast of burdens" and aligned it with the archetypes or stereotypes most commonly associated with African American leaders, as outlined by Cox (2017).

Personnel shortages, as described by both Trinity and Quintessa, constitute another example within the human resource frame. Trinity had to assume additional responsibilities due to the absence of the incumbent principal at the time of the school's opening. She described her diligence in preparation, requesting a checklist to ensure her readiness. She and her team completed the checklist and had a successful opening. Quintessa also discussed the impact of a personnel shortage in her description of an insufficient number of bus drivers, and her day was elongated as she had to wait for each child to be transported home.

Training and professional development are components of human resources; the office aids employees in connecting their skills to the organization's goals as well as assists employees in the development or honing of skills for advancement. A number of participants stated that they lacked access to professional development and felt that it impacted their skill development and chances for advancement. However, Mia discussed how professional development, training, and on-the-job training were an essential component of her success. Thus, human resources serve as a safeguard to ensure employee rights, align talent and skills with the organization's goals, as well as provide professional training and development opportunities. Furthermore, human resources should provide safeguards for candidates trying to access advancement opportunities and provide open communication and advisement for training and professional development opportunities (e.g., listserv email, flyers, and announcements). Human resources may also have to establish strong relationships with the personnel responsible for various aspects of training and development to ensure cohesion and follow-through with training as well as following up with attendees to capture training needs.

Politics

Bolman and Deal (2021) defined the political frame as rivalry, power, conflict, and organizational policies, as previously discussed. Due to rivalry and conflict, advocacy is necessary within the political framework. All of the participants' comments pointed to the same conclusion: as novice administrators, they were ill-prepared for the politics of education. Thus, it is important to discuss politics in education in more detail and perhaps to mention how new teachers might better prepare to deal with the issue. Preparatory education programs may consider including aspects of politics within the teacher/educational leadership curriculum.

Some participants reported that they learned about racial, equity, and equality issues from their general coursework and training; this information was mainly applicable to the student body. The study district's perceived level of racial and gender discrimination and exclusionary practices shocked the participants, according to the research findings. One way to raise awareness of the political implications could be for school systems, teacher/leadership programs (RESA), and college institutions to establish or strengthen partnerships to ensure that all graduating students are learning about the politics in education and educational leadership. Moreover, professional development training could be offered by professional organizations (e.g., GTA, TA, GSSA, and NASSP). At the district level, there should be a continuation program for new teachers and a program designed for veteran or tenured teachers aspiring to pursue advanced leadership positions. These suggestions or recommendations closely aligned with the participants' desires for mentorship and professional development as noted by Brown (2014) and Kingsberry and Jean-Marie (2022). Mentorship was an essential strategy in acquiring and retaining advanced leadership positions.

Implications for Practice

In honoring the participants' voices, I plan to discuss and utilize their recommendations and strategies for district-level barriers and aspiring leaders within the district (see Table 21). In reporting, the participants outline the barriers and recommendations that are organization-centric, as well as highlighted strategies in which aspiring leaders can engage in for acquiring and retaining an advanced leadership position. In addressing the racial, gender, and political barriers that African American women face within the district (e.g., discrimination, higher performance expectations, qualified and overlooked, low morale/culture, etc.), the participants recommended equity for all. In addition, the participants stated that there would need to be a cultural shift to

influence and ensure fair hiring practices and recognition for all school leaders. The recommendations made by the participants can significantly influence the disproportionality and underrepresentation of female leaders within the district. This, in turn, can lead to changes in other organizational elements such as structure, politics, and human resources.

To elaborate further, the participants advised aspiring leaders to try to become beacons of hope, lean strong on their faith, and believe in themselves. Their belief in themselves and others may prompt them to build strong relationships with students, parents, staff, and communities. In so doing, aspiring leaders will need to develop excellent interpersonal skills and balance the needs of those they serve with their personal and professional goals. Mentorship will be necessary when traversing the fight to break the ceiling and infiltrate the “good ol’ boys system.”

Limitations

A number of limitations could potentially impact the validity, transferability, or trustworthiness of the results, including the participant criteria, the study location, and the exclusion of other professions. The criterion sampling method required all participants to have served as a principal, assistant principal, or in a higher authority position. This along with time constraints limited the available participants for sampling. Additionally, a modification was made in the selection population, which was slated to include both African and White female leaders; however, as noted in the study, the sample only included four African American female leaders. Four participants were enough for the data set to reach saturation. Another limitation of the study was its site, which was a single small school district in the South. The exclusion of a population of professionals aspiring to advanced leadership positions and other school districts served as a limitation, potentially impacting the transferability of the study’s findings. Thus, both the selection of site and participants still served as limitations within the study. Lastly, the

exclusion of quantitative data to assess the relationships of underrepresentation and disproportionality statistically served as a limitation. I utilized triangulation, member checks, reflexive journaling, and peer debriefing to address issues related to trustworthiness: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (see Table 9). The data analysis process involved several iterations of AI-assisted, In Vivo, and cross-comparison that strengthened elements of trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Recommendations for Future Research

I believe that this topic would benefit from a mixed methods design wherein a survey would serve as quantitative data. The second phase of data collection should include interviews, which serve as qualitative data. The integration of both data sets could potentially provide more depth of understanding for the disproportionality and underrepresentation of African American female leaders in education. The survey has the potential to identify the perceived barriers, challenges, and strategies employed by the participants. The interview would capture the participants' life stories, lived experiences, and how they make meaning of the study's phenomenon.

A topic that should be further examined would be voice. During the process of analyzing the data, all participants expressed the need to have a voice. Likewise, the participants did not have a sense of being appreciated, respected, or credible. All four African American female leaders identified discriminatory practices in the hiring and promotion processes within the district under study, and those practices played a significant role in shaping their self-evaluations and validations. My research project inadvertently functioned as a means to acquire the participants' genuine responses (i.e., voice) to detailed interview questions, detailing their life stories, experiences, and the significance they attributed to them, indicating a need for further

examination. The participants expressed a sense of relief in articulating the components of their journeys toward advanced leadership.

Conclusion

Disproportionality and underrepresentation of females, particularly African American females, in advanced leadership positions remain prevalent in the field of education, including the district of study. Historically, White males have dominated senior roles, especially in superintendency, which was also evident in the district. Barriers such as lack of access to career advancement opportunities, perceived unfair hiring practices, and inadequate formal mentorships hindered female leaders from advancing to higher positions. In the district of study, there was an identified urgent need for a mindset shift among decision-makers regarding the elevation of aspiring in-house leaders to advanced leadership roles. This shift necessitates specific training for the school board, superintendent, and current district leaders. A change agent, preferably the superintendent, needs to emerge to implement the necessary initiatives for district and school improvements. The process requires the establishment and execution of fair and equitable hiring and promotional practices in line with updated district policies. Prioritizing building leadership capacity for those pursuing advanced leadership roles is essential, which could be achieved through on-site leadership development training initiatives. The objective is to create a leadership pool for future district-wide vacancies, promoting the hiring of in-house leaders rather than relying on external recruitment. Ultimately, this mindset change could prove to be very beneficial for all stakeholders involved in the education process.

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Appendix A
IRB Approval



**Institutional Review Board (IRB)
for the Protection of Human Research Participants**

PROTOCOL EXEMPTION REPORT

Protocol Number: 04505-2024

Responsible Researcher(s): Heroyline Hatcher

Supervising Faculty: Dr. Kathy Nobles

Dissertation Research Member: Dr. Jamie Workman

Project Title: *A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American and White Female Principals and Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South.*

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD DETERMINATION:

This research protocol is **exempt** from Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight under 45 CFR 46.101(b) of the federal regulations, **category 2**. If the nature of the research changes such that exemption criteria no longer apply, please consult with the IRB Administrator (irb@valdosta.edu) before continuing your research study.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- Exempt protocol guidelines **permit** the recording of interview sessions provided recordings are used to create an accurate transcript. Exempt guidelines **prohibit** the collection, storage, and/or sharing of recordings. Therefore, upon creation of the transcript, the recorded interview session must be deleted from all recording and storage devices used.
 - In keeping with established consent guidelines, recordings must include the researcher reading aloud the interview consent statement, confirming participant understanding, and establishing the participant's willingness to take part in the interview. Participants are to be offered a copy of the research consent statement. The transcript must document the researcher reading and obtaining consent.
 - To ensure confidentiality, pseudonym lists must be kept in a separate secure file from corresponding name lists., email addresses, etc.
 - Upon completion of the research study all data (e.g. data, pseudonym list, name/email list, transcripts, etc.) must be securely maintained (e.g. locked file cabinet, password protected computer, etc.) and accessible only by the researcher for a **minimum of 3 years**. At the end of the required time, collected data must be permanently destroyed.
- Please submit any documents you revise to the IRB Administrator at tmwright@valdosta.edu to ensure an updated record of your exemption.

Elizabeth W. Olphie *04.23.2024*

Elizabeth W. Olphie, IRB Administrator Date

Thank you for submitting an IRB application.
Please direct questions to irb@valdosta.edu or 229-259-5045.

Revised: 06.02.16

Appendix B
CITI Certificate



Completion Date 26-Mar-2024

Expiration Date 26-Mar-2027

Record ID 21836473

This is to certify that:

Heroyline Hatcher

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of
certification through CME.

Responsible Conduct of Research

(Curriculum Group)

IRB Basic (RCR)

(Course Learner Group)

1 - Basic Course

(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

Valdosta State University

CITI

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

101 NE 3rd Avenue, Suite 320

Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US

www.citiprogram.org

Generated on 17-Nov-2024. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wd829a8bf-ae9d-48d9-b2b5-dd5076099ca3-21836473

Appendix C
CITI Reports

**COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 1 OF 2
COURSEWORK REQUIREMENTS***

* Scores on this **Requirements Report** (Part 1) reflect quiz completions at the time all requirements for the course were met. The Transcript Report (Part 2) lists more recent quiz scores, including those on optional (supplemental) course elements.

• **Name:** Heroyline Hatcher (ID: 6032139)
 • **Institution Affiliation:** Valdosta State University (ID: 475)
 • **Institution Email:** hdhatcher@valdosta.edu
 • **Institution Unit:** Education-Doctoral Leadership
 • **Phone:** 8034131457

• **Curriculum Group:** Responsible Conduct of Research
 • **Course Learner Group:** IRB Basic (RCR)
 • **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

• **Record ID:** 21836473
 • **Completion Date:** 26-Mar-2024
 • **Expiration Date:** 26-Mar-2027
 • **Minimum Passing:** 80
 • **Reported Score*:** 95

REQUIRED AND ELECTIVE MODULES ONLY	DATE COMPLETED	SCORE
Using Animal Subjects in Research (RCR-Basic) (ID: 13301)	24-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Research Involving Human Subjects (RCR-Basic) (ID: 13566)	25-Mar-2024	4/5 (80%)
Plagiarism (RCR-Basic) (ID: 15156)	25-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Authorship (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16597)	25-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Collaborative Research (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16598)	25-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Conflicts of Interest and Commitment (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16599)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Financial Responsibility (ID: 16601)	26-Mar-2024	4/5 (80%)
Peer Review (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16603)	26-Mar-2024	4/5 (80%)
Research Misconduct (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16604)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Introduction to RCR (RCR-Basic) (ID: 17009)	26-Mar-2024	3/3 (100%)
Data Management (RCR-Basic) (ID: 20896)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Mentoring and Healthy Research Environments (RCR-Basic) (ID: 20963)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing Institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

This document was generated on 08-Apr-2024. Verify at:
www.citiprogram.org/verify/7k11ba8355-61a4-40a7-ad7e-be3280b62903-21836473

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 101 NE 3rd Avenue
 Suite 320
 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US

Email: support@citiprogram.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

APPENDIX D

CITI Transcript

COLLABORATIVE INSTITUTIONAL TRAINING INITIATIVE (CITI PROGRAM)
COMPLETION REPORT - PART 2 OF 2
COURSEWORK TRANSCRIPT**

** Scores on this [Transcript Report](#) (Part 2) reflect the most current quiz completions, including quizzes on optional (supplemental) elements of the course. The Requirements Report (Part 1) lists the reported scores at the time all requirements for the course were met.

- **Name:** Heroyline Hatcher (ID: 6032139)
- **Institution Affiliation:** Valdosta State University (ID: 475)
- **Institution Email:** hdhatcher@valdosta.edu
- **Institution Unit:** Education-Doctoral Leadership
- **Phone:** 8034131457

- **Curriculum Group:** Responsible Conduct of Research
- **Course Learner Group:** IRB Basic (RCR)
- **Stage:** Stage 1 - Basic Course

- **Record ID:** 21836473
- **Current Score**:** 94

REQUIRED, ELECTIVE, AND SUPPLEMENTAL MODULES	MOST RECENT	SCORE
Using Animal Subjects in Research (RCR-Basic) (ID: 13301)	24-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Research Involving Human Subjects (RCR-Basic) (ID: 13566)	25-Mar-2024	4/5 (80%)
Plagiarism (RCR-Basic) (ID: 15156)	25-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Research, Ethics, and Society (ID: 15198)	08-Apr-2024	4/5 (80%)
Introduction to RCR (RCR-Basic) (ID: 17009)	26-Mar-2024	3/3 (100%)
Authorship (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16597)	25-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Collaborative Research (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16598)	25-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Conflicts of Interest and Commitment (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16599)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Data Management (RCR-Basic) (ID: 20896)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Mentoring and Healthy Research Environments (RCR-Basic) (ID: 20983)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Peer Review (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16603)	26-Mar-2024	4/5 (80%)
Research Misconduct (RCR-Basic) (ID: 16604)	26-Mar-2024	5/5 (100%)
Financial Responsibility (ID: 16601)	26-Mar-2024	4/5 (80%)

For this Report to be valid, the learner identified above must have had a valid affiliation with the CITI Program subscribing institution identified above or have been a paid Independent Learner.

This document was generated on 08-Apr-2024. Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?k11ba8355-61a4-40a7-ad7e-be328db82903-21836473

Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative (CITI Program)
 101 NE 3rd Avenue
 Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301 US

Email: support@citiprogram.org
 Phone: 888-529-5929
 Web: <https://www.citiprogram.org>

Appendix E
Research Statement

You are being asked to participate in an interview as part of a research study entitled “A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American and White Female Principals and Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South,” which is being conducted by **Heroyline Hatcher**, a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. The purpose of this study is to explore African American and White female administrators’ perceptions of the elements of the rural school district’s organization, which includes structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames in relationship to hiring practices.

You will receive no direct benefits from participating in this research study. However, your responses may help us learn more about the underrepresentation of women in advanced leadership positions to include the field of education. There are no foreseeable risks involved in participating in this study other than those encountered in day-to-day life. **Participation should take approximately three hours (i.e., three- one hour interview session) to complete.**

The **interview will be audio recorded** to capture your concerns, opinions, and ideas. Once the **interview recording** has been **transcribed**, the **recording will be deleted** from recording devices. **This research study and your participation will be kept confidential.** Your **identifiable information will be replaced with a pseudonym (i.e., of your choosing)** in publications or **presentations**. No one, including the researcher, will associate your responses with your identity. Your **participation is voluntary**. You may **choose not to participate, to stop responding, or to skip questions** you do not want to answer. You must be at least 18 years of age to participate in this study. Your **participation in the interview serves as your voluntary agreement to participate in this research project** and your **certification** that you are 18 years of age or older.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to **Heroyline Hatcher** at hdhatcher@valdosta.edu. This study has been exempted from Institutional Review Board (IRB) review in accordance with Federal regulations. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Appendix F
Recruitment Email

Date: May 1, 2024

From: Heroyline Hatcher

To: Ms. XXXXXX

Re: Request for Demographic Data (Online Demographic Survey- generated by VSU Qualtrics)

My name is Heroyline Hatcher, a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. I am a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership within the program of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development at Valdosta State University. You are being asked to participate in a research project entitled “A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American and White Female Principals and Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South.” Your participation is entirely voluntary.

The purpose of this research is to explore African American and White female administrators’ perceptions of the elements of the rural school district’s organization, which includes structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames in relationship to hiring practices. The criteria for participation are African American and White female leaders in the rural South. All participants must be 18 years of age or older and serving or have served as a principal, assistant principal, or superintendent in the past. Prior leadership experience outside the proposed school system is acceptable.

Again, your participation in this research project is completely voluntary. All of your responses will be confidential. Prior to the interviewing phase, I am requesting demographic data (i.e., online demographic survey) to help move the interviewing process along efficiently. The online survey will take approximately 10-15 minutes.

To participate, please click on the following link:

https://valdosta.col.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_bPm4pKNzoGqx42

Thank you in advance for providing this important demographic information.

Questions regarding the purpose or procedures of the research should be directed to Heroyline Hatcher at hdhatcher@valdosta.edu. This study has been approved by the Valdosta State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Research Participants. The IRB, a university committee established by Federal law, is responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of research participants. If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the IRB Administrator at 229-253-2947 or irb@valdosta.edu.

Heroyline Hatcher

Doctoral Student, Valdosta State University

hdhatcher@valdosta.edu

Appendix G

Demographic Survey Questionnaire

1. Informed Consent (Conditional Question/Skip Logics: I do not – ends survey, I do – continue within survey)
2. Survey Code:
3. What is your age? - Qualtrics Generated Choices
4. What is your gender? - Qualtrics Generated Choices
5. What is your race? - Qualtrics Generated Choices
6. Level of education: - Qualtrics Generated Choices
7. What is your current employment status? - Qualtrics Generated Choices
Teaching Information
8. Number of years teaching:
9. Subject(s) taught:
10. Grade level(s) of teaching (P-12 / K-12):
11. School level(s) - (Primary, Elementary, Middle, and High School):
Administrator's Information
12. How many years employed in the district?
13. List positions held in the proposed school district:
14. Number of years performing as an administrator:
15. If retired or departed from the proposed school district, how long you been retired/departed as an administrator?
16. If currently employed, what's your current position?
17. What are your future career advancement plans:
 - a. Principalship
 - b. District office positions
 - c. Superintendency
 - d. None of the above?
18. Would like to continue with interview phase of this study? (Conditional: No – Not at this time, Yes, I will look for follow-up communication via email.

Appendix H

Site Approval – Participant Invitation

Date: March 27, 2024

To: Superintendent of the Proposed School District of Inquiry

From: Doctoral Student

Thank you for taking the time to consider participation by your school district in my proposed qualitative research study. My name is Heroyline Hatcher, and I am a doctoral student at Valdosta State University. I am a candidate for the Doctor of Education degree in Educational Leadership within the program of Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development. Currently, I am a retired educator who served in a Georgia P-12 public school.

I am emailing you in a request for your participation in my proposed study entitled, A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American and White Female Principals and Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South. Data from national, state, and local education systems show that there is underrepresentation of female teachers in K–12 public school systems holding senior leadership roles, ranging from principal to superintendent.

I will explore African American and White female administrators' perceptions of the elements of the rural school district's organization, which includes structural, human resources, political, and symbolic frames in relationship to hiring practices. District employees will be asked to complete a demographic survey. The survey instrument will be administered electronically. Each participant will be given a code to ensure the confidentiality of the institution and study participants.

I will need permission to access your employees during April 2024 or prior to August 2024. I would like to conduct three (60 minute) interviews. The employees will have the chance to select the dates and times that would work best for them. Please respond to this email indicating whether you are willing to grant permission for your employees to participate by their completion of the survey and interviews.

Upon completion of this study, you will have the opportunity to receive a copy of the published results, as well as a copy of the results. Questions about this study can be directed to myself by email at XXX@valdosta.edu. My faculty advisor, Dr. Kathy Nobles, may be contacted at XXX-XXX-XXXX or by email at XXX@valdosta.edu. Your time and effort in helping me gather information is greatly appreciated and will ultimately assist female district professionals in pursuit of advanced leadership positions.

Warmest regards,

Heroyline Hatcher, Ed.S. Retired Educator

Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development, Valdosta State University

Email: XXX@valdosta.edu

Phone: XXX-XXX-XXX

Appendix I
Site Approval

Project Title

A Case Study: The Underrepresentation of African American and White Female Principals and Superintendents in a Small Rural School District in the South.

Site Approval Request

Anthony Aikens
to me, Lezley

Mrs. Hatcher. I am giving my permission for you to proceed with your research. What exactly do you need from me or us? Thanks.

Anthony Aikens

--

Anthony Aikens, ED.S
Superintendent
Crawford County Schools
XXXXXXXXXX
Roberta, GA 31078
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Cell: XXX-XXX-XXXX
Fax: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Anthony Aikens
Mar 28, 2024, 9:37 PM
to me, Lezley

Mrs. Hatcher. We do not have a written protocol addressing conducting educational research. On Wed, Mar 27, 2024 at 2:48 PM Heroyline Hatcher <XXX@crawfordschools.org> wrote: Greetings Dr. Anderson and Mr. Aikens,

Dr. Anderson, I greatly appreciate all of your support thus far as I proceed on my dissertation journey. Mr. Aiken, your words of encouragement and willingness to support Dr. Anderson as she assists me through this process are truly appreciated.

UPDATES:

Please note that I received approval on Friday (22nd) to proceed to the completion of the Valdosta State University (VSU) IRB Application completion process in order to request and receive approval to begin the data collection process ASAP.

At this point, I must request Site Approval to conduct my research. At the attachment, an electronic IRB site approval request letter is presented for the Superintendent's review and action/approval. Secondly, I must request a copy of the school district's current protocol for conducting research in the district. This document must be attached to the IRB Application upon submission.

If a more in depth explanation of what potential participants will be consenting to by participating in this study, then upon request, I will be able to provide an IRB informed consent form (for participants) for your review.

Sincerely, thank you in advance for all future support!

Heroyline Hatcher, Ed.S. Retired Educator
Leadership, Technology, and Workforce Development, Valdosta State University
Email: XXX@valdosta.edu
Phone: XXX-XXX-XXXX

Appendix J

Interview Guide (Participants) / Coding Guide (Researcher)

Interview Protocol General Information

Date:

Time:

Location: Virtual Session

Interviewer: Heroyline Hatcher

Participant: Participant #__ (Pseudonym) / Code#:

Interview: 1, 2 or 3

Approach: The Three-Interview Series (Seidman)

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this case study was to explore the Four Frames of an Organization (OD) and the stages of Feminist Theory/Black Feminist Thought (BFT) as it related to the placement of African American administrators in formal leadership positions in a small rural school district in the South (Arinder, 2020; Bolman & Deal, 2021). The researcher seeks to capture the authentic, lived experiences of both African American and White female administrators in an identified Southern school district.

Informed Consent / Recording & Transcription: Permission granted by Participant #__ **Circle: Yes or No**

Remind participants of where we left off from the previous interview session!

Specific Information for Each Interview Session / Continuation Statements

General Information: 1st Interview: (Focused Life History)

Purpose of Interview #1: To gain insight of participant's life history

Interviewer to Participant: Explain the process for conducting three separate 45 to 60- minute interviews and the set time allotted for each interview session. Note that interview questions will be utilized as a guide to help move the interviewing process forward to capture a glimpse of participant's **life history (Interview 1)**, **lived experiences (Interview 2)**, and ultimately hear **how they make meaning (Interview 3)** of their own lived experiences.

General Information: 2nd Interview (Lived Experiences)

Purpose of Interview #2: In-Depth Interviewing session - Details of Lived Experiences

Interviewer to Participant: Today, this will be Interview #2. We will participate in an In-depth Interviewing process. I will be asking you to "Reconstruct" your experiences mainly during your journey to advanced leadership positions.

General Information: 3rd Interview (Reflection on the Meaning or Make Meaning)

Purpose of the Interview: Reflection on the Meaning

Interviewer to Participant: Today, this will be Interview #3. In the third interview, I'd like for you to reflect on the "Meaning" of the "Experiences" that you shared in Interview #2.

Research Questions:

- **RQ 1.** How do female administrators make meaning of experiences reported throughout their journey to secure leadership roles and positions?
- **RQ 2.** How do African American and White female administrators perceive the impact of race and gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in a rural school district in the South?

Theories:

Feminist Theory & The Frames of an Organization

Stages of Feminist Theory/BFT	Feminist Theory	The Four Frames of an Organization	
Stage 1 -SSOPO	Systems and structures of power and oppression exist	Structural, politics, culture	<p>Politics - Bolman and Deal characterized the political frame as power, conflict, competition, and organizational policies. Within the political frame, there is a need for advocacy due to conflict and competition.</p> <p>Structural - The central concept of the structural frame consists of rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment. Note that the image of leadership consists of a social structure within the structural frame</p> <p>Human Resources - Likewise, the human resource frame’s central concepts include needs, skills, and relationships with a goal of alignment of organizational needs and human skills.</p> <p>Culture - Lastly, the symbolic frame includes culture, meaning, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes. Key intrinsic values are inspiration, values, beauty, and meaning.</p>
Stage 2 - SGERA	Sex, gender, equality, difference, race, ability, etc.	Human resource, structural, politics, culture	
Stage 3 - DE	Discrimination and exclusion (not afforded an opportunity) career advancement due to race and/or gender)	Human resource, structural, politics, culture	
Stage 4 - POAD	Power and oppression are acknowledged and disrupted	Structural, politics, culture	
Stage 5 - UAC	Understanding, advocacy, and change	Human resource, structural, politics, culture	

Note. Feminist Theory data adapted from Feminist Theory, by J. A. Arinder, in J. Egbert and M. F. Roe (Eds.), *Theoretical Models for Teaching and Research* (para. 7), 2020, Pressbooks. Copyright 2020 by Joy Egbert and Mary F. Roe. Four Frames data adapted from *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (7th ed.), by L. G. Bolman and T. E. Deal, 2021, Jossey-Bass. Copyright 2021 by Jossey-Bass. Adapted with permission. **References: see note above**

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4th iteration of coding
Interview 1	1. Tell me about yourself!	Background IQ1_You_Back			
Interview 1	2. What is your career or educational background?	Background IQ2_ED_Back			
Interview 1	3. What are some things that your academic and professional background did not prepare you for in pursuit of advanced leadership positions?	RQ (1) IQ3_RQ1_acad_pro	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ3_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ3_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ3_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ3_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ3_Stage 5_UAC	All frames OD_IQ3_Structure OD_IQ3_Politics OD_IQ3_HR OD_IQ3_Sym_Cul	Politics The political nature of the job determines the level of access to professional development and career advancement.
Interview 1	4. What support systems, if any, have you had in place?	Background IQ4_SptSys_Back	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ4_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ4_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ4_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ4_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ4_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_IQ4_Structure OD_IQ4_Politics OD_IQ4_HR OD_IQ4_Sym_Cul	Family, co-workers dealing with similar challengers, informal/formal mentors (later in career- not at the beginning) Informal and Formal Mentors (Family & Friends)
Interview 1	5. How did you become interested in advanced leadership?	Background IQ5_Int-AdvLdr_Back	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ5_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ5_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ5_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ5_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ5_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_IQ5_Structure OD_IQ5_Politics OD_IQ5_HR OD_IQ5_Sym_Cul	Coming from humble beginnings, family, co-workers, community, society instilled in them higher education was the key to professional & personal success, therefore pursuing advanced leadership roles should open

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4th iteration of coding
					more doors of opportunities.
Interview 1	6. How would you describe or present your life story leading up to becoming an administrator?	RQ (1) IQ6_RQ1_Lstory	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ6_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ6_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ6_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ6_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ6_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_IQ6_Structure OD_IQ6_Politics OD_IQ6_HR OD_IQ6_Sym_Cul	Encouragement for Professional Development & Advancement Reflections Participants were given an opportunity to reflect on their lives and their body of work prior to serving as an administrator.
Interview 2	7. How do you make connections between your life journeys and becoming an administrator?	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ7_RQ1_Makcon IQ7_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ7_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ7_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ7_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ7_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ7_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_IQ7_Structure OD_IQ7_Politics OD_IQ7_HR OD_IQ7_Sym_Cul	In most instances, greater challenges/barriers than males (both African American and White males) and non-African American female leaders/counterparts.
Interview 2	8. Reconstruct what your navigation journey to advanced leadership has been like for you.	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ8_RQ1_Navjour IQ8_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ8_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ8_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ8_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ8_Stage 4_POAD	All Frames OD_IQ8_Structure OD_IQ8_Politics	Race & Gender Barriers_Administrators Making Connections Seemed to have worked above and beyond the call of duty, though obvious career

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4th iteration of coding
			BFT_IQ8_Stage 5_UAC	OD_IQ8_HR OD_IQ8_Sym _Cul	opportunities and job offers were never in their reach until the issue was finally aired and addressed (hesitantly in some instances). <u>Black Tax</u> – External Validation <u>Black Tax 2</u> <u>Black Tax 3</u> <u>Black Tax 4</u> Working Condition_Over worked
Interview 2	9. Tell me a story about your leadership journey. I would like for your story to be on your unique experiences while working through the different chapters of your journey to securing leadership.	RQ (1) IQ9_RQ1_TellStory	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ9_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ9_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ9_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ9_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ9_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_IQ9_Structure OD_IQ9_Politics OD_IQ9_HR OD_IQ9_Sym _Cul	Love for the field of Education, advanced leadership roles, student achievement/improvement, the love of school, home, community relationship Commitment for Home, School, and Community
Interview 2	10. Describe the most “current” typical day while on your leadership seeking journey from wake up to bedtime.	RQ (1) IQ10_RQ1_TypDay	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ10_Stage1_SSOPO BFT_IQ10_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ10_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ10_Stage 4_POAD	All Frames OD_IQ10_Structure OD_IQ10_Politics	Early risers, last one to leave daily> Full day from no later than 5 a.m. until 4:30 to 8 p.m.

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4th iteration of coding
			BFT_ IQ10_Stage 5_UAC	OD_ IQ10_HR OD_ IQ10_Sym_Cu 1	(afternoon/evening activities) Working Condition_ Over worked
Interview 2	11. Share some details on juggling work, private/family life and completing the requirements of your professional duties and responsibilities.	RQ (1)/ RQ (2) IQ11_RQ1_Jugroles IQ11_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ11_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ11_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ11_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ11_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ11_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ11_Structure OD_ IQ11_Politics OD_ IQ11_HR OD_ IQ11_Sym_Cu 1	Grateful for family support/being organized and disciplined individuals Familial Support Work Life Balanced
Interview 2	12. Challenges, if any, and how did you overcome them?	RQ (1)/ RQ (2) IQ12_RQ1_Chall_Over IQ12_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ12_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ12_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ12_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ12_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ12_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ12_Structure OD_ IQ12_Politics OD_ IQ12_HR OD_ IQ12_Sym_Cu 1	Never lost sight of one’s own personal moral compass, values, & belief. “Self-evaluation & Validation” Core Beliefs & Values Challenges
Interview 2	13. What are some celebrations/things that you are most proud of accomplishing (e.g., promotions, successful implementation of a school program/initiative)	RQ (1)/ RQ (2) IQ13_RQ1_Celeb_acc om IQ13_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ13_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ13_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ13_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ13_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ13_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ13_Structure OD_ IQ13_Politics OD_ IQ13_HR OD_ IQ13_Sym_Cu 1	Able to build sound working relationships in their buildings as building leaders which improve moral and build positive school culture

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4th iteration of coding
Interview 2	14. In your words, describe your school district's culture.	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ14_RQ1_Sch_dist_cult IQ14_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ14_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ14_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ14_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ14_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ14_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ14_Structure OD_ IQ14_Politics OD_IQ14_HR OD_ IQ14_Sym_Cu l	Building Administrators Professional Accomplishments Low moral Continuous instability due to ongoing leadership changes Perceived unfair hiring practices for local professionals, especially African American females at the advanced leadership levels Race & Gender barriers_School District's Culture Continue to witness improved school culture: more positive environments and ensured safety measures School Climate
Interview 2	15. In your words, describe your school's culture.	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ15_RQ1_Sch_cult IQ15_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ15_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ15_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ15_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ15_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ15_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ15_Structure OD_ IQ15_Politics OD_IQ15_HR OD_ IQ15_Sym_Cu l	School Climate
Interview 2	16. Describe the organizational structure of your school district.	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ16_RQ1_Org_struct IQ16_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ16_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ16_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ16_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ16_Stage 4_POAD	All Frames OD_ IQ16_Structure OD_ IQ16_Politics OD_IQ16_HR	School Climate Organizational charts are being put on paper and digital versions, though with the constant changes of leaders in need of updating,

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1 st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2 nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3 rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4 th iteration of coding
			BFT_ IQ16_Stage 5_UAC	OD_ IQ16_Sym_Cu 1	though the desire is there to ensure all personnel know and understand the chain of command at all levels.
Interview 2	17. Is there anything else you would like to share as a woman navigating to your current or highest level of advanced leadership?	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ17_RQ1_Fm_perspec t IQ17_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ17_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ17_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ17_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ17_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ17_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ17_Structure OD_ IQ17_Politics OD_ IQ17_HR OD_ IQ17_Sym_Cu 1	Hierarchical Understanding Mentors could play a positive role for aspiring female leaders Reflection
Interview 2	18. How did you as an administrator make meaning of experiences throughout your journey to secure leadership roles and positions?	RQ 1 IQ18_RQ1_Admin_mea n	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ18_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ18_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ18_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ18_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ18_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ18_Structure OD_ IQ18_Politics OD_ IQ18_HR OD_ IQ18_Sym_Cu 1	Making Meaning Being able to realize where you have been to effectively navigate one's future Realizing the positive impacts of their contributions to their school district
Interview 2	19. If any, how did you perceive the impact of race and/or gender interactions on navigating the path to advanced positions in this rural school district in the South?	RQ 2 IQ19_RQ2_ Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ19_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ19_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ19_Stage 3_DE	All Frames OD_ IQ19_Structure OD_ IQ19_Politics OD_ IQ19_HR	Race & Gender Barriers Race and Gender barriers were board

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1 st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2 nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3 rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4 th iteration of coding
			BFT_ IQ19_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ19_Stage 5_UAC	OD_ IQ19_Sym_Cu 1	and also unique as determined by the political era of time in which the participant entered the workforce. The political battle for rights has changed and the legislation and culture of the nation has warranted policy changes. It should be noted that policy changes do not necessarily impact the culture as embedded culture will find ways to circumvent policy.
Interview 3	20. After reflecting on what you shared about your life history in Interview #1 and your experiences as you navigated to become an administrator in Interview #2 , what does your <u>advanced leadership journey mean to you?</u>	RQ (1) IQ20_RQ1_Reflection	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ20_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ20_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ20_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ20_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ20_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ20_Structure OD_ IQ20_Politics OD_ IQ20_HR OD_ IQ20_Sym_Cu 1	It takes a village for females to navigate and advance through the various leadership roles/positions Reflection
Interview 3	21. In your own words , can you make meaning of the lived experiences you shared during Interview #1 and Interview #2?	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ21_RQ1_Making mean IQ21_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_ IQ21_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ21_Stage2_SGERA BFT_ IQ21_Stage 3_DE BFT_ IQ21_Stage 4_POAD BFT_ IQ21_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ21_Structure OD_ IQ21_Politics OD_ IQ21_HR OD_ IQ21_Sym_Cu 1	Advanced education Professional skills Barriers/ challenges Stay focus, maintain professionalism “Self-evaluation & Validation”

Interview 1, 2, 3	Questions	Data related to which RQs 1st iteration of coding	Feminist Theory Stages 2nd iteration of coding	Four Frames 3rd iteration of coding	Themes & Patterns 4th iteration of coding
Interview 3	22. What has your advanced leadership journey meant to you in the context of where you have been, your current status, and your foreseen future aspirations?	RQ (1) IQ22_RQ1_Aspirations	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ22_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ22_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ22_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ22_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ22_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ22_Structure OD_ IQ22_Politics OD_IQ22_HR OD_ IQ22_Sym_Cu 1	Resilience _Persistence Grateful for the journey Reflection Participants expressed gratitude for the ability to have their voice heard and their stories of challenge and triumph recorded for posterity.
Interview 3	23. Is there any final comment you would like to share on anything shared during our third interview session?	RQ (1) / RQ (2) IQ23_RQ1_Final comments IQ23_RQ2_Racgenbar	Stages 1-5 BFT_IQ23_Stage1_ SSOPO BFT_ IQ23_Stage2_SGERA BFT_IQ23_Stage 3_DE BFT_IQ23_Stage 4_POAD BFT_IQ23_Stage 5_UAC	All Frames OD_ IQ23_Structure OD_ IQ23_Politics OD_IQ23_HR OD_ IQ23_Sym_Cu 1	Thankful for opportunity to reflect Reflection Race & Gender Barriers Participants were given an opportunity to share their final comments and thoughts from the interview series.

Coding RQ1: 101 coded segments

Coding RQ2: 76 coded segments

Coding BFT: 313 coded segments

Coding OD: 413 coded segments

Coding across transcripts: Coding Petra: 124, Coding Trinity: 112, Coding for Quintessa: 101 and Coding for Mia: 84