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THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK  
WOMEN: THE SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE TROUBLED  
WATERS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

By  
Felicia Hood Simmons

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2021

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Felicia Hood Simmons under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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## **Dedication**

I would like to dedicate my dissertation to my late grandmother, Harriette Ella Hood, a/k/a “Maw Maw.” Your name is the reason I have been so intrigued by Harriette Tubman. You were so strong, kind, and humorous and had a love for children all over the communities. You instilled Godly principles in all of us. You are forever missed and will always be deep in our hearts. I am the woman I am today because of you.

I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my children. Thank you for sharing me with others including students. You were never selfish when I was late or absent from your events due to work or school. All of you encouraged me to do my best and to keep going. You all have witnessed and shared the obstacles I have gone through as a Black female leader, but you encouraged me to continue. Everything I have done has been for all of you.

Finally, to my husband Monte, words cannot express how lucky I am to have a husband like you. I also dedicate this dissertation to you. Thank you for being right by my side through this process and every career move. There is no way I could have done anything without your love and support. I love you. Thank you for listening patiently, not worrying about canceled date nights, etc. while I worked or burned the midnight oil to complete this dissertation. You gave me the courage to continue many times when I wanted to quit. THANK YOU!

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I would like to begin by thanking God for the strength and tenacity to go through this most tedious process. There are several individuals I would like to thank for their support not only during the doctoral studies process but through the years. I am very passionate about this topic due to personal experiences, and how the people you meet, along with experiences, can change the trajectory of anyone's personal life and career.

First, I want to give special thanks to my dissertation committee members. Thank you for your support and challenges to help me get through this task. Dr. Steve Laws, who encouraged me to research a topic that I relate to in so many ways. Dr. Larry Putnam, my chair, my mentor, I cannot say enough about your guidance, not only as my dissertation chair but professionally as well. You are a true conductor when it comes to navigating the troubled waters of leadership and the understanding of equity, inclusivity, and barriers that not only women, but people of color and all diverse backgrounds face. Thank you for tapping me on the shoulder and encouraging me to not only further my education but break concrete ceilings. Dr. Stone, thank you for entrusting me to have my first principalship under your leadership. Dr. Jennifer Putnam, thank you for your input, suggestions, and support throughout this process.

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has been memorable and challenged me to continue leading.

Thank you to the many mentors, conductors, and agents who assisted along my educational journey; I compare your mentorship to a track race. During each level of leadership, you were there to pass the mantle to me: Dr. Helen Hall; Dr. Tom McNeil, who tapped me on my shoulder to become an administrator; Dr. Trish and Larry Johnson; “Momma T,” who has been a shoulder, an ear, and a guide throughout all my personal and professional journey; and Buzz Sims, thank you for taking a chance on a young Black female to be your assistant principal all the way back in 2005. Thank you for being the first conductor for me.

Thank you to my friends and family, specifically my parents, who gave me life and did the best you could with a strong-willed little girl. Special thanks to my Dad for always supporting me through my endeavors. Aunt Carrie Jean, I do not have enough space to thank you for everything you have done for me from childhood through adulthood. You are the reason I am in education. I wanted to be a teacher just like you. My sister Lori, besides Monte, you are my number 1 supporter and encourager, pushing me to go to the next level. Shunta Ware, thank you for your calls throughout today and crazy encouraging words to make sure I was on task.

Last, special thanks to the dissertation cohort. We had many laughs and conversations, debates, etc. I wish you the best with your future endeavors.

Congratulations to all!

## **Abstract**

THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE TROUBLED WATERS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP. Simmons, Felicia Hood, 2021: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This dissertation was designed to explore the advancement, obstacles, and barriers Black female educational leaders in Region X confront. The qualitative research examined 13 Black female educational leaders and teachers regarding the advancement and sustainability of Black female leaders despite obstacles and barriers. Participants were Region X administrators and educators. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a focus group. The data were coded for common themes, assessed, and member checked. The findings revealed there is a need for informal and formal mentorship and networks to assist with navigating the obstacles and barriers in their leadership positions in Region X to advance and sustain in leadership. The dissertation builds on the literature related to the history of Black female educators, mentorship, barriers, and obstacles of Black female leaders in education. The end goal was to discover common challenges Black female leaders in educational leadership face in Region X and identify concepts in increasing the number of Black female leaders in the districts, along with support systems for survival and employment advancement opportunities.

*Keywords:* barriers, mentorship, advancement, and sustainability, Black female leaders, education.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Study**

The “Underground Railroad” is still in existence in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Housed runaway slaves found themselves on a path of hiding places known as the Underground Railroad while searching for their freedom. When most people, specifically Black women, hear the title Underground Railroad, they immediately think of Harriet Tubman. She helped hundreds of Black people escape slavery through the Underground Railroad. Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in 1820, and she escaped with the aid of benevolent Whites in 1849. Harriet was an abolitionist who started her advocacy in Philadelphia. Harriet developed networks with both Black and White abolitionists while she participated in the Underground Railroad (Yee, n.d.). She also formed genuine relationships with the prominent Black and White abolitionists of the day. Harriet was a role model and pioneer for Black women activists. The Underground Railroad existed through networking and mentorships that produced conductors and activists, allowing hundreds of slaves to be freed.

The Underground Railroad was an organization that worked in secret against the laws that permitted slavery to continue in the United States. The organization assisted by helping and funding the runaway slaves to freedom in Canada and some northern parts of the United States. Secrecy was necessary because of the fines levied on the slaves and those who would become their help (Del Mar, 2016). Del Mar (2016) addressed the correspondence between the Underground Railroad members in a confidential, guarded language and method. Via what the abolitionists called the grapevine message, contact was done through unique signals, whispered conversations, codes, and misses in

figurative phrases (Cichy, 2019). Del Mar (2016) described the Underground Railroad as a non-formal organization that brought cohesion and increased productivity to the escaping slaves. Cichy (2019) suggested the Underground Railroad was successful due to networking, communication, strategic planning, and mentorship. The network was the relationship among and between African American people seeking to flee slavery on the Underground Railroad in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries (Cichy, 2019). The Underground Railroad was the route of a network of hiding places that held escaped slaves in pursuit of their freedom.

Cooper et al. (2017) referred to a new “Modern Underground Railroad” in today's society that exists within organizations. Cooper et al. referred to the Modern Underground Railroad as similar to the 21<sup>st</sup> century of how there are fellow educators assisting and supporting Black women by navigating the journey to freedom of advancement and sustainability, which will likely contribute to intellectual freedom and financial stability. The Modern Underground Railroad will act as a guide or a road map to an academic career's peak. Through the use of the Modern Underground Railroad, Black women faculty are helping each other navigate the sometimes lonely and daunting journey to career advancement and sustainability with the assistance and support of others.

This study captures the continuous existence of the unique obstacles and structures Black women endure on the pathway to advancement or while employed in educational leadership positions. The research was based on a literature review on adequate training, mentorship, and leadership sustainability for Black women in educational leadership positions. The Modern Underground Railroad refers to the secret

networks, informal and formal mentoring, and private meetings that occur to support Black women in educational leadership positions on the pathway to advancement and sustainability within their positions of authority while being surrounded by continuous obstacles such as “concrete glass” and “good ole boy” networks.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The impact of mentors on the professional satisfaction of Black female school administrators in their careers is unknown. Black women are now entering school administration positions at higher numbers than past generations have been able to (Allen, 1995; Vail, 1999). Much of the literature on school administrators has been focused on males versus females or only on White males in administration (Baptiste et al., 1990; Edson, 1988). As a result, much of this study has been undertaken by White males, and little research has been done on the influence of mentors on Black female school administrators (Edson, 1988).

School administrators across America are in high demand, as there is a lack of trained education officials who are willing to bring the nation's schools to a higher level of academic excellence. Black women are expected, as part of a nationwide campaign, to better diversify the pool of school leaders. Arora (2005) indicated that students of all racial backgrounds must have access to Black teachers and school administrators and must establish student-teacher relationships. Arora claimed that students need to encounter interaction with people from minority groups who have achieved professional status and respect. It has also been argued that Black teachers have had such a positive impact on students that they have prompted students to cultivate an interest in seeking careers in the field of education.

There is a lack of Black females available as school leaders who may act as mentors to other Black female protégés (Charlesworth, 2002). There may also be a lack of desire on the part of the male-dominant culture to share their immense expertise due to the risk of possibly sacrificing any of their influence and prestige (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995).

Gewertz (2006) claimed Black women are frequently unable to navigate the inner workings of school administration networks due to microaggressions, obstacles, and lack of adequate mentorship. Moreover, Black women who act as school administrators are frequently trapped in double-binding dilemmas based on their minority status as women and Black women. It is not clear if higher numbers of Black women would earn improvements in school administration roles if they were allowed to reach mentors at comparable percentages as White males. This research examined the influence of formal and informal mentors and networks to assist Black female educational leaders with career sustainability, job satisfaction, and advancement.

## **Background**

Since school integration in the United States, small numbers of Black males have worked as school administrators, and the figures are much lower for Black females (Arora, 2005). As a result, this situation has forced Black women to lack the knowledge of formal and informal preparation required to work efficiently as school administrators. According to Chaika (2004), studies have found that the involvement of minority teachers and administrators increases the academic environment of minority students. Girls benefit from seeing women in positions of power; the same is true for minorities who benefit from seeing other minorities in positions of authority. Chaika stated all

students enjoy a dynamic workplace with minorities in positions of leadership and influence. This phenomenon helps both adults and children to develop desirable traits and to adapt to people of varying backgrounds other than their own.

Chaika (2004) acknowledged a continuous attempt in the United States to hire and retain minority teachers and administrators. Minority educators are retiring and are not replaced by a large number of minorities. There has been a sharp drop in the number of students pursuing the field of education and an even more alarming fall in the number of minority students choosing higher education. Chaika stated most students go through school without having a minority expert figure in classrooms, with the exception of urban schools. This is a disproportionate figure because 40% of students are of minority status, which is expected to increase to 54% in the next 18 years. The difference in the number of minority and non-minority teachers rises each year (Chaika, 2004).

While the number of minority teachers is insufficient, the number of minority school administrators is much more inadequate (F. Brown, 2005). Previous research findings have found a strong link between job success and mentoring (Chaika, 2004). However, according to Chaika (2004), there has been a limited amount of study focusing on mentoring Black females. This demographic has been overlooked, even though they are enrolled in university graduate programs in continuously growing numbers (Marlow et al., 1995).

On the grounds of the essence of education being that of growth, schools have a duty to improve all their workers regardless of ethnicity, sex, faith, nationality, or any other element (Mertz, 2004). The importance of mentorship and the power of networks for Black educational leaders were examined in this study.

Even in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Black women also face obstacles and difficulties in hiring, recruiting, and encouraging faculty in educational institutions. In comparison, 38% of women occupy leadership positions in higher education, of whom just 5.3% are Black (Alexander, 2011; Barnes, 2017). Prior studies have shown that Black women have different perspectives than women of other ethnicities seeking academic leadership (Edwards et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2014; Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013). Black women face a lack of faculty socialization, lack of substantive mentoring, and lack of consideration for the study agenda (Bonaparte, 2016; Edwards et al., 2011; Gardner et al., 2014; Kelch-Oliver et al., 2013). While marginalization is a problem outside the reach of a person, the way Black females respond to this issue has become the phenomenon to be studied.

Davis and Maldonado (2015) discussed the term glass ceiling which defines an intangible barrier that prohibits women from achieving success. Davis and Maldonado desired to explain how the new Black administrators had smashed the glass ceiling and had become the few to do so. Barnes (2017) argued that the glass ceiling is much more complex and challenging for Black women to overcome on their path to leadership than the concrete ceiling. The analog of a glass cliff was also debated and argued (Barnes, 2017; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Sabharwal, 2015). The glass cliff is the idea of Black female leaders taking positions in which they are unlikely to succeed, allowing them to slip back down this glass cliff or break off entirely (Barnes, 2017; Ryan & Haslam, 2005; Sabharwal, 2015). Such analogies would not exist if there were no reason for an issue to be investigated.

Barnes (2017), Bonaparte (2016), and Davis and Maldonado (2015) discussed the need for Black women to be encouraged to enter leadership positions in education. The

need to learn how the existing Black woman leaders have become the few has been critical for inspiring new, ambitious Black women to take on leadership positions in education (Barnes, 2017; Bonaparte, 2016; Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Barnes, Bonaparte, and Davis and Maldonado noted this research could be used as a tool to disable their fear of challenges stopping them from achieving their objectives as administrators. There was also a desire to know what makes the new Black female administrators different by being able to smash through the glass ceiling. Gamble and Turner (2015) argued that there was a need to find a solution for more Black women to achieve leadership positions in educational organizations. The authors suggested that little study was done on Black female leadership in the school system. This research has added to the body of current knowledge, which examines the importance of formal and informal mentorships and networks.

This southeastern state contains a total of 115 school districts that are divided into a total of eight regions. The focus of this research was on Region X, which is made up of a total of 14 school districts. The counties listed are considered rural areas. The smallest district, District 2, has 1,347 students, and the largest school district, District 7, has 15,906 students. There is a lack of Black administrators in Region X. Table 1 indicates the school district, enrollment, and the number of Black administrators.



**Table 1***Region X Enrollment and Black Leadership Representation*

County	Student enrollment	Administrators	Black educational leaders	Black central office district leaders	Black principals	Black female assistant principals	Black leaders
District 1	4,806	30	1	0	1	0	1
District 2	1,347	13	0	0	0	0	0
District 3	2,968	27	0	0	0	0	0
District 4	1,928	16	0	0	0	0	0
District 5	11,906	60	4	1	1	2	3
District 6	11,397	67	3	0	2	1	2
District 7	15,906	82	6	2	2	2	3
District 8	4,087	26	8	3	3	2	4
District 9	5,943	37	1	0	1	0	0
District 10	1,851	17	0	0	0	0	0
District 11	2,954	22	1	0	1	0	1
District 12	4,614	31	0	0	0	0	0
District 13	9,085	53	6	0	4	2	2
District 14	2,164	21	0	0	0	0	0

The table indicates a low number of Black administrators across Region X. There are less than 10 Black district leaders in each county. There are a total of 502 administrators; only 30, or 6%, are Black. The number of Black female administrators in Region X is 16, or 3%. Several counties do not have any Black administrators. A total of eight of 14 districts in Region X have Black administrators. The table explicitly identifies the lack of minority leaders across Region X. There is a further deficit of male versus female educational leaders. The low percentage of minority leaders in Region X allows for a more significant mentorship and networking deficit. The research explores the importance of networking and mentorships for Black female educational leaders to advance and sustain their positions in Region X.

**Purpose**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to investigate the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to

navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability in Region X. The phenomenological case study analyzes the personal experiences and obstacles Black female educational leaders face in Region X by examining formal and informal mentoring opportunities and networks provided within the districts and region in which they are employed. Extensive study has been performed on the challenges faced by Black women on their journey to educational leadership (A. R. Brown, 2014; Grant, 2012; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). However, problems also emerge as Black women occupy the positions of authority, thereby reinforcing the need for further studies on the perspectives of Black female leaders concerning mentoring and support relationships. I aimed to clarify better the difficulties facing Black women serving in rural Region X and explore how mentoring and nurturing relationships can improve their capacity to address perceived challenges for advancement and sustainability. This study's findings will help school district personnel and superintendents establish formal or informal mentoring organizations that accept and cater to women, especially Black women and other women of color who currently hold or aspire to advance in educational leadership positions.

### **Research Question**

The research question primarily centered on the obstacles faced by Black women in educational leadership and their understanding of how these issues have impacted their jobs: “How can Black female educators overcome obstacles and barriers to advance and sustain as leaders in Region X?”

### **Significance**

This research was performed to gain an understanding of Black female educational leaders and other stakeholders regarding knowledge on the influence of

mentoring on their employment satisfaction in Region X. The implications of the networking mechanism for Black female educators were also studied. The research offered further insight into the obstacles that prevent Black female educational leaders from achieving job fulfillment and satisfaction in Region X.

Black females in educational leadership positions, specifically in higher education leadership positions, continue to be reflected in low numbers (Wiley et al., 2017). By studying the experiences of Black females using a qualitative phenomenological case study design, I understood the variables that affect these experiences and the results that may contribute to a change in school improvement by concentrating on race and gender issues. As a result of this analysis and the growth of mentoring and nurturing relationships, Black female educators can change the workplace and improve equity. According to Collins (2009), many Black women are viewed as untrustworthy witnesses to their own experiences; in this context, Black women in education who choose to believe in other Black women may become suspects. It is also important not to devalue the degree to which experiences can be seen as sources of information and reality.

Awareness comes with experience, and help comes with knowledge. Jean-Marie, (2013) promoted research on Black women in education in order to combat hostility, indifference, and invisibility toward understanding the perspectives of Black women. Edwards et al. (2011) argued that it is vital to study Black women in educational leadership to understand the effect of societal inequality and gender segregation on institutions such as colleges. Edwards et al. also recognized that little research on Black females in educational leadership is accessible and information is required to adequately represent changes in the profession. The continued inclusion of appropriate and correct

knowledge in literature can help dispel invalid notions that Black women are uninterested in leadership roles and have poor leadership skills (A. R. Brown, 2014; Edwards et al., 2011).

According to scholarly research findings, the perceived difficulties facing Black female educational leaders include building and sustaining a work-family arrangement (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009; Kruse & Krumm, 2016), establishing and maintaining a healthy and fruitful relationship with school officials (Kowalski, 2011), and continually trying to prove their integrity based on their presumption of responsibility (A. R. Brown, 2014; Byrd, 2009; Lloyd-Jones, 2009; Wyland, 2016).

Conversely, structured and informal mentoring partnerships, encouragement from professional networks or organizations and communities, and dedication to spiritual values have been established to assist Black women in the role of educational leaders (Angel et al., 2013; Kelsey et al., 2014; Peters, 2012; Sherman et al., 2008).

Mentoring interactions can inspire Black women through encouragement and advice (Osler & Webb, 2014). Findings from many reports have highlighted the importance and rewards of mentoring and other support networks for women of color who strive to become educational leaders (Sampson & Davenport, 2010; Sherman et al., 2008; Wiley et al., 2017). However, little research directly centers on how mentorship and support networks have influenced the tenure and performance of Black women serving as public school leaders. The literature review presented in Chapter 2 provides a detailed account of academic research on the educational leadership issues of Black women and an overview of the impact of mentoring and supportive networks on the experience of public school officials.

## **Overview of Methodology**

I used a qualitative, phenomenological case study method to examine the perspectives of Black female educational leaders regarding the impact of mentoring partnerships and support networks on their career success and sustainability as public school leaders. The phenomenological case study technique was the most suitable approach to this analysis since it is the most appropriate tool for researching complex social phenomena that can be scientifically based and used to analyze and explain a phenomenon (Ritchie et al., 2013).

Yin (2013) described case study analysis as an analytical review of the contemporary phenomena within its ordinary space- and time-bound context. Yin explained that a case study approach should be used where the study aims to discuss "how" the form of problems is associated with the phenomena. The case study design allowed me to learn how mentoring and support networks affect Black women through perceived obstacles they face in their careers as educational leaders in Region X. I attempted to collect evidence that provided more in-depth knowledge of participant views and interactions as Black female educational leaders without being limited to preset responses collected from quantitative surveys (Mason, 2010).

Data gatherings took place by formal interviews and review of records. Participants feature a purposive sampling of Black women currently in educational leadership positions in Region X.

## **Definition of Key Terms**

### ***Barrier***

Any type of belief, occurrence, or experience that hinders the understanding or

communication between people with differing opinions or knowledge.

### ***Black Women***

Black or African American women are those born in the United States of America who identify as Black or have ancestors from one of Africa's Black racial groupings (Rastogi et al., 2011; Stanley, 2009).

### ***Dominant Culture***

White males.

### ***Formal Mentoring Relationship***

Formal mentoring relationships are managed and endorsed by an organization; these relationships often have structured goals, specific timelines, and guidelines for interaction frequency and interaction content (Bynum, 2015; Peters, 2012).

### ***Glass Ceiling***

The invisible hindrances and barriers that limit minorities and women from receiving higher-level positions within an organization (Crampton & Mishra, 1999; Harris et al., 2004).

### ***Good Ole Boy Network***

Inside the White male population, an unofficial structure controls access to important information and positions within the firm and employment market (Crampton & Mishra, 1999; Crosby et al., 1999). Additionally, this network overlooks qualified female candidates for administrative posts (Harris et al., 2004).

### ***Good Ole Girl Network***

Unofficial system in which females are perceived to be given preferential treatment when it comes to access to critical information and important positions inside

the organization and job market.

***Informal Mentoring Relationship***

A less-structured, self-directed mentoring relationship; these types of mentoring relationships occur spontaneously and without organizational intervention or guidance (Bynum, 2015; Peters, 2012).

***Intersectionality***

The “manner in which multiple aspects of identity may combine in different ways to construct social reality” (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176).

***Majority Population***

Male members of the American population who are of European descent.

***Mentee/Protégé***

One who learns and receives special instructions, information, and life skills from a more experienced individual.

***Mentor***

An experienced person who influences a less experienced individual's career development and socialization skills in an organization.

***Mentoring Relationship***

A mentoring relationship is one between a more experienced individual (mentor) and a less experienced individual (protégé) intended to help develop the protégé's personal and professional growth (Linehan & Scullion, 2008; Ragins, 2016).

***Minority Populations***

Males and females of African American descent and females of other ethnic groups.

***Networking***

Communications with others in the workplace with the expressed purpose of attaining information to provide support toward a particular career goal.

**Assumptions**

The premise of this research analysis is that the participants were telling the truth when they lived it and are living it. Another presumption is that I published data results free of personal bias in my capacity as a researcher. Additional information was received regarding the value, or lack of value, mentors provide to the professional lives of Black female educational leaders. The follow-up questions were framed based on the research given in the literature review. I bracketed myself after the test review. The knowledge gleaned from this assisted in filling gaps in the literature concerning the perspectives and attitudes of Black women in educational leadership positions in Region X. I created an ethical and fair research instrument. This particular study may contribute as an asset in the field of education regarding the plight of Black female leaders and those aspiring to be educational leaders who happen to be Black females.

**Limitations**

The study is based on Black female educational leaders in Region X, located in a rural section of the U.S. southeast. I purposefully limited the geographical location of the participants to Region X. There was a generalization of responses due to the focus only on Black women educational leaders in Region X. The Black women interviewed may have limited the study's findings based on their personal experiences and may not have been inclusive or reflective of all Black women in educational leadership positions. Due to the low number of Black female educational leaders in Region X, the sample size was



small. The measure may have prohibited me from generalizing findings to Black female educational leaders outside Region X. Participants may have feared their identity being discovered based on the small number of participants at the time of the study; therefore, the truthfulness of responses to interview questions may have been limited. Specific care was given to the research coding and instrument to limit researcher bias.

### **Delimitations**

Black female educational leaders in Region X who were currently employed were included in this study. I elected not to include Black males or other women of color in this research study.

### **Dissertation Organization/Summary**

Chapter 1 introduced the research study. The study parallels the same networking and mentoring of the Underground Railroad that allows Black female educators to advance and sustain leadership positions in education, regardless of their obstacles. Chapter 2 discusses relevant literature pertaining to mentoring Black female educational leaders in school leadership positions. Gender, race, and according to the research framework, stereotypes continue to be a hindrance to the advancement of Black women into leadership roles. The literature review also discusses how the glass ceiling effect, tokenism, and the network of good old boys have acted as impediments to accomplishing key leadership roles in education for Black women. Chapter 3 explains the methods used in the qualitative analysis of the report. Chapter 4 discusses the findings and themes extracted from the research study. Finally, Chapter 5 includes the results, summaries, implications, and suggestions for further research on the issue.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

There is an immense amount of research on Black females and educational leadership. The majority of the data collection is related to the experiences and perceptions of Black female educational leaders (Rocio, 2020). The published literature's focus includes the challenges, perceptions, mentorship, and barriers these women face in educational leadership. The study of Black women's perceptions and barriers in educational leadership offers meaningful insight to researchers on the challenges regarding the specific obstacles such as glass ceilings, intersectionality, and hegemony (Cardoso, 2016). The author stated hegemonic knowledge is evident when the dominant class has manipulated society's culture to believe that the set of beliefs, values, and viewpoints are the only applicable cultural norms. African Americans' worldview has a set of ethnocentric and originality views and cultural beliefs that are antithetical to the White western worldview, allowing hegemony to be a significant factor for Black women (Cardoso, 2016). Cardoso (2016) explained the experiences of Black culture's ancestral insight had been ignored, silenced, and devalued due to hegemonic beliefs. Black women have felt these feelings of oppression from personal experiences for decades (Dillard, 2016). As mentioned previously, the published literature includes barriers and perceptions of Black females in educational leadership. However, research was limited through my specific research on the benefits of adequate training, mentorship, and leadership sustainability. Black females are faced with challenges of professional career advancement within educational platforms due to the lack of same-gendered mentorships, social challenges, and institutional discrimination (Barnes, 2017; Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Mahoney, 2016). The purpose of this literature review is

to outline the history of leadership development of Black female leaders in education, which encompasses the background and history of the challenges Black women face on their journey to the advancement of leadership positions in education.

The exploration of this research began with a basic search utilizing a ProQuest search engine with keywords such as Black females in educational leadership positions, history, barriers, mentorship, advancement, and sustainability. The chapter begins with an outlook of leadership and gender intersectionality connected to barriers women face when advancing in educational leadership, the history of women and Black women in educational leadership, and an overview of mentorship, followed by the discussion of Black leadership development women in the workplace. A review of studies that parallel this topic indicates that Black women in educational leadership have experienced condescension, dismissal, communication challenges, appreciation and validation, exclusion, and isolation (Mainah & Perkins, 2015). The chapter concludes with the exploration of the influence that support systems and mentoring have on Black women in their charge to overcome barriers and perceived challenges due to gender and race.

Reoccurring themes that surfaced in the review of literature include challenges and barriers Black women in leadership face due to the intersection of their gender and race. According to Bakre (2018), society tells Black women they are too weak, too strong-willed, too stubborn, too aggressive, too volatile, or overly emotional, whatever fits the narrative at the time. Bakre highlighted the infamous “angry Black woman” stereotype that quickly takes form when a Black woman does anything remotely decisive. Support systems and mentorship are critical to the success of minority women in educational leadership positions (Ragins, 2016). Chapter 2 begins with the theoretical

framework for the study of the literature focusing on the roles of women in education and the importance of mentorships. The research continues to discuss barriers and challenges Black female leaders face due to the intersection of their race and gender in educational leadership positions, along with the basis of theoretical research.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical structure includes interwoven principles that govern and navigate a researcher's analysis. According to Merriam (1995) and Tisdell (2016), a theoretical framework is the underlying structure, scaffolding, or frame of an analysis. Crenshaw (1989) largely supported this research work, which focused on Bell's (1973) Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Collins's (2009) Black Feminist Thought (BFT). Together, they establish a framework that enables the researcher to explore Black women's histories to reflect on and discuss their experiences as educators and school leaders who communicate intersectionality. Carter (2013) stated that under the first two hypotheses, Black women and others may perceive Black women's work as a means of preserving the tradition of racial and gender struggles. Both theories together demonstrate the different intersections of recognizing and clarifying the particular injustices or confidence that a Black female school leader may experience at any given time.

### **BFT**

Collins (2009) indicated that collectively, as a group, Black women encounter a world that is distinct from that of non-Black females. It is critical to have a thorough understanding of Black women's situations while developing a theoretical framework for Black women's studies. Howard-Hamilton (2003) asserted that understanding why the experiences of African American women differ from those of other women and men is

inextricably linked to the historical history and ideology of Black people in the United States. While African American women have been admitted to leadership circles, they continue to face oppression, remain invisible, and lack a voice (Collins, 2009). According to Black feminist theorists (Crenshaw, 1989), because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any theory that overlooks intersectionality would fall short of appropriately addressing the specific way Black women are subordinated. African American women must raise their voices to share their stories. In comparison to other groups, Black women perceived oppression more accurately (Collins, 2009). According to Collins, living as a Black woman requires wisdom, as recognizing race, gender, and class subordination has traditionally been vital to the survival of Black women. According to Collins, BFT is founded on the following beliefs:

1. It is impossible to disentangle the structure and thematic substance of thought from the historical and material circumstances that shape the lives of its authors.
2. The concept implies that Black women have a distinct perspective on their experiences and there may be some shared perspectives held by Black women collectively.
3. While existence as a Black woman may yield a certain commonality of outlook, the diversity of individual Black women's lives in terms of class, territory, age, and sexual orientation has led in a variety of representations of these common themes. Thus, separate groups of Afro-American women can encounter and communicate the Black woman's basic themes differently.
4. The study hypothesizes that while Black women's statuses exist, their images

may be hidden. Thus, Black female intellectuals have a responsibility to provide data and theories regarding the Black female experience that will help to explain a Black woman's status in a positive light.

African American women must share their stories. The art of storytelling is deeply ingrained in African American history, and exchanging stories enables disadvantaged populations, particularly women of color, to reclaim their voices (Amoah, 2013). According to Collins (2009), when Black women define themselves, they expressly reject the notion that people in positions of authority who have the ability to characterize and evaluate actuality are allowed to do so. Regardless of the substance of Black women's self-definition, focusing on it reinforces the absence of women's authority as human subjects.

BFT is focused on resistance from oppressed groups, especially Black women. It is articulated while attempting to exist and survive inside repressive organizations that strive to deny and destroy your fundamental being (Collins, 2009). Collins (2009) identified three main elements of BFT:

1. Black feminist thinking is generated and developed by the experiences of African American women.
2. While each woman has a different experience of life, there are intersections of common experiences between them.
3. While there are commonalities between African American women, their distinctiveness as a group is intersected by diverse situations and needs to be exposed and acknowledged.

BFT was used to assess how the intersectionality of race, gender, and community

influenced the participants' perceptions.

### **CRT in Education**

CRT stems from the origin of the critical legal studies movement and examines how institutional structures and laws that appear to be "race-neutral" can lead to inequities in education (Thomas, 2014). Historically, CRT was introduced in the 1970s by Derrick Bell as a reaction to the awareness of the critical legal study's failure. He believed that the United States was moving at a slow pace for racial reform (Thomas, 2014). Bell recognized the need to produce theories and strategies to dispute racism within American laws (Johnson, 2015). Several CRT scholars believe Bell's racial classification can be applied to gain a deeper understanding of exploring educational challenges and the ability to overcome and resist these barriers (Johnson, 2015). Bell's CRT analytical and theoretical framework is utilized and applied today by scholars for educational research. The exposure of CRT can be traced back to the anti-slavery movement. CRT poses that in all economic, political, and social arenas, racial hierarchical structures exist. These systems enable Whites to be prioritized and people of color to be marginalized in many spheres of life, including education (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004).

In America, race continues to be an issue. The values and activities within the U.S. Constitution foundation are institutionalized (Berry & Candis, 2013). The flagship theme of CRT was highlighted by Delgado and Stefancic (2001), identifying racism as natural rather than traumatic and profoundly rooted in U.S. culture. As a result, it is difficult to detect and eliminate the idea of prejudice toward Blacks. As a result, racism directed at African Americans is notoriously difficult to detect and remove. Color

blindness, as a concept centered on treating all people equally, reduces the influence of White privilege or the debate over leveling the playing field (Gooden, 2004). CRT places a premium on the interaction of race, class, and gender, as well as on storytelling/counter-storytelling and self-definition Jean-Marie (2013). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) attempted to theorize race as a strategy for identifying educational inequalities empirically. Ladson-Billings and Tate made three recommendations for consideration:

1. Race remains a significant issue in determining injustice in the United States.
2. American society is centered on property rights.
3. We employ an empirical method based on the convergence of race and property. It is possible to comprehend social (and, ultimately, educational) imbalance.

Berry and Candis (2013) asserted that our genders, ethnic origins, and sexual orientations are all secondary; regardless of class, gender, national origin, language proficiency, or sexual orientation, race is a primary consideration that has repeatedly emerged as the primary element influencing our experience. The social, political, and racial context of the school should be examined, as well as how these dynamics affect our experience as Black leaders and the education of minority children (F. Brown, 2005).

CRT is a legitimate method for assessing institutions and trying to make sense of the complexities of racial, cultural, and ethnic groups (F. Brown, 2005), which also calls for a dialogue on social justice and inclusion in schools. Murtadha and Watts (2005) said that for over 300 years, African Americans have fought for the important educational ideals of equality, liberty, and justice.

CRT allows for a counter-story based on personal narratives that contradict the



dominant group's views (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Counter-narratives are used to cast doubt on members of the dominant group's preexisting opinions or misconceptions.

When oppressed individuals share their counter-story, they should be given within a safe space and venue, labeled counterspace (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). In examining Black women's leadership and how they view this role, it is vital to see it as a barrier through a racial lens, as most research finds race and gender.

### **Roles of Women in Education**

The education profession, specifically teaching, became popular during the period from 1830 through 1900 (Blount, 1998). Blount (1998) stated that 57.2% of the teachers by 1880 in the United States were women, and by 1900, at least 70% were women. Few women held administrative positions beyond the classroom, despite the increase of employment in the educational setting (Blount, 1998). Ella Flagg Young sparked suffrage activism to mobilize women into educational leadership positions (Lewis & Neville, 2014).

A significant democratic and liberal movement before 1920 was women's suffrage. This movement focused on women obtaining the right to vote and demanding equal rights between men and women (Lewis & Neville, 2014). The number of women in school administration was increased due to the suffrage movement. Shortly after the women's suffrage movement success, women gained notice in both teachings and education administration (Lewis & Neville, 2014). Women were also granted the right to vote. According to Blount (1998), men created the appointive system for school leadership positions. Due to this appointive system, women's advancement in school leadership was silently halted (Blount, 1998).

Loder (2005) explained that women leaders had been depersonalized, ignored, and impeded from entering the field of education. Loder stated that women are viewed as more fragile when demonstrating different leadership styles and are expected to perform disparately from their male colleagues. The literature suggests that women have been disregarded or neglected in advancing in educational leadership (Reddick-Smack, 2011). There is an increased number of women pursuing a leadership role in education, but they are intimidated by barriers that continue to suppress them in a society and domain where the White male is the player of influence (Adkinson, 1981; Blackmore & Kenway, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Women are known for their supportive, nurturing, and caring attributes; this contributes to their significant roles as teachers (Reddick-Smack, 2011). However, their administrative roles are invisible and not held to the same prestige as their male counterparts (Shakeshaft, 1989). Numerous studies discuss the obstacles women face on their paths to educational leadership or the barriers while holding leadership positions.

### **History of African American Females in Education**

Public schools began to incorporate in the 1830s; Black men and women, along with White women, were not looked upon for leadership positions. The lack of consideration for White females and Black educational leadership positions was due to the viewing of White females being less intelligent than their male counterparts, and both Black males and females being considered property and not human beings (Kowalski, 2011).

White women began to receive an education due to the early feminist movement based on the theory of the expectation of women's responsibilities to care for their

children and ensure their sons were adequately prepared and educated for society (Hooks, 2015). According to Kowalski (2011), a decrease in the interest of White qualified men pursuing the education profession allowed White females to become public school teachers due to the need for White women to educate their children.

Many Black leaders formed schools in their neighborhoods following the end of slavery (Reed, 2012). Black leaders believed that knowledge acquired through education could not be stripped away even if their property, civil rights, and money were taken (Tillman, 2009). Many schools were closed due to local White supremacist efforts and the struggle to find adequate resources; however, Black educational leaders did not quit (Wiley et al., 2017). Wiley et al. (2017) recorded that Black educational leaders maintained, operated, and opened schools for Black children without sufficient resources.

The public school teaching profession was considered feminized at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Seventy percent of teachers were White, and 20% were Black (Kowalski, 2011). Due to the teaching profession being feminized, teaching was known as women's work; the status was low; and wages remained relatively low, allowing Black people in the south to become employed (Kowalski, 2011). The superintendent's position remained male dominant, although the teaching role was considered feminine (Reed, 2012).

Mary Mcleod Bethune, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Anna Julia Cooper Septima Clark, and Fanny Jackson Coppin lead the way for all Blacks, specifically Black women, to have a voice in educational leadership (Wyland, 2016). The leadership and sacrifice of the Black women mentioned should never be forgotten. However, eminent Black male educators such as W.E.B. DuBois, Frederick Douglass, and Booker T. Washington are at

the head of several texts. Black women have been leaders in the home and the school system for quite some time (Reed, 2012). However, there have been obstacles and detours on the way to becoming leaders (Wyland, 2016).

Black female leaders experienced direct obstacles within the public school movement. A White female philanthropist, Anna Jeanes, developed the Jeanes teaching position in the early 1900s. The Jeanes Fund provided funding for Black rural county school systems to hire supervising teachers (Hoffschwelle, 2015, Malczewski, 2011). After the Southern Education Board seized authority of the Jeanes Fund in 1937, the instructors served as curriculum supervisors. Until the integration of the South's public schools, Black teachers served as administrators in Black schools (Hoffschwelle, 2015). The responsibilities held by Black females in southern states for Black schools mirrored superintendent positions. The author disclosed they were responsible for developing programs, mentoring Black teachers, and managing curriculum and instruction. Many Black female leaders of these schools experienced resistance and opposition from Black males in community leadership positions who felt threatened by Black female authority and the lack of sufficient support and resources from White male supervisors (Hoffschwelle, 2015).

*Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) impacted many school leaders (Wyland, 2016). Desegregation ended the role of Black female educational leaders such as Jeanes's supervisors (Hoffschwelle, 2015). Black school leaders were immediately impacted by the Supreme Court's decision to integrate schools; the closed nature of segregated schools was directly affected. Black educational leaders lost employment and influence (F. Brown, 2005). According to F. Brown (2005), a job crisis that undermined the status of

Black educators was created due to desegregation; schools were closed and consolidated. The value of their influence and middle-class status in their communities were at risk of being extinct (F. Brown, 2005). Homogeneous advocates for promoting, hiring, and the recruitment of Black women were minimized due to the displacement of Black school leaders, which also decreased the personnel of the same race to serve as qualified mentors (Tillman, 2009). Tillman (2009) stated Black leaders were quickly laid off, demoted, or transferred to central office positions with duties that mirrored secretarial roles. Tillman alluded that the impact of *Brown vs. Board of Education* can still be felt today.

Loder-Jackson (2009) noted there were two instrumental policies for Black females in educational leadership: (a) Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and (b) Title IX of the Education Amendment in 1972. Both governmental mandates were influential in allowing Black females the ability to obtain educational leadership positions (Loder-Jackson, 2009). Opportunities for career advancement increased among Blacks in government jobs and white-collar positions. Gender discrimination in any educational activity or program receiving federal money was prohibited through the Title IX Education Amendment policy, which allowed females to obtain advancement in school leadership positions (Loder-Jackson, 2009). Before these policies, Black females were subjected to low-paying and low-status employment, which were emotionally oppressive and physically burdensome (A.R. Brown, 2014; Loder-Jackson, 2009).

Many Blacks who attended college before the Civil Rights Movement returned home to their post-graduation communities to begin their career in a public service-like field. Black female college graduates leaned more toward a nurse or schoolteacher role (Reed, 2012). Traditionally, Black females were subjected to domestic service jobs;

becoming a teacher or any career requiring additional education was held with pride (Loder-Jackson, 2009). The Civil Rights Movement allowed opportunities for Black females to pursue and explore various career areas. However, Loder-Jackson (2009) and Osler and Webb (2014) emphasized that the movement left a void in the teaching field and caused a ripple effect on Black females in educational leadership positions.

### **Leadership Obstacles for Black Women**

Hill and Ragland (1995) examined research on women and determined structural barriers that hinder women from advancing in their careers include

- lack of mentoring,
- White male dominance of key leadership roles,
- lack of mobility,
- lack of political savvy, and
- internal bias and barriers against women.

Black women experience specific leadership challenges from the structural barriers mentioned; however, White women's experiences are similar and face some of the same challenges. Due to the title "all women," Black women's difficulties are masked (Hooks, 2015). Black women are not a monolithic group disputed by Collins (2009); he defended that the intersection of class, gender, and race is a distinct position for Black women to deserve a voice (Alston, 2000). There is a significant need for sponsors or mentors to be pursued, as Black women continue to advance professionally to increase the chances of overcoming barriers within the workplace environment (Benton, 1980). A breakdown of obstacles and barriers Black women face is discussed in the following sections, beginning with race and gender.

## **Barriers of Race and Gender**

### ***Race***

Humans created the race structure to establish a social system (Osler & Webb, 2014). This structure can be manipulated and transformed to favor those who created the organization (Schwelbe, 2006). Bonilla-Siva (2006) stated that social norms have been set based on the dominant race's ideology and alluded to the race being used to establish power, primarily those who possess or do not have power. A pattern of oppression is generated against those who do not bear the power (Noble, 2020). Racism has been a part of the Black American experience for centuries; however, in contemporary form, it wears a different face (Noble, 2020). The contemporary form is different from the apparent acts against Black Americans during the initial historical experience, blatantly filled with hostility and discrimination. Modern racism is difficult to identify due to the indirect and furtive expressions, which, in return, create a challenge to confront, eventually allowing oppression to occur (Noble, 2020). Black women have reported in numerous studies that racism within their dominant culture organizations is the most powerful obstacle to career advancement (Carter, 2013; Davis & Maldonado 2015; Farley, 2016; Hague & Okpala, 2017). Confronting institutional norms has been a continuous battle for Black females in educational leadership (Peters, 2012). Black women leaders are underrepresented in corporate America due to racism (Noble, 2020). Women have advanced in leadership positions compared to 2 decades ago; however, women leaders at the secondary school level are still rare (Noble, 2020).

### ***Gender***

Women leaders usually have negative assumptions that connect to them, such as

aggressiveness. Aggression in a woman is often considered a negative trait (Barnes, 2017). Women are often viewed as nurturers, which is an additional negative thought due to absences, leaving work early, or arriving late due to caring for children or household emergencies (Barnes, 2017). Women are predominantly guided to seek positions such as secretary or assistant in order to take care of others, which in return allows them to exercise their social and organizational duties comparatively to the home (Barnes, 2017). According to Collins (2009), the negative stigmas hinder women from advancing to leadership roles. Women are perceived to not properly handle leadership roles within an organization (Collins, 2009).

### **Intersectionality**

According to Black feminist scholars, intersectionality is submerged within BFT, which discusses the commonality among Black women of interlocking barriers (Collins, 2009). When gender and race are interlocking barriers and are combined as one, this is referred to as a double minority (Barnes, 2017). The constraints Black women face are more convoluted than those encountered by White women (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Multiple obstacles intersect or overlap (e.g., socioeconomic status, race, gender, political preference) for a Black woman (Cardoso, 2016; Griffin, 2016). These components emerge as one to represent the impact of Black women and everyday routines at their workplace (Griffin, 2016). Being Black and female concurrently creates issues of gender inequity among male peers of various ethnicities inside an organization (Rhode, 2017). The intersectionality movement has been nourished by anti-racism, disability rights, environmental activities, civil rights, and the pursuit of indigenous self-determination (Rhode, 2017). According to Rhode (2017), the intersectionality movement



has developed over 30 years. Stanely (2009) introduced the belief of intersectionality as an applicable method of investigating the social identities and related attitudes and understandings of Black females, resulting in systems of discrimination, oppression, and dominations that confer to the scarcity of Black women in leadership positions.

Rosser-Mims (2018) emphasized the commonality of multiple barriers Black female educational leaders experience. There is evidence of Black women holding leadership positions in male-dominated professions where gender and race barriers are still evident, hindering them from reaching their full potential in advancement (Rosser-Mims, 2018). Black women still experience gender discrimination in their work environment. A more in-depth review of the work environment and gender discrimination is discussed in greater detail further in my research. In analyzing the intersectionality ideals, I will outline three intersectionality types and three main themes of intersectionality.

Crenshaw (1989) delineated Black women were subordinate to real women; their experiences had no influence on what it meant to be a woman. There are different intersectionality forms: Intersectionality occurs at structural, political, institutional, economic, and representational levels. Crenshaw distinguished three sorts of intersectionality: representational, structural, and political.

### ***Representational Intersectionality***

Representational intersectionality depicts how the beliefs or images of Black women are misrepresented, represented, or not represented in the media. Representational intersectionality refers to how gender, race, ethnic images, and sexual orientation in society collaboratively create specific and unique narratives that shape and inform laws,

institutions, and policies. The depictions can build upon racist and sexist descriptive metaphors (McNeal, 2017).

### ***Structural Intersectionality***

Structural intersectionality observes how structural practices and policies fail Black women due to not considering the acknowledgment of understanding the layers of obstacles they encounter, specifically sexism and racism, in addition to marginalized identities they face (McNeal, 2017). According to Ralston (McNeal, 2017), even with some affirmative action policies utilized, White women continue to exceed people of color's employment rates, including women of color (McNeal, 2017). Affirmative action, a structural policy to increase gender and racial representation, still unintentionally continues to fuel power structures that disenfranchise people of color in the United States (McNeal, 2017). Public policies are shaped and informed by dominant cultural perspectives of ethnicity, gender, age, class, sexuality, ability, and race. These perspectives are highlighted on how laws and public policies are shaped and governed through political intersectionality.

### ***Political Intersectionality***

Political intersectionality is determined when an individual is a member of two or more conflicting subordinate groups that involve opposing political agendas. McNeal, (2017) explained that Black women are not being viewed when racial political issues are presented for men of color and when feminist political issues are represented in the dominant paradigm as White women issues. Reviewing the research allowed me to examine how representational, structural, and political intersectionality affects the historically and socially marginalized populations within work organizations.

## **Black Women and Leadership Development Barriers**

Leadership development focuses on assisting people with understanding through relational and learning processes to work productively with others, coordinate activities, access resources, build social networks, and create relationships (McCleskey, 2014).

Women overall may have inadequate support (such as adequate mentor availability, training, inclusion) to expedite their development as leaders in an organization (Johns, 2013). Davis and Maldonado (2015) stated that there is a significant amount of documentation indicating that Black women and minorities experience discrimination concerning leadership development. There is a lack of formal and informal access to networks to help Black women grow as leaders. Organizations lack the adoption of practices and create environments that support the leadership development of Black females (Noble, 2020). Career advancement to promote the leadership of Black women is crucial to recognize the hierarchy that can restrict them and foster awareness of how structures can be either opposed or eradicated (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

## **Adequate Mentorship**

### ***History of Mentorship***

The term mentor is obtained from Homer's *Odyssey* and has immeasurable roots (Barkley, 2005; Shea, 2002). Mentor (teacher) cared for Telemachus, son of Odysseus, King of Ithaca, while he fought in the Trojan War (Barkley, 2005; Shea, 2002). Mentor served as a helper, counselor, guide, and teacher to Telemachus. He was rewarded when Telemachus and his father were united by adding the naming of a wise person, trusted advisor, and teacher synonymously to his name, Mentor (Barkley, 2005; Shea, 2002).

Various divisions of the church, education, multiple forums, and businesses

utilize mentors. According to the ancient Greeks, effective mentoring is grounded in relationships, logic, and ethics (Barkley, 2005). Barkley (2005) stated that ancient Greeks felt that mentors acquire skills and knowledge to intensify interpersonal effectiveness, such as social competence, wisdom, and moral reasoning, by possessing social judgment capabilities. An individual's ability to view solutions from various perspectives and generate solutions to complex social problems involves social judgment (Barkley, 2005; Shea, 2002). Mentors should model social judgment in their organizations to support and assist mentees in making ethical decisions such as socially appropriate wisdom and behavior (Barkley, 2005; Shea, 2002).

Dunlap and Schmuck (1995) discussed recruiting efforts and the utilization of mentorships for minority populations, specifically minority males and females, to enter leadership and administrative positions. Workplace employees in the 1970s believed there was a monopoly of hiring practices in corporate America and the educational system due to the good ole boy network (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995).

### ***Mentorship***

Mentorship is the process of supporting, guiding, and training an individual less skilled or an experienced person who can be professionally identified as a mentee, protégé, or novice (Hill & Ragland, 1995). Mentorship is critical in an environment where underrepresented groups are outnumbered (Grant, 2012; Gupton & Slick, 1996; Loder, 2005). Mentoring has also been defined as an effective means of developing leaders in organizations (Sosik & Lee, 2002). The accessibility influences culture, gender, ethnicity, and race to mentors. The detriment of the intersectionality of race and gender in leadership and promotion is Black women are continuously left out of having

mentors who look like them (Sosik & Lee, 2002).

A new mentee or employee should have ongoing professional development and guidance to incorporate them into the workplace (Gregg, 1999; Lee et al., 2000). The mentoring program's primary purpose is to familiarize individuals who are not thought of as members of the culture with the complexities (Phillips-Jones, 1983). Mentoring programs are considered effective when tailored with the examination of the mentor's and mentee's personal intricacies such as work ethic and personality. Daloz (1999) described a mentor as a courageous gem of wise counsel who serves as a map to support their mentee. He continued to state mentors protect their mentees from evil while entering the darkness (Daloz, 1999). Bauer (1999) and Hansman (2001) claimed there are two primary functions to mentoring that are considered positive benefits for the mentee: vocational/career mentoring functions and psychosocial support. Due to the consideration of mentoring relationships being informal or formal, mentor relationships develop long-lasting effects (Bauer, 1999; Gagen & Bowie, 2005; Galbraith, 2003, Kramer, 2001). Lifetime personal and professional relationships have emerged with many individuals from the mentoring relationship (Schweitzer, 1993).

Barkley (2005) suggested that mentees should seek assistance from a mentor when needed. There are implicit rules, regulations, business politics, and an extensive amount of supportive and helpful advice mentees can receive from a mentor (Barkley, 2005). Protégé, mentee, and novice are applied interchangeably. The mentor has a mastery in the field to support and acknowledge the mentee's weaknesses but still empower the person to achieve through mentoring (Barkley, 2005).

Trust is a crucial aspect between a mentor and protégé; the mentor must trust a

mentee (Kramer, 2001; Young & Wright, 2001). Welch (1996) disclosed that individuals are inclined to connect with persons identifiable to themselves or who appear to have psychological, mental, and physical similarities and characteristics. Mentors are often determined, contingent on the likewise characteristics of the person choosing the mentor (Kramer, 2001).

### ***Mentorship Barriers***

Crawford and Smith (2005) defined a mentor as someone who can provide opportunities for the protégé (mentee) to practice, learn, and be rewarded so gained knowledge, performance, and motivation can improve. Mentors are known to share information about maneuvering organizational politics, provide emotional feedback and support, boost their mentee's confidence, and put an emphasis on their mentee's personal and professional growth and development (Helms et al., 2016). Mentorship is a valuable factor in the professional development of women (Helms et al., 2016). Mentees are expected to receive career guidance and development from mentors to create opportunities to enhance their careers (Helms et al., 2016).

Crawford and Smith (2005) stated in an earlier study that Black women were less likely to have someone mentor them than their White male colleagues. Black women have to compensate for the lack of sponsorship and mentoring White men and women enjoy. These women advance within predominately White organizations through merit and connections and must have added employment experience and higher educational credentials (Lewis & Neville, 2014). Support systems are crucial in assisting Black women in conquering gender and race obstacles, precisely when locating mentors within the old boy network (Lewis & Neville, 2014). According to another research study

regarding mentoring, Lewis and Neville (2014). found Black women participants identified relatives and friends as mentors due to the insufficient number of Black mentors. These friends and relatives served as a vital support system in assisting participants with navigating and networking while serving as a role model (Lewis & Neville, 2014). There are distinctive experiences at the intersection of race and gender that can be difficult to develop mentoring relationships for Black women. Cooper et al. (2017) found that many African American women prefer mentors of the same race.

### **Characteristics of Effective Mentors**

Research suggests innate characteristics that positively affect the development of mentors, although some are ineffective mentors (Cooper et al., 2017). Important characteristics such as personality, nurturance, inspiration, conscientiousness, power, competence, and flexibility are essential in a formal mentoring relationship in order to provide guidance and support to the mentee (Cooper et al., 2017).

Companies are more competitive in retaining and attracting new employees when someone has a positive mentoring experience (Droste, 2006). There are important mentor characteristics and qualities such as empathy, caring, sensitivity, and integrity that assist with positive mentoring outcomes and experiences. Researchers have developed theoretical models of critical traits mentors need to possess (Droste, 2006).

Informal mentoring is often viewed as the most effective. Grant (2012) discussed the importance of the support an informal mentor will give a mentee to achieve career advancement and success within an organization when relationships naturally occur. According to various studies, informal mentoring has shown a rise in expedited promotion rates, higher income, increased job performance, employee satisfaction, and

cognizance of substantial influence within the organization (Grant, 2012). Through informal mentoring, relationships developed vastly blossom career development, socialization networks, and the mentee's overall career satisfaction.

### **Mentoring Black Women**

The research reported and conducted has been limited regarding mentoring programs constructed for the accomplishment of minority groups (Haring, 1999). Mentoring programs that are initiated for minorities are often impermanent (Haring, 1999). Haring (1999) concluded that these programs begin with good intentions and drive but shortly after falter. There has not been substantial research conducted on mentoring from a theoretical framework perspective; the work is either declarative or descriptive in nature when presented (Hawkey, 1997). Haring concluded that the design of minority mentoring programs should be strengthened and analyzed to support the successful and adequate mentoring of minority protégés, particularly Black females, who aspire to be educational leaders. There is a weakness in designing the minority mentoring program models due to most having the same design (Haring, 1999).

Most Black females specify being more comfortable with mentors who have a similar background to their own. However, a more enriching and rewarding mentor experience is when the mentee selects from a diverse population of mentors within their workplace environment (Droste, 2006). Mentees should choose a successful mentor in their field and be comfortable around the individual (Droste, 2006).

Based on the revealing of studies relating to mentors and role models, Black female school administrators stated they did not have mentors or role models to support them in their current positions (Benishek et al., 2004; Crampton & Mishra, 1999). Black



professional females are now recognizing the need for mentorship and desire to give back to the community in admiration of the opportunities of mentorship they received when advancing in their careers (Harris et al., 2004).

### **Summary**

Researchers and theorists have concluded that African American women must continue their higher education careers, develop their leadership skills through experience, seek mentoring opportunities, and create a network of strong support networks (Harris et al., 2004). Therefore, this research will facilitate the development of education by applying additional research to mentorship, which has remained a focus of the study's attention. This research can lead to a slowly growing body of literature that is currently in existence. Stakeholders should have access to this knowledge to understand better the impact of mentoring on Black female school administrators and others who aspire to these leadership roles. Additionally, this chapter's literature analysis shed light on the challenges confronting Black women in the role of school leaders as a result of the intersectionality of their race and gender. The chapter laid the groundwork for the study by establishing CRT and BFT as the proper frameworks for this research design. The analysis provided a historical review of the reasons that contributed to the discrepancy between Black female leaders in the United States and how it developed. Additionally, this chapter offered background material on the position of school leaders and the history of Blacks and women in school leadership roles.

There is a scarcity of studies examining the unique experiences of Black women through the lens of intersectionality and how this construct might meaningfully influence their activities and professions. This optimistic view has the potential to have far-

reaching consequences in terms of developing a literary canon that offers a voice to the Black women school leaders and prepares the path for other oppressed groups to have the same opportunity.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability in Region X. This research was conducted via interviews and personal stories of the emotional perspectives of a group of Black women. The study focused on how race and ethnicity have guided and affected the leadership sustainability and advancement of these individuals. The research explained how mentorships and networks have enabled these Black female leaders to navigate advancement and sustainability through challenges. This study's subjects were existing educational leaders of school districts based in Region X. The research was carried out by detailed interviews.

Researchers have stressed the importance of support systems and mentoring relationships for Black female educational leaders (A. R. Brown, 2014; Jean-Marie, 2013; Muñoz et al., 2014; Peters, 2012; Wiley et al., 2017). This chapter offers an overview of the study design and methodological procedures I utilized to examine the relationship between mentoring, networking, and perceived difficulties that have an impact on the role of Black female educational leaders in Region X. In addition, I outline the instrumentation procedures, explicitly highlighting how interview questions have been raised. I explain the requirements needed for inclusion in the study, as well as the selection of samples, the data collection process, and the data and study care of the participants. The procedures outlined in this chapter represent compliance with the Gardner-Webb University IRB requirements.

A case study used to investigate the experiences of Black female educational

leaders helped to explain the connection between mentoring relationships and the experiences of Black female leaders in Region X to overcome challenges and to maintain advancement and sustainability in their leadership positions. By conducting in-depth interviews with current Black female leaders using a case study approach, I sought to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability in Region X.

In qualitative research, researchers negotiate definitions and perspectives with individual sources of data since they are striving to reproduce the reality about the subjects (Merriam, 1995). According to Creswell (2007), qualitative researchers strive to understand and analyze how people construct their worlds in social settings. Statistical information gathered through quantitative methods would not yield the amount of data needed for this research.

Qualitative analysis is used to encourage people to tell their stories. Qualitative researchers, according to Merriam (1995), are interested in how individuals understand their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and the meanings they assign to their experiences. Qualitative scholars are most interested in how people organize themselves and their environments and how the occupants of these settings make sense of their environment and social roles (Berg, 2004).

Researchers perform qualitative studies to clarify how participants in the survey approach a topic or circumstance, reduce the power relationships between researchers and participants, follow up on quantitative analysis, and explain processes or linkages in causal hypotheses (Creswell, 2007). Dowling (2007) suggested that individuals create a

viewpoint or outlook dictated by their climate, including people themselves and their history, race, and circumstance.

This chapter outlines the study design and methodological procedures for investigating the relationship between mentorship, networking, and perceived obstacles that affect the sustainability and advancement of Black female leaders in Region X. Furthermore, I discuss the instrumentation processes, focusing on how interview questions were developed. I address the criteria for study participation, as well as sample selection, data collection methods, and data and study participant treatments. The procedures outlined in this chapter are in accordance with Gardner-Webb University's IRB criteria and have contributed to the safety of human subjects.

## **Design of Study**

### ***Case Study***

The phenomenological case study technique is the most fitting approach to this study because it effectively directs me to data that would lead to useful information on the advancement and sustainability of Black female educational leaders in Region X through networking and mentorship despite challenges faced. This phenomenological case study is an observational study that focuses on recognizing the effect of mentoring and supporting relationships within the real-life context of current Black female educational leaders. For this research, the "how" and "why" were explored by recognizing how mentoring and networking partnerships have affected African American women during their employment as educational leaders (Yin, 2013). Using this methodological design, I gathered data on how Black female educational leaders in Region X interpreted the mentoring and support networks while in their leadership roles.

Specifically, this allowed me to explain how these relationships have affected the obstacles they have encountered in their careers and the motivations for seeking and holding leadership roles. The measuring instrument used to collect data was in-depth, virtual, semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions using the case study method.

When deciding the best methodology for the study, I utilized Yin's (2013) research criteria to ensure the case study design was most appropriate for the study. Yin noted that researchers should consider case studies where the subject's actions cannot be controlled, contextual conditions need to be included, or the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are ambiguous. Case studies provide researchers with an opportunity to explore multifaceted circumstances and address questions about a phenomenon (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014; Yin, 2013). In this analysis, the primary advantage of the case study approach is its applicability to real-world experience via first-hand accounts to help the researcher understand complex issues (Collins, 2009; Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014; Ritchie et al., 2013).

After reviewing the phenomenological case study methodology requirements, I have concluded that this approach is ideally suited to obtaining the most appropriate data to address research questions on how Black female educational leaders in Region X view the value of mentoring relationships and support networks as applied to the difficulties they have encountered in their careers to advance and sustain in their leadership positions. By encouraging participants to share their stories during in-depth interviews, which have also been conversational in nature, this methodological approach helped create trust between me and the participants, which contributed to a productive

researcher/participant relationship (Seidman, 2013).

**Phenomenology.** Phenomenology is the study of phenomena: how objects happen or how we perceive them (Creswell, 2007). Phenomenological case studies describe an individual's perception in the first person. The sole task of a phenomenological case study is to foster a deeper understanding of a person's behavior, experiences, and motivation. The case study was approached from a phenomenological viewpoint. At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Edmond Husserl, a German philosopher, laid the theoretical groundwork for phenomenology. According to Husserl (2008), individuals can only begin to comprehend the universe if they analyze their own experiences inside it. The purpose of this research was merely to collect the narrative by utilizing semi-structured interviews to see if there were any common themes or concepts expressed throughout the additional answers to the questions to aid in learning about the phenomenon. A phenomenological case study's primary objective is to aid in the comprehension of a person's intentions, actions, and encounters. A phenomenological approach lends itself well to the study of subjective, emotional, and usually intense experiences (Merriam, 1995). This methodology approach was critical to conducting my research.

**Focus Groups.** Collecting information from Black women in education but not in an evaluative role provided insight into why they would or would not want to advance to a leadership role in Region X. They discussed where they were professionally and what could or should have been concluded to increase the leadership roles of women in education. These focus group participants were interviewed separately from those whose cases were individually studied.

**Open-Ended Conversational Interviews.** The dialogues included thorough

responses to queries regarding their professional paths and life experiences. Each interview placed a premium on open-ended questions. Interviews conducted in a conversational way made the interview more approachable and flexible to the individual's personality (Conrad & Schober, n.d.).

## **Participants**

### ***Selection***

This research based its analysis on designing a qualitative phenomenological study documenting Black female leaders' career paths and the effects of mentorship as they attained and progressed to leadership roles in the Region X school districts.

The approach to phenomenology made it possible to organize the perspectives of Black female leaders in such a way as to draw meaning from them. According to Ashworth and Chung (2006), the phenomena dictate the method as well as the participant type. I used purposive sampling for the collection of study participants. The participants' objective sample was selected because their ancestry captured the lived experiences associated with the subject under investigation. In purposive sampling, the researcher selects individuals and sites for analysis because they may contribute to the study's comprehension of the research topic and central phenomena (Creswell, 2007).

Purposive sampling allowed for the selection of people who could adequately explain the phenomenon. According to Creswell (2007), phenomenological research participants must be individuals who have encountered and expressed their experience with the topic being investigated. Purposive sampling involves the selection of a group that is considered to reflect a certain population (Groenewald, 2004). Individuals for analysis were chosen using a procedure of purposive sampling. The sampling frame



consisted of Black female leaders serving as educational leaders or similar positions in the Region X school districts. I interviewed participants who met the selection criteria. Groenewald (2004) found two to 10 participants to be adequate to achieve saturation for a qualitative sample.

The study involved conducting in-depth interviews with Black women with supervisory responsibilities. The requirements included Black women who hold leadership positions in education in the Region X school districts. Each participant in the study met the following predefined criteria:

- employed currently in an administrative leadership position in either the current school or a combination of positions,
- employed in a school district within Region X,
- Black or African American descent, and
- a female.

Participants of the study were chosen for a specific reason. The sample consisted of Black female leaders who are serving as educational leaders. I utilized an interview guide to obtain demographic information (Appendix A).

### ***Demographic Information***

The participants were chosen because they are Black women and hold positions as educational leaders in the Region X school districts. Before, during, or after the case, participants were given demographic background on their educational level, race, school districts served, years of education, and employment positions.

### ***Informed Consent***

It was essential to obtain informed consent form (Appendix B) from those who

planned to contribute to this qualitative study. Informed consent explains how the research will be done and how the data will be archived to protect their identity. Before participating in the study, each subject signed an informed consent form. This classification emphasized the importance of safeguarding participant rights throughout data collecting (Creswell, 2007). Participants signed an informed consent form acknowledging that their interviews would be audio recorded, their participation would be optional, and their confidentiality would be maintained.

### ***Confidentiality***

Regulations on human study data's ethical reporting restrict researchers from revealing sensitive, personally identifiable information of research participants. Maintaining the confidentiality of participants was therefore important in this research. The common assumption in a study is that the research participants' identities remain confidential in studies involving in-depth interviews (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). The identification of information about the participants was stored in a safe folder on my computer with a specific passcode that I only can access. Aliases were used as a way of maintaining the confidentiality of participants. Aliases have been used in research to maintain confidentiality by keeping secret the existence and content of participant involvement in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

### **Instruments Utilized**

Permission to collect data was obtained from the IRB of Gardner-Webb University. After the permission was obtained, participants were approached to clarify my intent, and a description of the study's qualitative method was given. After specifying that participation was entirely voluntary, the individual participants obtained written

consent from me, and the initial questionnaire was circulated. A signed copy of this authorization form was returned to each participant. A list of questions was included in the interview and given to the participants before the interview in a two-part survey (Appendix C).

### **Data Collection Process**

I conducted virtual, semi-structured interviews, including open-ended questions through Zoom. I formulated a table that indicated the criteria for each interview. During virtual interviews, I used a software system to transcribe and capture details. The interviews resulted in a detailed description of the expertise and experience of Black female educational leaders in Region X by encouraging participants to provide meaningful explanations in response to questions about the challenges they have encountered and the role of support structures in addressing these challenges. While questions were prepared before the start of the interviews, the semi-structured approach allowed the interviews to have a more conversational tone, which provided a comfortable atmosphere for participants to answer in more detail. To ensure authenticity, a copy of the transcript was given to the participants for member checking to validate and deepen the connections (Miles & Huberman, 2014). After the member checks were complete and the transcripts approved, I began to examine the data revealed in the interviews.

Via in-depth interviews, participants utilized an interview guide, and I captured the true nature of each participant's experience of the phenomenon under study. Qualitative, in-depth interviews were performed more like discussions than structured events with predefined answer categories (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I predicted that the phenomenon of interest would rise as the participants expressed their views and

experiences.

I selected this form of interviewing as the primary means of data collection. Wimpenny and Gass (2000) further indicated that the object of in-depth interviewing is to understand the perceptions of other people and their significance. The method of in-depth, phenomenological interviewing was used with a sample of individuals whose shared structural and social experiences provided the stories of a relatively small number of participants with enormous power (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000). Wimpenny and Gass stated that the object of in-depth interviewing is to understand the perceptions of other people and their significance.

### **Interview Schedule**

I conducted interviews for this research following the IRB at Gardner Webb University. The participants were initially contacted by phone, followed by a formal email. Upon appointment, a confirmation email was sent. Questions were included for the interview participants, protocol questions, the informed consent form, and the invitation to participate letter. Due to the pandemic, I interviewed participants via Zoom or Google Meet platforms. Before performing the interviews, I reviewed the consent document and received an electronic signature for each study participant's approval.

### **Data Analysis Process**

Creswell (2007) noted that data analysis is not a one-size-fits-all concept; rather, it is customized, updated, and synchronized. Virtual face-to-face interviews were used to gather data from eight Black female educational leaders in Region X, and any additional information or services offered by participants were included. In accordance with data collection, I conducted data reviews by taking notes during each interview and

immediately transcribing interviews after they were done (Miles & Huberman, 2014). Before coding data, I sent transcribed interviews to participants for member tests to ensure authenticity and to remove the inclusion of my personal biases. I maintained regular communication with participants to ensure the accuracy of each transcript. I used the Google Voice software program to code and analyze initial qualitative data derived from interview transcripts after participants signed an agreement verifying the accuracy of their transcripts.

I used coding to categorize the details, which then were used to understand the effect of mentoring and support relationships on Black female leaders in Region X, along with identifying obstacles and barriers. During the first step of coding, the participant-inspired key (i.e., commonly used words or phrases) was used as quotation marks (Saldaña 2016). Following that, based coding was used to create categories. To organize categories and subcategories, a hierarchical outline was created (Saldaña, 2016). Afterward, coding was used to establish common themes (Saldaña, 2016) and pattern matching to compare interview results (Miles & Huberman, 2014). To connect categories discovered in the data, axial coding was used (Saldaña, 2016). Codes were allocated to data chunks, and a matrix was created to organize data systematically. During the study, data saturation was verified when no new or appropriate information related to the thematic content of Black feminist thinking was generated.

According to Yin (2013), studying a current phenomenon in its true context requires the researcher to adhere to fundamental ethical standards comparable to those applied in medical research. To preserve the participants' anonymity, their legal names were not used in this report. Instead, each participant was assigned a nickname. Other

identifying information, such as age, was also identified in a range. Furthermore, before conducting interviews, I gained participant approval through the use of an informed consent form.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Several protocols were used in the course of this research to ensure ethical behavior while conducting this research. All participants were informed that their answers, responses, and additional documents would be kept confidential. Name and personally identifying details were not compromised, maintained, or shared. Participants were made aware that they might, at any moment, interrupt the interview or cease their involvement in the research study. All participants were allowed to view a copy of their transcript at their convenience. At the end of the study, the study's findings were given to all participants upon request. These activities were intended to protect the participants' participation and serve to benefit their involvement in the study.

### **Research Question**

Due to the exploratory nature of the research question, a qualitative approach was used for this analysis (Yin, 2013). In general, qualitative research is useful in the acquisition of culturally contextual knowledge on the beliefs, views, attitudes, and social contexts of different communities (Farrelly, 2013). In addition to providing the researcher with an opportunity to collect culturally contextual knowledge from the participants, case studies provide the freedom required to develop ideas and theories (Yin, 2013). Likewise, in this report, I tried to explore the human experience and concern with transferability as a means of validating findings for the theoretical growth of BFT. Findings on the perspectives of Black female educational leaders in Region X may not be generalizable to

all Black female educational leaders but may reinforce current studies on issues related to racial and gender inequality in the ranks of educational leaders.

Exploratory case studies encourage researchers to listen to the participants' stories and take a sincere interest in learning about their experiences (Cousins & Bourgeois, 2014; Yin, 2013). A case study design is used to analyze several cases to gain insight into a phenomenon using various approaches (Yin, 2013). The use of open-ended questions with female Black educational leaders in Region X helped me better understand the effects of mentoring services (e.g., informal and formal) and network support for the target community. To gain a thorough understanding of the challenges facing Black female educational leaders in Region X, I utilized case study interviews that centered on the effects of mentoring and other forms of support networks on the effectiveness, advancement, and sustainability of this sub-population of educational leaders.

In this study, qualitative research questions were expected to help achieve the research goal by directing the research on the subject of the study. The following research question helped to clarify the views of Black female educational leaders in Region X on the difficulties they face in the field of educational leadership and to understand their view of mentoring relationships and support networks in their careers: “How can Black female educators overcome obstacles and barriers to advance and sustain as leaders in Region X?”

### **Assumptions of the Study**

This study made a number of necessary assumptions to review. Participants were honest and transparent with their answers for the benefit of this research.

I believe there was a positive relationship between the mentee's satisfaction of

their career status and the relationship with their mentor. All participants were able to participate with the expectation that their name or school would not be published in the report. In earlier research studies of a similar type, the names of the research participants on this subject have been identified, and the names of the research participants in other similar studies have been hidden.

### **Instrumentation**

The study involved eight Black female educational leaders from Region X. By studying the cases of the individuals, the information collected would provide an overall picture of their support systems on their journeys to leadership and how they are sustaining and maintaining in the leadership roles through mentorship.

The interviews were semi-structured and lasted up to 90 minutes each. Participants were asked the same questions. There were eight participants selected for the semi-structured interviews. The interview questions/topics were organized by the following: general information, the effect of race and gender on Black female educational leaders in Region X, formal mentoring opportunities and experience, informal mentoring opportunities and experience, networking opportunities and experience, support systems, mentoring/networking/supporting relationships, additional exploratory information, and concluding information. Participants were asked identical questions, which were created to assist with specifying obstacles and engage additional feedback regarding supportive relationships. Interviews took place in a virtual format, utilizing Zoom due to the pandemic. I asked participants to turn on their cameras for the ability to monitor and observe participants' nonverbal and verbal communication methods. I developed or validated the theory by synthesizing and examining field notes, transcripts, and



recordings. I was able to present themes in Chapter 4 by transcribing texts into units of meaning based on the interviews. The method described assisted with an understanding of significant patterns, concepts, descriptions, and important background information for reviewing the data from the viewpoint of the real world.

Participants were informed that their interview would be documented and that a transcript would be produced after the interview. At any time, the individual was entitled to request that their data be shared with them. Participants may have chosen not to answer any question for any reason. All data obtained from surveys and interviews were kept private and anonymous in a password-protected file on my computer drive.

### **Summary**

Chapter 3 presented the methodology for the study on the importance of mentorship for aspiring Black female educational leaders in Region X to maintain leadership sustainability and advancement despite obstacles. I recruited Black female educational leaders in Region X and conducted interviews. Data occurred and were grouped into themes that allowed me to understand the impact of mentoring and support for Black female educational leaders in Region X. Chapter 4 contains the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 4: Results**

### **Introduction**

The rationale of this research was to understand the experiences of Black female educators who have overcome barriers to not only become leaders but also advance, maintain, and sustain leadership in Region X. I utilized purposive sampling to locate and identify 13 Black females in Region X who were employed as educational leaders through district websites, word of mouth, and the North Carolina Public Schools Statistical Profiles database website for the interview process. Each potential participant was given a short demographic form that answered basic background information such as range of years of educational experience, age range, area of education, and certification utilizing the focus group protocol instrument (Appendix D). A focus group protocol informed consent form was given to participants prior to the semi-structured interview (Appendix E). I utilized semi-structured individual interviews to gather information to organize and report the data. A semi-structured focus group was formed based on the themes generated from the semi-structured interviews. Themes surfaced that led to specific topics of the focus group. Focus group data were collected and organized. I reported the data collected which are all grounded in the theoretical framework. All semi-structured interviews were conducted in the Zoom platform. Furthermore, all interviews and focus groups were transcribed, validated, examined, and coded for themes. The specific data aided in answering the following research question: “How can Black female educators overcome obstacles and barriers to advance and sustain as leaders in Region X?”

## **Interviews**

I conducted eight individual semi-structured, Zoom-recorded, and transcribed interviews. All participants completed the informed consent form and completed the background questionnaire form via Google forms. Pseudonyms were given to all participants for confidentiality. There was a total of 33 questions. Participants received a copy of the interview questions before the interview. The questions were categorized into the following sections:

- Background/Demographic Information
- Impact of Race & Gender on Educational Leadership in Region X
- Formal Mentoring Opportunities and Experiences
- Informal Mentoring Opportunities and Experiences
- Networking Opportunities and Experiences
- Support Systems
- General Questions Regarding Mentoring/Networking/Support Relationships
- Additional Inquiry Questions
- Questions for Discussion

The interview questions were field-tested by two Black female educators outside of Region X. I chose to stop the study at eight interviews because of saturation of information. Saturation is an idea utilized in qualitative research that supports the completion of participant searching due to enough data to uphold the theory (Hennink & Kaiser, 2019).

## **Participant Interviews**

In this section, I describe each Black female educational leader who participated

in the interview. Pseudonyms were given to each participant for confidentiality, which are described as conductors and agents. Due to low representation, Table 2 does not include educational positions. The Black female educational leaders hold various leadership positions in Region X. Table 2 indicates the background information for each participant, including pseudonym names, educational background, total number of years in education, educational leadership, and age range.

**Table 2**

*Region X Black Female Leadership Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age range	Years in education	Years in educational leadership	Employment status
Conductor 1	46-50	20-25	11.5	Principal
Conductor 2	51-55	30-35	15	Central office
Conductor 3	35-40	15-20	4	Assistant principal
Conductor 4	46-50	25-30	11	Principal
Conductor 5	51-55	25-30	18	Central office
Conductor 6	51-55	30-35	6	Principal
Conductor 7	51-55	30-35	24	Central office
Conductor 8	51-55	25-30	11	Assistant principal

Participants included eight Black female leaders (referred to as conductors) in Region X. Five of eight of the participants were in the age range of 51-55; two of the eight participants were in the age range of 46-50; and one Black female leader was in the age range of 35-40. Three of eight participants spent 30-35 years in education. Three of eight participants spent 25-30 years in education. One of eight participants had 15-20 years of educational experience. The years of educational leadership experience ranges

from 4-24 years. Participants who were school administrators participated from elementary, middle, and high school, along with central office staff. A focus group of Black educators who did not hold leadership roles in Region X were additional participants in the study. The focus group was utilized to discuss why these Black female educators did not enter leadership and to find out if there were common themes of what they perceived the barriers and obstacles for Black female leaders in Region X to be, and how these Black female leaders could advance and sustain their perspective leadership positions.

### **Participant Background Information**

#### ***Conductor 1***

Conductor 1 has been in education for 20-25 years and is in the age range of 46-50 years old. She has been in an educational leadership role for 11.5 years. Of the 11.5 years, she has served 6 years as a principal and 5.5 years as an assistant principal. To gain career advancement, she had to change school districts. Through the interview, Conductor 1 highlighted that no formal mentoring opportunities or experiences were given. However, there were informal mentoring opportunities and experiences from close friends of the same race and ethnicity that she participated in and took advantage of, but she made it clear throughout the interview that these mentoring opportunities were not available from the employed district.

#### ***Conductor 2***

Conductor 2 has been in education between 30-35 years and is in the age range of 51-55 years old. She has been in an educational role for 35 years. Of those 35 years, she has served as an assistant principal, principal, and in the central office. To gain

advancement, she chose to remain in her district and continuously have dialogue with her district leaders regarding advancement opportunities. In the interview, she highlighted that she was not privy to any type of formal mentorship. In addition, she added there were needs for networking opportunities for her that probably would have been very beneficial to her to see other women who looked like her and to see what they do. She added there was an informal mentor who she went to assist with sustainment in her leadership role as an administrator.

### ***Conductor 3***

Conductor 3 has been in education between 15-20 years and is in the age range of 30-35 years old. Of those 15-20 years, she has served as a teacher leader, mentor, instructional coach, and school administrator. To gain advancement, she moved school districts. During the interview, she stated a strong need for a sister circle that meets on a consistent basis in order to overcome the barriers and obstacles Black female leaders face in Region X.

### ***Conductor 4***

Conductor 4 has been in education for 20-25 years and is in the age range of 46-50. She has been in an educational leadership position for 11 years. Conductor 4 has moved between various districts to gain advancement. She discussed the good ole boy network as being a barrier to advancement in the districts she served. Like all other participants, Conductor 4 did not have a formal mentor to support or assist her. She stated that one barrier is that people have expectations of how far Black women can go. In her previous district, there has never been an African American female high school principal, which is an obstacle to advancement and sustainability within the district for Black

female educational leaders.

### ***Conductor 5***

Conductor 5 has been in education for 25-30 years and is in the age range of 51-55 years old. She has been in an educational leadership position for 18 years. Conductor 5 also had to change school districts to advance to a leadership role. She blames the good ole boy network as a continuous barrier to advancement and sustainment in Region X. The participant could not recall if she had been given a formal mentor. However, she stated that her White counterparts always had someone looking out for them. Conductor 5 discussed that she had to find informal mentor support to assist her in sustaining her leadership positions. She also stated that she had a group of friends who were Black female leaders she leaned on for support that aligns with similarities of the Underground Railroad concept. These ladies, she stated, navigated the waters to assist her with career advancement and sustainment.

### ***Conductor 6***

Conductor 6 has been in education for 30-35 years and is in the age range of 51-55 years. She served in an educational leadership role for nearly 7 years. Of the 7 years, she has served as an assistant principal and principal. Conductor 6 contributes respect to be an obstacle and barrier in her leadership position. She believes that race is the major factor in the lack of respect she receives from the employees. The participant discussed the obstacle of being alone because there is no one to trust around you who looks like you. They do not understand the obstacles Black women in leadership face. Conductor 6 felt that she has had informal mentors to go to and discuss situations. She felt there is a strong good ole boy and girl network in her district that sets a barrier for sustainability.

She stated that without the support assistance of those in an unspoken network looking out for her, she does not know how she could survive in her leadership position.

#### ***Conductor 7***

Conductor 7 has been in education for 30-35 years and is in the age range of 50-55 years. Overall, she has been in an educational leadership role for 24 years. She has served in the roles of assistant principal, principal, director, and assistant superintendent. Conductor 7 relocated districts to gain career advancement. During the interview, she stated that due to barriers, she felt she had to relocate. Conductor 7 also sought assistance through networking unofficially and the support of a group of Black women who face the same obstacles as she does.

#### ***Conductor 8***

Conductor 8 has been in education for 30-35 years and is in the age range of 51-55 years old. Overall, she has been in an educational leadership role for 11 years. Conductor 8 relocated districts to gain career advancement. She did not have a formal mentor to guide her through the troubled waters of educational leadership. However, Conductor 8 stated that she has a group of female leaders to support her when she faces obstacles, such as the lack of formal networks and an understanding of Black females, including the lack of opportunities for leadership advancement.

#### **Summary of Findings From the Interviews**

The eight conductors in this research emphasized multiple ideas that emphasized their experiences and discussed how they overcame barriers, became leaders, advanced, maintained, and sustained leadership in Region X. The conductors indicated that barriers such as intersectionality, disrespect, and advancement obstacles they face as educational



leaders are due to the glass ceiling developed by good ole boy and girl networks. The conductors also highlighted both informal and formal network opportunities, including formal and informal mentorships, were important to advancement and sustainability. Of the eight conductors interviewed, eight stated the importance of networking and mentorship. The emphasis on informal networks was prominent in the advancement of sustainability. Overall, how the conductors overcame barriers, became leaders, and are advancing, maintaining, and sustaining leadership in Region X is by informal networking and informal mentorships similar to the Underground Railroad.

I wanted to explore the obstacles or barriers faced by Black women in educational leadership to advance and sustain in their leadership positions in Region X. During a 60-minute semi-structured interview, 33 questions were asked with eight subheadings to answer the research question and develop themes. The subheadings focused on Black female leaders in Region X regarding the impact of race and gender, formal mentoring opportunities and experiences, informal mentoring opportunities and experiences, networking opportunities and experiences, support systems, general questions regarding mentoring/networking/support relationships, additional inquiry questions, and questions for discussion. I concluded each interview by asking participants if they had any additional feedback for the research or their experiences of leadership in Region X. Moments of clarity are identified in the next section from the semi-structured interviews addressing the findings of the subheadings in relation to the research question. I discovered common themes that emerged during this process in relation to the barriers and obstacles for Black female leaders in Region X. The themes are discussed in further detail, in correspondence with to the research question. They are also addressed through

the subthemes produced from the transcripts of the participants' interviews and replies.

The research question was, “How can Black female educators overcome obstacles and barriers to advance and sustain as leaders in Region X?”

Numerous questions were addressed to elicit participants' accounts of their unique experiences as school leaders who face intersectionality due to their race and gender. I sought for participants to share their perspectives and perceptions of how they dealt with their reality of "double jeopardy" (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). They detailed their experiences in spoken responses to the interview questions. I interviewed Black female school leaders in Region X on their leadership experiences in light of their race and gender. Although the participants in this example described predominantly bad events, they never expressed, verbally or nonverbally, that they allowed these negative experiences to define them or deter them from the larger aim of ensuring children received a meaningful education. The responses to the interview questions, in conjunction with the document evaluation, resulted in the formation of the first major topic.

### **Theme 1: Marginalization and Microaggressions**

All the women in this study experienced discrimination during their careers based on their ethnicity or gender. The women were all perplexed by the possibility of discrimination despite their leadership talents. They were unsure if discrimination was motivated by a single factor, such as race, or by numerous factors, such as being a woman or being a Black woman. The following statements were made by participants regarding their daily with microaggressions in the workplace.

Conductor 5 articulated her obstacle with marginalization, microaggressions, and

intersectionality as follows: She felt as if her thoughts and suggestions were being marginalized at work due. She explained that when she makes suggestions, “there's silence, nobody says anything and then 10 minutes later Johnny Appleseed says the same thing and it's the greatest thing since sliced bread.”

Conductor 4 shared her struggle of not being respected or heard due to intersectionality: “Absolutely, I think that people have expectations of how far we can go. In my previous district, there has never been an African American female high school principal.” Conductor 2 explained,

I think that just we know that being an African American you already got one strike behind you, and I think that once we show that people that we are to be respected and that we matter. Then when you add being a female, that is strike 2.

We do have qualities, and that we can contribute to make things better for everyone and we're not just in it for ourselves we're in it for everyone.

Conductor 2 explained,

You can tell in meetings when you get there with the whole district as far as administrators, and board members; You see who they migrate to, they don't speak directly to you, wave their hand. But that's it, they walk past you, or they may pass you, and walk straight to the men.

## **Theme 2: Good Ole Boy and Girl Network**

All the conductors felt that there was a good ole boy and girl network and glass ceiling that prevent women and minorities from achieving the peak of their careers in their districts. Conductor 1 shared,

I completely agree with the fact there is a glass ceiling. I mean if you just look at

the population of administrators and what their demographics are in this region, you do not see a lot of African American principals male or female. I think there's a glass ceiling. Just informally, we talk about the good old boy network and how that often blocks us from getting promotions and just different positions in administration. In my district specifically, there's only one African American principal, as I said before only one African American administrator at our central office and that's it."

Conductor 1 noted,

Like I mentioned before, I agree, it's quite frank at times when you see certain people get positions, and very cliquish people that they are asked to represent the district and chosen to serve on committees. Some are asked to speak for the district, it is very rare that you see someone looking out for us, that is very rare. So, I agree that there is a system of our culture of taking care of your own, it's there, but we don't have anyone to take care of us because there's no one in our system.

Conductor 4 felt that there is a good ole boy network in every system where she has been employed: "I think that people have expectations of how far we can go. In my previous district, there has never been an African American female high school principal." Conductor 1 reiterated,

In end in some respects, yes because there are certain people in certain positions again that take care of their own, always together, but I've witnessed like being in the midst of African American colleagues working or just talking to each other and someone say, oh why can't we be a part of this sister girl club, our sister girl

meeting and we all kind of stopped and looked and said, What is that supposed to mean? I think they're intimidated by us being together, but you know when they're together no one says anything, or thinks that it's out of the ordinary so I agree that there's probably a culture of good ole girl club as well. That is why we have to meet secretly to help each other cope when things like this happen.

### **Theme 3: The Necessity of Establishing Oneself**

The first and most significant topic that emerged from the data analysis was that Black female school leaders in Region X felt compelled to demonstrate their legitimacy in their leadership positions, as eight of the participants' replies featured this theme. The data sets provided insight into and explanations for why the participants felt this way. Even after preparing for and earning a position as a school leader through education and thorough interview processes, participants felt the need to demonstrate their knowledge and capability to serve in the capacity. Conductor 1 explained,

I feel that I've always felt that when your skin is brown you must prove yourself even harder even more so than other people of other races in any profession so in the education profession, I feel like we have to work 110 percent or twice as hard to get the same accomplishments to get the same position than anyone in that was White or another race.

Conductor 5 said, "I'm expected to fail." In the same way, Conductor 6 felt her race and gender influenced the obstacles and barriers she faced currently as a Black educational leader, not as much gender as race. Due to her leadership role, she wants others to accept that she is the leader and that she knows what she is doing. She stated that being "respected" by her faculty is the biggest obstacle. Participants also discussed

the need of having to relocate to receive job advancements. Conductor 7 shared,

I did not relocate but I did have to, I had to get out of my comfort zone from where I was for over 20 years, and I felt like I needed to leave my position to go to a higher place. I could not see myself moving any further than where I was in my former district due to barriers.

#### **Theme 4: Isolation**

All the participants discussed the feeling of loneliness within their specific schools and districts. Many disclosed the feeling of not having anyone talk to or to vent with when frustrations or problems arise due to the lack of individuals who are employed of the same race and gender.

Conductor 3 put it this way:

I think some of the barriers that I really see is being one of the only ones, leadership is lonely in itself, but being a woman of color in leadership and not really having anyone to go to or vent to can be very challenging and then trying to make sure that you are being that best representation.

Conductor 4's response supported this theme:

There is no one else who looks like me in leadership, so that can be difficult.

People look at you as the resident expert on everything Black. Other things that make that difficult is you don't have a support group or an affinity group of people who are like you that just to vent or talk with.

Conductor 7 further explained, "Not having someone that looks like me to bounce ideas with or share some of the same experiences in education. Sometimes it can be very lonely anyway."

### **Theme 5: Lack of Support Systems**

All 13 educational leaders desired to have both informal and formal mentorship opportunities. I also noted that none of the educational leaders had any formal mentoring but did receive some informal mentoring. All participants wanted a formal mentor but did not have access. Conductor 7 made a powerful statement regarding formal mentorship. She stated,

It just wasn't there in the district; you know when you are supposed to have that Mentor for Education for 3 years.... I try to do the things that I wish someone had done for me because the resources weren't there.”

All participants reported not having a formal mentor as a leader. However, there were influential individuals who assisted them throughout their leadership role. Participants described support systems for sustaining despite workplace gender and race concerns. They have created informal networks and connections with informal mentors to advance and sustain their leadership positions in Region X. These connections assisted participants in a way similar to the Underground Railroad. They discussed having codes and terminology to navigate through leadership obstacles and barriers. Participants were asked if they had a specific group of other Black women in Region X with whom they felt safe to discuss their frustrations and barriers regarding their position.

Conductor 8 stated,

I was the only Black assistant principal; there was one Black female principal, and I was able to speak with her, but there was another Black female that's in the district that I was able to discuss some of my concerns and get advice on how to move forward. So again, the issue is in that district and in the Region X, how are

we or how are they recruiting other Black female professionals? I'm not talking about teachers I'm talking about the district staff I'm talking about surrounding superintendents.

Conductor 8 went on to discuss why she trusted this particular group of women. She stated, "Well I'll be honest, because they've traveled the same path that I have they've encountered some of the same roadblocks and who traveled that same path they had the same roadblocks." The benefits that have been gained from this support group to advance or sustain the educational leadership position in Region X, according to Conductor 8, were acknowledged by the following statement:

Again, it was very limited, so the females that I did work directly with helped me to understand the processes in place to move to the next level. They shared within the region people that would or could provide some assistance or questions or answers if needed. But again, and I'm sorry to keep going back, I keep going back to me having to ask questions, there should be a mentor for a while we have a mentor program for teachers so why don't we have a mentor program for leaders?

Conductor 5 explained how her mentor relationships evolved during the year:

I think I'm being a sounding board and giving feedback, you know somebody that you could talk to and there are no repercussions. I can't do that with the White people that I work with. There's never been a White person that I can just talk to and be frustrated and share my frustrations and not fear any repercussions, so it was nice to have someone that I could talk with and share in a safe space.

Conductor 7 shared an interesting statement in relation to mentoring, networking, and support networks and advice that was shared with Black women seeking to be



educational leaders in Region X. She stated, “Speak up for support. Don't just be isolated and think that there's not someone out there to support in reference.”

Conductor 3 discussed how she desired to have networking opportunities but was not afforded an opportunity:

I wish I would have had a Sister Girl Circle. I think it would have been a fantastic idea. One Saturday every other month Black women in education leadership roles to get in kind of table. I think the networking opportunities personally are just going to build you up, just to say: You got this girl, you can do it. This would open doors and would definitely put you on their shoulders to break the glass ceiling that is there.

I captured additional thoughts and discussions relevant to this study. Conductor 2 claimed,

I think that we know that being an African American, you already got one strike behind you, and I think that once we show that people that we are to be respected and that we matter, we have qualities, and that we can contribute to make things better for everyone and we're not just in it for ourselves we're in it for everyone.

Conductor 7 shared,

I love the title of this study; I think it is going to be read and pulled and used for sources for many years to come. Thank you for having the courage to do the research where others would not even give it the thought. I applaud you for that. I really do hope that when it is complete, I have an opportunity to see it, and use that for others because I think is needed in other regions. Because this is not just isolated for this region, it's going on all over the country.

## Focus Group

I interviewed a focus group made up of five Black female teachers in Region X in a semi-structured setting via Zoom. The discussion was transcribed utilizing the feature on the Zoom platform. Participants validated the information for member checking. The informed consent was completed before the discussion, along with the completion of the background questionnaire form. Participants were given a pseudonym and asked to change their name to protect their identity in the chat before being allowed in the meeting. The questions were field-tested with other Black female teachers outside of Region X. I describe each Black female educator who participated in the focus group in the section that follows. The following questions were given to the focus group for discussion:

1. Why did you choose the education field? What made you choose Region X?
2. What barriers or obstacles have you faced as a Black female educator in Region X? How did you overcome these barriers?
3. Why did you choose not to pursue educational leadership?
4. What do you believe are perceptions or barriers of Black female leaders?
5. Do you think Black female leaders experience microaggressions in their leadership roles? Give examples of why or why not.
6. How do you think Black female leaders cope with these microaggressions?
7. Do you feel there is a good ole boy, and or good ole girl network in your system? Explain why, or why not.
8. What actions are needed to assist Black female leaders with advancement and sustainability in Region X?

9. Do you believe that these Black female leaders need a mentorship or network to succeed and sustain their leadership positions in Region X? Explain why or why not.
10. Any further questions or discussions?

Table 3 indicates the background information for each participant, including pseudonym names, educational background, total number of years in education, and age range.

**Table 3**

*Region X Black Female Focus Group Demographics*

Pseudonym	Age range	Years in education
Agent 1	56+	11-15
Agent 2	51-55	20-25
Agent 3	36-40	11-15
Agent 4	46-50	25-30
Agent 5	41-45	20-25

The focus group consisted of five Black educators in a non-leadership role in Region X. Each focus group participant had a different age range. The age ranges were from the age of 41 to over the age of 56. Two participants had 11-15 years of service in education, two participants had between 20-25 years of service, and one participant had 25-30 years of service in education. The group was instructed to answer each question one at a time. At the end of each person's response, additional thoughts could be stated. Because there was considerable information saturation, I decided to limit it to one focus group.

Themes were established during the data analysis process based on participant replies and feedback acquired using an interview guide. All participants were asked the same questions. Some participants responded to the questions without providing more comments, while others responded to the questions while providing extra feedback, they considered was pertinent to the question.

### **Good Ole Boy Network**

Agent 1 has spent between 11-15 years in education and is over 56. She led the conversation when discussing the barriers and obstacles she has faced as a Black female educator in Region X. She discussed the barrier of the good ole boy network, specifically concerning the school board. Agent 1 explained,

My district's school board doesn't look like the make-up of our school system. It is mostly made up of all White men. There are no Black and Brown people that reflect our students. Witnessing this same routine is disheartening. Who wants to stay in a district where the top doesn't look like you?

Agent 1's statement stood out and mirrored the conductors' responses addressing barriers and obstacles such as the good ole boy network. She chose not to pursue advancement in her career due to the lack of witnessing educational leaders in her district. She stated that by the time there was a Black female leader in place who she admired, she felt it was too late in her career to begin the groundwork.

Agent 2 has spent between 20-25 years in education and is between the ages of 50-55 years. She disclosed her barriers and obstacles as a teacher in Region X, along with her outlook on advancement and sustainability within her district. Agent 2 felt that she has had obstacles since day one. She stated,

You know there is a system, a clique and if you don't fit into that clique, then you don't fit in. Just by the color of my skin, I feel I don't fit in, and so many times, oftentimes and still even today, my voice is not heard, just simply because I am Black.

Agent 5 is between the ages of 41-45 and has been employed as an educator between 20-25 years. Agent 5 believes there are obstacles for Black females to advance due to the lack of diversity within the county. She stated,

It is all about who you know in order to advance. There is no one that looks like us in leadership positions, including the superintendent and school board.

Regarding sustainability, we don't have the support that we need. It needs to start at the top and trickle down. This is why we have to lean on each other, along with other people to help us.

Agent 4 has been in education for 25-30 years. She is between the ages of 46-50 years old. Agent 4 discussed her observation of Black female leaders in Region X and the obstacles she feels they have faced. She stated,

I think that Black females in leadership deal with microaggressions that stem from jealousy and ignorance. I've noticed White coworkers want to sabotage the Black females that are in administration. I have seen what they would do for White female administrators, but not do for a Black female. I just feel Black female leaders are not given the same resources. The Black female leader has to seek out her own resources and find her own support system.

### **Marginalization and Microaggressions**

All agents felt that the barriers and obstacles were labels in the workplace as

educators such as being aggressive, confrontational, good ole boy and girl networks, or the “angry Black woman” perception. The agents felt if they speak up in meetings, they are labeled as being too bold. People are intimidated by their intellect. Agent 1 began the conversation by detailing how the faculty and staff within her school system were patterned after the school board, which is all White. Several agents nodded their heads in agreement.

Agent 3 discussed the obstacles and barriers for her as a Black educator. She stated,

having a voice and standing up for me being with elementary students, just being able to see how to say things. Just having a voice as far as a Black female and usually being the only Black female, not coming off when I'm dealing with my co-workers or whatever as the necessarily aggressive person because I'm standing up for what I believe. I know what is right for my kids or my students and not be labeled as aggressive.

Agent 5 stated, “I know some Black women are often looked at as not having the same level of intelligence or the same level of leadership ability that our White counterparts may have.”

### **Isolation**

All focus group participants felt a sense of isolation, like the Black female leaders in Region X. They described the feeling of loneliness in dealing with being the only Black female in their departments, grade levels, or schools.

Agent 3 is between the ages of 36-40 and has been in education for 11-15 years. The obstacle and barrier she discussed was marginalization and intersectionality. She

said,

For me, an obstacle or barrier as a Black female education is having a voice and standing up for my students, just having a voice as far as a Black female and usually being the only Black female. I don't want to come off as aggressive when dealing with my coworkers because I'm standing up for what I believe. Knowing what is right for my students, or just not agreeing with you does not mean I am aggressive, and I have had to learn how to navigate the perception. I have to learn to overcome being the only Black educator in the building.

Agent 4 noted,

They couldn't see that because they were too busy putting that they thought I was aggressive or think I was just trying to disagree with that, so I would have to say that would be a barrier that I've had to learn how to overcome as a classroom teacher as being usually the only Black educator.

Agent 1 echoed,

It's sort of hard to get your ideas and your initiatives off the ground when you have your counterpart, your other colleagues that are White squash our ideas. There is a lack of people of color around us. There's not enough of us to support one another.

Agent 2 stated,

It was challenging day one. It was always me; I was the only Black female. It's been very lonely at times. I am from a very incestuous county because they like to keep things in House. There is a clique, if you don't fit in that system, then you just don't fit in. Just by the color of my skin as the only Black female in my

position, I didn't fit in. So many times, my voice is not heard, simply because I am Black. They do not value my voice. That is something I had to grow into my own. I tried for years to mimic what my coworkers were and there was one year, when I tell you, I was depleted in every way the end of the school year, I was depleted mentally, emotionally, and physically. I was professionally depleted, that is the most depressed I have ever felt as a professional. The one thing that has helped me to get through, is my faith. Also, my love for students and the feedback from students and families.

### **Lack of Support Systems**

The focus group participants believed that their school systems were lacking formal mentorships for Black women in leadership positions. The participants acknowledged that they felt that Black female leaders could not maneuver the troubled waters without formal mentorships. Agent 4's response sums up the group:

Black women are not given the same resources, especially Black female leaders. I feel like a lot of times the Black female must seek out her own resources, she has to find her own support system. There needs to be some type of support system for all Black educators.

### **Summary**

Chapter 4 focused on the data collection from the semi-structured interviews and a focus group. An overview of the sample, a descriptive review of the results, and a detailed analysis of the results based on themes identified in the data are included in Chapter 5. The participants' answers were connected to the research question for organization purposes.



Participants stated that staff personnel go above and above to double-check what they have said or decided. The fact that they are an instructional leader is undermined by the intersectionality of their race and gender. In other situations, individuals claimed that their age had a role in this as well.

Coding and themes were established to align with the conductors from Semi-Structured Interview Questions 2, 4, 5, 7, and 9. The answers from the focus group also aligned with the themes from the semi-structured interviews with the conductors: marginalization, microaggressions, good ole boy network, isolation, and lack of support systems.

Chapter 5 summarizes and discusses the findings as well as the responses to the research question, the study's implications and limits, and recommendations for future research. The chapter concludes with a summary of the chapter.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

*Diversity is being invited to the party; Inclusion is being asked to dance ~ Verna Myers.*

*I had crossed the line. I was free; but there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom. I was a stranger in a strange land. ~Harriet Tubman*

### Introduction

This concluding chapter highlights and discusses the research findings. The chapter begins with the purpose and the summary, followed by the identified themes. The findings were related to the theoretical frameworks of intersectionality, BFT, and CRT. Additionally, this chapter contains recommendations for future study, policy implications, and practice ideas.

### Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine Black female educators' perceptions of the barriers related to their own leadership opportunities. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and a focus group. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the study's results, implications, and suggestions for future research. Recommendations, delimitations, and limitations are also noted in this chapter.

### Summary

In the educational region where this study was conducted, there are 502 administrators in all; barely 6% of them are Black. In Region X, there are a total of 16 Black female administrators, or 3% of the total. While eight of 14 districts in Region X have Black educational leaders, six counties lack Black administrators, and none of the leaders are superintendents.

Extensive research has been conducted on the obstacles Black women experience

on their path to educational leadership, including the superintendentship (A. R. Brown, 2014; Grant, 2012; Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). However, as Black women assume positions of power, complications arise, reinforcing the need for additional research on the viewpoints of Black female leaders about mentoring and support relationships. This study adds to previous research noting that Black women are frequently subjected to marginalizing experiences that seek to deprive them of the ability to be viewed as knowledge representatives (Jean-Marie, 2013; Wallace et al., 2014). This study found the following themes related to Black female educators in leadership roles: marginalization, microaggressions, good ole boy network, isolation, and lack of support systems.

### **Marginalization**

Black women face marginalization as a result of intersectionality, which emphasizes the intersections of many identities such as race, sex, class, gender, and sexual orientation (Bowleg, 2012). All the women in this study reported that during their careers, they had experienced discrimination based on their ethnicity or gender. The women were all perplexed by the discrimination despite their leadership talents. They were unsure if discrimination was motivated by a single factor, such as race, or by numerous factors, such as being a woman or being a Black woman. Often, Black women are forced to choose between their gender identities and their African American identities due to a variety of challenges (e.g., political, education, personal). White women benefit from their relationship with White men. Although there may be a disparity, they share their race from the benefit of being White men's family members, such as wives, daughters, and mothers. Craig (2014) referenced Hurtado's (1989) development of an understanding of how operational inequality affects contact between women of different

races and ethnicities. Craig explained that Black women do not share the same link with White men; their interests differ greatly from White women's interests due to their relationship with White men, the most privileged group in American society. Black women do not have this link, and as a result, their femaleness is not the same. Craig stated explicitly that the definition of woman is constructed differently for White women and women of color, even though gender serves as the identifying mechanism for both. Black women and women of color have not been able to accept norms of beauty and femininity due to the social restraints led by stereotyping, cultural marginalization, and economic exploitation. The stated factors have become a baseline and standard for Black women which has led them to be degraded. These benchmarks have become a standard for all femininities (Collins, 2009). In her interview, Conductor 5 stated that when dealing with her mostly White female employees and counterparts, she feels there is a secret network out there:

The connections that White people have out there, almost like a spider web in this region; everybody knows everybody; everybody knows everybody's family. We don't have access to the same information that a lot of my White peers and employees have access to.

When a person belongs to numerous subordinate groups, they are subject to whatever assumptions have been made about those groups. This idea affects the Black female school leader on several levels. As a result, she must make judgments regarding her leadership that will allow her to succeed despite these setbacks.

### **Microaggressions**

Microaggressions are frequently directed towards Black women in educational

leadership. Carter and Vavrus (2018) defined microaggressions as short and common verbal, behavioral, and environmental components, whether intentional or accidental, that express hostile, insulting, or negative racial slights and insults directed at the target person or group. Ignoring race and gender issues may result in unwanted microaggressions and systemic racism in educational leadership for Black women. Non-minorities must possess a certain amount of self-knowledge and understanding in order to comprehend how to manage racial and gender-based difficulties that frequently result in microaggressions. Carter and Vavrus shared that Rubin and Rubin's (2005) research indicated that while subtle forms of racism are difficult to recognize, racism is ubiquitous in schools and presents itself through prejudice, bias, a lack of impartiality, lower standards, microaggressions, unequal access and resources, and systemic exclusion. In this study, it was discovered that ignoring microaggressions left all but one participant feeling as though there was no support system in place to act as a counterspace when discussing issues of race and gender. All participants felt isolated within the workplace in leadership positions and their teaching positions.

When any member of an educational institution perceives that there is no support structure in place to discuss the microaggressions that they encounter on a regular basis, a counterspace must be created. When there is no support system in place, minorities may feel compelled to absorb microaggression experiences, which can lead to trauma, isolation, and a lack of advancement and sustainability. When there is no support structure, women of color, particularly Black women, may feel uncomfortable sharing these issues (Arnold et al., 2016). However, most of this inequity may be handled by instilling and maintaining a heightened sense of awareness among all members of the

institution.

Previous research on Black female school leaders reveals that women continue to be underrepresented in these positions because their voices are not heard, both physically and metaphorically (Dowdy & Hamilton, 2012). The outcomes of this study support this idea because participants reported needing to prove themselves in their roles as well as being questioned despite their positions of leadership. Participants reported that their trustworthiness was frequently called into question by the stakeholders around them. The literature supports Theme 1: Microaggressions that the participants stated they endure while advancing and sustaining their leadership roles. They reported that anything they say is frequently followed up on or confirmed by people who go to someone else (who is usually White and/or male) to check. This behavior reflects the study participants' beliefs that the majority of the White race's perception is that they are unqualified for the role. Participants feel that they are unable to contribute to the literature on educational leadership since they are unqualified. Participants noted that it was as though the majority group is tolerant of Black female school leaders, but when it comes time for them to speak their opinions and provide perspectives that may differ from those of the majority, that opportunity is denied. The consequences of Black women's many isms manifest themselves in various ways in the professional life of Black female school leaders.

### **Isolation**

Isolation is an additional theme from the findings of this study and is supported by Grant's (2012) claim that Black female school leaders have been admitted into situations where the majority group has assembled, yet they continue to be outsiders due to their invisibility and lack of voice when discussion begins. Conductor 3 felt that the barrier of

being one of the only ones (Black female leader) in the room. As the only Black female in the room, she feels alone and isolated. Because non-Black women cannot relate to Black women's opinions, microaggressions, and marginalization, their voices and points of view do not need to be confirmed by them. Black female voices, however, must be heard, considered, and cherished. Their perspectives must be included in what educational scholars study and understand about school leadership and administration. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) indicated that Black women professional leaders see themselves as they are increasingly visible but socially invisible; they are under increased pressure to adapt and make fewer mistakes. They discuss growing isolation and difficulty establishing credibility, as well as a lack of authority and sponsorship prospects.

### **Good Ole Boy Network**

Both men and women participants in Hoff and Mitchell's (2008) investigation acknowledged the presence of the good old boy network, which culturally marginalizes both women and African Americans in administration. Women seeking administrative careers suffer from a lack of insider status and connections. According to Hoff and Mitchell, the presence of a good old boy network may incentivize action such as supporting and assisting males within their network by intentionally providing them information regarding employment opportunities. The good old boy network is also known to withhold pertinent information from women to keep them out of the loop, whether they are job opportunities or political knowledge (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). These types of networks, if in existence, may be largely camouflaged; however, this type of behavior has a powerful and evident impact resulting in negative consequences which may include outsiders, specifically women, from seeking leadership roles within the

organization. Good old boy networks are a benefit to some but a disadvantage to others that do not take action to oppose or stop the behavior.

The irony of gender function expectancies in school management is that the establishments that declare to be kinship and gender-impartial organizational structures are nonetheless entrenched in male-dominated administrative roles and time limitations (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). Unfortunately, disparity between men and women is not the only impediment to African American women seeking positions of leadership. Despite the fact that many Black women hold leadership roles in professional contexts, many continue to experience gendered racism, the double whammy of being both Black and female (Jean-Marie, 2013). According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), when African American leaders become more visible, they may feel a sense of social invisibility and an increased pressure to conform and make fewer errors. Additionally, they experienced loneliness and untrustworthiness. They confronted misunderstandings about their identities and responsibilities, were subjected to heightened stereotyping, and experienced increased stress (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). When African American women are not invited to engage in networking circles, they experience feelings of invisibility.

### **Lack of Support Systems**

There are only 16 Black female administrators of 502 administrators in Region X. The participants continuously stressed the lack of support systems, such as mentorship and networking opportunities throughout the Region.

Mentoring connections have been identified as a source of support for sustainability and advancement in recent studies (Wyland, 2016); however, there is not a



mentoring program for women of color in Region X. The purpose of this study was to explore Black female educational leaders and teachers regarding the advancement and sustainability of Black female leaders despite obstacles and barriers. Additionally, throughout the semi-structured interviews, participants shared details about their experiences with, or lack of, these support networks. Due to microaggressions, marginalization, navigating politics, and additional barriers, the contributors of this study discussed the lack of support systems for Black female educational leaders to sustain and advance in their leadership positions in Region X.

The most recurrent issue that emerged from the interviews and analysis was the necessity of mentorship and networking, specifically informal networks, and mentorships. The informal mentorships and networks supported the women to consider themselves as leaders in ways they may not have considered previously. These individuals occasionally exerted influence over the women through their conversations, expertise, and advice. The concept and lived experience of validation were also present in these significant other interactions, where they were able to recognize and consolidate their developing leadership identities through witnessing others in leadership or engaging in leadership mentoring relationships.

This study discovered that Black females in education expressed a desire or need for increased engagement with women or others in leadership roles throughout their careers in teaching or leadership. They described a lack of identifiable influential others who could actively mentor, validate, or support them in their leadership growth. Where there were differences from others, the women leaders indicated how this perceived lack of opportunity created a hole in which they struggled to find colleagues with whom they

felt comfortable seeking counsel or support.

Numerous researchers have proven the scarcity of viable female leaders who can act as role models and mentors for those in training (Stelter-Flett, 2005). Similar thoughts and lived experiences have been reported in the research on women's leadership and are believed to influence work identity formation, self-efficacy, self-concept development, and successful career pathing (Stelter-Flett, 2005).

### **Connection to Theory**

The study was undergirded by three theories: CRT, BFT, and intersectionality.

#### ***CRT***

From a legal standpoint, CRT offers a critical critique of race and racism (Carter & Vavrus, 2018). It acknowledges that racism is ingrained in the fabric and system of American culture. The concept of naming one's reality or voice is central to CRT (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004).

According to CRT theorists, race is inextricably linked to relationships between individuals and groups, while additional demographics exacerbate the complexities inherent in those interactions (Carter & Vavrus, 2018). This study's stated findings lend credibility to CRT. The semi-formal interviews and discussions indicated that microaggressions occurred frequently in their work environment for Black female educators.

#### ***BFT***

According to Crenshaw (1989), BFT is a movement that emphasizes sexism's connection, gender identity, class oppression, and racism. This movement's message urges Black women to recognize, redefine, explain, and share their unique experiences of

racism and sexism (Collins, 2009). The term BFT, as employed in this study, encapsulates the participants' perspectives. According to BFT, the Black woman's identity is distinct from the woman identity. It implies that the Black woman experience is distinct from other forms of oppression, stemming from racism, sexism, and classism (Browne & Kennelly, 1999). This study's participants specifically reported that oppression manifested itself in the form of racism, sexism, and classism.

Conductor 7 emphasized this theory by her statement during her interview:

You're not invited to the boys' club and it's obvious in meetings and various platforms. It's obvious that I am a Black female, it hurts when I open my mouth and I am not heard, especially when I am in meetings.

The emergent themes indicate that significant microaggressions happened in a variety of ways, influencing the participants' racial and gender intersectionality.

Conductor 5 discussed a powerful statement relating to intersectionality. She discussed that due to her race and gender, "I have to be more than competent because I am a Black female."

### ***Intersectionality***

Crenshaw's (1989) Theory of Intersectionality encompasses a wide range of oppressions. The ability to transcend the numerous isms that Black female school leaders face daily is critical. These are the ideologies highly subtle in that they change depending on who she is connecting with and the setting in which she is operating. Consequently, Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) suggested that Black women focus on all aspects of minority difference and see how these sources of identification affect their struggle for success and comfort within majority-dominated organizations. In terms of Black women,

Crenshaw sought to develop a paradigm that transcended feminist theory and anti-racist policies, as these two notions tended to exclude them from discussion as a minority group. As a result, intersectionality has developed into a potent analytical tool for comprehending the perspectives of persons who do not belong to a majority group. According to Bright et al. (2015), social theory has a history of proceeding as if all women are White and all Blacks are men. This reaffirms Crenshaw's contention that Black women are frequently left out of discussions about societal injustices. By evaluating the experiences of Black female leaders and teachers in Region X, I employed CRT to investigate the relationship between race, racism, and power.

Participants in this study described a variety of the barriers and obstacles they encounter to sustain and advance in their leadership positions in Region X. They felt that they could not appear too strong for fear of coming across as aggressive, but they also could not appear too weak for fear of coming across as inadequate. Interviews also revealed emergent themes of isolation and lack of support systems.

Intersectionality divides Black women into two categories: They share their race and gender with Black men and White women, but that's all they have in common. The interviewees all described an experience they believed would not have happened to them if they had been White or male. This discovery broadened the scope of the investigation. Black women who were once the forerunners of education for their race, now stand at the bottom of the educational leadership ladder due to their experiences being marginalized and disappointed.

Conductor 2 hypothesized that Black female school administrators usually are either viewed as incompetent or pushy. Because of these possibilities, Black female

school leaders need to maintain a balance, so they appear savvy and confident without coming across as conceited and overconfident. The conclusion confirms Collins's (2009) statement that Black women must exercise restraint when exercising power. This polarizing reality forces Black women to operate in a domain where she reminds herself that she is an educational leader responsible for the development of the next generation. This conclusion backs up Collins's claim that Black women must exercise restraint when exhibiting power. In this seemingly polarizing reality, Black women are forced to operate in two domains. She must take two steps in her journey: one to remind herself that she is an educational leader responsible for the effective education of students and another to acknowledge that she is still a double minority operating within a culture that values whiteness and maleness.

There is considerable variability in the leadership styles of Black female school administrators compared to their White counterparts (Newcomb & Niemeyer, 2015). Black women have different perspectives on the world and their jobs. Consequently, Black women have gained more creativity in their leadership styles, focusing their efforts on what they can control and what is most important to them. Black women should deliver their thoughts cautiously to avoid coming across in ways that could be deceptive or misconstrued since it is crucial that they do not want to be misunderstood or deceived. As Jean-Marie (2013) discovered, Black women need to lead in ways that do not necessarily reflect those of their White or male counterparts because, regardless of what they do or the pressures they encounter, they must allow themselves to be perceived positively.

**Limitations**

The study was centered on Black female educational leaders in Region X, located in a rural section of the southeast United States. Because the focus was solely on Black women educational leaders in Region X, replies were generalized. Because of their personal experiences, the Black women interviewed may have limited the study's conclusions, which may not be inclusive or reflect all Black women in educational leadership roles in other regions. The sample size was limited due to the low number of Black female educational leaders in Region X. Because of the small number of participants at the time of the study, individuals may have been afraid of their identity being revealed; as a result, the sincerity of responses to interview questions may have been limited. To limit researcher bias, careful attention was paid to research coding and instrumentation.

**Delimitations**

Delimitations are choices made by the researcher. They identify the research constraints (Percy et al., 2015). One drawback centered on the geographical location of the Black female educational leaders and educators who participated in this study. All the participants were from Region X. The disadvantage of not having participants from different regions is that the Black female educational leaders and educators represented a small fraction of the whole, providing a restricted focus and only representing what was happening in one region. Furthermore, the presence of only Black female educators of Region X may suggest that their perspectives or encounters are influenced by the demographics of residing in Region X.

## **Recommendations for Practice**

The collected data and analysis in this study resulted in recommendations for future practice.

### ***Organizational Recommendations***

Despite the fact that each individual has a unique set of abilities that may be utilized to make a personal contribution to society, if organizational leaders do not allow their employees to optimize their skills, their full potential will be missed (Sandelands, 2017). Increasing diversity in higher positions within the organization requires leaders to organize workshops to raise awareness of stereotypical threats in the workplace and conduct professional development on intrinsic bias. Resource groups can be funded to promote employee resource groups to foster inclusion. Through the use of mentors, skills can be developed, including the implementation of mentoring programs to meet the needs of educational institutions and businesses. Sandelands (2017) expressed that by being who we are and doing what we do, we are called to exist in the image of God.

Organizational leaders are expected to reorient daily operations toward fair, equal, and resourceful operations that provide abundant goods and satisfy the physical and social demands necessary to sustain God's creation. Keller (2012) demonstrated that our labor is a manifestation of God's image. Humans have been entrusted with caring for and maintaining the earth by employing skills, producing innovation, and collaborating toward mankind's education due to our labor being an expression of God's image.

Organizations should focus on improvement business strategies and practices that focus on understanding and listening to the perspectives of Black female employees and ensure that stereotypical threats, discrimination, and personal bias do not hinder the chances for

Black female leaders to advance and to grow the organization in the future (Adams & Kirchmaier, 2016).

### ***Principal Preparation Programs***

University principal preparation programs might use the research to address the difficulties of Black women in leadership and educate them with information about potential impediments to better prepare them for educational leadership roles. Principal preparation programs provide information to all future leaders as they climb the educational leadership ladder, demonstrating the disparities in hiring methods for Black female leaders and the challenges they must overcome.

### ***Mentoring***

An additional recommendation is for more same-sex/same-gender mentorship groups to help Black females seeking to be academic leaders on their leadership journey base. The intersectionality theory notes that Black female leaders can benefit from a mentor in the following areas: a White male, a White female, and a Black female (Wyland, 2016). Having access to White female and male mentors would allow Black female leaders to navigate the troubled waters from different angles. Based on the participants' experiences and interviews, it was recommended that there was a need for more Black female representation to be able to share experiences, confide in about daily challenges, trust, and simply be able to offer counsel from someone who can understand. According to the findings of this study's research, there is a need for programs that promote diversity awareness and professional development centered on diversity mentorship and leadership (Barnes, 2017; Gamble & Turner, 2015; Mahoney, 2016). The findings revealed that mentorship groups are formed by White males or White females



who do not comprehend the challenges Black women experience in academics. To create sustainability and advancement among Black female educational leaders in Region X, a recommendation of a mentorship academy should be implemented to assist with the barriers and obstacles of microaggressions and marginalization.

### ***Networking Opportunities***

The findings of the research revealed that the participants have an underground network, like the underground railroad, where they have individually sought out other Black female leaders to sustain and advance in Region X, despite obstacles and barriers. All participants in the study voiced a need for networking. There is a great need for a Black female educational network, known as a Sista-Circle, established to prevent isolation and loneliness in their individual districts. According to the findings, there are limited minority, specifically Black female, educational leaders, employed in Region X; therefore, the Sista-Circle could be established for neighboring districts and additionally Region X to assist Black female leaders in navigating the troubled waters of educational leadership (Barnes, 2017; Bonaparte, 2016).

### ***District Equity Officer***

An additional recommendation would be to hire a district equity officer who is in conjunction with the human resources department to review hiring and recruiting practices for individual districts in Region X concerning minorities. The district equity officer could be responsible for professional development and professional learning communities focusing on race and gender equality. Participants discussed the need for networking and visibility. The district equity officer could review representation guidelines for conferences and committees to ensure equal representation of all races and

ethnicities. Rural districts should be required to participate in equity and diversity training.

### **Implications**

Lack of diversity, opportunities, and representation for Black women are frequently the result of acts of gender and racial discrimination (Pietri et al., 2018). During the research findings, while compiling themes, there was an indication that there is a significant number of barriers and obstacles Black women face when pursuing promotions and when employed in their leadership positions. Educational institutions are driven by the district's mission, vision, and core values, specifically of the leaders of the institutions. Based on the study's findings, there is support for the need of Region X to adopt standards that focus on the recruitment, promotion, and hiring of the advancement and sustainment of Black female educators. Standards that address recruitment, advancement, and sustainability should be a priority that aligns with the mission and vision of the leaders. Barriers and obstacles Black women face have a lasting negative effect on the advancement and sustainability of their careers and the success of organizations even if the treatment of these women is deliberate or unconscious bias by organizational leaders (Wodtke, 2015). Wodtke (2015) discovered that organizational leaders need to focus on understanding the marginalized groups' negative experiences and make efforts to improve their career experiences Vilkinas et al. (2019) stated that effective leadership is vital to the success of a business; leaders are viewed by their ability to lead a group of people to expand, craft, and innovate employees within their organization. The findings are noteworthy for educational institutions and leaders in Region X. When this is compromised by intersectionality and the marginalization of

Black female leaders, the institution suffers due to promoting identity qualities versus qualifications (Vilkinas et al., 2019).

According to the study's findings, a large number of these women were forced to rely on an underground support network in order to survive and advance in Region X. Black females in education who aspire to be leaders should be able to seek out not only supportive fellow Black female leaders, but also cross-cultural mentors who will encourage them in their leadership ascension, particularly given the region's lack of Black female leaders and upper-level leadership positions. The fact that there are so few Black women in central office leadership roles is problematic, as same race mentoring and networking are beneficial (Sherrard, 2019).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

I embarked on this study to discover how Black female leaders in Region X advanced and sustained in their educational leadership positions despite the obstacles and barriers. The research provided a discovery of the need for mentorship despite informal networks. Additional research could be done by looking at all minority educational leaders in Region X to review if Black males experience similar barriers and obstacles and determine if there is a Black male Underground Network to assist with advancement and sustainability. Due to the research focus on mentorship, additional research could be completed on districts in Region X that establish a mentorship for Black female leaders. I would suggest replicating this study with a focus on White female educational leaders regarding leadership advancement and sustainability in regard to mentorship and networks (M. A. Brown, 2018).

A final future research thought could be to examine the tenure of Black female

leaders who end up leaving the K-12 public school system due to the obstacles and barriers in Region X. The study could include Black female educational leaders in Region X who have retired.

### **Summary of Findings**

Black women in educational leadership are conscious of the racial and gender disparities that exist in their workplaces, particularly in Region X. The goal of this study was to get an understanding of how Black female educational leaders in Region X advance and sustain regardless of obstacles and barriers. The interviews emphasized how many Black female leaders in Region X faced similar problems in educational leadership. To address these issues, it was critical for me to recognize that a meaningful call to action required backing from non-minorities or the majority. It is necessary to make the unseen visible. There is a need for Black women in educational leadership to be viewed in their fullness, which means that their race and gender must be acknowledged within any educational leadership job. The most important takeaway from this study is that ignoring either race or gender for a Black woman is ignoring a component of their identity.

There is a need for the individual to be visible in educational leadership, as there is in any place of employment. When a person's identity is revealed, others can see the genuine attributes that person brings to the job. When a person is not seen, their profession defines them, and their experience becomes fabricated. As a result, time must be set aside for diversity and inclusion training. Diversity and inclusion training should be owned by everyone who expects to be recognized via its lens. In the end, educational institutions may be remembered for their distinctions rather than their similarities. As the variety of academia grows, it is time to appreciate the distinctions. There is a need for

mentorship programs and networks for Black female leaders in Region X to develop trust and vent without repercussions.

This study could lead districts in establishing a mentor program, specifically in Region X. The study could be constructed additionally for women who aspire to be leaders or develop leaders early in their careers. The research could assist educational leaders in developing educational programs to incorporate mentorship programs into their curriculum. Early mentoring and networking opportunities will hopefully assist the future leaders in Region X in finding the path to get to leadership which can lead to making a greater impact for a longer time frame. Women in Region X need the support and influence to change the barriers and obstacles in education to break through the glass or, according to Black females, the concrete ceiling.

## **Conclusions**

These findings corroborated many of the truths that Black women have known since the antebellum period. Black women have faced numerous challenges since the abolition of slavery. It is a shame today that Black female leaders must seek to find individuals who are not formal mentors or appointed by districts in Region X to assist with advancement and sustainability. However, there are informal mentors and networks who many of the participants described similar to the conductors and agents of the Underground Railroad who seek to demolish the ideals of the microaggressions and marginalization that are presented in districts.

I argue that there is a critical need for culturally competent researchers and educators. Researchers must continue to undertake research on Black female leaders in rural areas in order to assist in closing the gap in the educational literature addressing

their sole experiences in Black female educational leadership. Additional resources should be invested in diversity training for educators, as well as more opportunities for Black female leaders in Region X.

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**Appendix A**  
**Interview Guide**

## Interview Guide

### INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR PARTICIPANTS

The Power of the Underground Railroad: The Sistas' Guide for Survival to Navigate  
Troubled Waters in Educational Leadership

#### **Background/Demographic Information:**

Pseudonym:

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District Enrollment Size: 10,000< 11,000-20,000 20,000; 25,000 26,000-30,000 31,000+

Total number of years in education: 0-10 10-15 15-20 20-25 25-30 30-35 36+

Highest degree  
held \_\_\_\_\_

Age range: 30-35 35-40 41-45 46-50 51-55 56 & over

#### **General Information:**

1. Please tell me about yourself, specifically:

- a. Educational background
- b. Work experience detailing previous leadership experience and pathway to Educational Leadership
- c. Marital status
- d. Children and/or additional dependents

2. Please state your employment role:

- a. Assistant Principal
- b. Principal
- c. Central Office Staff
- d. Assistant Superintendent
- e. Superintendent

3. Total length of years spent as a classroom teacher:
4. Total length of years in administrative position

**Impact of Race & Gender on Educational Leadership in Northwest Region 7:**

1. How has your race and gender identity influenced your educational and professional experiences as a Black woman?
2. What do you think the expectations and demands are for you as a Black female educational leader in Northwest Region 7 compared to individuals of other races?
3. What are the current obstacles or barriers do you face as a Black female educational leader in Northwest Region 7?
4. How has your race and gender influenced the obstacles and barriers you are currently facing as a Black educational leader in Northwest Region 7?
5. Do you think there is a "glass ceiling" that prevents women and minorities from achieving the peak of their careers in educational administration in Northwest Region 7?
6. Have you ever felt as if your thoughts and suggestions were being marginalized (silenced) at work?
7. Do you believe your school district has a "good ole boy" system?
8. Do you believe your school district has a "good ole girl" system?
9. Did you physically relocate to or from Northwest Region 7 in order to gain a place in school administration?
10. Did you change school districts to get a career in school administration in Northwest Region 7?

**Formal Mentoring Opportunities and Experiences:**

11. Please explain any formal mentoring opportunities that you believe have been helpful to you since entering the field of education.
  - a. How did those formal mentoring opportunities affect your progression to an educational leadership position in Northwest Region 7?
  - b. How have those formal mentoring opportunities aided you in your role as an educational leadership in Northwest Region 7?
12. How would you characterize your experiences as a protégé in a structured mentoring relationship in Northwest Region 7?
13. Please explain any formal mentors or mentoring opportunities that you would have liked to have had but did not.
  - a. How do you believe formal mentors or mentoring opportunities may have helped you personally and professionally?
  - b. Why did you not have access, or why did you want not to access?
  - c. How do you believe certain individuals or mentoring interactions influenced you in your current position?

**Informal Mentoring Opportunities and Experiences:**

14. Please identify any important informal mentoring relationships you have had since entering the field of education in Northwest Region 7.

- a. How did such informal mentoring partnerships influence your transition into educational leadership in Northwest Region 7?
- b. How have those formal mentoring opportunities aided you in your role as an educational leader in Northwest Region 7?
- c. Tell me about your experiences as a protégé in an informal mentoring relationship, specifically in Northwest Region 7.

### **Networking Opportunities & Experiences:**

15. Please identify any networking experiences/events that you have considered to be important since entering the field of education.

16. Please explain any networking opportunities that you wish you might have had but did not.

- a. How do you believe such networking opportunities affected you personally and professionally?
- b. Why did you not have access, or why did you want not to access?

17. In your view, what effect has networking had on your success as an educational leader in Northwest Region 7?

### **Support Systems:**

18. In addition to mentoring and networking experiences, please describe any additional factors that you would characterize as support that you consider vital to successfully maintaining your position as an educational leader in Northwest Region 7.

19. Do you have a specific group of other Black women in Northwest Region 7 that you feel safe to discuss your frustrations and barriers regarding your position?

- a. Why do you trust this group of women?
- b. What benefits have been gained from this support group to advance or sustain in educational leadership position in Northwest Region 7?

20. How have mentoring, networking, and/or support systems helped you to establish and maintain a healthy work/life balance in Northwest Region 7?

### **General Questions Regarding Mentoring/Networking/Support Relationships:**

21. Explain how your mentor relationships (formal or informal) have evolved during your career.

22. Did you have a defining mentoring or networking experience that you think had the greatest effect on you? Please describe it and clarify why you think it was so important.

23. Consider a difficult situation in your career, especially during your tenure as an educational leader, in which your mentoring or networking involvement played a role. Please explain how mentoring/networking supported you in coping with this situation.

24. What qualities of a mentor do you believe have been most important to you as a Black female educational leader in Northwest Region 7?

25. Were any of the mentors listed earlier in this interview Black females?

- a. If so, how did your mentoring relationship change as a result of having the same race and gender?
  - b. If not, how did your mentoring relationship change as a result of being of a different race and/or gender?
26. In your view, can racial differences in educational leadership in Northwest Region 7 be minimized by mentoring, networking, and/or support relationships?
27. Do you believe your geographic location has affected your access to mentoring, networking, and/or funding opportunities?
28. Do you think your geographic location influenced your recruiting process for your current position? If so, how so?
29. Do you currently tutor others?

**Additional Inquiry Questions:**

30. How can you describe your relationship with your coworkers?
31. What aspects of your leadership position do you enjoy the most? Why is this so?

**Questions for Discussion**

32. In terms of mentoring, networking, and support networks, what advice do you have for Black women seeking to be educational leaders in Northwest Area 7?
33. Is there anything else you'd like to say that you believe is relevant to this study?

**Appendix B****Informed Phone Consent Script Form**

**Gardner-Webb University IRB  
Informed Phone Consent Script Form**

***THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE  
SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE TROUBLED WATERS IN EDUCATIONAL  
LEADERSHIP***

Dear Participant:

Thank you in advance for taking the time to speak with me about your potential participation in my research regarding investigating the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability, by identifying obstacles and barriers of their leadership positions in education. In order to perform my research, I am interviewing individuals who are in Region X that serve in an Educational Leadership position. I am attaching three documents to this email:

- The Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- A link to the background questionnaire
- Interview questions

The Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University IRB

The attached Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University IRB requires you to execute a copy as evidence of your consent to participate in this study. The Informed Consent Form will be emailed to all participants, signed, and scanned/emailed back to me as the researcher. This form mentions a background questionnaire and interview questions. The background questionnaire will be completed on your own time via a google form. The interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured setting via the Zoom platform setting due to pandemic.

Background questionnaire

I ask that you complete this form prior to your interview. [Background Questionnaire Link](#)

Interview questions

The interview questions are provided to enable you to be familiar with the content of the interview.

I realize that you are busy, and I appreciate you sharing your perspectives and experiences with me. I look forward to our interview.

Sincerely,

**The Power of the Modern Underground Railroad for Black Women: The Sistas' Guide for Survival to Navigate Troubled Waters in Educational Leadership**



The purpose of this research is to investigate the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability in Region X by identifying obstacles and barriers of their leadership positions in education. In order to perform my research, I am interviewing individuals who are in Region X that serve in an Educational Leadership position. If you decide to participate in this research, you will receive a follow up email with three attached items:

- The Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- A link to the background questionnaire
- Interview questions.

It is anticipated that the study will require approximately a total of 70 minutes of your time, including the background questionnaire and interview. The interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured setting via the Zoom platform setting due to pandemic.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. It is possible that the Data from this study will be used or distributed for future research studies. Please look for an email from [simmonshfelia@gmail.com](mailto:simmonshfelia@gmail.com) for actual documents.

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**

**Appendix C**  
**Participant Survey**

## Participant Survey

5/7/2021 THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE ...

### THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE TROUBLED WATERS IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

Thank you for your participation in this study. Your perspective will benefit black women in educational leadership positions, and anyone who wishes to promote diversity and equality within the workplace. This questionnaire will help gather general information and the interview questions (contained in a separate document) will be discussed during your interview session.

If you have questions about this questionnaire, please contact [simmonshefelia@gmail.com](mailto:simmonshefelia@gmail.com). Thank you!

\* Required

1. Email \*

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General Information: Please tell me about yourself specifically:

2. Educational Background \*

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5/7/2021 THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE ...

3. Total Number of Years in Education \*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ 0-10  
☐ 11-15  
☐ 15-20  
☐ 21-25  
☐ 26+

4. Age Range \*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ 25-30  
☐ 31-35  
☐ 36-40  
☐ 41-45  
☐ 46-50  
☐ 51-55  
☐ 56+

5. Educational Background \*

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6. Work experience detailing previous leadership experience and pathway to Educational Leadership \*

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2/3

5/7/2021 THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS' GUIDE FOR SURVIVAL TO NAVIGATE ...

7. Marital Status \*

Check all that apply.

- ☐ Single  
☐ Married

8. Number of Children \*

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9. Please state your employment role \*

Mark only one oval.

- ☐ Assistant Principal  
☐ Principal  
☐ Central Office Staff "Director, or Coordinator"  
☐ Assistant Superintendent  
☐ Superintendent

10. Total length of years spent as a classroom teacher: \*

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11. Total length of years in an administrative position: \*

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Google Forms

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qokFYHq\\*18U2P8ggZpKtK0V0R/joqpn-2u7qGt6tdk](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1qokFYHq*18U2P8ggZpKtK0V0R/joqpn-2u7qGt6tdk)

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## **Appendix D**

### **Interview Participant Questions**

## **Interview Participant Questions**

### **Impact of Race & Gender on Educational Leadership in Region X:**

11. How has your race and gender identity influenced your educational and professional experiences as a Black woman?
12. What do you think the expectations and demands are for you as a Black female educational leader in Region X compared to individuals of other races?
13. What are the current obstacles or barriers do you face as a Black female educational leader in Region X?
14. How has your race and gender influenced the obstacles and barriers you are currently facing as a Black educational leader in Region X?
15. Do you think there is a "glass ceiling" that prevents women and minorities from achieving the peak of their careers in educational administration in Region X?
16. Have you ever felt as if your thoughts and suggestions were being marginalized (silenced) at work?
17. Do you believe your school district has a "good ole boy" system?
18. Do you believe your school district has a "good ole girl" system?
19. Did you physically relocate to or from Region X in order to gain a place in school administration?
20. Did you change school districts to get a career in school administration in Region X?

### **Formal Mentoring Opportunities and Experiences:**

11. Please explain any formal mentoring opportunities that you believe have been helpful to you since entering the field of education.
  - a. How did those formal mentoring opportunities affect your progression to an educational leadership position in Region X?
  - b. How have those formal mentoring opportunities aided you in your role as an educational leadership in Region X?
12. How would you characterize your experiences as a protégé in a structured mentoring relationship in Region X?
13. Please explain any formal mentors or mentoring opportunities that you would have liked to have had but did not.
  - a. How do you believe formal mentors or mentoring opportunities may have helped you personally and professionally?
  - b. Why did you not have access, or why did you want not to access?
  - c. How do you believe certain individuals or mentoring interactions influenced you in your current position?

### **Informal Mentoring Opportunities and Experiences:**

14. Please identify any important informal mentoring relationships you have had since entering the field of education in Region X.
  - a. How did such informal mentoring partnerships influence your transition into educational leadership in Region X?

- b. How have those formal mentoring opportunities aided you in your role as an educational leadership in Region X?
- c. Tell me about your experiences as a protégé in an informal mentoring relationship, specifically in Region X.

### **Networking Opportunities & Experiences:**

- 15. Please identify any networking experiences/events that you have considered to be important since entering the field of education.
- 16. Please explain any networking opportunities that you wish you might have had but did not.
  - a. How do you believe such networking opportunities affected you personally and professionally?
  - b. Why did you not have access, or why did you want not to access?
- 17. In your view, what effect has networking had on your success as an educational leader in Region X?

### **Support Systems:**

- 18. In addition to mentoring and networking experiences, please describe any additional factors that you would characterize as support that you consider vital to successfully maintaining your position as an educational leader in Region X.
- 19. Do you have a specific group of other Black women in Region X that you feel safe to discuss your frustrations and barriers regarding your position?
  - a. Why do you trust this group of women?
  - b. What benefits have been gained from this support group to advance or sustain in educational leadership position in this Region?
- 20. How have mentoring, networking, and/or support systems helped you to establish and maintain a healthy work/life balance in Region X?

### **General Questions Regarding Mentoring/Networking/Support Relationships:**

- 21. Explain how your mentor relationships (formal or informal) have evolved during your career.
- 22. Did you have a defining mentoring or networking experience that you think had the greatest effect on you? Please describe it and clarify why you think it was so important.
- 23. Consider a difficult situation in your career, especially during your tenure as an educational leader, in which your mentoring or networking involvement played a role. Please explain how mentoring/networking supported you in coping with this situation.
- 24. What qualities of a mentor do you believe have been most important to you as a Black female educational leader in Region X?
- 25. Were any of the mentors listed earlier in this interview Black females?
  - a. If so, how did your mentoring relationship change as a result of having the same race and gender?
  - b. If not, how did your mentoring relationship change as a result of being of a different race and/or gender?

- 26. In your view, can racial differences in educational leadership in Region X be minimized by mentoring, networking, and/or support relationships?
- 27. Do you believe your geographic location has affected your access to mentoring, networking, and/or funding opportunities?
- 28. Do you think your geographic location influenced your recruiting process for your current position? If so, how so?
- 29. Do you currently tutor others?

**Additional Inquiry Questions:**

- 30. How can you describe your relationship with your coworkers?
- 31. What aspects of your leadership position do you enjoy the most? Why is this so?

**Questions for Discussion**

- 32. In terms of mentoring, networking, and support networks, what advice do you have for Black women seeking to be educational leaders in this region?
- 33. Is there anything else you'd like to say that you believe is relevant to this study?

**Appendix E**

**Gardner-Webb University IRB  
Informed Consent Form Focus Group**



**Gardner-Webb University IRB**  
**Informed Consent Form Focus Group**

Title of Study: *The Power of the Underground Railroad: The Sistas' Guide for Survival to Navigate Troubled Waters in Educational Leadership*

Researcher: Felicia Simmons, Candidate, Doctor of Education

**Purpose**

The purpose of this qualitative research is to investigate the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability in Region X. I aim to clarify better the difficulties facing Black women serving in rural Region X and explore how mentoring and nurturing relationships impact their capacity to address perceived challenges. This study's findings will help school district personnel and superintendents review their capacity to address perceived challenges. This study's findings will help school district personnel and superintendents establish formal or informal mentoring organizations that accept and cater to women, especially black women and other women of color, who currently hold or aspire to advance in educational leadership positions despite obstacles, barriers, and intersectionality.

**Procedure**

Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Gardner-Webb University, this research will involve Black female educational leaders in Region X. You were identified by the NC Public Schools Statistical Profile website, along with district and school websites. Your name may also have been given to me through a mutual acquaintance.

1. If you consent to participate, you will receive a background questionnaire focusing on your basic background information and educational experience to assist with this study. Please complete the questionnaire, which is estimated to take less than 10 minutes. This questionnaire will be completed using a google form, and this consequently will be done individually at each your leisure. As a final step to the background questionnaire, you will register for an interview time. Several interview times will be scheduled to accommodate your schedule.
2. Semi-structured interviews for the Focus Group will be conducted via Zoom at predetermined times. The focus of this interview will include questions about your experiences with Black female leaders. Zoom interviews will utilize the "host admit" feature. There are 4 additional participants that will be present during the interview. A transcript of the focus group interviews will be created to allow for data analysis. Interviews should last no longer than an hour. You will not be required to show your identity or have your camera on in the Zoom Video. You can change your name to the pseudonym name on your screen to protect your identity from other participants in the focus group. Separate consent forms for the focus group and the participants interviewing are located in the appendix.

**Time Required**

It is anticipated that the study will require up to 70 minutes of your time. It is estimated that the background questionnaire will take less than 10 minutes to complete. It is estimated that the interview session will last approximately 60 minutes.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

### **Confidentiality**

The information that you provide will be handled confidentially. Information regarding your participation will be assigned a pseudonym. The list connecting information to your name/number will be maintained in a secure location on my computer, with a password protected passcode on Google Drive. The audio files, transcripts and data analysis will be maintained in this location. Once the study is completed and all data has been analyzed, all of the data in this secure location will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report.

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Because of the nature of the data, it may be possible to deduce your identity; however, there will be no attempt to do so, and your data will be reported in a way that will not identify you.

### **Risks**

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

### **Benefits**

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand the value and benefits of mentorship and networks for advancement and sustainability for Black female educational leaders in Region X by identifying obstacles, barriers, and intersectionality in the workplace. It will also offer perspectives on marginalization that Black female leaders face in educational leadership positions in Region X. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

### **Payment**

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

### **Right to Withdraw From the Study**

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio (or video) tape will be destroyed.

### **How to Withdraw From the Study**

- You have the right to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.
- If you want to withdraw from the study, please contact Felicia Simmons. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

- If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact Felicia Simmons. If you choose to withdraw from this study, your recording will be destroyed. If you choose to withdraw from the study during the interview process, please tell the interviewer to stop the interview.

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**

Researcher's name:

Student Role: EdD Candidate

School/Department, Gardner-Webb University

Researcher telephone number:

Researcher email address:

Faculty Advisor name:

Faculty Research Advisor

Department of Education, Gardner-Webb University

Faculty Advisor telephone number:

Faculty Advisor email address:

**If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact the IRB Institutional Administrator listed below.**

IRB Institutional Administrator

Gardner-Webb University

Telephone: \

Email:

**Voluntary Consent by Participant**

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me. I agree to participate in this study.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Printed Name

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

IRB Informed Consent Email Form **Focus Group****The Power of the Modern Underground Railroad for Black Women: The Sistas' Guide for Survival to Navigate Troubled Waters in Educational Leadership**

Dear Participant:

Thank you in advance for taking the time to speak with me about your experiences and perceptions of Black Female Leaders in Northwest Region 7. I appreciate your time and effort to share your experiences. I received your information from word of mouth, or the school's website. The purpose of this case study is to understand how Black female leaders survive to navigate the obstacles in Educational Leadership. The Background Questionnaire link can be found below. Please complete the information. In order to perform my research, I am interviewing teachers as a focus group who have had experiences of a Black female leader in Northwest Region 7. I am attaching three documents to this email:

- The Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- A link to the background questionnaire
- Interview questions

The Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University IRB

The attached Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University IRB requires you to execute a copy as evidence of your consent to participate in this study. The Informed Consent Form will be emailed to all participants, signed, and scanned/emailed back to me as the researcher. This form mentions a background questionnaire and interview questions. The background questionnaire will be completed on your own time via a google form. The interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured setting via the Zoom platform setting due to pandemic.

Background questionnaire

I ask that you complete this form prior to your interview. [Background Focus Group Questionnaire Link](#)

Interview questions

The interview questions are provided to enable you to be familiar with the content of the interview.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. It is possible that the Data from this study will be used or distributed for future research studies. It is anticipated that the study will require approximately a total of 75 minutes of your time, including the background questionnaire and interview. I realize that you are busy, and I appreciate you sharing your perspectives and experiences with me. I look forward to our interview.

Sincerely,



Gardner-Webb University IRB  
**Informed Phone Consent Script Form for Focus Group Participants**

**The Power of the Modern Underground Railroad for Black Women: The Sistas' Guide for Survival to Navigate Troubled Waters in Educational Leadership**

The purpose of this research is to investigate the importance of networking and mentoring for Black female educational leaders to navigate the trajectory of their careers for advancement and sustainability in Northwest region 7 by identifying obstacles and barriers of their leadership positions in education. You have been invited to serve on the Focus Group Panel. In order to perform my research, I am interviewing individuals who are in Northwest Region 7 that serve in an educational capacity that have had an experience with Black female leaders. If you decide to participate in this research, you will receive a follow up email with three attached items:

- ☐ The Informed Consent Form for Gardner-Webb University Institutional Review Board (IRB)
- ☐ A link to the background questionnaire
- ☐ Interview questions.

It is anticipated that the study will require approximately a total of 75 minutes of your time, including the background questionnaire and interview. The interviews will be conducted in a semi-structured setting via the Zoom platform setting due to pandemic. You will be able to turn off your screen and use a pseudonym for your screen name.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. It is possible that the Data from this study will be used or distributed for future research studies. Please look for an email from simmonshfelia@gmail.com for actual documents.

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**

[REDACTED]


[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Focus Group Background Questionnaire: THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND

Questions Responses



## THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND

Thank you for your participation in the Focus Group. Your perspective will benefit black women in educational

Email \*

Valid email

This form is collecting emails. [Change settings](#)

Name \*

Short answer text

Pseudonym Name for Zoom \*

Short answer text

+

Tt

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1LvFLkkGWzOzNUeX6LSwSaBtaTtPen10fftsnnd6otc/edit>

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5/18/2021

Focus Group Background Questionnaire: THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS E...

Description (optional)

**Educational Background** \*

Short answer text

.....

**Total Number of Years in Education** \*

☐ 0-10

☐ 11-15

☐ 15-20

☐ 21-25

☐ 26+

**Age Range** \*

☐ 25-30

☐ 31-35







☐ 36-40

☐ 41-45

☐ 46-50

☐ 51-55

☐ 56+

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1LvflLkkGWzQzNUeX6LSwSqBtqTfPgn10fftsnned6ptc/edit>

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5/18/2021

Focus Group Background Questionnaire: THE POWER OF THE MODERN UNDERGROUND RAILROAD FOR BLACK WOMEN: THE SISTAS E...

Long answer text

Marital Status

\*

☐ Single☐ Married

Number of Children

\*

Short answer text

Please state your employment role

\*

1. Teacher
2. Department Chair
3. Grade Level Chair
4. Counselor
5. Retired
6. Other

Total length of years spent as a classroom teacher or other field in Education:

\*

Short answer text





### Focus Group Interview Questions

Pseudonym:

---

District Enrollment Size: 10,000< 11,000-20,000 20,000-25,000 26,000-30,000 31,000+

Total number of years in education: 0-10 10-15 15-20 20-25 25-30 30-35 36+

Highest degree

held 

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1. Please tell us about yourself, specifically:

a. Educational background

b. Work experience detailing previous leadership experience and pathway to Education

c. Marital status

d. Children and/or additional dependents

2. Please state your employment role:

a. Teacher

b. Counselor

c. Other (Please define)

3. Total length of years spent in education and your position:

**Focus Group Interview Questions: (All answers are kept confidential)**

- 1. Why did you choose the education field? What made you choose Region X?**
- 2. What barriers or obstacles have you faced as a black female educator in Region X? How did you overcome these barriers?**
- 3. Why did you choose not to pursue educational leadership?**
- 4. What do you believe are perceptions or barriers of black female leaders?**
- 5. Do you think black female leaders experience microaggressions in their leadership roles? Give examples of why or why not?**
- 6. How do you think black female leaders cope with these microaggressions?**
- 7. What actions are needed to assist black female leaders with advancement and sustainability in Region X?**
- 8. Any Further Questions, or Discussion?**