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## A Phenomenological Study: The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers created by Gender and Race on African American Female's Advancement to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

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A Phenomenological Study: The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers Created  
by Gender and Race on African American Women's Advancement to a  
K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

A dissertation by  
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University of Massachusetts Global  
A Private Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts  
Irvine, California  
School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

February 2023

Committee in charge:

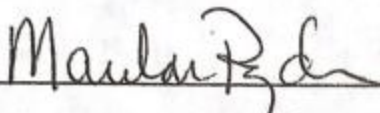
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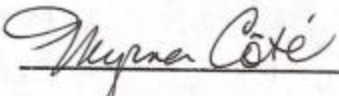
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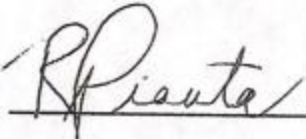
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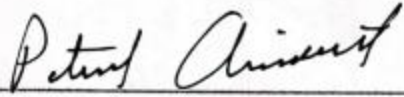
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February 2023

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by Gender and Race on African American Female's Advancement to a  
K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

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*I will lift up mine eyes to the hills which cometh my help, my help cometh from the Lord, the Lord who made Heaven and earth. 1 John 5:4*

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*You are Alpha and Omega. We worship you our Lord, you are worthy to be praised.*

*We give you all the Glory, we worship you our Lord, you are worthy to be praised.*

## ABSTRACT

A Phenomenological Study: The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers Created  
by Gender and Race on African American Female's Advancement to a  
K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

by Mariyon Thompson

**Purpose:** This phenomenological study aimed to explore the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on African American females' advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. The second purpose of this study was to identify strategies African American females leverage to overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

**Methodology:** This qualitative research study employed a phenomenological approach to describe the lived experiences of eight African American women leaders employed in K-12 central office leadership positions in San Bernardino and Riverside counties. Data collection included an interview protocol of 13 semi-structured questions and artifacts submitted by participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed, and data were analyzed to identify themes.

**Findings:** The analysis of data revealed the following major findings. The most referenced finding for this study was that racial barriers experienced while serving as an African American female in a K-12 central office position impact confidence and self-esteem. Assumptions that African American females are not qualified for central office positions, African American females must be overly prepared to be successful in central office leadership, and the importance of mentorship and sponsorship to support African American females as they advance through their careers were revealed.

**Conclusions:** The results of this study conclude that African American female central office leaders face systematic barriers that make it difficult to advance in their careers. Although highly qualified, racial barriers prevent African American females from advancing to central office leadership positions. African American female leaders must develop strategies that address race and gender inequities.

**Recommendations:** It is recommended to replicate this study in other counties, states, and nationally. It is further recommended to examine stress factors that manifest as a result of intersectional barriers African American women face in central office leadership positions as they advance through their careers.



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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Grogan (2005) suggests that American female leaders are not always acknowledged. However, words commonly used to describe how they lead include competent, efficient, and strong when describing their leadership capabilities. The seminal work of A. H. Eagly and Carli (2007) illuminates the impact of females in leadership. In a review of A. H. Eagly and Carli's work, *Cracks in the Ceiling*, Susan Hansen (2008) writes: "Only a couple of generations ago, society seldom used the words 'female' and 'leader' in the same sentence" (p. 9). According to Hansen, this fact is due to female's management styles not being equally comparable to historic male leadership characteristics. The work of A. H. Eagly and Carli (2007) challenged this assumption about females in leadership by expounding on the exceptional progress females have made in the American workplace in the past 20 years. Despite this progress, the differences in leadership perceptions must be addressed. Gipson et al. (2017) assert that there is a difference in the hiring practices of men and female. A 2015 mid-decade survey conducted by the American Associated School Administrators found that men serve in higher positions than female (as cited in Robinson et al., 2017). This survey further reported that while 75% of teachers are female, they are not hired for the district's highest leadership positions. According to the 2022 Labor Force Participation rate, men still hold 65% of leadership positions compared to females at 35% (FRED Economic data, 2022).

The lack of educational leadership intensifies the problem for African American females (AAF). Researchers agree that AAFs are not hired to the highest central office positions in school districts (Dennis-Jackson, 2018; Harris-Mohamad, 2020). These females have many challenges, most significant, being a woman and being Black. The



data suggests that AAF struggle to advance to higher-level leadership due to racial and gender barriers (Harris-Mohammad, 2020). According to Marshall (2018), AAFs also experience racial discrimination. (P. H. Collins, 2000) concludes that racial discrimination can be experienced by AAF in the workplace daily. Racial discrimination includes microaggressions, marginalization, and differential treatment in the workplace. Although the research is limited, studies show that AAF administrators are knowledgeable about these differences and these differences are validated in conversations with other ethnic groups (Starks, 2019). Sadly, these barriers follow these females throughout their administrative careers (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). Many stories recount these female's experiences, such as competence questioning and requirements to perform more tasks than their counterparts (Cain, 2015; K. Crenshaw, 1989; Dennis-Jackson, 2018). The results of several studies suggest that subordinates, coworkers, and bosses often challenge their authority (Beasley, 2020; Dennis-Jackson, 2018).

Further, some female African American administrators share that they are at a higher rate of dismissals, demotions, and transfers (Starks, 2019). Unfortunately, supervisors within the school system may not even recognize these unfair practices (Haynes, 2016). The lack of recognition of unfair practices may be due to implicit bias, automatic and unintentional, yet may impact supervisors' judgment, decisions, and behaviors. Implicit bias “the stereotypes and attitudes that occur unconsciously and may or may not reflect our actual attitudes” (Gullo & Beachum, 2019, p. 19). Examples of these practices, however innocent, are internal and hard to prove. The outcomes of

implicit bias result in internal opinions about whether female will be hired, are promoted, or meet the qualification for being hired or promoted.

Females have made great strides in being recognized as legitimate leaders, particularly in education. However, AAFs do not enjoy equal access to coveted higher-level positions. The research on the AAF reveals that they are likely to face discrimination and racial barriers in the educational workplace (Cain, 2015; Catalyze, 2022, Chance, 2021; Fuller et al., 2019; Harris-Mohamad, 2020; O'Brien-Brzenchez, 2021).

Intersectionality, a conceptual framework introduced by K. Crenshaw (1991), is defined as the combination of being a woman and an African American has created double challenges for the AAF leader. Not only does she face challenges in hiring as a woman, but she also encounters a second barrier: being hired as an AAF. Dual barriers are unique to the African American woman, which limits her voice in hiring practices about the causes for lack of advancement to central office leadership positions and solutions available to address those causes.

### **Background of the Study**

There is a noticeable difference in the hiring trends for people in the United States and internationally (Gipson et al., 2017). Although females are gaining ground in recent years, they are not hired at the same rate as men (Robinson et al., 2017). More importantly, Johnston and Johnson (2017) explain that African American females in leadership positions encounter racial and stereotype bias while seeking educational leadership positions. Even though females are more qualified for leadership positions

than ever, they are not hired at the same rate as in educational leadership, despite females monopolizing the teaching force nationally and internationally.

### **Underrepresentation of African American Female in Leadership Positions**

Although AAFs are highly qualified for leadership positions, multiple barriers prevent them from advancing in their careers (Shepherd, 2015). Chabaya et al. (2009) agree that racial stereotypes significantly contribute to the lack of hiring of AAFs in central office leadership. Examples of racial stereotypes are negative and include the questioning of job competency, being seen as angry and aggressive, and loud voiced when they are responding emotionally. Additionally, racial stereotypes may influence how AAFs are viewed as leaders and can impact their chances of advancement through their careers. On the other hand, White females do not experience stereotypes due to race because although they are females, they are not Black. Their Whiteness allows them to focus primarily on gender discrimination because they share the same skin color as White men in leadership (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007).

The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) (2019) data confirms that while (54%) of females in leadership positions are principals, only 10.5 % of these administrators are African American. Additional data from the NCES National Teacher and Principal survey indicate that 64% of female are cabinet-level leaders. However, only 25% of these cabinet-level leaders are female of color (National Center for Educational Statistics [NCES], 2019). Additionally, females account for 31 % of district chiefs; however, only 11% are female of color.

These statistics show a probable correlation between race and gender barriers of AAFs pursuing K-12 central office positions. Marshall (2018) posits that race and gender

are barriers to AAFs seeking leadership positions and explains that females of color are subject to racial stereotypes that undermine their credibility and authority. Furthermore, their discrimination can prevent them from being hired in higher-level positions. Randolph (2015) contends that critical race theory (CRT) and Black feminism should be studied to understand the barriers that impact AAF leadership. Randolph reminds us that these female are members of two minority groups not traditionally found in top leadership positions. The challenge for K-12 AAF central office leaders is to navigate the barriers that prevent their success.

### **K-12 Central Office Positions**

In California, K-12 schools are governed by local education agencies. The California Department of Education (CDE) establishes the procedures and policies for district offices' operations. Local school districts within the state are headed by the elected officials that constitute the board of trustees, who set the guidelines for their district office, otherwise known as central office. Murphy and Hallinger (1986, 1988) found that central office leadership is essential to effective school districts. The main structure within the K-12 central office includes the business department and the instructional department. The organizational structure funnels to individual departments within their scope. District leaders ensure that policies and procedures are implemented. A meta-study conducted by Waters and Marzano (2006) found a strong correlation between central office leadership and district performance. District performance is enhanced by building positive relationships between school sites and school boards. By building effective teams, central office administrators make important decisions about funding and personnel that increase student performance (Honig, 2013).

### **Female Central Office Leaders**

Men have traditionally occupied leadership positions at the central office in the past. Despite great strides made by females, they still face obstacles such as discrimination and harassment in the leadership workforce (Sandberg, 2013). Furthermore, both male and female staff members and leaders are more likely to challenge the authority of females in leadership positions (Moorosi, 2010; Narsee, 2006). By contrast, the *queen bee* phenomenon has also been associated with female in powerful positions who distance themselves from other female in lower junior positions. For instance, female who work in male-dominated leadership environments might assimilate and support the positions of the men in power instead of working to improve gender equality (Derks et al., 2016). Therefore, it may be difficult for women to advance to central office leadership.

### **Female African American Central Office Leaders**

AAFs have dual identities of being black and female, contributing to the barriers they experience in leadership positions (Brittenham-Stevens, 2016; Harris Mohammad, 2020). These dual identities, referred to as intersectionality of race and gender, are an unfortunate reality experienced by most AAF in central office leadership positions (D. Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Research confirms that White females have more positive experiences than Black female with multiple identities. For instance, AAF must navigate through two cultures, one that creates the gender bias of White female's culture and mirrors the challenges they face because of their ethnicity (Suarez-McCrink, 2002).

## **Theoretical Foundations**

Investigating gender theories helps identify specific barriers that stand in the way of career advancement for AAF. For this study, a theoretical framework was used to justify the study's rationale, scholarly perspective, and justification (J. McMillan & Schumacher, 2014). This framework has three theoretical foundations: (a) social role theory, (b) role congruity theory, and (c) CRT.

### **Social Role Theory**

The social role theory helps clarify why AAFs may not ascend to K-12 central office positions. This theory explains how the social environments and norms impact the differences in how people act (A. Eagly, 1987). Since strong leadership is more associated with men, female face stereotypes that prevent them from being accepted in their leadership roles. A Chiefs for Change (2019) study (bipartisan network of diverse state and district education chiefs) stated that men are more frequently hired for educational leadership positions. That same study also concluded that candidates from male-dominated backgrounds were more likely to be favored. Loewus (2017) agrees that even though female dominate positions in education, there are more men in educational leadership roles. Hence, female may not be hired at the same rate as men.

### **Role Congruity Theory**

Role congruity theory explains why females face additional barriers while advancing in leadership positions (A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002). These barriers demonstrate how society may discriminate against female as they move through their careers. Society may view female as less capable than men of successful leadership (A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002). Female may have more difficulty being hired and retaining

leadership because they may have too many male characteristics like being too harsh or having too many feminine characteristics, perceived as too weak (A. H. Eagly, 2005; A. H. Eagly & Carli, 2007). Role congruity can be a barrier to female when seeking leadership roles. Female must be aware of the impact of role congruity on their leadership careers (Bongiorno et al., 2014; A. H. Eagly & Carli, 2007; A. H. Eagly & Diekman, 2005; A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002).

### **Critical Race Theory**

CRT, a theoretical framework created by Kimberlee Crenshaw, explains why racism exists. The hiring practices that prevent female of color can be influenced by policies and laws inherent in the political structure. For example, Ladson- Billings (1995) confirms that some CRT theorists agree that civil rights laws do not benefit Black female but support White people. Furthermore, by understanding why racism exists, researchers can understand how racism affects AAFs in career advancement and view racism as hidden in laws and policies that internalize racism to the point that it is not recognized (Burrell-Craft, 2020; K. W. Crenshaw, 2011; Sachuk, 2021). Although AAFs can feel the impact of racism, how it manifests in the workplace is often hard to see. CRT studies what policies and laws are at the heart of racism (Delgado & Stenfancic, 2012). The assumptions that govern these laws prevent society from understanding racism at its core. Therefore, organizations may not understand why racism exists (Bernier & Rocco, 2003).

### **African American Female and Intersectionality**

The theoretical framework that serves as a conceptual umbrella for this study is Intersectionality. Kimberlee Crenshaw's (1991) seminal work conceptualizes the disadvantages that plague AAFs through their administrative careers. The framework

reveals the causes and effects of barriers that prevent success in career advancement. Intersectionality explains how oppression is compounded by being Black and female. The Intersectionality theory demonstrates that the experiences of being both Black and female create separate experiences that are unique to the Black female (K. Crenshaw, 1991). The gender barriers of being a woman impact career advancement exponentially, and the racial barriers that exist because they are Black intensify their experiences. Each of these experiences multiply the negative impact of their career advancement because they are inescapable. K. Crenshaw, (1989) concludes that the intersectionality of race and gender is a complex phenomenon that cannot be understood independently but must include how they interact with each other. Hooks (2012) confirms that AAFs are affected by intersectionality as they move up in their careers. The conceptual understanding of the intersectionality of being Black and female may explain why very few AAFs are in higher leadership positions, particularly K-12 central office leadership.

### **Structural Intersectionality**

Structural intersectionality is defined as intersectional characteristics based on individual experiences (Cole 2009; K. Crenshaw 1991). These characteristics, including race, class, and gender, can impact their positive or negative experiences (K. Crenshaw, 1991). For example, Black females can experience structural racism, sexism, and classism, resulting in inequalities as they advance through their careers. Some inequalities may impact hiring practices for Black female more than for White females. The employment rates of White females are significantly higher than that of people of color, even when district affirmation action policies are in place (Kohn, 2013, Massie, 2016). According to Catalyst.org (2021), White females held over 32% of management



positions, while only 4.3 % of AAFs served in that capacity. Policymakers in the United States must use their power to prevent the oppression of females of color (Ralston, 2019).

### **Political Intersectionality**

Political intersectionality defines how most policies and laws rarely address multiple oppressions of race and gender (Breslin & Riccucci, 2017). For instance, the dual oppressions of being both Black and a woman can impact lives in various ways. K. Crenshaw and Bonis (2005) describe how female African Americans' career advancement is complicated because the feminist focus is exclusively on the oppression of female and not necessarily on the unique experiences of the Black female. Similarly, an anti-racist focus on Black men may not include challenges that Black females face. Political intersectionality provides a framework for arguing against inequality in power structures that address the political struggles that impact AAFs.

### **Representational Intersectionality**

According to K. Crenshaw (1991), representational intersectionality identifies how people of color are represented in popular culture (media, text, film, television) due to the intersectionality of race and gender. A study of representational intersectionality may include examining how narratives on race and gender contribute to the way female are represented and how critiques and protests of representation often ignore the interests of AAF. How marginalized groups are portrayed or represented leads to the creation or affirmation of stereotypes. Bell Hooks (2012) described how contemporary images of Black female bodies often reflect sexist and racist representations like those of the 19th century that emphasized them as expendable and lesser than the White female (Marshall, 2018). For example, popular culture is rife with negative stereotypes depicting Black

female as sexually available, accessible, wild, angry, and aggressive. These stereotypes may result in AAFs being afraid to build trust in authentic relationships with co-workers, reluctant to express their opinions in decision-making and can negatively impact their relationships with subordinates. These stereotypes harm AAFs and their career advancement.

### **Scarcity of Research for African American Female at Central Office Positions**

Lemotey (2019) explains the importance of learning about AAFs in school principal positions. He explains that not enough peer-reviewed journals provide insight into their experiences. The lack of research about the challenges AAFs face confirms that there is much more to learn their representation higher level educational leadership. Since the research on Black administrators is limited, researchers should examine causes for the lack of AAFs in K-12 central office more closely.

### **Research Problem Statement**

Although female dominate the educational system, they lack representation in educational leadership positions. To complicate matters, "No federal or national organization, including the NCES, collects or reports annual administrative data by gender for Central Office positions" (Shakeshaft et al., 2007, p. 103). Consequently, there is a shortage of statistics, which make it difficult to identify trends over time. Although data about K-12 central office administrators is not available, most research confirms that females in educational leadership continue to be not equally represented while advancing in their careers (Robinson et al., 2017). Since the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) began its data collection in 1970, hiring practices for female to present an added challenge (as cited in Yeakey et al., 1986).

Murphy and Hallinger (1986) found that district leadership is essential to effective districts. A meta-study conducted by Waters and Marzano (2006) found that effective district leadership aligned closely with strong school district performance. Waters and Marzano explain that the K-12 central office position is essential to district effectiveness because it provides support to all students. Females can be effective as central office leaders. For example, district-level female leaders are crucial in designing effective instructional programs aligned with state standards. The personnel department benefits because female have expertise in hiring personnel because of their expertise in curriculum development. The business department is responsible for purchasing materials and equipment that impact the alignment of student curricular needs with the district budget. More importantly, AAF administrators in the central office contribute to important decisions that build professional development and increase the understanding of how underperforming students increase achievement, especially children of color. In fact, Bowman et al. (2018) states that African American students can succeed academically when provided strategies addressing how they learn. Another essential point is that many researchers agree that when leaders share common cultures, that understanding can be a catalyst for increased student learning because there is more experience about how these students learn best. AAFs bring different perspectives to organizations as district leaders continue to increase the representation of all students to increase student achievement (Holley, 2021).

However, females in the central office positions experience barriers that may negatively impact district effectiveness. Despite great strides, subtle sexism, sexual harassment, and discrimination are obstacles female face in the modern workforce

(Sandberg, 2013). Since men traditionally occupy leadership positions at the central office, female's oppression may affect the district's effectiveness.

The educational attainment of female ages 25-64 has increased in the last 50 years. In fact, in 2019, the number of females who attained a bachelor's degree increased from 11% in 1970 to 45% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2021). According to Johnston and Johnson (2017), although females are more educated now than in the past, education and career advancement rarely benefit AAF. Powell and Butterfield (2003) found that AAFs ability to advance in their careers faces limitations, and they struggle to ascend to higher-level positions. Marshall (2018) asserts the one of the hardest challenges the AAF faces is racial discrimination. Racial discrimination causes extreme hardship for female of color. However, few researchers examine how administrators survive gender and racial discrimination (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). Some researchers conclude that racial discrimination may prevent AAFs from attaining K-12 central office positions (Alexander-Lee, 2014; Beckwith et al., 2016; Catalyst, 2004; D. Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Randolph (2015) agrees that there is more to learn about the barriers to being female and African American. Research confirms that African American females face stereotypes and negative perceptions of being Black and a woman (Harris-Mohammad, 2020). Although research about the barriers female face is consistent in other leadership positions such as superintendents, principals, executives, and higher education exists (Beasley, 2020; Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Cain, 2015; Chance, 2021; D. Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Lomotey, 2019; Marshall, 2018), researchers agree that the barriers AAFs face should be studied through the lens of intersectionality that provides concrete

evidence that these barriers are unique and separate (K. Crenshaw, 1991). The combination of being a woman and a Black woman overlaps and multiplies the negative experiences while advancing to a central office position. These barriers can prevent females from being hired. Additionally, the strategies that allow females to overcome the obstacles of attaining leadership positions are scarce.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on the advancement of African American females to a K-12 central office leadership position. The second purpose of this study was to identify strategies African American females leverage to overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?
2. What barriers do female African Americans experience due to race while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?
3. How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact the advancement to a K-12 central office leadership positions perceived by African American females?
4. What strategies do African Americans females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

## **Significance of the Study**

Researchers suggest that AAFs are not equally represented in K-12 leadership. Brittingham-Stevens (2016) states that the intersection of race and gender is one of the most imposing factors behind their underrepresentation. The complexity of overlapping race and gender inequities has been understudied and continues to challenge researchers in understanding their impact on AAFs career development (Wiley et al., 2017). Race and gender significantly impact African Americans and subsequent females' marginalization as female and leaders. When intersecting race and gender, researchers are beginning to understand how this phenomenon impacts African Americans' unique needs (Stevens, 2015).

According to Dataquest (2018), there are 17,734 female school administrators in California. Of those administrators, 1475 were African American. More importantly, according to the CDE (n.d.), there are more than 8,000 principals in California. The NCES (2019) confirmed that 6.1% are African American. The research is clear that AAFs, while rarely able to secure educational leadership positions as school principals, continue to struggle to acquire K-12 central office positions.

A. H. Eagly and Carli (2007) and Northouse (2016) agree that AAFs are often not hired for leadership positions because of racial and gender discrimination. The complexity of overlapping race and gender and the barriers they present have been understudied and continue to challenge researchers in understanding its impact on career development, especially for female. Furthermore, additional research is needed to analyze how dual identities present distinct barriers that create a unique yet negative impact on AAFs career advancement.

The results of this study will benefit AAFs desiring promotion to K-12 central office positions by providing strategies to help them acquire these often-coveted leadership positions. Results from the study will also enable district officials responsible for embracing workplace equity to understand better the impact of race and gender disparities in hiring practices. This study will also add an arsenal of information that could help district officials to learn about the organizational barriers that prevent female of color from being promoted within school systems. According to Bernier (2012), current diversity initiatives do not improve racial balance in their organizations. Furthermore, districts must understand the underlying causes of racism before they can address diversity issues within their organization (Bernier & Rocco, 2003).

The importance of this study will focus on research, which addresses how innovative strategies and training can also increase diversity in hiring practices in district organizations. Intersectionality of race and gender are critical issues and are barriers to AAFs in career advancement. It is crucial to raise awareness of the discrimination experienced by AAFs in their career advancement (Harris-Mohammad, 2020). Although AAFs have worked to earn degrees, certifications, and are qualified for administrative positions, they continue to struggle and are not equally represented in central office leadership positions. Diversity in leadership is vital because it provides motivation, innovation, and creativity. Medley (2017) explains that district leaders should use their knowledge and ability to increase diversity in school systems. Schools benefit from diverse thought and influence when all leaders are represented. AAFs experience acceptance and are not hindered by unfair practices when the group accepts them.

More research is needed to increase literature regarding the negative impact of inequities of racial discrimination caused by external barriers toward female in K-12 central office career advancement. Although internal and external barriers are commonly found in existing literature regarding superintendents, principals, executive leaders, and higher education leadership positions, literature that addresses the intersectionality of race and gender of AAFs in K-12 central office positions is rare.

African American females benefit from the strategies used to enable and support them as they advance in their careers. District leaders will benefit from learning about intersectionality and its impact on female of color. More research is needed to emphasize the importance of diversity training in the workplace and how race and gender differences promote overall benefits to the students and the entire community. Local and national organizations can benefit by revisiting racial disparity, studying the systematic racism narrative, and looking at the laws and policies that prevent AAFs from career advancement. Unfortunately, many current researchers contend that organizations have created a culture that is toxic and deadly when encouraging diversity, and results from this study will enable AAFs to harness new knowledge and skills to gain access to higher-level educational leadership positions, specifically in K-12 district offices (Bernier, 2012).



## Definitions

Terms used throughout this study are defined to provide clarity and a shared understanding of their meaning. The definitions were used in this context throughout the whole study.

*African American woman.* An African American woman culturally identifies with the descendants of slaves brought from Africa by force to work in the United States. In addition, they also identify with the suffrage of limited rights and have been denied a fair share in the social economic progress of the United States (Sigelman et al., 2005).

*Barriers, cultural.* Demonstrated through self-identity attributed to patterns of behavior related to culture where an individual view themselves as inferior or superior; these beliefs can thwart an individual's progress or growth (Cokley et al., 2019).

*Barriers, organizational.* Can include the lack of diversity and inclusion, stereotyping, informal workplace networks, isolation, tokenism, poor communication, failure to include employees/leaders in the decision-making process, differing expectations, lack of mentoring and fostering a non-inclusive work environment (Evans & Chun, 2007).

*Barriers, personal.* Defined as conditions or events that occur to an individual in his or her environment that makes progress challenging (Candia-Bailey, 2016).

*Barriers, stereotypical.* "Convey to stigmatized individuals the stereotypical accusations that specifically devalue their group's social identity" (Davies et al., 2005, p. 276).

*Central office leadership.* School district administrators, responsible to the superintendent and board of education for such areas as curriculum, personnel, budget,

assessment, student services, and community relations with administrative credential (Honig, 2012).

*Discrimination.* The term refers to a policy or practice that applies to everyone, regardless of race or color, which prohibits or negatively impacts an individual from employment opportunities (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2018).

*External barriers.* External barriers include sex-role stereotyping. These barriers include patterns of employment discrimination, such as promotion and advancement, and lack of a mentor, role models, and sponsors (Shakeshaft, 2007).

*Gender.* Gender refers to learned beliefs and the way which meaning, and evaluations are associated with sex by members of a culture (Hoffman, 2006).

*Internal barriers.* Internal barriers are the thoughts and feeling affected by females (Carter & Peters, 2016).

*Intersectionality.* A combination of marginalized identities that an individual has, like in the case of a woman of color, whereby the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of sexism and racism (K. Crenshaw, 1989). Theoretically, if identities like gender and race were treated separately, the effects may be less oppressive.

*Leadership.* An individual who can influence a group of people to achieve a common goal (Leithwood, 2021).

*Leaders.* Might hold positions of authority and power within an organization (Northouse, 2016).

*Racism.* A doctrine that one's race or ethnic group is superior to another race without the evaluation of individual traits of its members (Kohli & Pizarro 2022).

*Sexism.* Discriminatory practices directed towards female based on gender. These practices have a negative impact on the career advancement of female (Bell et al., 1994).

*Underrepresentation.* When the number of people in a certain type of position is less than the percentage of the group related to the general population (Mawene & Bal 2020).

*White/Caucasian.* The terms White and Caucasian are interchangeable terms used to refer to individuals with European ancestry (Bhopal & Donaldson, 1998).

### **Delimitations**

This study is delimited to AAFs who serve in K-12 central office leadership positions. These females are (a) leaders who are full-time directors, assistant superintendents, deputy superintendents in their district, (b) central office leaders with least one year of experience in any central office level position in the same district, and (c) leaders who work in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in southern California. (d) leaders who hold an administrative credential. Although, assistant superintendents or equivalent employees participated, no superintendents were included in this study.

### **Organization of the Study**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter I presents the background information on women in leadership, specifically the intersectional barriers of race and gender faced AAF in K-12 central office positions. The chapter also identifies the research problem, purpose statement, and research questions aligned with the research. Chapter II investigates what is known about women in leadership and the impact of intersectionality of race and gender on AAFs in central office positions. Historical evidence which supports understanding about why barriers exist for AAFs while

advancing through their careers are explored. This section also explains the theoretical and conceptual theories that provide additional evidence that challenges for AAFs are evident in research. The theoretical frameworks for this study include CRT and Black feminist thought (BFT) theory. The conceptual framework umbrella is intersectionality and AAF. Chapter III contains the research design and the methodology used to find results for the four key questions aligned with the research question. This methodology will be focused on interviews of eight AAF central office administrators with at least one year of experience. Chapter IV will analyze data results from these interviews and identify findings, perceptions, and results of these central office administrators. Finally, Chapter V will identify the conclusions of the study presented by the researcher and any recommendations for further research.

## CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of a literature review is to synthesize, evaluate and analyze research that aligns with literature directly related to the researcher's topic of interest and the purpose of the research study (Roberts, 2010). The purpose of this literature review is to examine how AAFs perceive barriers that impact the intersectionality of race and gender on advancement to K-12 central office leadership positions in the San Bernardino and Riverside counties in southern California. Relevant research will provide an overview of women's challenges and barriers in educational leadership, specifically AAFs. The impact of the underrepresentation of females in educational leadership will be analyzed. And the effects of external and internal gender barriers on female advancement to central office positions will be evaluated.

Furthermore, the literature review will study theoretical frameworks related to the current perspectives and understanding of the intersectionality theory. This primary framework examines how the phenomenon of race and gender impacts the experiences of AAFs. The CRT and BFT theories will provide a historical background that explains the social constructs and laws that support why AAFs lack of career advancement exists. The theoretical considerations will include social role theory and role congruity theory, which provide an understanding of how complex social issues impact the study. The research will also address racial and gender barriers and identify strategies to support African American career advancement in K-12 central office positions. Lastly, this study will add to the limited body of research on central office hiring practices and investigate why very few AAFs are hired in K-12 central office positions.

## **Women in Leadership**

Research confirms that female leadership is not equally represented (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Harris-Mohammed, 2020; Robinson et al., 2017; Superville, 2017). Specifically, women are not equally represented due to gender stereotypes that impact hiring practices in central office positions. Research suggests that females are hired at lower rates than men (Gipson et al., 2017; Robinson et al., 2017). According to Superville (2017), men have characteristics that align with leadership ability. Lawson et al. (2022) explain that gender stereotypes identify agentic traits (decision-making and assertiveness) which are more associated with men. The results of these stereotypes cause females to be devalued, and not as competent and qualified to be influential leaders (Chabaya et al., 2009). The assertion reinforces the opinion that men are more equipped for leadership positions (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; A. H. Eagly & Carli, 2007). As a result, gender stereotypes can prevent females from being hired in educational leadership, specifically K-12 central office positions.

Despite these stereotypes, females have proven qualified for higher-level leadership positions (Prime et al., 2009). Despite this assertion, A. H. Eagly and Carly (2007) confirm that females hold fewer higher-level positions than men. In fact, research suggests that women hold very few positions at the executive level (C. Hill et al., 2016; Rhode, 2017). Equally importantly, growing research in the United States corroborate that females are highly suitable for top leadership positions in every area (Kellerman et al., 2007; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For example, females bring creativity and divergent thinking to leadership positions, which helps increase success in organizations. Collaborating among team members brings diverse decision-making to organizations,

confirming their suitability for exclusive leadership positions. These qualities make them highly qualified yet not equally represented for K-12 central office leadership positions.

A. H. Eagly and Carly (2007) and Carli and Eagly (2016) provide an interesting analogy of the challenges females in leadership endure, which causes the lack of attainment of senior leadership positions. These seminal authors address barriers females face and argue that the obstacles in leadership are multidimensional, and research supports that many factors exist. Each barrier, although different in scope, offers distinct obstacles that prevent females from moving toward leadership positions. Eagly and Carli and Carli and Eagly suggest that although research claims that the barriers only occur at top-level positions, evidence is clear that these barriers arise at all levels of leadership. The evidence of barriers described in the root causes is associated with females' roles in their households and men's perceptions about females' ability to assert themselves as leaders. The evidence claims that females traditionally are not interested in working outside the home, and men traditionally do not see them as leaders outside the home. Therefore, these authors provide a thoughtful analysis of how pursuing leadership positions for females is a complicated journey and navigating these barriers can be a complex process.

Both Eagly and Carli (2007) and Ariella (2022) agree that even though females are highly qualified for leadership positions, they continue to face barriers from other inequities that impact their career advancement. For instance, they have less chance in acquiring leadership positions in businesses not being ready to hire females for top posts. Additionally, females are held to a higher standard and face barriers while advancing to top positions (Ariella, 2022). Misconceptions about females' ability to perform and

negative perceptions regarding their ability contribute to the hiring rate of females (Gipson et al., 2017).

Family responsibilities that may hinder female leaders' job performance and lack of mentorship or sponsorship support are additional barriers females face in leadership positions. In conclusion, gender bias can account for the lack of females in senior leadership positions (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

### **History of Females in Educational Leadership**

Although many more females are in the educational field than men, research confirms that men hold most educational leadership positions (Wiley et al., 2017). However, according to the U.S. Department of Labor (2015), 77% of females are in the educational field as teachers. Although men are the minority in teaching, it is difficult to understand why they are promoted to leadership positions. Without more studies on females and their impact as leaders, females will continue to lag in championing their contributions to the educational system.

Females have served as teachers for hundreds of years, even when they were not afforded opportunities for promotions to higher-level positions (P. Parker, 2016). In fact, females hold most jobs in education, but few holds leadership positions (Sanchez & Thorton, 2010). Gamble and Turner (2015) also agree that females are not equally represented in educational leadership despite the overwhelming number of female educators in the field. Bogotch and Shields (2013) add that school leadership positions are still currently dominated by men, and females in leadership have received little attention because the focus on educational leadership has often been given to men. In the same way, the lack of female administrators may be caused by male dominance in



leadership positions, and as leaders, they also oversee hiring (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). Carli and Eagly (2016) assert that females are challenged in educational settings because they are not treated fairly. Therefore, females may feel less confident about applying for administrative positions because there may not be positions available to them and because the status quo does not appear to favor them (Coleman, 2005).

### **Impact of Females in Educational Leadership**

The impact of females in educational leadership can be seen in their positive experience working with others. For example, females describe power as a means to work with others. (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). Findings indicate that female leaders may exhibit qualities of transformational leadership and fairness more than men (Gipson et al., 2017). Cavallo and Brienza (2006) support that females are influential as leaders. There is an abundance of literature supporting that females inspire, motivate others, build relationships, and collaborate through teamwork more than their male peers (Zenger & Folkman, 2012).

Females lead differently from men (A. H. Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gipson et al., 2017; Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2010). According to Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010), females are known to build relationships in the communities they lead. Additionally, when female educational leaders make decisions, they often ask opinions and ideas of others to ensure collaboration and input. However, A. H. Eagly et al. (1992) concluded that female leaders in the educational setting are more likely to focus on completing tasks than male leaders. The overarching context and task type seem to influence leadership styles of women and men in the workplace. Research concludes that female professionals are highly qualified for more advanced leadership positions in every sector (Kellerman et al., 2007; Sanchez-

Hucles & Davis, 2010). In fact, since 1860, females in education have been enjoying higher-level positions such as the principalship, director, and superintendent leadership positions (L. C. Tillman, 2004). However, white males still dominate central office leadership positions (Grogan & Brunner, 2021).

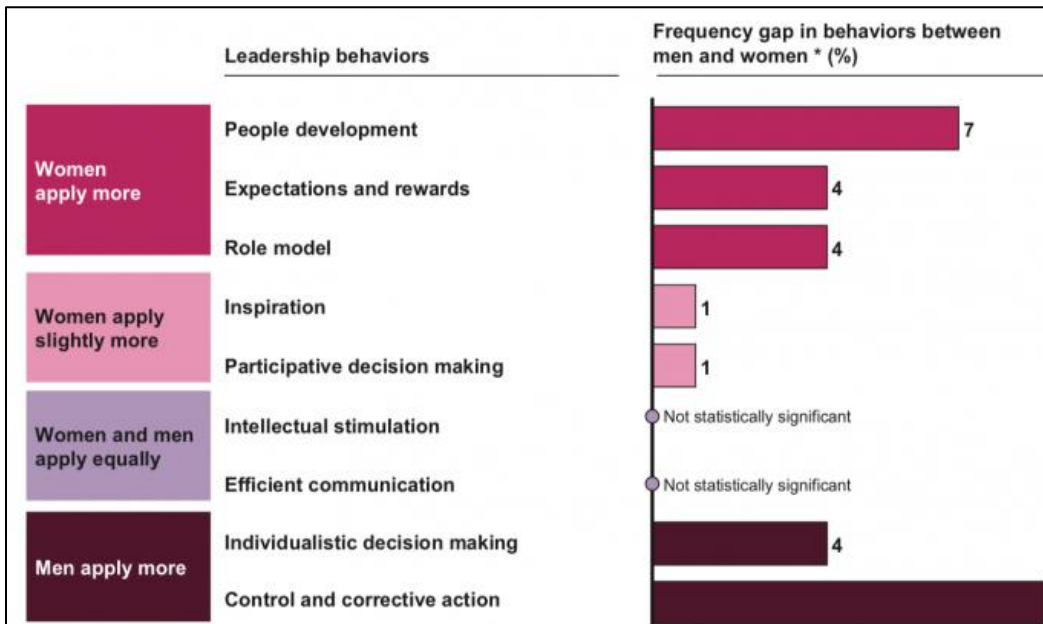
Female progress toward leadership has advanced in the 20th century, however more research is needed to understand what prevents them from advancing central office positions. Although prior research has focused on stereotypes, gender bias, and discrimination, gender promotions at top levels need to be explored (A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002; Garcia-Retamero & López-Zafra, 2006; Heilman, 2001). Some researchers have identified a possible leadership pipeline problem resulting in the lack of qualified females to fill senior leadership positions (A. H. Eagly & Carli, 2007; Ibarra et al., 2018). Although females make up more than 50% of the overall population, progress toward advancing to leadership positions is not equal to men (Catalyst, 2017; Chira, 2017). However, the percentage of females in leadership positions continue to improve, including wages (Philip & Matt, 2007).

Research confirms that females possess effective leadership skills (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gipson et al., 2017; Pianta, 2020). Some researchers argue that effective leadership performance is associated with females more than men (Connell et al., 2015; Finneran, 2016; Hopkins, 2012; Kaufman & Grace, 2011). In addition, Baker (2014) agrees that females have more characteristics and traits that align with effective leadership. More and more, female leadership skills are being recognized, and their ability to succeed in educational leadership, specifically central office leadership, can be confirmed.

Researchers have identified specific leadership traits that would indicate that females are more effective leaders than men. Eagly et al. (2003) identified nine leadership behaviors that are most common in highly effective leaders; of those nine leadership behaviors five are most common, and appear to be most innate, in women. According to the leadership behavior differences identified by Eagly et al., females are more likely to excel in: (a) people development, (b) expectations and rewards, and (c) being role models.

**Figure 1**

*Leadership Behavior Gap Between Men and Woman*



*Note.* Adapted from “Females' leadership style the new competitive advantage,” by T. Chetan, 2020. <https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=ZmhEzZ7w&id=C82C57AFBDAD>

Although the number of females in leadership continues to grow, the lack of females in educational leadership follows a similar pattern in other senior leadership positions (Glass, 2017). Females continue to experience race, gender, and cultural bias and have rarely obtained the distinguished title of leader, even with outstanding

leadership abilities (Horsford & Tillman, 2012). Data confirming the lack of leadership positions by females of color compared to white females can be verified by the National Aggregate report that from 2007-2018, the under-representation of females of color remained the same. The data results report that senior leaders and managers were 25% White females, 2% Black females, 2% Hispanic females, and 2% Asian females (EEOC, 2018). Even though White females hold higher leadership positions, AAFs have not held positions at the same level as their White male and female counterparts, specifically in the western United States (NCES, 2019).

According to Johnston and Johnson (2017), females are more educated now than in the past. However, these findings indicate that education and career advancement rarely benefit AAFs. Powell and Butterfield (2003) suggest that AAFs ability to advance faces limitations. Researchers identify racial discrimination as one barrier that deserves much attention for AAFs (Marshall, 2018). Johnson-Jones (2009) and Hornsby (2008) agree that race and gender issues negatively impact African Americans' ability to be hired in leadership positions. Additionally, (Mock, 2012) concurs that race and gender are significant barriers to attaining leadership positions.

### **Underrepresentation of African American Females in K-12 Central Office Positions**

Females are not equally represented in leadership positions (Cotter et al., 2001; Galloway, 2012; Lemasters & Roach, 2012). AAFs are also not equally represented since they experience overlapping discrimination in hiring practices. Although females make up over 60% of administrators in California, there are less AAF administrators compared to White females (Strange, 2020). According to Ed Data (n.d.), on the national average, 55% are female administrators; of those female administrators, only 11.5% are AAFs.

Although females, particularly AAFs, earn administrative credentials and other certifications, they continue to be not equally represented in K–12 leadership positions (T. Glass & Franceschini, 2007). In fact, Katz, 2020 argues that Black females are the most educated in the United States.

Moreover, according to the NCES (2018), AAFs of color earned more than 75% *more* degrees from 2000-2001 in comparison to any other group. For example, Black females only make up 12.7% of the female population in the country, yet they consistently make up over 50% of the number of Black people who receive postsecondary degrees. Percentagewise, Black females outpace White females, Latinas, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans in this arena. However, negative stereotypes continue to mask their accomplishments.

The lack of data that tracks hiring practices for central office positions has been prevalent throughout this study. However, the underrepresentation of AAFs in central office leadership may influence their underrepresentation in the superintendency. Since few articles and dissertations provide little data about the number of AAF central office administrators, the data about AAF superintendents may provide insight into their lack of representation. Research confirms that most superintendent positions are held by White men (Carli & Eagly, 2016; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Gresham & Sampson, 2019). Statistics show that 71% of men are in superintendent positions, while only 28.5 % are females. Even with the increase of females in superintendent positions since 2010, most research confirms that superintendents do not live in the communities they serve. Since the minority communities are increasing and represent 42% of the total population, this lack of representation may mean a lack of connection to the communities they serve (Cherng

& Haplin, 2016). The information about the low percentage of female superintendents aligns with the conclusions that there are very few females in central office leadership positions.

### **Importance of Representation of African American Females**

Academic leaders' community representation significantly impacts students and their educational goals (Cherng & Haplin, 2016). The lack of representation can present a problem with understanding minority students, their needs, and their culture, which may impact student achievement (Cherng & Haplin, 2016). With research reinforcing that representation is essential for students, the assumption confirms that African American leaders are vital. This assumption may lead to the conclusion that representation is necessary for central office administrators, and their roles must be diverse.

The influence of AAFs in minority communities reinforces the need to address hiring practices K-12 central office leadership. Horsford (2012) affirms that representative leadership is vital. When females, particularly Black females, are hired as central office administrators, it creates more opportunities for females of color to be employed in upper and lower-level positions. For instance, since principalship can be a gateway to central office positions, more AAFs need to be hired to increase the number employed in the district office. Holley (2020) agrees with the trickle-down effect of hiring AAFs to central office positions. She confirms that when Blacks are hired as central office administrators, there is a likelihood that more Blacks as principals may increase the possibility of more females of color being hired.

Black females can empower students, other people of color, females, and families. Also, school districts that hire Black females in higher leadership positions show society

that their organization values and promotes diversity in leadership (Gershenson et al., 2018). When district leaders hire employees from the ethnicity of their school districts, it creates a positive environment for the students in their communities (Memduhoglu, 2016). Most students in the United States are the minority, yet 80% of teachers are not a minority (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). The authors further explain that the lack of minority teachers creates a demographic divide. For example, New York urban schools have 85% racial minorities, and only 45% of teachers are the minority (New York City, Department of Education, 2015). The demographic divide is significant because additional research has demonstrated that "teachers have higher expectations of White and Asian American students and lower expectations of Latino and Black students" (Cherng & Halpin, 2016, p. 408). The lack of high expectations for Black students is harmful for them because it prevents students from forming positive relationships with their teachers that do not believe their teachers see them as capable and educated. African American leadership is extremely important to Black students because students need mentors that look like them have confidence in their ability to succeed (Gershenson et al., 2018). Cherng and Halpin (2016) also explain that students who have teachers from their own race increase academic achievement because their teachers are more likely to expect more from them. District offices need diverse representation for the communities they serve, therefore it is critical that educational systems align leadership populations to the demographics of each district.

The impact of AAF leadership on the school district's climate and culture is directly connected to increased student demographics. As the demographics of the student population change, the need to provide alignment increases. The U.S. Department

of Education (USDE) (2016) confirmed that the diverse student population in the United States will increase to 54%. The expansion will charge districts with changing the climate and culture of the community. It may require a broader and deeper perspective on the problem related to hiring equity (Shindler et al., 2016).

Moreover, according to Boser, (2014), there continues to be more White teachers working in U.S. schools. Research supports that students of color are disciplined at a higher rate, the lack of high expectations continues to keep students from performing at their potential, and students of color are not likely to go to college because of these low expectations (Owens & McLanahan, 2020). Developing a culture of excellence is the superintendent's job, which must generate a system for all district members. When analyzing policies that impact hiring practices, the importance of representation that aligns with the student population is affected. Research supports that when students gain more confidence in their ability to learn and succeed the district experiences success (Mittleman, 208). AAFs who experience intersectional barriers prevent a culture of acceptance, support, and diversity (Aaron, 2020).

Johnston and Johnson (2017) assert that females are more educated than in the past. However, these findings indicate that education and career advancement rarely benefit AAF leaders. For instance, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2015) reported that 43% of White/European and 49% of Asian females were more likely than African American females (35%) to be employed in higher-paying management, professional, and similar careers. Being female and African American negatively impacts career development (Pollard, 1997). Despite outstanding training and competence, AAFs have difficulty ascending to higher-level positions, including district-level positions. Most



literature focuses on the experiences of individual AAF and not on experiences of a group. Generalizations cannot be made because most dissertations are based on lived experiences of individuals. However, researchers agree that AAFs are slowly attaining leadership positions in higher education institutions, but discrimination, racism, and sexism continue to stifle their advancement (D. Davis & Maldonado, 2015). According to Powell and Butterfield (2003), AAFs' ability to obtain executive-level positions in organizations has been limited to only a tiny percentage of females who have navigated their careers into these positions. Limited research prevents researchers from understanding why. White females may not be aware of the influence of race on leadership but may understand gender discrimination because they do not experience racial discrimination because they share ethnicity with White males (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007).

Based on data reported by the USDE (2016), African Americans comprised 10.6% of school principals nationwide. Whites make up approximately 78% of those in positions of school site leadership (USDE, 2016). This lack of diversity reflects a greater need. Scholars found that the double disadvantage of race and gender presents a significant challenge for AAFs (Randolph, 2015). The complication of being both female and African American has a direct impact on career advancement (Pollard, 1997). Today, opportunities to advance remain elusive. Since the EEOC began its data collection in the 1970s, hiring practices for females have presented an added challenge (as cited in Yeakey et al., 1986). Unfortunately, limited data exist to monitor how many females are hired in leadership positions. Therefore, the obstacle of tracking female leadership advancement in the field of education persists.

There are very few role models for up-and-coming AAFs in leadership. Moreover, the lack of diversity in school leadership persists even with changing national student demographics (Harris-Mohammed, 2020). Therefore, access to role models is limited. In addition, few researchers describe how AAFs school administrators address racial discrimination (Townsend & MacBeath, 2011). African American role models in central office leadership are needed to support upcoming AAF who desire to work as K-12 central office leaders.

Many theorists provide evidence that there are very few AAF administrators in K-12 school systems, particularly studies focusing on principals, higher-level education and superintendents. However, this study will examine the impact of the intersectionality of race and gender as perceived by central office administrators and multiple challenges that AAFs face as they advance in their careers (K. Crenshaw, 1989). The lens can help explain why race and gender are two distinct barriers preventing females from attaining higher-level leadership positions. Since the lack of access for AAF to the principal position is evident due to their lack of representation, it would be logical to conclude that obtaining even higher leadership positions would be uncertain.

In the 1970s, studies on AAFs in central office positions were nonexistent, according to Humphrey (2007). He reported that studies about females in leadership reemerged in the 1990s but not so with AAFs. He further explained that research showed that AAFs aspired to advancement in leadership three times greater than their White counterparts. According to Lemotey (2019), since the study of females in leadership rarely addressed African American attainment to central office positions, there continue

to be limited studies about AAFs in leadership positions, and most research about them is only found in dissertations and very few journals.

### **Historical Perspective**

The history of American public education schools in the United States began under Horace Mann. In 1877, Mann lobbied to model American schools after the Prussia model after becoming the head of Massachusetts's newly created board of education. The Prussian model focused on teaching students to be disciplined and follow the rules. Before that, students of privilege were educated by hired tutors. The free and compulsory education model included duty, responsibility, discipline, and the ability to follow orders, like the Prussian system. The need for centralization became a significant issue as the education model expanded. The standards for teaching needed to be standardized and consistent throughout different states so that common skills would be taught to create a standard workforce. For instance, the model included what would be taught, how many grade levels would be included, and that all students should receive an education (Khan & Noer, 2012). As states began to organize their school systems, they created district offices to set aside state funding, address policies and procedures, and ensure the overall well-being of schools. District offices operate several schools and function as local governmental units under a grant of authority within geographical locations in the state. In most cases, policies and procedures are governed by elected officials called boards of education and carried out under the supervision of superintendents of schools.

The CDE website contains information about how central offices were established in California. According to the CDE (2009) district organization handbook, the section called *Chapter 2, History of School District Organization*, confirms that in 1849, there

was a need in California to address the change in the economic focus from an agricultural society to address the increasing educational needs of the state. These changes resulted in the organization of schools into districts.

### **Current Role of Central Office Administrator**

The K-12 central office or district office is an organization that implements the educational objectives of its board, county, state, and federal mandates (Reckler, 2022). Johnson (2022) explains central office administrators are responsible for personnel, instructional, and business decisions. The school board creates and approves the budget, identifies objectives, provides materials for the instructional needs of its students, and is responsible for hiring personnel for the district. The central office administrators' job is to ensure that the objectives set by state guidelines are implemented. Johnson also states that since each district has various needs, each one has multiple responsibilities; for instance, some common responsibilities include:

- Textbook and audio-visual materials.
- Staff hiring and monitoring of district personnel.
- Implementation of budget for all aspects of district needs.
- Compliance with all state and federal laws regarding school activities.
- School building maintenance and requirements.

The organization of a school district is not a particularly regulated system.

Reckler (2022) explains,

Each district may be organized in the way the administrators choose, and typically the larger the school district, the more complex the hierarchy and structure will be. In general, the principal and the school superintendent are considered the

heads of and responsible parties for each of the schools within the school district. Communication between a school and its district will occur through these individuals. (p. 1)

Honig (2012) centers her research on central office administrators as one support for principals through professional development strategies. She explains that the most critical role of central office administrators is to support student learning. However, Recker (2022) offers a different perspective identifying the current role of central office administrators to include carrying out the directives of every level of the educational system. The levels include following board directives to the county office of education to ensure compliance with all political, state, and federal laws.

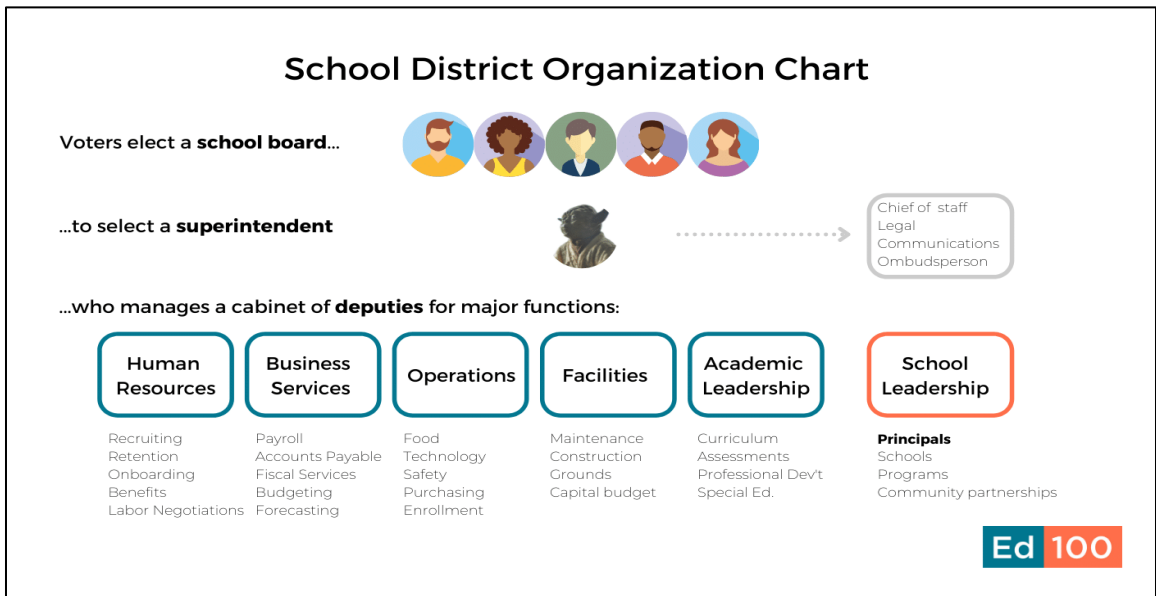
Although districts vary in size, most central office leadership follows a general structure/model. Within the central office, there are several departments. Each department has specific responsibility for implementing programs and statewide requirements. The departments are usually included within the district, depending on the district population: human resources, business services, instruction, facilities, and operations. The district is also responsible for reporting to the county office of education, which receives guidance and mandates from the state and federal governments. The county office of education, state department of education, and National Education Department are structured for all school districts.

Each school district is responsible for creating its own organizational chart. Figure 2 illustrates how board members are voted on by the community, who selects the superintendent, and common district leadership roles generally included in most districts. The school district organizational chart below includes the school board and the primary

functions of its district level employees. This model is not always the same in every school district but can be used as a general organizational chart for district offices.

**Figure 2**

*School District Organizational Chart*



*Note.* Adapted from “What are the Functions of a School District Central Office?,” by L. Reckler, 2022, February 22. ed100.org

The CDE is the legislative arm of expectations and standards. The legislator of the State of California directs school districts in what policies and procedures they follow. This information is then distributed to county offices of education, which provide school districts with steps to ensure procedures are followed. Most policies are written in plans that must be completed and submitted to required entities. The responsibilities of district office representatives vary according to each district based on the size and needs of that district. Their primary responsibility includes ensuring that schools comply with state and federal regulations and that schools have the materials and equipment necessary to implement programs required by the state available to students.

## **Female Central Office Leadership**

The research about females' history in central office administration primarily focuses on females at the highest level, the superintendent. However, since this research does not include superintendents, assumptions can be compared to females in other educational leadership positions. In the past, men have traditionally occupied leadership positions (Sandberg, 2013). While women dominate the field education, leadership positions continue to elude them (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Kowalski et al., 2011; Munoz et al., 2014). Research supports that females are over-represented in the education system yet are limited to lower positions. Educators need to focus on the importance of hiring school and district leaders who reflect the student populations they serve because children consider the possibilities for themselves based on the adults around them (Magdaleno, 2016). Without diverse personnel who understand the cultural background of students, schools remain in a state of continuous social reproduction, where students that know the code for participating in the culture of power continue to succeed ahead of those who are ignored or even punished due to a lack of this knowledge (Delpit, 1995). According to Frank and Hou (2015), females continue to struggle not necessarily because of their educational attainment or qualification but are not hired at the same rate as men.

Female central office leaders must advocate for representation in the organization they serve. Sandberg (2015) reinforces females' importance in pursuing gender equality. She suggests that females must become more confident in their approach to gaining equity in the workplace by being assertive and confident. Sandberg recommends that even though they are primarily responsible for the family, women must engage men in stepping up to the plate regarding family responsibilities. Despite making great strides,

subtle sexism, sexual harassment, and discrimination are some obstacles females face in the modern workforce (Sandberg, 2013). Sandberg also asserts that females must not be afraid to ask for their worth. She explains that when she applied for Facebook, she was encouraged to negotiate for a better salary and earned more because she spoke up (Sandberg, 2013).

Although the women's movement has positively impacted females and work, females continue to be not equally represented in the workforce and underpaid compared to men. In the early 20th century, most females did not work outside the home; however, they contributed to the economy in other ways. They worked in family businesses and were responsible for the family. Only 2% of females were enrolled in higher education (Yellen, 2020). By 1930, females' participation in the labor force had increased to 50%. These changes overlapped with the suffrage movement that resulted from Amendment 19 (Yellen, 2020).

Female issues were not widely accepted or discussed in the early women's movement era. There was little focus on female issues except for a few females and men who unsuccessfully tried to raise issues. It was not until after the 1964 Civil Rights Movement that sex discrimination was even mentioned. Although it was noted, most people in the United States did not see it as a problem. In 1972 Mink and Edith introduced Title IX and were responsible for its passage (Winslow, 2013).

Sandler (2007) recounts a letter from a woman who had applied for a position at a prominent University in response to a woman applicant: "Your qualifications are excellent, but we already have a woman in this department" (Sandler, 2007, p. 473). Sandler explained, "when she was rejected for a position at her university, she blamed



herself for being too assertive for females when she was not appointed to a high-level position” (p. 473). Furthermore, the women stated that she “was somewhat ambivalent about the female movement and halfway believed the press descriptions of its supporters as ‘abrasive,’ ‘man-hating,’ ‘radical,’ and ‘unfeminine’” (Sandler, 2007, p. 473).

The Title IX law states: “No person in the United States shall, based on sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance” (as cited in Sandler, 2007, p. 7). Since the landmark ruling equity act Title IX 1972, female leadership has continued to be not equally represented (Longman & Madsen, 2014). Research also identifies the idea of neutrality as a barrier that prevents district leadership from confronting discrimination against females (Skrla et al., 2000, p. 49). Neutrality may be a significant factor in why females in central office positions continue to be not equally represented and a continued lack of interest in hiring female African American leaders. It has been noted throughout this literature review that when females are absent in K-12 senior leadership positions, their absence affects the power of influence on decisions that impact students through policies and procedures (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 486).

Bower (2021) found that females do not differ from men in leadership in their competence, effectiveness, and capability. Most studies agree that women are capable leaders. According to a new survey of 432 companies across the United States and Canada, 54% of females contribute positively to their employees' well-being compared to 31% of men (Bower, 2021). Further support of this study confirms that females are more likely to support diversity and inclusion efforts in their organizations. A recent survey

from Resume Lab finds that 38% of employees prefer to work for a female boss, 26% prefer to work with men, 38% believe females are better leaders, and 35% believe men outperform women (as cited in Bower, 2021). However, 35% of the respondents had no preference (as cited in Bower, 2021). According to Zenger Folkman (2019), females have higher leadership skills than men. They argue that females ranked higher in taking the initiative, acting with resilience, practicing self-development, driving for results, and displaying high integrity and honesty. In fact, they were more effective in 84% of the most frequently measured competencies. Perception of the effectiveness of females in leadership plays a vital role in whether employees prefer men over females.

Catalyze (2022) confirms that at least 90% of companies worldwide have at least one woman in senior management positions. Although data is not readily available about district placement of females in central office positions, statistics confirm that the awareness of the importance of females in leadership is increasing. However, with the increase of females in higher leadership positions, the barriers that continue to plague females in leadership prevent females from being hired. Guihen (2017) concludes that several significant barriers prevent females from pursuing career aspirations. These barriers include societal bias and gender stereotypes, family obligations, and the lack of support in their ability to succeed in leadership positions.

### **African American Female Leaders**

Many words describe the relentless pursuit AAFs sacrifice in their quest for promotion to K12 central office leadership positions. The evidence of their leadership can be confirmed throughout history as demonstrated by their keen ability to respond to dangerous situations and to keep their families safe during slavery. Enslaved Black

females were natural leaders (Aptheker et al., 1994; Hine, 1994). These females held firm to their instincts to nurture their families in dangerous situations. Despite the horrific conditions of slavery, survival fueled creativity. In addition to being creative, they had incredible courage (Diouf, 2015).

One historical example of females in leadership during slavery was Harriet Tubman. After escaping from her plantation, she changed her name and led approximately 20 enslaved people to freedom along the Underground Railroad (Humez, (2006). Her resilience and determination are demonstrated by the strength of AAF leaders today. As Black females advance through their careers, strength and determination guide them through the many pitfalls. The history of endurance experienced by these female ancestors leads one to believe that these females will succeed no matter how hard.

Another example of female leadership can be seen in Sojourner Truth, a public speaker during the feminist movement. When White females were fighting for their freedom, she realized the struggle for females like her was different. Her struggle was different from other females because of the horrific experiences as an enslaved person not shared with White females. The famous words, *Ain't I A Woman!* illustrated her fight for justice. Her fight for freedom reminds us that AAFs still ask the same question today. Females must overcome incredible odds just as they did in the past. The examples of bravery and commitment arise from the strength of their ancestors. Similarly, to advance to K-12 district levels, African American leaders must never give up. Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and countless others never gave up.

## **Brown vs. Board of Education Impact on Central Office Administrators**

Brown vs. Board of Education was a landmark decision of the U.S. Supreme Court that laws in public schools that promoted racial segregation were unconstitutional (Amber, 2018). After Brown vs. the Board of Education's decision, many African American principals in formerly segregated schools lost their positions because their schools were often closed (Echols, 2006). School closures in African American schools resulted in thousands of African American educators' displacement, dismissal, and demotion, particularly school principals in the south.

Furthermore, African American schools continued as underfunded, dilapidated, and in substandard conditions, nowhere equal to the quality of their White counterparts (L. C. Tillman, 2004). As a result of the Brown vs. Board of Education, decision has a negative impact on the hiring practices of AAFs today. The results caused the disappearance of the African American principal (Karpinski, 2004). Since principalship is the gateway to advancement to higher-level leadership, the Brown Vs. The Board of Education's decision impacted Black educators seeking leadership positions. Among other leadership positions, the impact resulted in the underrepresentation of female administrators in central office leadership positions.

### **Impact of Rulings**

The quality of education was not equal among all schools; however, district boards did not respond right away. In fact, they did not comply but instead used various ways to circumvent the laws that affected equality in African American schools. Some unfair practices during integration included the creation of barriers that prevented their

success, including unfair hiring practices and discrimination, which minimized African American educational leaders' contributions (Hill, 2009).

The impact of the Supreme Court ruling was significant. Its impact is also substantial concerning African American administrators' leadership roles. One article claimed that Brown vs. Board of Education and AAFs contributions to educational leadership are underdeveloped (Tillman, 2004). And most of the limited research referred to principalship among AAFs after the Brown vs. Board of Education decision. It centered on their leadership, predominately in schools of their own ethnicity (Nash, 1988). Another significant impact of the ruling was that AAF leaders who were prominent in the community and role models lost their jobs to Whites (Nash, 1988). Since Whites were forced to integrate with Blacks, many refused to have their children educated by Black teachers. As a result, more than 38,000 Black teachers in the south lost their jobs (Amber, 2018).

Another essential point was that 90% of the Black principals also lost their jobs. Black students were bussed to White schools, and Black teachers were demoted to substitute status or fired (Amber, 2018). Furthermore, according to Amber (2018), the reduction in faculty diversity after the 1954 court ruling fluctuated over time. Amber explains that during the mid-1960s, the decline resulted from racism marred school desegregation. From the late 60s, the number of Black teachers in the early 70s increased because of the focus on diversity. However, by the mid-70s, another drop in the Black teacher population occurred because they were hired at a much lower rate than their counterparts and fired faster (Amber, 2018). Since White-run districts implemented the court order, Black principals' and teachers' jobs were not protected.

## **Gender Barriers**

Within the past 50 years, females continued to advance in the attainment of educational degrees, earned more money than ever before, and moved up the ranks in educational leadership positions (Dewalt, 2018; Mudau & Ncube, 2017; Ryder & Briles, 2003). However, gender barriers continue to impede females' progress toward equal leadership opportunities compared to men (Bodalina & Mestry, 2020; Zheng et al., 2018). Sandberg (2013) suggests that females start their careers with less confidence than their male counterparts. Munoz et al. (2014) agree that confidence is a significant barrier for females in career advancement. She asserted that females must prove themselves far more than men, while men are being promoted based on potential. Moreover, Sandberg suggested that females are promoted based on past accomplishments. However, her critics argue that females meet with opposition in the form of lack of support, rigid structural and systemic antagonism, and ingrained patriarchal practices (Eisenstein, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014).

Although laws have passed, including Title IX, that prevent gender discrimination, females have not reached the same level as men in acquiring roles in educational leadership (Roseberry & Roos, 2014). The research is conclusive that gender barriers faced by females in educational leadership are both external and internal.

External barriers are societal structures and systems that can be changed by the attitudes and behaviors of the organization (Phipps & Prieto, 2021; Sandberg, 2013). External factors are gender-role stereotyping, discrimination, lack of specialized preparation, lack of mentors and sponsors, absence of adequate gender and/or same-sex role models, and the dynamic of family responsibility (Shakeshaft, 2007). Zaidi (2022)

identifies seven external barriers that impact the career advancement of AAFs. These external barriers include:

- Structural
- Professional
- Personal
- Cultural
- Socio-political
- Organizational
- Psychological barriers

These external barriers impact hiring practices in K-12 central office positions.

According to Zaidi (2020), the primary professional barrier for females is the glass ceiling, coined by Morrison, White, and Vam Velsor in 1987. This invisible barrier explains that when females attempt to advance to top leadership positions, the social and organizational structures prevent them from advancing. For example, although females dominate the field of education in the role of teacher, external and internal barriers prevent them from advancing in the executive leadership structure. However, internal barriers are harder to address because of an individual's negative, engrained societal beliefs and expectations (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Superville, 2017). This mindset often prevents females from pursuing higher-level positions, although highly qualified, when serving in leadership positions.

### **Theoretical Foundations**

Theoretical foundations give rationale and scholarly perspective and help justify a study (J. H. McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The theoretical foundations applicable to

this study include CRT and BFT. These two theoretical perspectives provide a deeper understanding of impediments to AAFs rising in educational leadership positions.

### **Critical Race Theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) explains how race impacts hiring practices of marginalized groups. The central argument of CRT is that racism is deeply rooted in American society and institutions (K. W. Crenshaw, 2011). The core concept is that racism is embedded in the policies and legal systems and not based on individual prejudices and bias (Sachuk, 2021). CRT provides a framework to analyze the social, political, and economic disadvantages because racial barriers persist and impact social structures, discourse, representation, and achievement (Díaz-Cruz, 2018; Randle, 2018; Yamaguchi & Burge, 2019). Despite the more recently accepted concept of race as a social construct, race and racism remain the central mechanisms for understanding inequities that persist for people of color. Consequently, diversity within organizations cannot be sustained unless based on understanding the root causes of racism (Bernier & Rocco, 2003).

In 2007, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racism in educational settings was colorblind (K. W. Crenshaw, 2011). This concept was interpreted to mean that schools are not guilty of segregation by race. According to K. W. Crenshaw (2011); Burrell-Craft, (2020); and Sawchuk (2021), laws and policies fail to address racism. Although the roots of racism cannot be seen, the oppression is visible (Bernier, 2003). The colorblind interpretation of the laws and policies that perpetuate racism has an impact on educational institutions (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). CRT has become known in the legal arena for addressing educational institutions' exclusion and racist policies (Ladson-



Billings, 1995). Since the dominant society views law as colorblind and neutral, it is impossible to see the reality of unfair practices (K. W. Crenshaw, 2011).

Researchers suggest that the root causes of racism often result in excluding AAF leaders in hiring practices. Examples of root causes include doubts about their competence as leaders, lack of qualifications, and must work harder for promotions. P. H. Collins (2000) recognized that AAFs rarely achieve career advancement due to discrimination. The lack of advancement continues to be studied; however, not much has changed. Additionally, career advancement is hindered by the negative impacts of race and gender (Tarmy, 2012). P. H. Collins recognized the uniqueness of the intersection of racism and sexism that creates oppressive experiences for the AAF leaders. Additionally, McCray et al. (2007) assert that "their study brings to the forefront issues concerning whether or not the historically negative presumptions as it relates to the leadership capabilities of African American principals are still part of the thought patterns of decision-makers regarding the placement of these administrators" (p. 1). Although females make up over 60% of educational administrators in California, a significant disparity exists in the number of AAF administrators compared to their White counterparts (Strange, 2020).

### **Black Feminist Thought**

Patricia Hill Collins (2009), a seminal author on BFT, brought to light a theoretical understanding of the barriers faced by Black females as leaders. She conceptualized the opinions of how other groups characterize Black females. Alinia (2015) adds that BFT brings to view the daily challenges that AAFs face. Since Black females' leadership experiences are rarely shared because of limited research, their

valuable contributions may not be prevalent in generalizations about them. BFT allows females to express how they see themselves from their point of view (Brock, 2011). If AAFs are not able to verbalize and express the oppression of institutionalized racism, their experiences will continue to be silent while advancing in leadership (Starks, 2019). According to P. Collins (2009), the view of AAFs is framed by White males who often characterize AAF leadership as ineffective and not valuable. BFT rejects those images of inferiority and powerlessness. Instead, BFT provides an understanding of how society rejects the impact of Black females in leadership and denies the importance of placing importance on their contribution. Theorists provide avenues for AAFs to tell their own stories to help others confirm their realities based on their lived experiences. In addition to the more broadly defined term of feminism, "black feminism" is characterized by understanding how sex, class oppression, and racism interconnect (P. H. Collins, 2000). Black Feminist scholars explain that the traditional feminism movement was White females' inequities did not represent and did not reflect the experiences of AAFs (Roth, 2004). This framework provides insight about how AAFs in K-12 central office positions endure oppression and brought to the forefront what strategies they use to leverage injustices in the workplace (Olow, 2021).

### **Social Theoretical Concepts**

Social theories aligned with females in leadership define how society interprets females' place in society. These theories provide reasoning associated with cultural norms that influence perceptions about who they are in society (Reeves et al., 2008, p. 631). Tabassum and Nayak (2021) explain that although there has been some improvement, females in leadership face inequities while advancing through their careers. Moreover,

AAF roles in educational leadership are often based on stereotypes perpetuated by society's expectations of gender and ethnic roles. The following theories: social role theory and role congruity theory provide a base for understanding societal norms and expectations of females in leadership and their effect on advancement to higher-level positions.

### **Social Role Theory**

The origin of the social role theory was created by Eagly (1987) to explain how society has invented traditional roles of females and men in society. The behaviors based on their gender roles perpetuate expectations of their roles in society. For instance, society expects females to serve in specific roles that are more feminine, and men traditionally serve in roles that require masculine qualities. Eagly and Karau (2002) explain how females and men differ in characteristics. Females are known for communal qualities, while men are perceived as having agentic qualities. Communal qualities associated with females can be identified as nurturing and sensitive, while men's agentic qualities are associated with aggression and confidence (A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002; Wells et al., 2014). Eagly and Karau assert that agentic roles and communal roles are widely accepted by society. These societal role stereotypes negatively impact females while advancing to leadership positions. Pianta (2020) explains that men and women have stereotypical beliefs that men make better leaders than females, which is why gender inequality continues to exist.

### **Role Congruity Theory**

Eagly and Karau (2002) provide insight into the relationship between gender, leadership roles, and social behaviors that cause prejudice and stereotypes. Female

leaders are often criticized and devalued because of how they respond. For instance, when female leaders respond in assertive and powerful ways, their responses are often misinterpreted as pushy or bossy. On the other hand, when men respond identically, their replies align with social expectations. Social expectations of men are more agentic and seen as more effective leaders. Role congruity theory helps explain why it is difficult for females to be seen as competent leaders because society's expectations of leadership harm their advancement to leadership positions (Lawson et al., 2022).

### **Intersectionality and African American Females**

According to Knudsen (2006), the intersectionality theory provides a critical explanation of the complexity of how intersecting racial, sexism, ethnicity, and gender oppression is understood by society (P. H. Collins, 2000; Schmidt & Mestry, 2014). Intersectionality is a term that symbolizes the numerous and multifaceted ways in which race and gender interact to shape a person's experience (K. W. Crenshaw, 2011). The Intersectionality theory can be used to understand AAFs barriers while pursuing central office leadership positions (Mestry, 2014). This lens may help explain why race and gender are two distinct barriers preventing AAFs from attaining higher-level leadership positions in K-12 central office leadership. Intersectionality can be used to explain how "cultural and social axes interweave" by providing insight into gender, race, and other characteristics to explain how social constructs promote inequities in society (Strange, 2020).

P. H. Collins (2000) explained that the oppression experienced by AAFs is unique. Racism and sexism create multiple systems of oppression that overlap and are not experienced by other groups. Hooks (2012) agrees that AAF experiences cannot be seen

as Black or as a woman independently but must be understood as interlocking and frequently reinforcing each other. These experiences create multiple overlapping oppression, which impacts their advancement to leadership. These disadvantages cause society to see AAFs negatively because of their identity as Black and female (Shields, 2008). Patel (2001) explains that remedies for the intersectionality of race and gender in the development of policies in racial equality must be examined. Patel also asserts that organizations must raise awareness of the multiple racial discrimination experienced by these marginalized females. He further states that structural racism cannot be changed by one individual but must be addressed by organizational changes, local and national laws, and policies that demand equity in hiring practices for AAFs.

While many in the research community value intersectionality as a framework for examining the experiences of individuals with multiple social identities, others are critical of underlying concepts that are critical to the framework. For instance, Wing (1990) questioned if all identities and not only those of marginalized individuals can be considered intersectional, while Cho et al. (2013) posited that "the failure to give all intersectional subjects their day in the sun is a fundamental shortcoming of the field" (p. 798). Other concerns with the intersectionality framework include the concept of intersectional identities as stable and resistant to changes in time, culture, and geography (Bowleg, 2013) and the increasing understanding of race as a social construct (Parent et al., 2013).

At the heart of intersectionality is the concept of identity. Shields (2008) defined identity as "social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories" (p. 301) and included self-image and

self-expression as components. However, no individual can be defined by a single identity, and multiple identities interact differently to inform an individual's social interactions and experiences (K. Davis, 2008; Garry, 2011). According to Parent et al. (2013), "multiple identities construct novel experiences that are distinctive and not necessarily divisible into their component identities or experiences" (p. 640). It follows that the combination of identities creates a new category of experience greater than the sum of each (K. Crenshaw, 1989; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Voltmer, 2018; Wing, 2000).

Intersectionality is a term that describes the impact of both race and gender. The theory of intersectionality acknowledges differences among females and explores how the intersection of race and gender transforms relationships of power (K. Davis, 2008; Thorpe, 2019). Those who experience multiple subordinate identities as one are often marginalized, face distinctive forms of oppression, and experience disparate outcomes (Arriaga et al., 2020; Bowleg, 2013; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). The complication of being both female and African American has a direct impact on career advancement (Pollard, 1997). These dual identities serve to explain AAF leaders' complexities (K. W. Crenshaw, 2011). K. Crenshaw (1991) further described three forms of intersectionality, structural, political, and representational, and their impact on the experiences of females of color.

### **Structural Intersectionality**

Structural intersectionality provides a lens through which to examine social and political structures that impact those with overlapping layers of subordinate identities. This intersectional lens supports an analysis of the policies and practices that create

marginalized conditions for females of color and determine the resources allocated to them (Cho et al., 2013; Shields, 2008). According to K. Crenshaw (1991), females with multiple subordinate identities contend with structural inequities that create conditions and experiences, unlike White females. They face different obstacles and have different needs, and interventions and access to resources are often unavailable, inadequate, or less effective (K. Crenshaw, 1991). Females of color are impacted by institutional structures linked to a history of racism, sexism, and expectations based on a single-axis identity are affected. They, therefore, find limited access to educational and employment opportunities (Hobbel & Chapman, 2009).

### **Political Intersectionality**

Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) defined political intersectionality as the effect of political laws and policies on individuals with intersecting minority identities. This intersectional lens supports examining the impact of political and social forces on individuals with multiple subordinate identities (Cho et al., 2013). Kimberly Crenshaw (1991) argued that females of color are members of two subordinated groups that often pursue conflicting political agendas and priorities that frequently split their political energies between both groups. Multiple oppressions of race and gender are rarely addressed, and intersectional experiences are ignored or suppressed due to each group's political priorities. For example, feminist and antiracist movements have often failed to recognize females at the intersection of both. While the Civil Rights Movement focused on racial issues but did not address females' issues in general, the feminist movement focused on female inequalities without addressing Black females' oppression (K. Crenshaw & Bonis, 2005).

## **Representational Intersectionality**

According to K. Crenshaw (1991), representational intersectionality reflects how females of color are represented in popular culture (media, text, film, television) due to the intersection of race and gender. This intersectional lens examines how females of color are represented and how critiques and representation protests often ignore the females' interests. Hobbel and Chapman (2009) found that stereotypical images affect females of color as they adopt, modify, or reject these images. When marginalized groups are portrayed or represented in negative ways, it lends to the creation and affirmation of stereotypes. Examples of negative stereotypes of AAFs include sexual immorality, aggressiveness, and anger. These stereotypes also cause these females to shift their personalities to adjust to the work environment and armor themselves to withstand racial oppression. These representations negatively impact how society views them and can prevent them from advancing in their career.

### **The Lack of Research in the Field**

Most research about what is known about AAFs in educational leadership and their underrepresentation is similar. The research relative to the K-12 central office is often scarce for AAFs. In addition, the data for understanding the importance of K-12 central office leaders are unavailable because the CDE, the Association of California School Administrators, and the county offices of education do not keep data on central office administrators. Therefore, their impact is not monitored and rarely included in the research.



## **Synthesis Matrix**

A synthesis matrix provides an overview of the list of authors for the literature used in this study. The matrix was categorized by subjects associated with barriers perceived by AAFs in K-12 central office leadership positions. Each category aligns with authors who contributed to each section. Authors names and dates of publication are included, and the outline includes literature from Chapters I-III (see Appendix A).

## **Summary**

Chapter II summarized the research about barriers created by the intersectionality of race and gender on AAFs advancement to K-12 central office leadership positions. The study examined females' history, impact, and underrepresentation in leadership. The research explored the challenges that AAFs face in leadership and their roles in central office positions. It provided research about the landmark legislation of Brown vs. Board of Education and Title IX implications. A summary of the impact of internal and external barriers created by stereotypes of AAFs was presented. Social theoretical concepts, including social role theory, role congruity theory, and CRT, were also examined. The theoretical frameworks included how BFT, and Intersectionality impacted race and gender impacted career advancement. Finally, the literature review confirmed that there is a lack of research about AAFs in K-12 central office leadership positions and that more research is needed.

## CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

### **Overview**

Chapter III provides an overview of the methodology and research design used to conduct this study. The research design uses the qualitative phenomenological approach to find the meaning of interest and phenomena (J. H. McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Phenomenology was the methodology selected because it uncovers a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (M. Patton, 2015). This chapter describes the purpose of this study and research questions that identify the perceived intersectional barriers of race and gender on AAFs in K-12 central office positions. A description of the research design, population, sampling frame, and the sample provides the process for interviewing candidates. An in-depth description of instrumentation is described, including the researcher as the instrument and qualitative field testing. The chapter concludes with the process for data collection, data analysis, and potential research limitations.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on the advancement of African American females to a K-12 central office leadership position. The second purpose of this study was to identify strategies African American females leverage to overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?

2. What barriers do female African Americans experience due to race while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?
3. How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact the advancement to a K-12 central office leadership positions perceived by African American females?
4. What strategies do African Americans females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?

### **Research Design**

The most important task of the research design is to identify the most appropriate research method for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher must identify the best method for the purpose statement in research design selection. The importance of this design is aligned with the purpose of this study. This qualitative study explores the people, culture, and experiences of how they view problems or causes (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The research method chosen for this study is qualitative. Qualitative research is used to find the deep meaning of interest and phenomena. This research method was used to understand female African Americans' school leaders' intersectional barriers while advancing to a central office position. The interviews are purposeful and allow the researcher to gain insight to discover through interviewing African American leaders in K-12 central office positions. The interviewer is interested in understanding people and their opinions and lived experiences related to the research question. The researcher observes the natural environment and uses interviews, fieldwork, or focus groups to gather information from participants.

The criteria for judging qualitative research vary depending on the study's purpose. Qualitative data and analysis often use the words of the participants and may be more intent on understanding the perspective of those directly involved in the issue. This means that one cannot judge the appropriateness of the methods in any study or the results of its findings without knowing the study's purpose, agreed-upon uses and intended audiences (M. Patton, 2015). Furthermore, in qualitative research, the analysis method is not reliant on numerical data but is often based on direct experience through observation or extended interviews.

### **Qualitative Research Design**

The research design selected for this study is the qualitative phenomenological approach used to find the deep meaning of interest and phenomena. The criteria for judging qualitative research vary depending on the study's purpose. Furthermore, the phenomenology core question describes the lived experiences of a phenomenon, person, or group of people (M. Patton, 2015). It makes meaning of multiple experiences of the same phenomenon. This research design explains what has happened and not perceptions. The experience comes from many people's stories until the stories start to sound the same or saturation is achieved. For this phenomenological study, semi-structured interviews were used to gather information through rich discussion. Semi-structured interviews are popular partly because thinking through question-wording carefully allows researchers to consider whether the questions are complete and whether they are biased or leading. Semi-structured interviews combine this strength with the ability to deviate from the guide to collect the most helpful information (Patten, 2018).

This study aims to contribute to the body of knowledge on the intersectional barriers of race and gender that impact AAFs advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. The qualitative research method is also interested in the expressions of the participants. Qualitative research strives to gather saturated and highly detailed participant accounts, which place significant time demands on the researcher to collect, collate, and analyze the data (Lanka et al., 2021). Qualitative research requires few participants, unlike quantitative research. More importantly, qualitative research looks to understand concepts and experiences. In conclusion, qualitative research is flexible and adapts to new information based on data collected, provides a holistic perspective on the topic, and allows the researcher to become entrenched in the investigation (Rutberg & Bouikidis, 2018).

### **Method Rationale**

A qualitative inquiry utilizing a phenomenological approach focuses on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, and M. Patton (2015) explained that this involves capturing "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it" (p. 115). A phenomenological inquiry was, therefore, an appropriate approach to probing AAFs experiences through the lens of intersectionality, the phenomenon under study. Participants described and reflected upon the experiences, behaviors, and interactions that comprised their journey to the K-12 central office leadership position. A qualitative phenomenological study provided an effective format through which AAFs could share their perspectives on the impact of their intersectional identities on their advancement to school leadership positions.

## **Population**

According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a study's population is a group of individuals who conform to a common and specific criterion chosen from the general population for which a study's data are used to make inferences. The population for this study was AAFs serving as central office administrators (excluding superintendents) in K-12 public schools in California.

The NCES (2018) National Teacher and Principal survey indicates that 64% of females are school district cabinet-level leaders. However, only 25% of these cabinet-level leaders are females of color (NCES, 2018). Furthermore, NCES (2019) confirmed that there are 4,041 K-12 central office administrators in California. Of these central office administrators, 55.2% are female, and 11.5% of the female administrators are Black. The researcher used the percentages from 2019 to calculate the number of AAF K-12 central office administrators in California. Based on 55% of 4,041, the estimated female central office administrator's population is 2,222. Based on 11.5 % of the female administrators identifying as Black, the estimated population for this study is 244 AAF central office administrators in California.

## **Sampling Frame**

A sampling frame is the population from which a sample is taken (J. H. McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), sampling is selecting a "group of individuals from whom data are collected" (p. 129). Similarly, M. Patton (2015) and Creswell (2003) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population.

The sampling frame of this research study included female African American K-12 central office administrators (excluding superintendents) in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties in southern California. K-12 central office administrators serve in various central office positions such as instruction, personnel, student services, business, and special education.

The focus of this study is K-12 central office leadership. Central office leadership is the top district administrator for each division of the central office. Figures 3 and 4 are from San Bernardino and Riverside Counties' websites and were used to identify district leadership positions for this study. Although these charts do not represent all districts, they provide a general understanding of central office positions for most district offices.

There are similarities in both organizational charts. The same is true for all the districts in each county. Districts have other departments, but most have the personnel department, business services, student services, instructional services, technology, operations division, nutrition services, special education, and risk management.

**Figure 3**

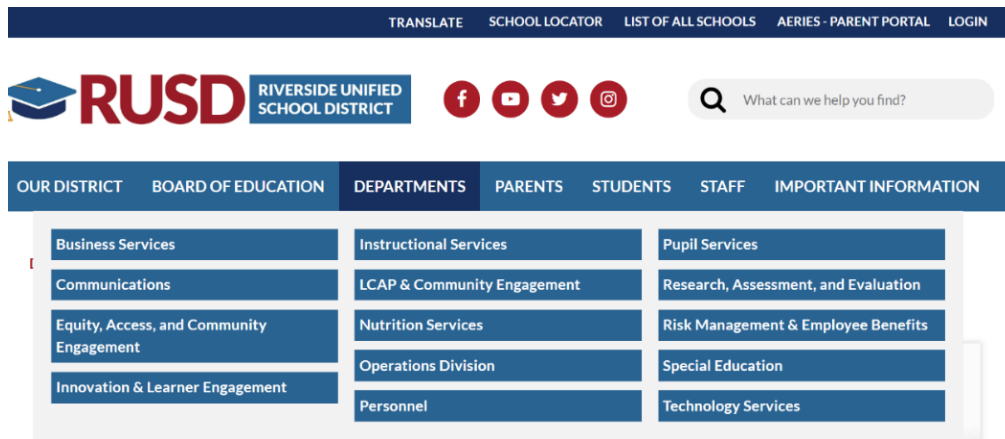
*Sample Organization Chart of Office Administrators in San Bernardino City Unified School District*



*Note.* Adapted from San Bernardino City Unified School District website. [https://www.sbcusd.com/district\\_offices](https://www.sbcusd.com/district_offices)

**Figure 4**

*Sample Organization Chart of Office Administrators in Riverside Unified School District*



*Note.* Adapted from the Riverside Unified School District website.  
[https://www.sbcusd.com/district\\_offices](https://www.sbcusd.com/district_offices)

***San Bernardino County***

According to Ed Data (n.d.), there are approximately 1,712 K-12 administrators in San Bernardino County. Using the national percentage of 55%, the approximate number of female administrators is 941. There are 33 districts and 552 school principals in San Bernardino County. Since 55 % are female, it is estimated that there are 18 female superintendents and 303 female principals. By subtracting 18 female superintendents, and 303 principals, the approximate number of central office female administrators is estimated to be 620. Research confirms that 11.5% of central office administrators are African American, and it is estimated that there are approximately 68 AAF central office positions in San Bernardino County.

***Riverside County***

According to ED Data 2018-19, there are 1,489 K-12 administrators in Riverside County. According to the national average, 55% are female, and of those female administrators, only 11.5% are female of color. It is estimated that there are approximately



818 female administrators, including 12 female superintendents and 338 female principals. Based on this calculation, 468 female district administrators work in the central office. Since 11.5% of female administrators are Black, it is estimated that there are 51 AAF central office administrators in Riverside County.

The estimated sampling frame for this study was (68 + 51) for a total of 119 AAF central office administrators in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Additionally, to strengthen the data estimations, the researcher identified 10 school district websites within both counties and made phone calls to district representatives to confirm the number of AAF central office administrators. Table 1 identifies the number of AAF central office administrators for 10 San Bernardino and Riverside Counties districts.

**Table 1**

*African American Female Central Office Administrators in San Bernardino and Riverside Counties*

County	District	AAF COE
Riverside	Banning	1
Riverside	Beaumont	0
San Bernardino	Chino	1
San Bernardino	Fontana	3
Riverside	Moreno Valley	3
San Bernardino	Ontario Montclair	1
San Bernardino	Rialto	2
Riverside	Riverside	1
San Bernardino	San Bernardino	4
San Bernardino	Upland	1

*Note.* AAF COE = African American Central Office Administrators.

<sup>a</sup>Data sorted with District controlling the sort in ascending order, then by County in ascending order.

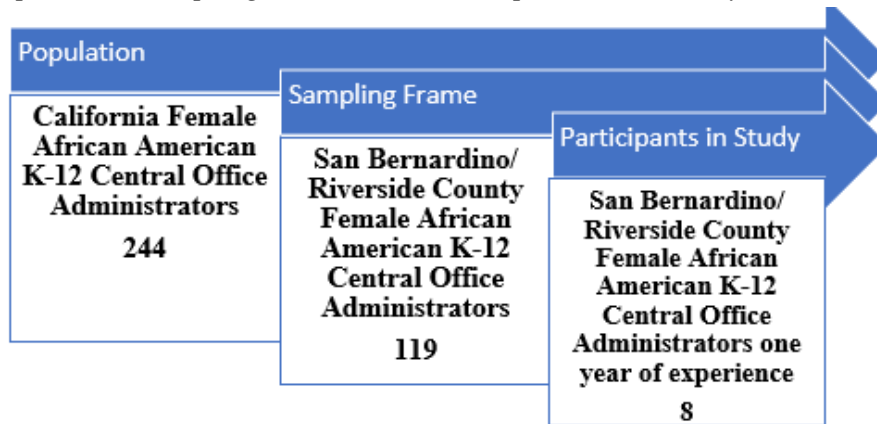
**Sample**

A sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population from which the researcher intends to generalize. According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher

(2010), sampling is selecting a "group of individuals from whom data are collected" (p. 129). Similarly, M. Patton (2015) and Creswell (2003) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population. For this study, the researcher employed convenience sampling to identify the sample population based on the criteria set in the sample frame. J. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) assert that convenience sampling is widely used in qualitative and quantitative studies because of its accessibility; however, researchers must proceed cautiously as this method may be difficult to generalize. Since there was very little data available, based on the 119 San Bernardino and Riverside Counties female African American K-12 central office administrators, the sample selected to participate in this study was eight. J. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) assert that the sample frame refers to specific characteristics of the selected research sample. As a result, the following criteria must be met for participation in this study. The participants must (a) identify as African American or Black, (b) identify as female, (c) be employed as an administrator in a central office position in a San Bernardino or Riverside County district, (d) serve in that position for at least one year and (e) hold a valid administrative credential. Figure 5 illustrates the population, sampling frame, and number of participants of this study.

**Figure 5**

*Population, Sampling Frame, and Participants in the Study*



### **Sample Selection Process**

M. Patton (2015) confirms that it is important to focus on the depth of rich data. This rich data will be used to identify how many sample participants are sufficient. He further explains that the sample size depends on the quality of the collected data. The number of participants selected for this study will depend on the number of AAFs in central office positions in the Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The researcher will need to saturate each district to find participants who are willing to participate. The criteria for the selection process included AAFs in K-12 central office positions as full-time employees. The participants are administrative leaders in central office positions, including personnel, student services, special education, business services, and instruction. Convenience sampling was chosen for this study.

In convenience sampling (also called available sampling), subjects are selected based on being accessible or available. Although this type of sample makes it easier to conduct research, there is no precise way of generalizing from the sample to any population. Researchers often describe convenient samples carefully to show that although they could not employ random selection, the characteristics matched those of

the population or a substantial portion of the population (J. H. McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). However, it does not mean that the findings are not useful. It simply means that caution is needed in generalizing.

The convenience sampling selection process was used to identify potential participants. The researcher determined the criteria for selection to ensure that participants met the requirements. Based on the selection criteria, the population included eight AAFs in K-12 central office positions who participated in the study. The selected criteria was that these females were full-time employees in the San Bernardino and Riverside counties in southern California, have been administrators in central office leadership positions for at least one year and hold a valid administrative credential.

### **Instrumentation**

For the study, three peer researchers utilized a qualitative instrument to participate in a thematic study on the perceived impact of intersectional barriers of race and gender on the career advancement of females in various fields of leadership positions. The faculty advisor provided guidance and support in developing the purpose of the study, interview questions aligned with the purpose, and the development of the instrument-aligned phenomenon of the study. The instrument used to address the phenomenological inquiry consisted of 13 standardized open-ended questions developed to align with the purpose of the study (see Appendix B). M. Patton (2015) defined standardized open-ended interviews as ones in which the precise wording of open-ended questions and their sequence of questions are determined in advance and are posed to all subjects in a standard format. Interview questions asked participants to describe their career in central office leadership positions, barriers encountered due to gender and race, and strategies

they employed to address barriers. Additional questions asked participants to share barriers and strategies due to their intersectional identities. Probing questions were included on the instrument so that researchers might elicit greater details and "explore unexpected, unusual, or especially relevant material revealed by a participant" (M. L. Patton & Newhart, 2018, p. 161). Once the instrument was developed, an alignment table was created to ensure that interview questions were aligned with the research purpose (see Appendix C).

“In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the instrument” (M. Patton, 2015, p. 22). The researcher conducted interviews as the primary instrument for this study. Since the researcher leads the process as the primary instrument of the study, their interview styles, idiosyncrasies, and personality traits may impact how the data is collected (Pezalla et al., 2012). As a result, the study may contain some biases based on how the researcher influenced the interviewee during the qualitative interview sessions. The researcher conducted eight interviews with AAFs that work in K-12 central office positions within the San Bernardino and Riverside County school districts. The interview questions focused on intersectional barriers perceived by African American females in K-12 central office leadership positions due to gender and race and the strategies used to leverage those barriers. The interviews were conducted via Zoom using the transcription device to record answers. The responses were analyzed and coded to find common themes from the interviewees' responses.

The researcher is an African American woman educational leader who retired after 38 years of experience in education. The last 15 years were spent as principal of three sites. The researcher is also a four-time Principal of The Year award from the

Association of California School Administrators, NAACP, and the Rialto Unified School District. The researcher also served as a California Distinguished School evaluator and was an adjunct professor for three universities with an emphasis on teacher education. The researcher is the CEO of Williams Literacy Connection which provides services for at-risk students in reading instruction. For the last four years, the researcher has been the lead coordinator for the Summer Algebra Academy, funded by California State University Chancellor's Office to provide extended learning opportunities for 9-12 grade students.

### **Field Test of Instrument**

A field test of the interview protocol was conducted to gauge the effectiveness of questions in soliciting rich detail from participants (see Appendix D). According to J. McMillan and Schumacher (2014), the field test is also an opportunity to check for possible bias in interview questions and the need to reword explanations or questions before the actual interviews. The interview protocol was field-tested with a participant who met all the study's sample criteria. A peer researcher was invited to observe the field test to provide feedback on the process, the effective use of the instrument, and the researcher's interviewing skills. After the field test was completed, peer researchers met to discuss the feedback from observers and interviewees and to make minor revisions to the interview protocol (see Appendix E). After final revisions, this researcher scheduled one-hour interviews with each participant. Interviews were conducted, recorded, and transcribed using the video platform Zoom.

## **Researcher as an Instrument of the Study**

In qualitative research, the researcher, as the instrument of the inquiry, interacts closely with subjects to capture rich details through skillful interviewing and careful observation. To elicit reflections and insights that provide valid data, the interviewer must establish rapport, demonstrate that they are nonjudgmental, authentic, and trustworthy, and indicate that they hear and connect with the interviewee (J. McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; M. Patton, 2015). M. Patton (2015) further described the qualitative interview as a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee and stated that "rapport and empathy reside in that relationship" (p. 461). Additionally, M. Patton reinforced that the quality of the data obtained during interviews is dependent mainly on the interviewer's skills, experience, perspective, and background are integral to the process.

While using a carefully constructed interview protocol and establishing rapport with the interviewee, a skillful interviewer must also manage the patterns of interaction throughout the interview process. As M. Patton (2015) recommended, the researcher monitored the pacing of questions and responses to maintain the flow of the conversation. In addition to probes and follow-up questions, elaboration was encouraged through non-verbal cues, and reinforcement and feedback were provided to signal appreciation for the interviewee's responses (M. Patton, 2015). In conclusion, the researcher's careful attention to the content and process of the interview, "with both informed by the purpose of the interview" (M. Patton, 2015, p. 471), was essential to obtaining rich data that contributed to the study's findings.

## **Validity**

According to (J. H. McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; M. Patton, 2002), in establishing the validity of a study, the researcher must confirm the accuracy of the instrument that it is intended to measure. Since no research instrument is perfect, validity cannot be absolute (M. Patton, 2015).

The researcher developed interview questions that were aligned with the research questions. The thematic team reviewed the questions to ensure the unity of the data collection process. Also, there was pilot testing as well to ensure validity. Validity is established in phenomenological studies because the claim of the truth of lived experiences is logical.

## **Reliability**

According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), when the researcher provides consistency in the structure of their studies, the data collection process is standardized and, therefore, consistently administered. In this study, the researcher used open-ended interview questions to ensure that the interviewee was provided ample opportunity to fully express their opinion about what was being asked. J. H. McMillan and Schumacher; and M. Patton (2015) agree that the standard open-ended interviews consist of a set of questions worded consistently, making sure to use the exact wording during each interview to allow for future duplication of the study and reliability of the questioning process.

## **Intercoder Reliability**

Intercoder reliability involves peer researchers examining and coding the same data to check for agreement between coders. It requires that equally knowledgeable



coders come to similar interpretations regarding the data examined (Campbell et al., 2013). According to Campbell et al. (2013), an intercoder agreement occurs when peer researchers crosscheck data codes and reconcile discrepancies to agree on the codes used for a particular text.

After interviews were transcribed and the responses verified by participants, the researcher coded the data and identified emerging themes. Themes were sorted and categorized by research questions. The researcher and a peer researcher then sorted and coded the data to determine intercoder reliability. At least 10% of the data was analyzed and coded by the peer researcher, with an agreement of 80% or greater (M. Patton, 2015). After the data were coded, a narrative analysis was written to identify common themes that emerged from each research question to describe the participants' common lived experiences.

### **Data Collection**

In qualitative research, the method of analysis is not reliant on numerical data but is often based on direct experience through observation or extended interviews (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative data and analysis often use the words of the participants and may be more intent on understanding the perspective of those directly involved in the issue. Qualitative studies rely heavily on data collection and interpretive analysis, leading to a deep understanding of the phenomenon (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The most common type of data collection for qualitative research is interviews. Interviews are the most widely used measure for collecting data for qualitative research (M. L. Patton & Newhart, 2018).

For this study, the researcher used one-on-one interviews to explore perceptions, experiences, and beliefs about intersectional barriers African American central office administrators faced in career advancement. Interviewees were asked to describe their experiences, thoughts, and beliefs as they responded to 13 interview questions. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because semi-structured interviews can explore the views, experiences, beliefs, and motivations of individuals (Merriam & Tisdale, 2009). Interviews are beneficial for getting the story behind a participant's experiences (Merriam, 2002). Zoom platform semi-structured interviews were conducted for the data collection method for this study.

The interview questions were created by a thematic group of researchers that focused on internal and external barriers due to the intersectionality of race and gender. The depth of the interview protocol ensured that each research question would have enough data to help answer the question (Yin, 2013). The questions were field tested and reviewed by two expert panel members to ensure that the questions were aligned with the purpose and research questions for the study. The interview questions included follow-up questions to provide complete responses and the ability to explore new avenues throughout the process (Creswell & Creswell 2018). The interview protocol included the procedures for interviewing (a script followed before the interview), interview questions, and procedures after the interview for closure of the process.

The selection criteria were used to identify the number of participants. The interviewees were contacted via email once the criteria for acceptance were completed (see Appendix F). The email included the purpose of the study, and a confidentiality statement was required. Other information included the Zoom link and availability for

participation in the study, including possible dates and times. All collected data was kept in a secure location with password protection. Data were only collected once approval was granted from UMass Global University's IRB (see Appendix G), and after completing the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Protecting Human Research Participants Certification (see Appendix H). The researcher collected signed documents and ensured that informed consent documents were signed before any data could be collected or interviews conducted (see Appendix I-K). After the interviews, the researcher gathered data to identify common themes and their significance to the study. The list of interview participants was finalized, and schedules with interview times were sent via email with a follow-up telephone call to ensure the information was received. Additional communication between all final interviewees was confirmed at least 24 hours before the interview. The process was sequential and organized to ensure the best possible results.

### **Artifacts**

Researchers are encouraged to use more than one data collection method to triangulate and validate the data. In addition to interviews and observations, artifacts are a third source of qualitative data, which, according to Merriam (2002), may provide insights and clues into the phenomenon of study and are therefore worth the effort to locate and examine. The eight participants were asked to submit by email any written documents (photos, social media posts, letters, etc.) relevant to their experiences as AAF central office administrators advancing to the K-12 central office leadership position.

## **Data Analysis**

J. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) define qualitative data analysis as "an inductive process of organizing data into categories and identifying patterns and relationships among the categories" (p. 395). M. Patton (2015) further described qualitative analysis as a challenging endeavor in which one must make sense of voluminous data through identifying patterns and "constructing a framework for communicating the essence of what the data reveal" (p. 521). In short, the researcher codes the data, making meaning and drawing conclusions based on emerging themes.

The researcher interviewed eight participants using the Zoom platform. After the interviews, the data was transcribed using the Zoom platform by the researcher. The researcher used Microsoft word to organize the raw data by comparing responses from each of the eight interviewees. This process was repeated three times until the codes became clear. Once potential themes were identified, they were placed in sentence frames and were reworded to ensure accuracy of alignment with research questions.

## **Limitations**

Limitations are methodological weaknesses that may affect data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. The researcher identified the following limitations that could affect the study's results.

### **Limited Research on Central Office Leaders**

The researcher used estimations to identify the number of AAFs in central office administration in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. When deciding on the sample size, the researcher explored district websites in both counties to identify AAF administrators based on pictures, if available, to verify how many were in each district.

Most websites did not include photos to confirm race and gender, so in some cases, the researcher called or emailed district representatives in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties to identify the number of AAFs in each district. Since most of the districts identified two or fewer AAFs were represented, this could result in limitations to the study. Also, there may be a discrepancy in the San Bernardino Unified District's number of AAFs in central office positions. The complexity of the organization may result in more females in director positions. The researcher must continue to investigate to identify the exact number of AAFs in central office positions accurately. Finally, it may be challenging to secure participation. If the researcher cannot secure eight participants, she must use other sampling methods or expand county searches. Qualitative studies focus on small samples, typically no larger than 40, selected purposefully to develop an in-depth understanding of a particular phenomenon (J. McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; M. Patton, 2015).

### **Researcher Bias**

The researcher's bias is another limitation. The researcher must remain neutral and be aware of personal bias concerning K-12 central office leadership positions. Since the researcher is an African American woman, the topic may influence data analysis, data collection, themes, and code development. Since the researcher is part of a thematic team of researchers, the team will practice neutrality during the field-testing of instruments to ensure that opinions and emotional responses are not a part of the interview process.

### **Summary**

Chapter III provided the methodology to study the perceived impact of intersectional barriers of race and gender on AAFs in K-12 central office positions. The

methodology used for this study included identifying the research design, the population, the sample frame, and the sample population. The research included 13 field-tested interview questions. The interview questions were field tested to ensure the validity of the questions. An expert panel was used to confirm the clarity of the questions. The researcher conducted step-by-step data collection and analysis. The methodology concluded with the limitations of the study and behaviors of the organization (Phipps & Prieto, 2021; Sandberg, 2013).

## CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA, COLLECTION, AND FINDING

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on AAFs advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. The first three chapters of this dissertation offered an introduction to the problem, a review of the literature surrounding the topic, and an exploration of the phenomenological qualitative methodological design used for this study.

This chapter will now present findings that emerged from data collected and analyzed using the conceptual framework constructed for the purpose of this study. This chapter presents findings of a qualitative phenomenological research design. Three areas that are covered include: (a) summary of the research design, (b) overview of qualitative study settings, and (c) the study's findings. This study investigated eight female central office leaders who were not superintendents in K-12 leadership roles. The study participants were interviewed via Zoom for 60 minutes using semi-structured interview questions. The participants of this study were given pseudonyms to protect their identities.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on the advancement of African American females to a K-12 central office leadership position. The second purpose of this study was to identify strategies African American females leverage to overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?
2. What barriers do female African Americans experience due to race while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?
3. How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact the advancement to a K-12 central office leadership positions perceived by African American females?
4. What strategies do African Americans females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

## **Methodology**

Chapter III provided an overview of the methodology and research design used to conduct this study. The research design uses the qualitative phenomenological approach to find the meaning of interest and phenomena (J. H. McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Phenomenology was the methodology selected because it uncovers a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (M. Patton, 2015).

This chapter describes the purpose of this study and research questions that identify the perceived intersectional barriers of race and gender on AAFs in K-12 central office leadership positions. A description of the research design, population and sample was described. An in-depth description of the interview process was described, including the researcher as the instrument after qualitative field testing. The chapter concludes with the process for data collection, data analysis, and summary of findings. The researcher



observed the natural environment and used thirteen interview questions to gather information from participants.

The criteria for judging qualitative research vary depending on the study's purpose. Qualitative data and analysis often use the words of the participants and may be more intent on understanding the perspective of those directly involved in the issue. This means that one cannot judge the appropriateness of the methods in any study or the results of its findings without knowing the study's purpose, agreed-upon uses and intended audiences (M. Patton, 2015). Furthermore, in qualitative research, the analysis method is not reliant on numerical data but is often based on direct experience through observation or extended interviews.

A qualitative inquiry utilizing a phenomenological approach focused on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences. M. Patton (2015) explained that this involves capturing "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it" (p. 115). A phenomenological inquiry was, therefore, an appropriate approach to probing AAFs experiences through the lens of intersectionality, the phenomenon under study. Participants described and reflected upon the experiences, behaviors, and interactions that comprised their journey to a K-12 central office leadership position. A qualitative phenomenological study provided an effective format through which AAFs could share their perspectives on the impact of their intersectional identities on their advancement to central office leadership.

### **Population**

According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a study's population is a group of individuals who conform to a common and specific criterion chosen from the

general population for which a study's data are used to make inferences. The population for this study was AAFs serving as central office administrators (excluding superintendents) in K-12 public schools in California.

The NCES (2018) National Teacher and Principal survey indicates that 64% of females are school district cabinet-level leaders. However, only 25% of these cabinet-level leaders are females of color (NCES, 2018). Furthermore, NCES (2019) confirmed that there are 4,041 K-12 central office administrators in California. Of these central office administrators, 55.2% are female, and 11.5% of the female administrators are Black. The researcher used the percentages from 2019 to calculate the number of AAF K-12 central office administrators in California. Based on 55% of 4,041, the estimated female central office administrator's population is 2,222. Based on 11.5 % of the female administrators identifying as Black, the estimated population for this study is 244 AAF central office administrators in California.

### **Sample**

A sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population from which the researcher intends to generalize. According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), sampling is selecting a "group of individuals from whom data are collected" (p. 129). Similarly, M. Patton (2015) and Creswell (2003) defined a sample as a subset of the target population representing the whole population. For this study, the researcher employed convenience sampling to identify the sample population based on the criteria set in the sample frame. J. McMillan and Schumacher (2014) assert that convenience sampling is widely used in qualitative and quantitative studies because of its accessibility; however, researchers must proceed cautiously as this method may be difficult to

generalize. Since there was very little data available, based on the 119 San Bernardino and Riverside Counties female African American K-12 central office administrators, the sample selected to participate in this study was eight. J. McMillan and Schumacher assert that the sample frame refers to specific characteristics of the selected research sample. As a result, the following criteria must be met for participation in this study. The participants must (a) identify as African American or Black, (b) identify as female, (c) be employed as an administrator in a central office position in a San Bernardino or Riverside County district, (d) serve in that position for at least one year and (e) hold a valid administrative credential.

### **Demographic Data**

For this study, eight AAF leaders in Riverside or San Bernardino County who work in central office leadership positions were selected to participate in this study. These female leaders have held central office leadership positions for at least one year and hold a valid administrative credential. Each administrator was provided a pseudo name to protect their confidentiality and to ensure that their identity was protected. The pseudo names were randomly chosen for each participant and are famous African American women in history. Five of the eight participants hold a doctorate degree, two are currently in doctoral programs and one has a master's degree. At the time of this research study, the participants represent 8 of 119 AAFs in central office leadership positions in Riverside or San Bernardino Counties.

These pseudo names were explicitly chosen to honor women who have achieved success despite systemic racism and to celebrate the women in this study for their

willingness to share their voices in addressing the barriers they face. The pseudo names are:

- Althea Gibson
- Dorothy Height
- Harriet Tubman
- Mary McLeod Bethune
- Phillis Wheatley
- Rosa Parks
- Shirley Chisholm
- Sojourner Truth

### **Participant Demographic Characteristics**

Each name of the eight participants were randomly assigned and not based on any of the characteristics of the participants but based on the top 10 most influential Black women in history. The historical names were chosen from an article titled “10 of the most important Black women in U.S. history,” written by Jone Johnson Lewis (2020), and featured on the ThoughtCo publishing family.

#### ***Dr. Sojourner Truth***

Dr. Sojourner Truth has been a central office administrator for 14 years. She serves as a director of equity and access and previously served as director of categorical programs. Her journey to the central office includes teacher, vice principal, principal.

#### ***Dr. Rosa Parks***

Dr. Rosa Parks has been a central office administrator for eight years. She currently serves as a director of career and college readiness. She started her journey to

central office leadership through higher education. She previously served as a college advisor, admissions counselor, associate director of the college board, public school counselor, then transitioned to her current position.

***Dr. Harriet Tubman***

Dr. Harriet Tubman has been in central office leadership for three years. She is currently serving as director of special education and leads the Special Education Plan Area (SELPA) for her local district. Her journey to the central office includes teacher, vice principal, and principal.

***Mary McLeod Bethune***

Mary McLeod Bethune has been in central office leadership for 13 years. She has currently been the director of student services for the past eight years. She began her career as a teacher, math coach, principal, coordinator of child welfare and attendance, director of child welfare and attendance and director of student services.

***Dorothy Height***

Dorothy Height is currently serving as an assistant superintendent and has held a central office leadership position for 17 years. She has served as teacher, principal, program specialist, coordinator of research and analysis, director of research and analysis, director of curriculum, chief academic officer and assistant superintendent.

***Dr. Shirley Chisholm***

Dr. Shirley Chisholm has recently been promoted to deputy superintendent and has been at the central office for seven years. She has served as program specialist, vice principal, principal, director of human resources, and deputy superintendent.

***Althea Gibson***

Althea Gibson is currently serving as a director of human resources certificated at the central office for the past three years. She has served as a teacher, vice principal, and principal. She has been in the same district for 28 years.

***Phillis Wheatley***

Phillis Wheatley currently serves as the director of human resources, classified for this year and was the director of wellness last year. She has been in the central office for one and one-half years. She served as a teacher, vice principal, principal, and director of wellness.

Table 2 displays the participant description, their educational background, years of experience in the central office position and positions held in their educational career.

**Table 2**

*Participant Description*

Participant Description	Educational Background	Years of Experience in Central Office Leadership	Positions Held
African American female central office administrator Sojourner Truth	Doctoral degree administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	14 years	Teacher, principal, coordinator of categorical programs, director of categorical programs, director of equity and access
African American female central office administrator Rosa Parks	Doctoral degree administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	8 years	UC Berkley college advisor San Jose admissions college board associate director public school counselor director of college and career

continued

Participant Description	Educational Background	Years of Experience in Central Office Leadership	Positions Held
African American female central office administrator Harriet Tubman	Doctoral degree administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	3 years	Teacher, vice principal principal, director of special education
African American female central office administrator Mary McLeod Bethune	Doctoral degree candidate administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	13 years	Teacher, coach, vice principal, principal, coordinator and director of child welfare and attendance, director of student services
African American female central office administrator Dorothy Height	Doctoral degree administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	17 Years	Teacher, program specialist, coordinator of research and analysis, director of research and analysis, principal, director of curriculum. chief academic officer, assistant superintendent
African American female central office administrator Shirley Chisholm	Doctoral degree administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	7 years	Program specialist, vice principal, principal, director of human resources, deputy superintendent
African American female central office administrator Althea Gibson	Doctoral degree candidate administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	2 Years	Teacher, vice principal, principal, director of human resources, certificated
African American female central office administrator Phillis Wheatley	Administrative credential master's degree bachelor's degree	1 ½ Years	Teacher, vice principal, principal, director of human resources, classified

The selection criteria for the participants includes the criteria for how the participants were chosen to participate in the study. All participants have agreed to participate in this study by signing an informed consent and an audio release form. Table 3 displays the selection criteria graph.

**Table 3**

*Selection Criteria*

Participant	Administrator is a current employee in Riverside or San Bernardino	Administrator has a current administrative credential	Participant has been a central office leader for at least one year	The participant has agreed to participate in this study by signing the informed consent form
Sojourner Truth	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Rosa Parks	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Harriet Tubman	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mary McLeod Bethune	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Dorothy Height	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Shirley Chisholm	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Althea Gibson	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Phillis Wheatley	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

**Presentation of the Data**

The results of this study were gathered from open-ended, semi-structured interviews using 13 questions created by the thematic team with the approval of the committee chair. Each interview was 30-60 minutes in length and conducted via Zoom platform. The data was collected through interviewee responses from each of the 13 questions. Follow-up questions were allowed for clarity of responses and the free flow of information. Each interview was recorded, transcribed, and approved by the interviewee before data was created. The results were disaggregated via Microsoft Word. Codes were created, themes were identified, and intercoder reliability was conducted with a peer reviewer to ensure that codes were checked for consistency of code.



Artifacts for this study were requested from participants to enhance research for the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on AAFs advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position by the researcher, however no artifacts were received. The researcher was not able to triangulate data. However, participants were provided an opportunity to review transcripts for validity and accuracy.

### **Presentation of Findings**

There were eight participants in this qualitative phenomenological study. The purpose of this study is to identify the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on AAFs advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. The second purpose of this study was to identify strategies AAFs leverage to overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

Interviews were also transcribed via Zoom and reviewed for accuracy by each participant who then approved it for use in this study. The interview questions were identical for each participant, however, follow up questions were asked based on how participants responded. Participants were allowed to reflect on their lived experiences. For each question, participants shared an example of a time when they experienced the barrier and provided strategies that would help to navigate that barrier. The researcher used Microsoft Word to summarize responses, which were color coded and highlighted to establish codes and themes. The frequency counts were identified for each research question and common themes created from similar codes.

## Results by Research Question

### Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: *What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership?* Interview Question 1 divided gender barriers into two categories: External and internal barriers. The interview questions provided an overview of the categories, then asked the participants to reflect on experiences related to being a woman, provide examples or a story about each category and provide strategies used to address and overcome these barriers. The results were organized by the number of responses for each theme and not separated by external and internal responses. As a result, six themes were identified regarding the experiences of AAF gender barriers. Each theme was aligned to the responses of each participant. All participant responses were organized in a chart by the number of respondents for each theme and the number of responses called frequency counts. As a result of the analysis, six themes were identified based on gender barriers experienced by each participant. The themes are:

- Confidence and self-esteem
- Men appointed more often
- Women not seen as qualified or capable
- Lack of focus on gender barriers versus race
- The need for more support to female
- Women must be overly prepared

### ***Theme 1: Lack of Confidence and Self-esteem***

The most frequently referenced theme for Research Question 1 was the internal barrier of lack of confidence and self-esteem. This barrier was mentioned by all eight participants with 32 frequency responses. All of the participants recounted the importance of having confidence in their ability to perform in their position and how other employees have contributed to the difficulties they faced. Three of the responses also suggested that the lack of self-confidence was experienced by AAFs in central office leadership positions. For example, one of the participants with pseudo name Phyliss Wheatley explained,

Yeah, this is a big one for me because I feel like I went up the ladder fast. And then sitting as director, and then being kind of on maybe the younger side and you're sitting with people that have been in the position for a lot longer than you have and they have all of the experiences, so sometimes I feel like you doubt yourself, a little bit, and whether you belong in the position, so sometimes the confidence, they talk about that imposter syndrome. 'Do I really belong here? Should I be in that position? Do I know enough? Should I have stayed at different positions a little bit longer to get more experience?'

Another participant, Sojourner Truth, added, "I was reluctant to take risks and I think I do experience a lack of self-esteem." She recounted a disturbing account of an interaction she had with her female boss. This encounter rocked her to her core, and this was one of the very few times she has talked about it to anyone because she was afraid of repercussions. She stated,

One time my boss, assistant superintendent, she called me about something, and she asked me a question, and we were on the phone, and I said, 'yes, ma'am,' and she said, 'Don't call me ma'am, bitch!' and you know, I don't talk about it a lot, but it was one experience that really had an impact on how I felt about working and the impact and my self-esteem.

Mary McLeod Bethune questioned herself, "Are you strong enough for the position, because I felt that I might not know what I am doing, and I might not be doing enough. I struggled with being assertive while being respectful to my supervisors." While Shirley Chisholm asked herself, "Can I carry the emotional weight of this position mentally" and stated that she was not confident about being the first female in this position. Shirley Chisholm also explained "that although she was pretty self-confident, she may not be strong enough for the position" and was apprehensive about second-guessing herself. Dorothy Height agreed that she had to "fight with I may not be the best at my job because the mind was starting to play tricks on me."

Consequently, all participants felt that the lack of confidence they experienced was not from within themselves, but was a result of what others had suggested, remarked or openly stated to them. They felt that their tenacity to overcome internal barriers came from calling upon their inner strength. This sentiment is further reflected in the following statement by Althea Gibson,

I just have never had that issue. It just has always been, 'if this is what I want, this is what I'm going to do' because that's just always been my mindset. That's what has been very ingrained in me. That nothing can stop me, regardless of ethnicity

or gender and my parents have always driven that in me from as far back as I can remember.

Shirley Chisholm further asserted that she did not have many internal barriers because "I was raised by a strong mother."

The results of the data analysis for this theme indicate that confidence and self-esteem have the most impact on internal gender barriers experienced by AAF while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions.

### ***Theme 2: African American Women Must be Overly Prepared***

The second theme from Research Question 1 was African American women must be overly prepared while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions. Of the seven participants who responded to this theme, there were 13 frequencies. The data revealed that participants believed that they needed to be more prepared for their positions than their counterparts. Participants were consistent in their comments. For instance, Althea Gibson explained, "You have to do more, and prove yourself more, feels like to me at least that's how it felt. To be in the game, so to say, and be taken seriously, and prove yourself." Shirley Chisholm provided examples of her experiences, noting, "Be careful about what you wear and how you present yourself and think about who is going to interview you." On the other hand, Sojourner Truth provided examples of preparing for district presentations,

Anytime I'm doing a presentation with other women, I practice it. [Redacted] will tell you, 'We got to practice this—the whole presentation. We'll get it down, whatever we don't feel comfortable saying, we're going to make sure we get rid of all the uncomfortable terms that are in it and use ones that we feel comfortable

using' and for a lot of people you know they may do a presentation, and then they just do it without practice.

Data analysis confirms that AAFs in K-12 central office positions must be overly prepared in their abilities and skills and is an internal gender barrier that can prevent AAF from advancement through their careers.

### ***Theme 3: Lack of Focus on Gender Barriers Versus Race***

The third theme for Research Question 1 was the lack of focus on external gender barriers vs race. Seven participants stated that external gender barriers, while a factor, minimally impacted their roles in K-12 central office leadership positions. The data confirms that responses overwhelmingly focused on the barriers based on women in education. Seven participants with 11 frequencies confirmed that since education is predominately women, they did not think other women kept them from advancing to central office leadership. Sojourner Truth confirms,

In education, I would have never been promoted by now in my career in teaching you know there's so many teachers and women, you know 83% of teachers are women right, so I've never had where I felt that there was a barrier from me being a woman. A woman of color, yes, but not a woman.

Shirley Chisholm adds, "I probably feel I've encountered more biases with being an African American woman than just being a woman. Education is predominately women." Mary McLeod Bethune agrees, "There was minimal impact of external barriers because education is so heavily female dominated." Rosa Parks adds, "I think in education, education is overrun by women, I don't recognize a lot of gender specific

barriers externally, in my current role or previous role, because women are the majority in education.”

Data analysis of this theme concludes that participants are impacted by racial barriers more than external gender barriers in educational leadership of AAFs career advancement.

***Theme 4: Men are Appointed More Often to Higher-Level Leadership Positions***

Another theme identified by the AAF K-12 central office leaders was men are appointed more often to higher-level leadership positions. The responses indicate that five participants mentioned this theme with 18 frequency counts. They provided examples that men are appointed at higher rates than women. Data reveals that systematic racism causes men to be appointed to higher level positions and that since more men are in those positions, they tend to hire more men to those positions. However, participants felt they were as qualified or in some instances more qualified. Dorothy Height recalls a time when she felt that she was better qualified yet was not appointed to a position she felt she was more qualified for. Dorothy stated,

Males were given a job even though not as qualified as I was. And at that time, I was talking about who would be the best person to be able to convey the thoughts of the group, and of course, I thought I was. Not a disagreement, but very much trust in, yes, and excellent discernment. And he says, ‘well no, I think it should be this person who was a male.’ I was having a hard time with it because I thought they didn't really know what I know. They know a lot of stuff, I'm not them... but I was saying in terms of having this specific knowledge in terms of the K-12 part,

which is what we're talking about and so I really felt some kind of way and just let it go, but it bothered me for a while.

Four other participants agreed with her response. For instance, Shirley Chisholm stated, "there tends to be more males at the district office." She explains,

Males tend to be assistant superintendents and executive directors are at that level and when you get to a certain level, when it comes to the finalist, they are usually not women. When it comes to a tie, the nod usually goes to the male. (Shirley Chisholm)

Mary McLeod Bethune explained, "it wasn't until I began moving up to an executive position, assistant superintendent, and superintendent that I became aware of external barriers." She concluded that her "relational leadership style did not line up with the leadership style of the boss" (Mary McLeod Bethune). She also stated, "moving up to executive positions seem to be male dominated. Men are stereotyped as being disciplinarian and firm. Women are only given opportunities because of the shift from the traditional job" (Mary McLeod Bethune). Mary McLeod Bethune continued to reflect,

However, I think the time I moved into those positions was when districts were trying to address the disproportionality of students of color being excessively excluded from instruction with suspensions and expulsions. There was a shift in the dynamics of an expectation that a person was going to come that, what do you call it, no tolerance and suspension and expulsion and getting them out versus someone who could come in and think about how you change our system and impact our system to keep kids there. So, I think that was an opportunity, what it [sic] would be a traditional barrier for moving into that position, to open up a door



for someone who had a different style, namely a female, so that we could meet that new expectation of that shift, and how we address behaviors and kids.

Finally, Harriet Tubman provided evidence of why men were hired at higher positions more often than women. She recalls that sometimes women's views were not acknowledged. She stated,

It would probably be having to speak up in situations where I feel like in the room of men, my voice is not heard, so where I will say something that's a good idea, but that idea is not recognized until a male counterpart says it. (Harriet Tubman)

Dorothy Height's comment agreed with Harriet Tubman's. As she struggled internally, she recalled that "Maybe I don't know, my voice is not deep maybe I can't articulate commandment presence" (Harriet Tubman). She concluded that her "male superintendent did not value me and was from the good ole boys club" (Harriet Tubman). Harriet Tubman described a barrier to advancement that sometimes women are not heard when providing input and suggestions during leadership team meetings. She said,

I think I was in a meeting like a couple of weeks ago, where there were a bunch of stakeholders sitting around a table. And I gave an idea for how to move the work forward and that idea was almost like I didn't say it. And then a male at the table said the same idea in a different format, for like a different way, and then it was like, 'Oh, that's a great idea,' and so it was accepted, but in that moment I just let it go because you know I was happy that the idea was moving forward but I wasn't credited or acknowledged for the fact that it was my idea to begin with. (Harriet Tubman)

Dorothy Height shared,

I've been in meetings, not so much right now, but in previous years where I've literally said something... and then a male says the same thing, and someone says 'that's a great idea.' I'm sitting there like, 'maybe they didn't hear me. Maybe I didn't talk loud enough when I said it.' So it's a great idea, so that would mess with me a lot, because I would start to second guess myself, like, 'well, maybe I didn't say it.' That really messed with me because 'am I losing it?' And so, does that impact the level of assertiveness? Because it's always a risky trick when you do speak up and say something, because you don't know how it's going to be perceived.

Data confirmed that these AAF central office leaders emphasized that even though they had problem solving skills and provided effective strategies to provide district improvement, they were not heard and sometimes their ideas were duplicated by men. The data analysis for this theme confirmed the barrier that men hired more often to higher level leadership positions prevented AAFs from advancing through their careers.

***Theme 5: Women are Not Seen as Qualified or Capable***

For this theme, respondents provided an example of how women are not seen and qualified and capable for K-12 central office positions. Participants' responses indicated that the perception of their qualifications was not always seen by their bosses. There were five participant responses and 13 frequencies referenced for this theme. The majority of the respondents agreed that the perception of the capacity of job performance for women is a barrier in central office leadership.

Sojourner Truth emphasized that, "women are not seen as able to complete the task because you are not capable and are being blocked from promotion." Shirley Chisholm had several responses about the perception of women's capabilities. Those perceptions included: "Well, do we want to hire a woman or man?" "The perception is that men are easier to work with," "men have more time to devote to their job," "women are juggling family obligations," "questions about, 'can you handle the stress'" and "are you going to be too emotional" (Shirley Chisholm). She agrees that these perceptions are barriers and prevent AAF from advancing in their careers.

This mindset often prevents females from pursuing higher-level positions, although highly qualified, when serving in leadership positions. Mary McLeod Bethune is conflicted about her leadership style and is not sure if her style lines up with a traditional leadership role. She provided this insight about her concerns about advancement to higher-level positions.

I think, now that I'm at a point where the next level for me would be an assistant superintendent and superintendent is now that I am really being aware external barriers being present. Some of that has to do with my leadership style that is more relational. And when I talked a little bit about the respect and I don't mean like biblical reverence, but just my style is I defer to what my leader wants and I think the style that is an external that impeding me is that my style doesn't line up with the expectation of a male leader that I have right now of pushing back and being more for lack of better word, aggressive. (Mary McLeod Bethune)

Data confirms that women not seen as qualified impact perceptions of whether AAF are qualified for promotions. And perceptions limit their access to central office higher level leadership positions.

***Theme 6: The Need for Female Support in Central Office Positions***

This theme focused on the importance of having support for AAFs while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions. In this theme, four participants believed that these females needed more support as they advanced in central office leadership positions. Of the four participants, some remembered how other female leaders helped them to navigate to higher level positions. Phillis Wheatley explained that collaboration with other females helped her succeed in her central office leadership role. She recalls,

So, there is this political figure who had this assistant, and we just hit it off. She was amazing; she was a dynamo. Our focus was the same. Her focus was homelessness, and my focus was homelessness and low income. And we really wanted to make sure that we were targeting those families and making it fun and getting people connected, and so as I was working with her, we just meshed so well with the events. We started off with one event, and like that was the first time we had gotten to meet each other, and it was just a glowing success. And as I worked all year in this capacity, we just kept tag teaming with these events, one after the other. Yeah, I loved that because we both felt successful. (Phyllis Wheatley)

Other participants confirmed the importance of support from other females. Harriet Tubman explained, "there's always been a black woman or some woman who saw

my potential and are the reason for my advancement within my career." Mary McLeod Bethune stated, "the first principal to give me an opportunity was a female principal and there is power in females bringing other females into leadership." And Dorothy Height confirms, "a female superintendent gave her the first opportunity to advance to a central office leadership position."

Data analysis revealed that although the need for females in leadership positions to be a catalyst in ensuring the promotions of other females, two of these women suggested that mentors were not limited to only females.

Research Question 1 describes the impact of gender barriers on the career advancement of AAF. There were six themes that emerged from the data collected from eight African American women in central office leadership positions in Riverside and San Bernardino County. As noted, gender barriers were divided into two areas: external and internal. The results were combined for both external and internal responses and organized in order by the number of participants and frequency counts.

Table 4 identifies the frequency counts by themes for each question.

**Table 4**

*Themes Related to Gender Barriers Experienced by African American Females While Advancing to a K-12 Central Office Position*

Theme	References Participants (n=8)	Frequency Counts
Lack of confidence and self-esteem (internal)	8	32
Women must be overly prepared (internal)	7	13
The lack of focus on external gender barriers vs race (external)	7	11
Men appointed more often to higher leadership positions (external)	5	18
Women not seen as qualified or capable (external)	5	13
Need for female support (external)	4	8

## Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: *What barriers do female African Americans experience due to race while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?*

Questions included what experiences, examples, stories, and strategies were used to address and overcome racial barriers.

Data revealed that race was seen as the most significant barrier faced by African American women while advancing to a K-12 leadership positions, even when discussing external gender barriers. Racial barriers generated seven themes from participant responses. Also, some of these same themes were duplicated for race and gender. The similar themes generated from gender and race included, *African American women are not seen as qualified to serve in their positions at the central office and African American must be overly prepared for their responsibilities in leadership.*

Data revealed that participants' concern about racial barriers was evident in their responses. Four of the interviewees confirmed that race was more important than gender. For instance, Harriet Tubman, while responding to gender barriers said,

I feel like a lot more barriers are related to my race, and not necessarily to my gender. So, there's always been a Black woman or some woman who saw my potential and are the reason for my advancement within my career.

Shirley Chisholm further explained,

Now I think that hits home a little bit more. When you get to a central office position there's usually one [Black] or none. And why is there one or none? Does it mean that we're not applying but again, how do people see you?

Rosa Parks stated,

And then as I'm thinking stuff, I don't know if you saw me, I was writing down a couple of things because I do have some mentorship that I'm doing with some Black females. And so, I always make sure to share these things with them, as they learn and grow and navigate their waters. But I always like to share things that I feel or have felt and have gone through. Because I don't want others to feel like they're alone and nobody else has ever felt these things or gone through them. And that's half the battle is knowing that this isn't just you. Now, you're not hallucinating. This you know so that's half the battle is just knowing that it you're not alone.

There were seven themes for racial barriers:

- Assumptions about whether AAF are qualified
- AAF experience disrespect and unfair treatment
- AAF must be overly prepared
- AAF are sometimes given responsibilities over and above their primary job description
- Not many AAF are hired
- Assimilation
- Low expectations for AAF

The following themes were generated from interviews with eight participants. Their responses are listed by themes generated by similar responses.

### ***Theme 1: Assumptions About Whether African American Females are Qualified***

The most frequently referenced theme for race barriers faced by AAFs in K-12 central office leadership positions were assumptions about their qualifications. All the participants commented on this barrier. There were eight participants with 16 frequencies. Data analysis confirmed that the assumption that AAFs were not qualified, impacted whether they were hired or promoted. The participants shared many experiences that confirmed that even though they felt they were qualified for K-12 central office leadership, racial barriers prevented them from advancing forward included the assumption that they were not highly qualified, but they were.

Sojourner Truth stated, "There is still racial bias and discriminatory hiring practices in 2022 and the question of what your qualifications are."

Shirley Chisholm added as HR director,

I often see White women and other women, non-African American women, able to excel in places where we're not, even though we may be more qualified. I work in HR, so I've learned to look and study, and I've been on many a panel where people unconsciously or consciously tune out the Black female or pin her as being too much for the very same position they'll give it to the Black male that may not be as qualified.

Mary McLeod Bethune shared her frustration. She recounted that,

The bigger challenge that I find is not so much as my experience, has not been that because I'm an African American woman, that people don't have confidence in me, or they see me as not having the skill to do what's needed. (Mary McLeod Bethune)



The participants provided personal examples of experiences that verified that others did not value their qualifications which might prevent them from advancing in their careers. One example was recalled by Sojourner Truth, where she felt more qualified than her counterparts. She expressed her frustration:

I went to an interview for a job, and it was a group interview. So, there were two other people. All three of us were being interviewed at the same time. I think it was for a principal or assistant principal job, and there was me and two White men. When they would ask the question, I knew the answers you know, and the other two would either piggyback on my response or if they didn't go first, they would even go back and then say, 'you know I would have to I agree with what [redacted] said' blah blah blah. Now I didn't get the job. but I was the one that had the answers. And so, you'll see then that promotion is not based on whether or not you know the job and you have the experience in the background for the job when you're an African American female.

Another participant, Dorothy Height, expressed a similar frustration with hiring practices. Dorothy Height talked about her qualifications not being honored. She said,

There have been several positions that I've applied for, actually two particularly, that I felt I was overwhelmingly qualified for, based on others who are at my same level. One White got a similar position, so I said 'okay, it's possible. So, I'm going to go after a similar position.' Some I wouldn't even get an interview for, and I know my skill set.

Ironically, Rosa Parks, who had no idea that Dorothy Heights was part of this study reiterated that she was troubled by Dorothy Heights' experience because they were previously in the same district when the incident occurred. Rosa Parks explained,

There was a friend in a role everyone knew she was overqualified but did not receive the job over someone who was friends and not qualified for the role but received the job. And everyone in the district knew that she was, in fact, not just qualified, but overqualified for the role. Very humble in spirit, humble in tone. Everyone loves her, works well with her, but yet she did not even receive the job offer. Someone else who was White, less experienced, was friends with the superintendent, was the person who got the position. And so just to see things like that has just been very sad for me.

Finally, Phillis Wheatley summed up her ideas about qualifications and the impact of racial barriers experienced by AAFs.

You know there's been times where you felt like you needed to qualify, or validate yourself, your educational level, your experience level in order to be where you are at. So, I found myself explaining about your background more, and this is what I have to bring to the table, and this is what supports me and holding the position.... You wonder if people are curious, not even just racial, maybe just age. What have you done? What qualifies you to be here, so you almost feel kind of like that just becomes part of who you are.

### ***Theme 2: Experience Disrespect and Unfair Treatment***

The next highest theme that emerged from racial barriers generated from interviews with participants was they experienced disrespect and unfair treatment while

advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions. There were six participants and 16 frequencies in this theme. The six participants recounted times where they felt they were treated with disrespect or received unfair treatment, but the experiences were rarely shared with superiors due to fear of repercussions. The participants in this theme shared many experiences about disrespect and unfair practices. The data results confirm that these practices are experienced more often than revealed and negatively impact AAF while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions.

One of the most disturbing interactions occurred while Harriet Tubman was the principal. This experience still impacts her as a central office administrator. She provides this story:

I believe when I transitioned to my district, coming into my first principalship within the district, so I did follow an African American male, and they did accept him but coming in later as an African American woman, it was a different level of acceptance. So, for example the parents and the people at the school didn't want to call me Dr. They said 'were not calling her Dr.' and I said, 'I didn't ask you to call me Dr.,' but that was a thing. So, a lot of it was just a full-on attack, like questioning my credibility, my education, my ability to be a leader, and they were very vocal, you know it was very aggressive, and it was really before I even started, and so there was a conversation where they were even considering like maybe I shouldn't be the principal there.

Harriet Tubman added,

In addition to that, I've noticed when African Americans apply for some of these positions at executive leadership, it feels like they have to jump through so many

hoops. They have to hold so many degrees, when in fact the other members of senior leadership will not hold those degrees, may not have that same level of experience. And so it's like the bar is set higher in order for African Americans and Latinos to come into district that traditionally served kids who look like them, but yet someone who is Caucasian can have very little experience, not necessarily have experience in the field of education and come in and be hired as a superintendent or an associate superintendent. But I don't necessarily see that happen with people who are non-Caucasian. I mean, you see it sporadically, but not predominantly.

On the other hand, Sojourner Truth explains, "there is a lot of institutionalized racism that happens even with the best of them." She recounts an incident that happened recently while she attended an awards ceremony. She says,

While I was waiting to be seated at the table for the awardee, a representative came up to her assuming I didn't belong at the awardee's table. And so, before he (awardee) arrived, a lady came up to me, White lady, came up to me, and she said, 'I'm sorry this table is reserved for awardees, and their invited guests.' When the representative realized that I was indeed at the correct table, she apologized and realized that she had not asked but assumed that I did not belong. On the other hand, there was a White women seated at the table but was never questioned, but she was not at the correct table. (Sojourner Truth)

Sojourner Truth explained, "We still have issues of people, you know, surprisingly in our district, using the N-word. You know, I'm talking about teachers and administrators." Other examples of unfair treatment were expressed by Shirley Chisholm. She stated, "I still see the differences between how women are treated in other racial

groups, so how it's impacted my current role" (Shirley Chisholm). Mary McLeod Bethune shares an interesting point about some of the unfair practices she experienced. She shared the following about when initiatives are implemented by district policies,

I could be the African American woman with a skill set that can make things happen. So, which is not fair either, right? I feel like I get more work, more work, more work. And I actually shared that with my direct supervisor and my executive leader in my district last year because there was another task being put on me. But the challenge in the barrier that I see being a Black female, is that, and especially if you are proficient in your responsibilities, is that you just get more. They will work you until you break, and I don't know if that's true I can't speak for anybody else. But that's just a sense. That's my perception of black Female leaders, that when you are good at their job they will just keep giving you more.

Mary McLeod Bethune calls it "performance punishment." She explains that performance punishment is when an employee does a job well, they are punished by being given more work. Finally, Rosa Parks shares insight into the mistreatment she experienced while in her central office position.

And from a personal example that I have, that I've noticed, is that oftentimes when you are talking to, for me anyway, White women, and you're saying that there's something that you saw that you don't like and you want to talk about it, one of the things that I always notice is this. They throw their hands up and they're just like, 'well, don't kill the messenger.' I don't see them doing that to other people. And so, it is almost as simple, 'don't get upset, don't get angry, and no one's angry.' I'm simply saying, 'I noticed you did this, and I want to talk to

you about it.’ And so, I don't particularly care for that. And so, what I've started to do when I've seen White women throw up their hands, I ask them, ‘what does that mean? Why are you doing that? Because I've never seen you do that with other people.’ And I will ask the question, ‘are you doing that because I'm Black?’

***Theme 3: African American Leaders Must be Overly Prepared***

According to Theme 3, AAFs must be overly prepared to advance in leadership positions. It is important to note that out of the eight participants in this study, five hold doctorate degrees, and two are currently in doctoral programs. Only one central office leader is not in a doctoral program, however she has moved up rather quickly. These AAFs have expressed how important it is to be overly qualified and there is a benefit to having a terminal degree. There are six participants who agree that AAFs must be overly qualified. There was 1 frequency for this theme. Data is consistent for theme three. The importance of AAFs being overly prepared can address racial barriers that impact the advancement to K-12 central office leadership positions.

Shirley Chisholm provides additional insight:

You always have to be prepared if you're in front of the audience, because grace is not often given to mistakes made by women of color, with African American women in particular, my strategy is you got to stay ready. Stay ready so you don't have to get ready, and always be prepared. So, do you watch what you say? Do you make sure you tone down the gestures and your expressions because you don't want to be too emotional. So, the coping skill would just always be over prepared for whatever you do, and just be demure.

She also insists on the importance of having a terminal degree to ensure over preparedness. Shirley Chisholm continues to reinforce the importance of educational preparation:

Prepare yourself. Part of it is, prepare yourself educationally. We spend a lot of years in education going, do I need to continue in education to a terminal degree? Now I know everyone doesn't and it doesn't mean that your path won't be successful, but I have a feeling that I wouldn't position myself to be in this next position if I had not finished my educational journey. So, prepare yourself. Go ahead and buckle down and get that terminal degree. You know you just don't come to the table anymore with your credentials and your masters.

Harriet Tubman insists she makes sure that she is overly prepared explaining,

But I think actually for me, I'm probably just over prepared for situations. When I walk into a room where I feel like I might be the only woman, or the only Black woman in that space, it's really being assertive, in like my posture, my walk, my communication of ideas, making sure that I'm talking clearly, loudly and in a way that I'm confident about the words that I'm saying.

Phillis Wheatley brings another perspective. She explains,

For me, personally, I always feel like I need to know more. You need to know more. You know, so if I'm not asking a lot of questions and then I get frustrated sometimes with myself when I don't know you know. So yeah, that's just my take. I feel like I need to know more. (Phillis Wheatley)

Additionally, Dorothy Height explains,

Also, exposing myself to things that may not have been my focus, to make sure that I am prepared. And that means studying up on some things. And so, when I did get the opportunity to be the research and evaluation director, I was going to have to go a little deeper and go to some conferences and surround myself around people who have the expertise so I could keep my skill set sharpened. And that's huge, and as you know, in this business, we have to be constant learners. I'm constantly learning, surrounding yourself around people who have that skill set and being surrounded by mentors who are other women of color.

She recalls an example of a situation that reinforced the perspective the AAFs must be overly prepared.

I think I was still a coordinator. I was giving a presentation in front of many community partners, schools, officials were there, obviously cabinet members and the superintendent, and someone spoke up. This was actually an assistant superintendent stating 'that wouldn't be right, because if x is y, then this is that whatever it was you said' and I just remember like literally being frozen, because I've never had anyone stand up in the middle of a presentation I was giving, and told me that something I said was wrong, whether it was or wasn't...I just remember literally freezing...Oh, my gosh! I said something wrong. I was able to recover and say, you know what, whether it was or wasn't, acknowledge it, and move forward. You cannot break down and let people see you and then that respect where people want to see as you've been truthful, being real, being transparent, but also acknowledging. And so, I'm having this literal internal



dialogue my brain like if you could read my mind, it would be like a little work cloud that popped up, and so I recovered, I said ‘you know what, I thank you for pointing that out, and I’m going to come back and look at that later. I’m going to continue with the presentation, but I appreciate you bringing that to my attention.’ That was a critical and pivotal point, because from that moment forward, just in terms of how I present... It just put me on a different level because I said, ‘you know what, next time it happens again, I’ll be even more prepared, and it’s not the end of the world.’ But just being able to not let things like that define you as you’re not good enough. And so that was just a critical point for me. You know the confidence and all of that. And so, I just had to learn to recover and continue again, as we have to continue to improve around myself, around people who were doing it. And I could sharpen my skill set. (Dorothy Height)

***Theme 4: Added Responsibilities Over and Above Primary Job Description***

Data revealed that AAFs share their frustration of added responsibilities over and above their job description. The data confirms that these women are often given work not aligned with their job descriptions but from initiatives that have more to do their race. Examples of those responsibilities are aligned with equity and access for African American students and are solely added to the current jobs these women hold. Four participants expressed that they are given more responsibilities over and above their job descriptions while serving in K-12 central office leadership positions. Out of the four participants, there were six frequencies. Mary McLeod Bethune explained why she felt that other jobs were added to her primary job during her tenure. These jobs were aligned with programs for African American students. She explains,

So, I was given the responsibility over the last several years. That responsibility of leading that work, and I kept telling my superintendent, ‘You have to have somebody whose job is their job. You can't keep putting more work on your African American leaders who are hired to do something else. I was hired to do student services’.... so that's what I kept trying to say, and the response was ‘no, it should be everybody's job.’ And my response was, ‘well if it's everybody's job, it's nobody's job. We just can't put it on top. The district can't keep adding more to responsibilities on African American leaders without specifically creating a job for that initiative.’ (Mary McLeod Bethune)

Speaking passionately, Mary McLeod Bethune states,

I remember when we were probably 15 or 16% Black. I remember it being 12, 10, 9, and we're at 8 and yet this population of kids continue to be disproportionately disciplined and not performing academically. So, then it becomes well, who are the Black leaders who can be responsible for improving the outcomes for that population of kids? I don't want to necessarily call it a burden. But that responsibility is put on the handful of Black leaders to impact the outcomes for those Black kids.

Finally, Harriet Tubman explains,

Another example probably is as the SELPA director, as well as the district director [redacted] which ended up, I feel, as a barrier. Because in every other situation of a person who is doing my work, they are an executive, so I feel like that's an underlying barrier. So why am I doing this work of like 1,000 men, as a

director, and everybody else gets to be an executive director, or an assistant superintendent?

The participants shared instances where the burden of added responsibilities that were not from their primary job description, it was a barrier that impacted their career advancement because added responsibilities were given to them without the benefit of promotion. Both Sojourner Truth and Mary McLeod Bethune noted that they observed other racial groups not experiencing these same barriers and oftentimes were provided additional support and even more staffing for those tasks that did not align with their job description.

Mary McLeod Bethune concluded that "entire departments were created to support other racial groups but when implementing initiatives specifically designed for African American students, the responsibility was given to an African American central office administrator already hired to perform other duties."

***Theme 5: Not Many AAFs are Hired for K-12 Central Office Leadership Positions***

Data about the number of AAFs in central office positions is not easily available. However, according to national percentages AAFs hold 55% of female leadership positions. The researcher concluded that the approximate number of AAFs in K-12 central office leadership positions in California is 244 and 119 in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. To confirm this low number, 10 random districts within Riverside and San Bernardino counties were analyzed. It was found that these 10 districts employed an average of two African American females in central office positions. There were several districts that confirmed that there were no AAFs in K-12 central office leadership in their district, therefore confirming the lack of AAFs in central office leadership in San

Bernardino and Riverside Counties. Theme 5 confirms that three participants responded to this theme with seven frequencies. The data is compelling about the lack of AAFs hired to K-12 central office positions. Participants confirmed that they agree that there are very few African American central office leaders in their district and even fewer in their departments. The barrier of very few African American women hired to central office leadership prevents advancement to higher-level leadership positions.

Shirley Chisholm agrees that the number of African American females in leadership positions is very low. She states,

When you get to a central office position, there's usually one or none. So, you have to believe it's been a barrier. I believe that's why I might not have gotten to the district office as soon as I did. Because of that, like I said, there's always this feeling you don't want too many in a space. I do not believe African American women are expected to go to a certain level. I believe if you looked in the State of California, out of 1,004 school districts led by African American women, I think you can count them on one hand. I mean they're just not that many and even if you look at someone at the district office level assistant superintendent of personnel, deputy superintendent in our county you are not going to find that many.

Sojourner Truth agrees,

There are very few female superintendents in California. When you start looking at how many of those are Black, you know you could probably count those on one hand, and I'm just a believer in the fact that they're highly skilled African

American women in the state. And so, when you look around it's sometimes here in California, mostly Latino women in cabinet level positions.

Finally, Harriet Tubman believes, "then so in the spaces I have to be with other directors, executive directors, and we meet, and I'm literally probably the only or maybe two other Blacks, out of the 200 that are in the space that meet regularly."

***Theme 6: Some AAFs Assimilate to Meet Expectations***

Theme 6 addresses how African American women assimilate. This means that they will take on the culture of other ethnic groups to ensure that their race is not their primary focus for them while holding central office leadership positions. In this study, data reveals that assimilation can be seen in their decision making. In other words, African American students cannot be their focus because AAF who assimilate do not want to be labeled as having an African American agenda. Two participants discussed the issue about how some AAFs act differently while in central office positions. There were two participants and five frequencies that align with this statement. The pressure for AAFs to assimilate and reframe from being seen as overly focusing on African American student needs is not only a barrier to all students but creates an internal conflict. Being seen as one dimensional can be a barrier to career advancement. Data reveals examples of cases that some AAFs assimilate as they advance in their careers.

Sojourner Truth was extremely vocal about what she called being "Whitewashed." She provided a situation about a time when she witnessed another AAF was afraid to stand up for an African American district program. She provided this story:

You know, one of our African American high school principals has been very innovative.... We have an African American AVID class, and she started a new

class this year, targeting African American students to get them to do more things and be more successful. And so, my colleague, she's African American, too, when she says, 'well, why would I call [redacted]?' She said 'if I call her, I have to call everybody else.' And I say, 'she's African American principal and probably will do it. You try and get more people? Why do you need to call everybody?' I don't think either one of us left the conversation feeling good because I'm thinking, you know, it's like it's my job. I plan and host activities for African American families. That's part of my job and part of that is getting them more engaged in school and more engaged in the curriculum. We're engaged in everything, and this is an area here. Why is it a big deal for you to call the African American principal and say it's opportunity to try to get her to offer this class? Our lowest performing students are African Americans. It's everybody's focus, but because you are Black, it can't be your focus. I don't believe it's that, that just pisses me off. (Sojourner Truth)

On the other hand, Rosa Parks provided an explanation for why African American women assimilate stating, "so a lot of us tend to wear masks that we feel like we can always be who we are because we're going to be judged. Our tone is being judged; our facial expressions are oftentimes being judged." Sojourner Truth contributes, "I think the only way for them to get the job is to Whitewash who they are, and I'm just not able to do that, just not able to do that even to get a job to move up."

***Theme 7: Low Expectations add to Negative Perceptions of African American Females***

Theme 7 revealed that some participants felt that low expectations for AAFs added to negative perceptions in K-12 central office leadership positions. There were two participants with four frequencies. Two participants stated that low expectations add to

negative perceptions of AAFs. Both participants believe that low expectations prevent AAFs from advancing in their careers. They believe that employees from other races do not expect them to have competent skills based on unfounded stereotypical ideas. The data revealed that the racial barriers are caused by these stereotypes and can only be overcome by AAFs speaking for themselves. One of the participants was particularly verbal about how low expectations impacted perceptions of the effectiveness of AAF in central office leadership positions. Dorothy Height concerns included, "I think one of the things that resonates mostly with me is probably low expectation in the discriminatory hiring practices... I don't have proof.... but that doesn't mean there haven't been discriminatory hiring practices." Dorothy Height further stated,

Well, are your expectations so low that you think I can't talk, that I can't convey content and I started to mention it too few other trusted colleagues, and yes, of course, in agreement that the expectations are probably just so low.

Althea Gibson also complains about how some people are surprised that she is so articulate.

I don't know what they expect me to say, but I've had little microaggressions.... I have had several people in the course of my career, say 'no, you're very well dressed, and just very professional.' You know that's what professionals are supposed to do, dress professionally. I've had one person in particular say, 'well, you know you don't wear your hair like...' I know where they're headed, but I'm trying to make them say whatever they say... 'like corn rows?' It's okay to wear what you're comfortable in, and that has nothing to do with your professionalism.

Table 5 displays the themes, number of participants for each theme, and frequency counts for each response for Research Question 2.

**Table 5**

*Themes Related to Experiences due to Race While Advancing to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position*

Theme	References Participants (n=8)	Frequency Counts
Assumptions about whether AAF are qualified	8	16
AAF experience disrespect and unfair treatment	6	16
AAF Must be overly prepared	6	11
AAF are given responsibilities over and above their primary job description	4	6
Not many AAF are hired	3	7
Assimilation	2	5
Low expectations	2	4

*Note.* AAF = African American Females.

### **Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 asked: *How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact the advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position perceived by African American females?*

Research Question 2 asks how intersectionality of gender and race impact career advancement of AAFs to a K-12 central office position. Interview questions asked about participant's experiences, examples, stories and strategies used to address and overcome intersectional barriers. The participants agreed as they advanced in their careers, the barriers of being women are compounded for women of color. There were two themes generated about the barriers that AAF's faced due to being a woman and a Black woman.



Since data must be based on the actual responses, the following two themes were generated from data collected for this study. The themes were: Racial stereotypes compound barriers faced by AAFs, and opportunities are limited for advancement.

The primary purpose of this study was to identify the perceived barriers created by the intersection of race and gender on AAFs in a K-12 central office leadership position.

***Theme 1: Racial Stereotypes Compound Barriers Faced by African American Females***

Theme 1 summarizes the responses of seven participants to barriers faced as a result of intersectionality of race and gender. There were 16 responses. During interviews with one participant, Shirley Chisholm shared, "I see race as having a greater impact than intersectionality on career advancement." Other participants specifically pointed out examples of racial stereotypes that impede AAFs for being promoted. These responses were expressed after the question of intersectionality barriers. For instance, Sojourner Truth stated that,

Culturally speaking, African American women are not always perceived to be laughing, happy, jokey kind of people....but the perception is we're just angry Black woman. But when I told them about myself, I would say, 'I'm very serious, but the perception is that if you're not laughing, you're angry, or you were upset'

These cultural perceptions confirm that there are additional barriers faced by AAFs than women from other ethnicities. These barriers prevent AAFs from advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions.

Mary McLeod Bethune adds,

You know, I think being an African American woman has a connotation. I think whatever industry you're in, there's some stereotypes of the ways that we are to behave, or that we typically behave. I think that in a lot of ways, I don't behave in that manner and I'm just going use the stereotype of being kind of aggressive and direct that some people then perceive as angry and assertive, you know those pieces.

Sojourner Truth explains,

I have kind of gone around this but I really think that most African Americans are more straightforward in terms of answering questions and that for some people in different cultures, they don't understand that that's a cultural difference, and should not be something to keep you from getting a job, or to say you can't work with other people, or just say it is a cultural difference for Black people.

Still Dorothy Height states, "I feel like sometimes we get it harder because of kind of the perceived notions of whatever it means to be a female, with the outside stereotypes and what it is perceived to be a Black woman."

However, Mary McLeod Bethune believes that both barriers of being a woman and being a Black woman creates barriers to AAFs advancement to central office leadership positions. She explains,

I think it can have a double negative impact, right? Because as I was saying earlier that the field of education is dominated by women. And yet, when you look at who's in leadership, at sites or district level is disproportionately men and White men at that. So once women start to be seen as viable candidates in roles of

leadership, to move up to lead schools and lead districts and overcome the barriers that women have, right, societal barriers. So, women have to overcome those barriers, the societal barriers of being nurturers, and not being a strong leader as men right. And then, when you talk about women getting to that level, then those stereotypes of Black women, of your Blackness, and what it means to be a Black woman trying to make sure you're not perceived as the angry Black woman, make sure that you're perceived as being confident and strong, but not arrogant or overly confident. So, I think that for Black women you have double barriers. You have the barrier of being a woman, which other women of other races deal with. but then you have the barrier of being Black, and our societal stereotypes around what it means to be a Black woman. So, I think they do impede our rise to upper-level position.

Finally, data concluded that the challenges of unconscious bias, cultural differences, negative connotations, and negative perceptions contribute to intersectional barriers. Other issues related to inability to communicate with other cultures and unfair work expectations add to the reasons why AAF face intersectional barriers that compound why very few advance to central office leadership positions.

***Theme 2: Opportunities are Limited for Advancement for African American Females***

The second theme generated from this research question is that intersectionality of race and gender that opportunities are limited for advancement for AAFs. There were six sources and 12 frequency counts. Participants recounted how intersectionality impacted their career advancement. Sojourner Truth highlights, "I wish it were not true but in 2022,

African American females must endure unfair assessments of their ability to do their jobs."

Shirley Chisholm further explains, "I believe with African American, being that pivotal point, because I still see the differences between how women are treated in other racial groups that African American women are expected to go to a certain level." She continues to explain that there is pressure on her to succeed and ensure that she is a role model for other AAFs for opportunities for advancement. "I mean, you carry a weight because sometimes you feel like you've been the experiment, and so they'll say, 'well, we had a Black woman, and it didn't quite work out'"(Shirley Chisholm).

Dorothy Height adds,

Since many places of work are White male dominant, anything that deviates from that 'norm' including race and gender poses more of a barrier for career advancement. For example, Black women are already stereotyped as aggressive so being mindful of that is always a challenge when communicating. It is totally unfair but a reality. We have to be additionally tasked with protecting the feelings of others as we try to express what our needs are. The perception of our intersectionality is already a barrier before we even apply for a job and on the actual interview and how we answer questions.

Rosa Parks brings another perspective about opportunities for hiring. She adds, In addition to that, I've noticed when African American females apply for some of these positions at executive leadership, it feels like they have to jump through so many hoops. They have to hold so many degrees, when in fact the other members of senior leadership will not hold those degrees, may not have that same level of

experience. And so the bar is set higher... for African Americans females. (Rosa Parks)

Rosa Parks adds another interesting perspective about how gender and race may not be the only issue,

But the barrier to advancement I don't think for me is it has not been racing or gender. Not having the positions that are available for people to even go into. So, once you reach a certain level as director, you cap out at that level. Unless you go to another district that has those additional layers for you to promote and grow into. So, if the next level under teaching and learning, we have probably 10 directors, we all report to the associate superintendent. There's only one position for that. That person leaves, then everyone is applying for that one position. And so, it is not necessarily, perhaps a matter of male, female, may not be an issue of experience or race. It just might be something as simple as there's 200 people that are applying for one position.

The data analysis for intersectional barriers that prevent AAF from advancing to K-12 leadership positions resulted in different perspectives about its impact because career advancement for AAF due to intersection barriers produced varied responses.

Table 6 displays the themes, number of participants for each theme, and frequency counts for each response for Research Question 3.

**Table 6**

*Themes Related to the Intersectionality of Gender and Race While Advancing to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position*

Theme	References Participants (n=8)	Frequency Counts
Racial Stereotypes compound barriers faced by AAF	7	16
Opportunities are limited for advancement for AAF	6	12

*Note.* AAF = African American Females.

#### **Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 asked: *What strategies do African Americans females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?*

The final question for this study asked participants what strategies AAFs used to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 leadership position. The interview questions reflect on how the combined identities impact their current role. The researcher organized strategies responses by gender, race, and intersectionality to ensure all strategies were included. Once strategies were organized, the researcher concluded that themes were very similar, and strategies could be combined. As a result, five themes were generated: (a) importance of being prepared, (b) need to collaborate, (c) build positive connections, (d) be confident in your ability, and (e) seek mentor or sponsors.

#### ***Theme 1: Importance of Being Prepared***

The most frequently referenced theme for strategies AAFs leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership

position was the importance of being prepared. Seven out of the eight participants referenced this theme with 24 frequencies. Shirley Chisholm stated,

The best strategy is to know yourself and be unwavering in your power and what you feel you're capable of doing. You have got to think past the negativity. Be confident in who you are. You can't have an off day, whether that be, you got to always be dressed appropriately.

Harriet Tubman agrees,

I feel like I tend to overdress, I always feel like I can't show up like others even though they're dressed in jeans or don't always comb their hair. Whatever my situation, I'm always going to be poised, dressed and on point, because I feel like I don't have the luxury of just showing up.

Shirley Chisholm adds,

You always have to be prepared in front of the audience, because grace is not often given to mistakes made by women of color, with African American women in particular, that I feel, and these are our perceptions so as I feel are given to others. Stay ready so you don't have to get ready and we'll, never stop grinding.

Dorothy Height adds to the importance of being prepared, "Making sure you were up and sharpened on the content knowledge. So that means that studying or reading is an absolute must because you have to be well informed."

Phillis Wheatley suggests,

Another strategy probably is being over prepared for whatever situation I'm going to encounter and just positive self-talk. If you find that there's a flaw or weakness, or there is an area of growth, always look for opportunities to strengthen that area. I always feel like you just need to be good at what I do. You just need to be really

good. And so, whatever it takes to be that good. This is what I do.... Making sure you're highly educated. Making sure you have experience, making sure you're doing the best that you can.

Data revealed that African American women must be prepared as they advance in leadership positions. As confirmed in themes for racial barriers, they not only must be prepared but highly educated. Data confirms that they must have high qualifications when advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions.

***Theme 2: Need to Collaborate with Others***

The second highest strategy identified by participants for AAFs in K-12 central office leaders was the importance of collaboration with others. There were six participants with 24 frequencies for this theme. Data revealed that the main idea focused on being a team player. Sojourner Truth explained that in her position, “she has to find ways to work with difficult people who may want her to make decisions that may not align with her goals and expectations for funding requirements.” She talked about using strategies that she calls "yes" because her supervisors do not want to hear "no" (Sojourner Truth). Sojourner Truth continues to explain,

What I see is that they want me to say yes, even though it may be against the guidelines for programs, but they want me to say yes to that. But instead of just being direct, I must try to smile and try to get them to come to the realization that this is really not something that we should be doing with these funds. And asks 'What would you like me to do? How can I do that for you? How can I support it? What do you need? So, what can I do to make this program a success for you?'



However, she finds that "talking and smiling, and I find it very difficult, and I have a headache at the end of the day" (Sojourner Truth).

Shirley Chisholm agrees, "a strategy at work, though, is also they need to know that you are flexible." She explains that when others know "that you are competent, that you're a listener when dealing with work people, they're not caught up on your gender or your race" (Shirley Chisholm).

However, Althea Gibson reminds AAFs in central office leadership about being careful about collaboration with others. She states,

I really just don't think there's a safe space, and even though it's 2020 almost 2023, we can't have these very open conversations. We can have them, but nothing really will happen with them, or there will be repercussions. But the whole climate of the world has just taken a shift, or just it's absolutely not safe to have those conversations openly to make the kind of movement and make people very hyper-aware that this is happening. (Althea Gibson)

### ***Theme 3: Build Positive Connections***

The next theme is building positive connections. There were six participants and 10 frequencies. Some responses described how important it is to connect with other central office leaders for support. Phyliss Wheatley said,

Developing relationships, huge, same race or not, I think just really being authentic and then trying to find the commonality in what you're doing. So that way, you're reaching the goal that you need to. Then after you develop relationships, I think it's developing a relationship strong enough when you're

stuck, you feel comfortable and you can go to somebody and say, 'hey I'm needing that help' so that way you're not just frustrated or unsuccessful.

Shirley Chisholm gives her advice about the importance of building positive connections. She reminds AAF leaders, "Do not take things personally even if it's meant to be personal because they cannot impact you in that way" (Shirley Chisholm).

Mary McLeod Bethune advice was,

Don't take things personally, be impeccable with your words, and do not put a negative intent is to not see that and put a negative connotation to it or negative intent, but try to be neutral about it, and then go ask questions.

Althea Gibson describes how she leverages strategies to address barriers she encounters.

I absolutely utilize my critical friendships. You know, my network of people that constantly meet and discuss things that might be being said to us or experiences that we're having, that encouragement and motivation to keep moving forward and discuss how to navigate around things so that it doesn't become my pervasive mindset. Because if something gets underneath your skin that can hinder your performance. There's about six of us who meet because obviously we want to prove others wrong. So really, using that network for a meeting regularly, like we meet once a month and just talk about any of the experiences that we are having. It's all about straight talk laid out there, like what's going on with you and we are a support system for each other and navigating things that we may come across because we know we can't always know. I'm just glad people had the care and the concern, and their arms embrace me.

The data from Theme 3 confirms the need for AAF to understand the importance of collaboration with their peers and with their superiors. Participants described strategies that confirmed collaboration and the importance of building relationships reduced the barriers they faced while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions.

***Theme 4: Be Confident in Your Ability***

Theme 4 addresses the importance of being confident in your ability to lead. There are four participants and eight responses for this theme. Data reveals that participants feel they need to be sure that they qualify for the positions they hold. Shirley Chisholm explains, "The best strategy is to know yourself and be unwavering in your power and what you feel you're capable of doing and you got to think past the negativity and be confident in who you are."

Dorothy Height continues,

You have to believe that you were here for a specific reason and it's very spiritual for me, but I will say that you know the experiences we've all had were made to strengthen us, so that we can come and carry out the task, and so believe that you have every right to be there just so much as anyone else that you've gone through your schooling. You're qualified, so believe that you have just as much right as anyone.

Althea Gibson concludes that,

I think I would lean on spirituality, and I don't know if that's part of your work, but when you have these personal struggles, it's a lot of prayer. So, it's just a lot of prayer, a lot of sitting with who you are and surrounding yourself with likeminded people who can help you to deal with those personal struggles that you have. I

mean, I've had other personal struggles, we all have our personal struggles, but I always lean on prayer, I've always leaned on my parents. I've always leaned on my inner circle. Just being reflective, journaling and going back and looking. That always works for me because then, as I write things, and I notice things, and I notice trends, and I notice negative self-talk and one need to reroute that cause, that can dictate your whole day, your whole week, your whole year, if you're taking in that negative self-talk, or if you're, putting yourself in environments where there's a lot of that negativity, then got to remove yourself from those as well.

Based on the data analysis, the participants confirmed that confidence in their ability to lead was important while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position. This was further supported by strategies used by the participants which included internal strength, external support, and spirituality.

***Theme 5: Seek Mentors or Sponsorship***

The last theme referenced by participants for strategies AAFs leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position is the importance of mentors and sponsors. There are four participants and six responses for this theme. Dorothy Height states,

Make sure you have a mentor or mentors who you believe in and trust. I don't know, women and someone who's going to be able to tell you, you know what, when you say 'I don't know, think about it this way' or 'this is what you need to do'. Someone you can go to sometimes and give some words that maybe

somebody else can't tell you. They can speak to you and tell you the truth out of love certainly.

Phyliss Wheatley explains,

How one mentor always helps me. [Redacted], I had a mentor there. She helped me clear my credential and she gave me a bird's eye view of what the county looks like in my role as a principal. I mean, it's just been person after person after person that has really invested in me. That has helped me to be successful and gotten me where I am today. And I really feel like it's those mentors that saw something in you that really helped push you, or get you back on track to say, to say 'you're here for a reason, here's your success'. And you can see all the success you've done over the years, but for some reason, when you're sitting, you feel everybody does this. And it takes somebody from the outside to say 'no, not everybody does this, that's why we need your skill set'. Because you have this skill set and you diminish your qualities a little bit because you always feel like everybody has that skill. Until somebody looks at you and says 'no, not everybody has that skill set'.

Finally, Mary McLeod Bethune explains,

What I'm looking for is sponsorship, I have mentors, have some formal mentors, and I have some informal mentors. But I don't know if that sponsorship will come into play until you are really trying to move into assistant superintendency. I rely on sponsorship to say, 'hey, you know [redacted] is going to be applying for this position, and I really recommend her'. Not just in writing not just a letter recommendation but picking up that phone and calling that person who's a

decision maker, and saying, ‘hey, she's coming, I think she'd be great, I think you should really consider her’.

Data from this study confirms that AAFs leverage the following strategies to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position. They include (a) being prepared, (b) collaboration, (c) building positive connections, (d) confidence in ability to lead, and (e) having effective mentors and sponsors.

Table 7 displays the themes, number of participants for each theme, and frequency counts for each response for Research Question 4.

**Table 7**

*Themes That Identify Strategies African American Females Leverage to Address and Overcome Barriers due to Intersectionality While Advancing to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position*

Themes	References Participants (n=8)	Frequency Counts
The importance of being prepared	7	24
Collaborate with others	6	24
Build positive connections	6	10
Be confident	4	8
Seek out support from other mentors	4	6

### Summary of Findings

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on AAFs advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. The analysis of data responses was aligned to each research question gathered through answers provided by participants.

Chapter IV presented results based on analysis of themes using detailed responses aligned to research questions. A summary of key findings is presented below.

### **Key Findings**

#### **Key Finding for Research Question 1**

Research Question 1 was: *What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?* The key findings for this research question include:

- All of the participants in this study believe that the internal gender barriers of confidence and self-esteem resulted from external stereotypes. It was referenced by eight out of eight participants. The participants referenced this finding 32 times.
- Women must be overly prepared to achieve success at their jobs. Seven out of eight participants confirmed that it is important to be overly prepared while advancing to central office leadership positions. Participants referenced this finding 13 times.
- Gender barriers were not as critical as racial barriers for participants in this study because women dominate the educational system. Seven out of eight participants stated that they did not experience many gender barriers because there are more women in K-12 education. This finding was referenced 11 times.

## **Key Findings for Research Question 2**

Research Question 2 was: *What barriers do African American females experience due to race while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?* The key findings for this research question include:

- Participants overwhelmingly agreed that there are assumptions about whether AAFs are qualified for their positions which contribute to misconceptions that prevent AAFs from advancing to central office leadership positions. All eight respondents confirmed that this was a racial barrier, with 16 responses.
- The second most referenced theme was that AAFs experience disrespect and unfair treatment. Six out of eight participants recounted that AAFs experience disrespect and unfair treatment. Six participants confirmed this with 16 references. Participants told personal stories about instances where they experience unfair treatment.
- Participants found that AAFs must be overly prepared when responding to racial barriers. This finding was also found in gender barrier themes. Six participants confirmed that it was advantageous to have a terminal degree and AAFs need to be overqualified to provide more chances for them to advance through central office. The findings indicated that there were 11 responses.

## **Key Finding for Research Question 3**

Research Question 3 was: *How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact the advancement to a K-12 central office leadership positions perceived by African American females?* The key findings for this research question include:



- Findings for intersectionality of race and gender revealed that racial stereotypes compound barriers faced by AAFs. There were seven participants who referenced this theme 16 times.
- The second finding for barriers of intersectionality of race and gender is a lack of opportunities for the advancement of AAFs. Six participants stated that the perception is confirmed by the number of AAFs hired to central office positions. There were 12 references for this theme.

#### **Key Findings for Research Question 4**

Research Question 4 asked: *What strategies do African American females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?* The key findings for this research question include:

- Findings that identified the most important strategies to overcome barriers due to intersectionality included the importance of being prepared for a central office leadership position. This is the third time this finding has been identified. Seven out of eight participants with 24 references confirmed that an important strategy is to be prepared to advance to K-12 central office positions.
- Another strategy for addressing barriers is the importance of collaboration with others while advancing to central office leadership. Six out of eight participants addressed this strategy with 24 references.
- Another strategy is the importance of building positive connections with others. Six participants stated that it is crucial to build relationships with members and included 10 references.

- Another strategy for addressing barriers is the importance of mentors and sponsors in providing support to central office leaders. There are four participants and six responses for this theme.

### **Unexpected Findings**

- One of the important findings that did not garner enough codes to create a theme but stood out as a critical unexpected finding was that AAFs are not a monolithic group. As participants reflected on their experiences it was evident that AAFs have a variety of differences in their attitudes, background and philosophies.
- Another unexpected finding was that gender barriers were not a major compounding factor in AAFs career advancement. Race played a more significant role in preventing the advancement of AAFs in central office leadership positions.
- An unexpected finding was generated in a comment from one participant. This comment was extremely critical and needed to be highlighted in this study. Some of the other administrators stated that there were too many black administrators in the district, and this was a problem.
- The final unexpected finding was stated by one participant was that some AAFs assimilate to avoid the perception that they only support initiatives and programs for African Americans. One story recounted a time when a central office administrator refused to ask a Black principal if he was willing to add a new program designed to increase participation for African American students.

## **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to examine the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on AAFs advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. Chapter IV presented the methodology used to address the results of this study. Eight participants were interviewed and responded to 13 interview questions that were used to identify codes, themes, and analysis of data. The data was used to identify themes for each research question. There were 19 themes identified for this study, with a total of 108 participant responses and 261 frequencies over all themes referenced. Chapter V will provide reflective discussion of data results major findings, unexpected findings and conclusions based on results identified in Chapter IV.

## CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of Chapter V is to summarize and draw conclusions from data analysis provided in Chapter IV. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived impact of intersectional barriers of race and gender on AAFs career advancement to K-12 central office leadership positions. The second purpose of this study was to leverage the strategies AAFs use to overcome barriers due to intersectionality. This chapter will present the purpose statement, research questions, and overview of the methodology used to perform this study. Chapter V includes the population, sample, and demographic. The chapter also provides the major findings from data collected from Chapter IV, unexpected findings, conclusions and implications for action. The chapter concludes with recommendations for further research and researcher reflections.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on the advancement of African American females to a K-12 central office leadership position. The second purpose of this study was to identify strategies African American females leverage to overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were developed to guide the study:

1. What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?

2. What barriers do female African Americans experience due to race while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?
3. How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact the advancement to a K-12 central office leadership positions perceived by African American females?
4. What strategies do African Americans females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?

### **Methodology**

A qualitative inquiry utilizing a phenomenological approach focuses on how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, and M. Patton (2015) explained that this involves capturing "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it" (p. 115). A phenomenological inquiry was, therefore, an appropriate approach to probing AAFs experiences through the lens of intersectionality, the phenomenon under study. Participants described and reflected upon the experiences, behaviors, and interactions that comprised their journey to the K-12 central office leadership position. A qualitative phenomenological study provided an effective format through which AAFs could share their perspectives on the impact of their intersectional identities on their advancement to school leadership positions.

### **Population**

According to J. H. McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a study's population is a group of individuals who conform to a common and specific criterion chosen from the general population for which a study's data are used to make inferences. The population

for this study was AAFs serving as central office administrators (excluding superintendents) in K-12 public schools in California.

The NCES (2018), National Teacher and Principal survey indicates that 64% of females are school district cabinet-level leaders. However, only 25% of these cabinet-level leaders are females of color (NCES, 2018). Furthermore, NCES (2019) confirmed that there are 4,041 K-12 central office administrators in California. Of these central office administrators, 55.2% are female, and 11.5% of the female administrators are Black. The researcher used the percentages from 2019 to calculate the number of AAF K-12 central office administrators in California. Based on 55% of 4,041, the estimated female central office administrator's population is 2,222. Based on 11.5 % of the female administrators identifying as Black, the estimated population for this study is 244 AAFs central office administrators in California.

### **Sample**

Eight African American female leaders in Riverside or San Bernardino County who work in central office leadership positions (not superintendents) were selected to participate in this study. The researcher employed convenience sampling to identify the sample population based on the criteria set in the sample frame. Since there was very little data available, the sample was based on 119 San Bernardino and Riverside Counties female African American K-12 central office administrators.

Participants were selected by email based on Riverside and San Bernardino City School District websites. The email contained an introduction letter with a google document with selection criteria. Potential participants were asked to complete demographic information to participate in interviews. The researcher contacted

respondents and scheduled times and dates for Zoom interviews. Interviews were conducted over a two-week period and were transcribed by the researcher. The results were categorized by codes and developed into themes based on participant responses. The researcher worked with a peer familiar with the subject area for intercoder reliability.

All participants were provided pseudo names. These pseudo names were explicitly chosen to honor women who have achieved success despite systemic racism and to celebrate the women in this study for their willingness to share their voices in addressing the barriers they face. The pseudo names are: Sojourner Truth, Shirley Chisholm, Mary McLeod Bethune, Dorothy Height, Rosa Parks, Althea Gibson, Phillis Wheatley and Harriet Tubman. The historical names were randomly assigned to each participant. Based on results and careful analysis of responses, major findings are identified below.

### **Major Findings**

The major findings for this study were grouped according to themes generated from data gathered by interviews of central office leaders in Riverside or San Bernardino Counties. Major findings are organized by the highest number of participant responses with the highest frequency count. The major findings were based on the experiences of eight central office leaders who shared barriers they faced while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions. There were five major findings identified for this study and two unexpected findings.

## **Major Finding 1: African American Females Must Over Prepare When Advancing to Central Office Leadership Positions**

African American central office leaders who participated in this study overwhelmingly agreed on the importance of being overly prepared for central office leadership positions. This theme was evident in three of four research questions. Being overprepared for the position was important for AAFs facing both gender and racial barriers faced while attempting to gain advancement in their careers. Participants for this study reinforced the importance of having a terminal degree. In fact, five of eight AAFs interviewed held a doctoral degree, two are currently in a doctoral program, and one has a master's degree.

Research Question 1 identified gender barriers faced by AAFs. There were seven participants with 13 frequencies. Participants provided examples of being overly prepared to serve in their positions because they needed to be seen as competent and qualified. The participants voiced their concern about having to prove themselves more than their counterparts, focus more on the development of skills and knowledge to be competitive, and emphasized the importance of perfecting their craft to avoid criticism. Further, each participant shared the importance of positional knowledge and experiences that effectively prepared them for the position. According to Wiley (2017), assuring preparedness is important for the challenge of securing a high-level leadership position. Althea Gibson explained, “You have to do more, and prove yourself more, feels like to me at least that's how it felt. To be in the game, so to say, and be taken seriously, and prove yourself.”



The same was true for racial barriers. African American women must be overly prepared. This was confirmed by responses from six participants with 11 frequencies. Participants explained that as an AAFs performance is held to a higher standard and when mistakes are made, they are judged more critically. At the same time, participants shared they must exude confidence in who they are and how they present themselves. It is important to dress appropriately, even though your counterparts may be more relaxed because the way you dress can sometimes be criticized.

Finally, seven out of eight participants recounted the importance of being prepared for advancement. There were 24 frequency responses for this theme. Participants made sure they were more than prepared because there were very few AAFs in those leadership positions. They felt that because there were not many AAFs represented they needed to be ready to address any circumstances by being perceived as experts in their field. Dorothy Height explains "make sure you were up and sharpened on the content knowledge. So that means that studying or reading is an absolute must because you have to be well informed."

### **Major Finding 2: African American Females Experience an Increasing Lack of Confidence and Self-Esteem**

A significant finding of this study is the internal barrier of self-confidence and self-esteem. All eight participants referenced this theme 32 times. The participants overwhelmingly recounted time after time when a supervisor made assumptions about their ability, embarrassed them while giving a presentation, questioned their ability, and even disrespected them. The result was that their confidence and self-esteem were damaged. Participants shared that most of their confidence and self-esteem issues were a

result of external barriers imposed on them because of racial stereotypes, microaggressions and other racial inequities. Some participants struggled because of comments about their abilities which resulted in questioning their competence and skills.

### **Major Finding 3: African American Females Identify Race as Having a Greater impact Than Intersectionality on Career Advancement**

The two themes generated for intersectional barriers were that racial stereotypes compounded the barriers experienced by African American women. There was a lack of opportunities for participants to advance because of these racial barriers. In the area of racial stereotypes compounding barriers, seven participants shared these references 16 times. Six participants referenced a lack of opportunities to advance 12 times.

Participants shared that they believed race was a primary factor preventing them from advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position. When addressing intersectional barriers, Mary McLeod Bethune directly addressed the overlapping inequalities of gender and race that impacted career advancement. Dorothy Height believes that AAFs are more challenged because of what it means to be Black and a woman. She describes the perception that AAF aggressiveness is a barrier to career advancement. Sojourner Truth discussed cultural differences which may cause negative perceptions while Althea Gibson addressed how the odds are stacked against you as a woman of color. Still, Harriet Tubman addressed the need for more community role models to motivate and support African American females. Shirley Chisholm concluded, "I see race as having a greater impact than intersectionality on career advancement."

There is limited research that focuses on AAFs in K-12 central office in leadership. However, even less research exists on intersectional barriers that address the

impact of advancement to central office positions. Most of the limited articles on women in educational leadership focus on the role of the principalship, higher level education, and superintendent positions. Yet only a handful address the factors regarding K-12 central office leadership positions.

#### **Major Finding 4: Mentorships and Sponsorships are Critical to African American Females Career Advancement**

According to findings and backed up by the literature, mentorship and sponsorships are important factors in providing support to AAFs in a K-12 central office leadership position. According to Brock (2008) as well as Montgomery (2020), mentorship inspires female leaders to collaborate and work together toward career advancement. This theme was referenced as a significant strategy for addressing and overcoming barriers that prevent advancement to leadership positions. Participants expressed the importance of mentorship and sponsors throughout this study. Mentorship provided guidance in decision making, was critical to creating trusting relationships, provided wise counsel as participants navigated through difficult circumstances and made a difference in the success of these participants. Participants also mentioned that the mentor does not have to be a woman but anyone who can provide support through their career journey. Mary McLeod Bethune explained sponsorship as she explored the possibility of advancing to the next level in her career. She explained how a sponsor is more than a mentor because that person actively reaches out to decision makers to recommend that one is hired. She explained that they make the telephone call, present an argument for the importance and advantage of hiring that person and are willing to use their sphere of influence to convince, follow through, and ensure that the person is hired.

A solid informal network is also crucial to an organization's promotional opportunities. These networks are formed through close associations and friendships and create positive relationships. Informal conversations where accomplishments and ideas are discussed provide a pipeline to advancements in the organization. Unfortunately, many AAF administrators are often left out of these critical circles of influence. Wyatt and Silvester (2015) agree that not having a solid informal network is also a significant barrier to career advancement. Most informal networks are created through friendships with employers who have similar values and share common ideas. AAFs reported that networking strategies were critical to promotional opportunities but that the barrier of not having influential networks prevented them from career advancement. Adding an additional layer to this barrier is that very few AAFs are available to mentor or sponsor these women.

### **Major Finding 5: African American Females are Highly Qualified yet Experience Barriers in Hiring Practices**

The final major finding of this study is that AAFs are highly qualified yet rarely hired to central office leadership positions. According to data based on this researcher's calculations, there are approximately 119 females in central office leadership positions in Riverside and San Bernardino County. Themes generated from gender barriers identified five participants with 13 frequencies who reported that AAFs focused more on strategies that ensured they were more qualified than their counterparts. Shirley Chisholm reinforced that it is important to be confident about your qualifications and make sure it is evident because AAFs are not given grace for making mistakes. There is pressure to do well because how they perform could impact whether other AAFs are hired. She further

states that it is important that perceptions about one's capability not be questioned because of being too emotional or failing to handle stress. These barriers can prevent your counterparts from fairly evaluating whether you are qualified to perform.

Additionally, racial barriers also confirm assumptions that AAFs are highly qualified but not hired at the same rate as other ethnic groups. All eight participants responded to this theme with sixteen frequencies. The major premise confirmed by participants is that racial discrimination creates a perception that AAFs do not qualify for leadership positions. One participant believes that it is evident during the hiring process where it may be obvious that one person is more qualified than another. The qualified applicant is not chosen for unclear reasons not aligned with confirmation of abilities, experience, and expertise. Guihen (2017) concludes that several significant barriers prevent females from pursuing career aspirations. These barriers include societal bias and gender stereotypes, family obligations, and the lack of support in their ability to succeed in leadership positions. However, research states that despite these stereotypes, females have proven qualified for higher-level leadership positions (Prime et al., 2009).

### **Unexpected Findings**

#### **Unexpected Finding 1: Gender Barriers Were not Identified as Critical in Educational Career Advancement**

Research confirms that external and internal barriers prevent women from advancing. For example, although men are appointed more often to higher level leadership positions, there are many more females in the educational field (Wiley et al., 2017).

Further, while females dominate the field of education in teaching positions, external and internal barriers prevent them from advancing in the executive leadership structure. However, internal barriers are harder to address because of an individual's negative, engrained societal beliefs and expectations (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Superville, 2017). Based on participant responses to this study, gender barriers were less critical to AAFs career advancement than race. Sojourner Truth confirms

In education, I would have never been promoted by now in my career in teaching you know there's so many teachers and women, you know 83% of teachers are women right, so I've never had where I felt that there was a barrier from me being a woman. A woman of color, yes, but not a woman.

Rosa Parks adds, "I think in education, education is overrun by women, I don't recognize a lot of gender specific barriers externally, in my current role or previous role, because women are the majority in education."

Mary McLeod Bethune agrees, "there was minimal impact of external barriers because education is so heavily female dominated.

### **Unexpected Finding 2: African American Females are not a Monolithic Group**

AAFs are not a monolithic group. They vary in their attitudes, background, and philosophies about how their experiences impact the barriers they face while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions. Although only directly stated by Mary McLeod Bethune in her response to racial barriers she faced, this sentiment was indirectly expressed as a theme throughout the entire interview process. Participants

varied greatly in how they experienced racial inequities and provided diverse solutions for navigating through the complexities of discrimination.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this study as supported by the literature, the following conclusions were identified:

#### **Conclusion 1: African American Females Face Ingrained Systemic Barriers Making it Difficult for Career Advancement**

The results from this study reveal that participants confirmed that AAFs in K-12 central office leadership positions work harder, endure unfair treatment, and must consider perceptions generated by misconceptions of their ability to lead. They face gender, race and intersectional barriers because of perceptions ingrained in society that are systematic and pervasive. These perceptions prevent them from career advancement. Based on the findings of this research, it is concluded that AAFs in K-12 central office positions increase their chances of hiring and promotion by having a doctoral degree and developing skills and knowledge that give them an advantage. Preparation can include attending professional opportunities related to their position and reaching out to those already in that position to learn what is required to be successful in the job. AAFs who do not prepare at a high level have less chance to be hired for central office leadership positions.

The research on the AAFs reveals that they are likely to face discrimination and racial barriers in the educational workplace (Cain, 2015; Catalyze, 2022, Chance, 2021; Fuller et al., 2019; Harris-Mohamad, 2020; O'Brien-Brzenchez, 2021).

## **Conclusion 2: Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought Bring Clarity to why Racial Discrimination Exists for African American Females Seeking K-12 Central Office Positions**

Randolph (2015) contends that CRT and Black feminism should be studied to understand the barriers that impact AAF leadership. Randolph reminds us that these females are members of two minority groups not traditionally found in top leadership positions. The challenge for K-12 AAF central office leaders is to navigate the barriers that prevent their success. CRT has become known in the legal arena for addressing educational institutions' exclusion and racist policies (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Since the dominant society views law as colorblind and neutral, it is impossible to see the reality of unfair practices (K. W. Crenshaw, 2011).

BFT is a theoretical framework coined by Patricia Hill Collins (2009). A seminal author on BFT, her work brought to light a theoretical understanding of the barriers faced by Black females as leaders. She conceptualized the opinions of how other groups characterize Black females. Alinia (2015) adds that BFT brings to view the daily challenges that AAFs face.

Both theories confirm the existence of systemic racism which cannot be changed by the participants but by the persons responsible for its manifestation. Despite their leadership abilities AAFs still face the same issues and opportunities to advance to K-12 central office leadership positions. This is evidence by data that only 119 AAFs are employed throughout Riverside and San Bernardino Counties. The data also reveals that there are less than three AAF educational administrators hired within each district



confirming logistically why very few AAFs are promoted to central office leadership positions.

**Conclusion 3: African American Females are Highly Qualified yet Continue to Face Multiple Barriers While Seeking Career Advancement**

Conclusions for this study reinforce research that AAFs are highly qualified but continue to be challenged by obstacles they cannot control. Both A. H. Eagly and Carli (2007) and Ariella (2022) agree that even though females are highly qualified for leadership positions, they continue to face barriers from other inequities that impact their career advancement. For instance, they have less chance of acquiring leadership positions in businesses not being ready to hire females for top posts. Additionally, females are held to a higher standard and face barriers while advancing to top positions (Ariella, 2022). Misconceptions about females' ability to perform and negative perceptions regarding their ability contribute to the hiring rate of females (Gipson et al., 2017). According to Johnston and Johnson (2017), females are more educated now than in the past. However, these findings indicate that education and career advancement rarely benefit AAFs.

**Conclusion 4: African American Female Leaders Must Develop Strategies That Address Race and Gender Inequities**

AAF participants in this study had a general understanding of the impact of intersectionality of race and gender on advancement to a central office leadership position. This was evident as they expressed that gender did not have as much impact as race on career advancement because there were more women in education. Since men dominate higher level leadership positions, the conclusion was that societal norms could not be changed. Therefore, most of the focus on barriers that prevented them from

advancement was on the role of women in higher leadership. There were not many stories about interaction with men that prevented them from being promoted even though research confirms that men often hire men in higher positions. Gipson et al. (2017) assert that there is a difference in the hiring practices of men and female. Furthermore, although females are gaining ground in recent years, they are not hired at the same rate as men (Robinson et al., 2017). Shirley Chisholm stated, "there tends to be more males at the district office." She explains,

Males tend to be assistant superintendents and executive directors at that level and when you get to a certain level, when it comes to the finalist, they are usually not women. When it comes to a tie, the nod usually goes to the male.

She recognized that men were hired more often but there were very few strategies to address and overcome gender barriers related to men.

### **Implications**

#### **Implication 1: Districts Must Address Current Hiring Practices that Exclude African American Females**

This study provides insight into the need for districts to look closely at their data regarding their hiring practices. School districts should begin by using a historical lens to identify trends that counter diversity efforts in hiring. Human resource personnel must examine interview questions, study the definition of leadership, and take a hard look at why they are not hiring AAFs for critical roles in their district. Finally, districts must examine policies and procedures that impede fair hiring practices which prevent them from hiring women of color.

**Implication 2: Agencies Involved with National and Regional Employment Statistics Must improve the Disaggregation of Data to Include African American Females**

The number of AAFs in central office leadership positions is not readily available on the national, state, and county levels. Therefore, the numbers used for this study are approximate because no data was available to confirm real numbers. Since district offices have disaggregated data for all employees, it should be simple to disaggregate that data at all levels. This data can be used by districts to analyze current hiring trends and improve district diversity practices, processes, and cultural norms for central office leadership.

**Implication 3: Districts Must Reevaluate the Narrow Perception of Leadership**

In the Harvard Business Review article, "Does Your Definition of Leadership Exclude Women of Color," authors Jackson and Rajai state, "we've seen first-hand how narrow perceptions of leadership and 'fit' can reinforce the status quo" (Jackson & Rajai, 2021). These perceptions create barriers for AAFs because the perception can be interpreted as primarily White men are qualified for leadership positions. Districts must evaluate the meaning of what leaders look like. Superintendents, Board members and higher-level administrators must create and participate in programs that help them honestly assess their interpretations of effective leadership.

**Implication 4: African American Females Must Receive Support to Address the Mental Stress Associated with Racial Discrimination**

Districts must provide systematic support for AAFs that experience overt racism while working in central offices. Funding must be allocated at the national and state levels to provide districts with resources to address barriers created by inequities. Studies

that reveal barriers, counselor expertise, and social-emotional strategies should be included in direct funding for district implementation.

### **Implications 5: Districts Must Enforced Policies and Follow up Sanctions for Employees who Engage in Identified Forms of Racial Discrimination**

Many AAFs report that those who engage in racial discrimination are rarely held accountable for their actions. Repercussions are real consequences for exposure. Although racial discrimination policies and procedures exist in every district, the silence about unfair practices continues. Districts must reverse these unfair practices, uncover the culprit and create an environment where discriminatory practices are unacceptable. The district must first provide resources and programs to identify inappropriate practices. Still, consequences must be clear and real sanctions implemented against those who break the policies set by the district.

### **Recommendation for Further Research**

This study explored the perceived barriers to the intersection of race and gender faced by AAFs in a K-12 central office leadership position. The major finding from this study concludes that these women are highly qualified yet face internal and external gender barriers, racial discrimination and stereotypes, and overlapping marginalization due to race and gender. Strategies that address these barriers include being overly prepared for educational advancement and knowledge, seeking out mentors and sponsors for support, building relationships with peers, and building confidence and self-esteem. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made to further research the perceived barriers AAFs face in a K-12 central office leadership position.

### **Recommendation 1: Replicate this Study in Other Counties, States, and Nationally**

For this study to continue to impact research conducted about the experiences of African American women in K-12 central office leadership positions, it should be replicated in as many counties as possible. The voices of AAFs holding these positions have rarely been heard. Therefore, confirming their experiences across the nation is necessary and required to change the perceptions of their power and influence for the improvement of all students. By increasing the sample size, more voices can be heard. It is recommended that the study of the perceived impact of the intersectionality of race and gender barriers faced by AAFs be replicated in other counties, states, and national levels.

### **Recommendation 2: Conduct a Study on the Psychological Effects Caused by Intersectionality on African American Females as They Advance to Central Office Leadership Positions**

Very few studies focus on the psychological effects caused by barriers to the intersectionality of race and gender that impact AAFs in central office leadership positions. The analysis, which focuses on their ongoing discrimination, is critical to their mental health. The long-term effects of racism and sexism may be detrimental to their survival as they navigate through ongoing challenges in their day-to-day responsibilities. A longitudinal study that will influence research outcomes and add to why ingrained racism is harmful to AAFs would add to the literature and benefit women in other leadership positions. Further research is suggested for women who face long-term discrimination while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position.

**Recommendation 3: Conduct a Study on the Barriers of the Intersection of Race and Gender Faced by African American Women Leaders in Black Sororities**

Black sororities are college social organizations established in the 20th century for women of color. These Greek letter organizations challenged mainstream society because they were discriminated against and were motivated to prove their capabilities in the intellectual environment of the collegiate world. Today, there are over 250,000 women around the world who belong to the four major Black sororities. These women make a lifetime commitment to sisterhood, public service, and activism. Black sorority women continue a commitment to their organization after college graduation to become some of the most influential leaders in the world. Although, highly educated, many of these women experience racism and sexism in the workplace. The experiences they share from their work environments can influence how they support the communities they serve. Further research is suggested to explore the barriers these women face as members of Black women sororities.

**Recommendation 4: Conduct a Study on Stress Factors That Manifest as a Result of Intersectional Barriers Faced by African American Women in Central Office Leadership Positions as they Advance Through Their Career**

Stress is the silent killer. Yet very few studies focus on the impact of stress on AAFs in central office leadership positions. Although stress is not limited to AAFs, it is recommended that because they face additional overlapping barriers of being a Black woman and female, research might study if there are different stressors not met by other groups and their impact on their job performance. Further research is recommended to

address the effects of stress on African American women in a K-12 central office leadership position.

**Recommendation 5: Consider a Study on Current Examples of the Impact of Critical Race Theory on African American Women's Experiences While Advancing to a Central Office Leadership Position**

Currently, CRT has been criticized by society. This criticism is filled with unfounded and misunderstood perceptions about how racism is ingrained in society and how counter stories confirm the existence of laws and policies that are colorblind and continue to promote false narratives about barriers faced by African Americans, and specifically AAFs. Research that highlights the importance of not allowing the significance and truth about how CRT explains the impact of African American women in K-12 central office leadership positions should be conducted. The subject should be addressed in dissertations but added to current peer-reviewed research topics.

**Recommendation 6: Conduct a study on the Psychological Impact of the Limited Number of African American Women in Central Office Leadership Positions**

This study confirms that very few AAFs are in K-12 central office leadership positions. Data also supports the approximate numbers for most districts ranging from 0-3. Most women confirmed that they rarely work with Black women while serving in these positions. Human beings are communal. They thrive in an environment of familiarity. There might be psychological effects from being labeled the only one or very few in a room full of other ethnicities that are the majority. The impact of this ongoing experience may be interesting to study. Further research is recommended to address the

psychological impact of being one of the few AAFs in a K-12 central office leadership position.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Central office leadership positions are critical to implementing state and federal regulations and decision-making in K-12 districts. AAFs contribution to the central office is necessary for addressing the diverse needs of all students in the educational communities. Therefore, more African American women should be hired in the K-12 central office leadership position. Information specifically geared toward AAF leaders is needed because they seem the most invisible in studies discussing European American Women and African American men (Stevens, 2015). Very few quantitative studies focus exclusively on AAF administrators, and qualitative studies are limited to dissertations and have a small sample size (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). Finally, failure to examine African American women leaders as a group separate from their mainstream counterparts results in a lack of understanding of how marginalization affects them. (Stevens, 2015).

Strategies that address systematic racism solutions are not being addressed. The intersection of race and gender and its impact on AAFs needs to be further explored because according to participant results from the study, race played a more significant role than gender in barriers faced in their career advancement.

CRT and BFT are theoretical frameworks that help define the impact of and highlight how systematic racism impacts women of color. The impact of these theoretical frameworks provides depth in understanding why AAFs face gender and race that compound to create overlapping intersectionality barriers while advancing to a K-12



central office leadership position. These overlapping barriers are invisible deterrents that make it almost impossible to overcome and explain. At the same time, very few AAFs are hired at central offices contributing to why there are so few higher-level leaders who can influence, mentor, or sponsor these women.

CRT has become a theory plagued with negative connotations and implications as of late. However, CRT exposes that systemic racism is engrained in society and fuels the assumption that AAFs are not qualified for leadership positions and explains the reasons why they are not hired. There is a direct correlation of why African American central office leaders are rarely provided a place at the table, despite their qualifications.

AAFs in central leadership office positions are plagued with challenges yet are resilient, strong, and determined to provide outstanding service to the communities they serve. The women who participated in this study were impressive and served in their leadership roles with excellence and grace. The researcher thoughtfully and purposefully gave pseudo names for these women to reflect their new status in academia generated by the study. Being named *participant* was not enough to honor their contributions, I will say each participant's pseudo-name: Sojourner Truth, Shirley Chisholm, Mary McLeod Bethune, Dorothy Height, Rosa Parks, Althea Gibson, Phillis Wheatley, Harriet Tubman. As the central office leaders from this study's voices are heard, I hope they will forever be linked to the 10 most influential Black women in history.

### **Reflections**

Participant Sojourner Truth said something in this study that clarified my journey through this dissertation process. She said, "I am glad you are doing this study" (Sojourner Truth). Rosa Parks gave me a directive at the end of her interview. She said,

"You have a scholarly duty to publish. Take your dissertation, scale it down and convert it to an article" (Rosa Parks). As an expert in the field, I say yes to both ladies. I am motivated to ask the hard questions as to why there are so few AAFs in central office leadership. Despite their excellent qualifications and skills, they continue to face racial discrimination not based on their competence. Because of this study, I have added a component to Williams Literacy Connection, my LLC, because if the lead educators of African American children face barriers that prevent them from doing their best, how will the children thrive? Who will be poised in the position to change the narrative of failing African American students? The students are underserved by the educators who are failing them. As AAFs in central office leadership positions, we must come forth to change the perception of our children. My goal is to keep telling my story, as Sojourner Truth eloquently said in her interview. The voices of these outstanding women must be heard. Stereotypes must be eliminated by truth. The only way truth can be heard is to continue letting AAFs tell their own stories. Because, after all, no one can tell the story better than they can.

I am deeply grateful to all the participants of this study who graciously gave their valuable time, passion, and contributions to this study. Your experiences touched my heart in a way that I am forever changed. If you want to take your story on the road with me, hop on the train. This study is going somewhere.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Reference	Year	Women in AA women leadership	Underrepresentation of African American women	K-12 Central AA	Female African K-12 Central Office	Importance of AA	Gender and Racial Barriers	American Women and Intersectional	Intersectionality	Foundations, Critical Race Theory, Social Role	Scarcity of Research
Aaron, T. S. (2020).	2020					x					
Acheampong, L. (2009)	2009										
Amber, M. (2018).	2018										
Aptheker et al (1994)	1994			x							
Ariella	2022										
Beard & Brown (2008)	2008										
Beard, K. S. (2012).	2012										
Beckwith, et al. (2016).	2016										
Bernier, & Rocco (2003)	2003	x	x		x					x	
Bodalino & Mistry	2020	x									
Bogotch, & Shields (2013).	2013	x									
Bongiorno & Davis, 2014	2014	x					x				
Bower, 2021	2021			x							
Bowman, et al, 2018	2018										
Brittingham-Stevens, P.	2016	x	x				x		x		
Brunner & Kim (2010)	2010	x									
Burgess, Tonia,	2021	x	x				x				
Capper et al., 2006	2006			x							
Carli & Engly (2016)	2016	x	xx		xx						
Catalyst 2020	2020										
Catalyst 2021	2021	x									
Catalyst (2004).	2004		x								
Cavallo & Brienza, (2006)	2006	x									
Chabaya et al. (2009)	2009	x									
Cherng & Haplin, (2016)	2016				x						
Chira	2017										
Clitpin, S. (2021)	2021										
Coleman, M. (2005).	2005	x									
Collins & Bilge (2016)	2016										
Collins PH (2000)	2000										
Connell et al.	2015	x									
Conway-Smith, & Zarifa	2019										
Corley & Warner	2017	X									
Cotter et al 2001	2001		xx								
Crenshaw & Bonner	2005	x	x				x	x	x	x	
Crenshaw (1991)	1991						x	x	x	x	
Crenshaw. (1989).	1989	x	x			x	x	x	x	x	

Reference	Year	Women In leadership	AA women leadership	Underrepresentation of African American women	K-12 Central	AA Central	Female K-12 Central Office	African American Central Office	Importance of AA	Gender and Racial Barriers Strategies	American Women and Intersectional it structural	Intersectionality	foundations, Critical Race Theory, Social Role	Scarcity of Research
Davis, D., & Maldonado, C.	2015		x				x	x	x	x				
Delgado, R., & Stefancic, J.	2017		x					x		x			x	
Delpit, L. D. (1995)	1995				x									
Derks B. Van Laar C and	2016	x					x							
Dewalt, S. L. (2018).	2018													
Dewalt, S. L. (2018).	2018													
Dingell, J. D., & Maloney, C.	2002					x								
Diouf, 2015	2015													
Eagly & Karau, (2002).	2007	x								x				
Eagly, & Johnson, (1990	2002	x								x			x	
Eagly, & Karau, (1991)	1992	x								x				
Eagly, A. (1987	1987	x	x							x			x	
Eagly, A. H. (2007).	2007	x		xx				xx		x				
Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J.	1991	x								x				
Eagly, et al	1990	x												
Elias, E. (2018).	2002													
Ely, R. J., Ibarra, H., & Kolb,	2018													
Finneran	2018													
Frank	2016	x												
Galloway	2015													
Gamble, E. D., & Turner, N. J.	2012			xx		x								
Garcia-Retamero and Lopez	2015	x												
Gerschensien, et al, 2018	2006	x												
Gipson, et al	2018								x					
Glass & Franceschini, 2007)	2007			x										
Glass 2007	2017													
Gresham, G., & Sampson, P.	2007	x		xx										
Grissom, J. A., Kern, E. C., &	2019			xx				xx						
Grogan, M., & Brunner, C. C.	2015			xx		x								
Grogan, M., & Shakeshaft, C.	2005	x												
Grove, R., & Montgomery, P.	2010	x								x				
Gulthen (2017	1999	x												



Reference	Year	Women In AA women leadership	Underrepresentation of African American women	K-12 Central	AA Central	Female K-12 Central Office	African American Central Office	Importance of AA	Gender and Racial Barriers	Strategies	American Women and Intersectional	Intersectionality	Social Role	foundations, Critical Race Theory, Scarcity of Research
Hill, C. Miller, K., Benson, K., 2009	2001	x												
Hill, J. H. (2009)	2016	x												
Hine, 1994	2020	x						x	x					
Holley, 2021	1994	x												
Holloway, J. H. (2000)	2012	x												
Hornig, M. I. (2003). Building	2012		x											
Hooks, B. (2012). Black	2000	x												
Hopkins	2003													
Hornsby, A. (2008	2008													
Horsford, S. D. (2012	2012		x											
Humez, J. M. (2006)	2012	x												
Humphrey, 2007	2006													
Hunter														
Hymowitz, C., & Schellhardt,	2017													
Ibarra, H., Tannen, D.,	2013													
IbarraEly and Kolb	1986													
Johnson 2021	2021													
Johnson, D. D., & Bornstein, J.	2021													
Johnson-Jones, M. (2009	2009													
Johnston, E., & Johnson, A.	2017													
Jones, S. J., & Pal, P. R.	2022													
Kaufman & Grace	2011													
Kellerman,Rhode, and Oconnor	2007	x												
Khan, S, Noer	2012	x												
Kowalski, 2006	2006													
Ladson-Billings, G. (1995	1995													
Ladson-Billings, G. (2019).	2019													
Lanehart SL (2009)	2009													
Lawson, M. A., Martin, A. E.,	2016	x												
LeMASTER & Roach	2012													
Lewis, C. (2016).	2016	x												
Lomotev, K. (2019). Research	2019													
Longman, K. A., & Madsen,	2014	x												

Reference	Year	Women In AA leadership	AA women leadership	Underrepresentation of African American women	K-12 Central	AA Central	Female K-12 Central Office	African American Central Office	Importance of AA	Gender and Racial Barriers Strategies	American Women and Intersectional	Intersectionality	foundations, Critical Race Theory, Social Role	Scarcity of Research
M. E. Hellman	2021	x		x			x	x		x				x
Magdaleno, K. (2016).	2016													
Mahitvanchcha, K., & Rorrer,	2006				x									
Marshall, T. (2018). An	2018			x										
Mason, 2011	2011	x			x									
McCrav, C. R., Wright, J. V.,	2007								x					
Mendhoughi, 2016	2016				x									
Mestry R (2014)	2014								x					
Mittleman, Joel . 2018	2018		x	x					x	x				
Mock	2012													
Moorosi P (2010)	2010			x										
Mudau, T. J., & Neube, D.	2017													
Muller, B. (2015	2015	x		x			x			x				
Munoz et al, 2014	2014													
Murphy & Hallinger,	1988						x							
Murphy, J. & Hallinge (1986).	1986				x									
NCES	2020													
OECD. (2002).	2002				x									
Olow, S. (2021)	2021													
Parker & Villalpando (2007)	2016				x									
Parker, P. (2016)	2007	x					x		x					
Pausian-Underdahl, S. C., Walker, L. S., & Woelr, D. J.	2003	x												
Pestabozzi, J. H.	2014													
Philip & Matt	2020			x										
Pianita, R.	2007													
Pollard	2020													
Powell, G. N., & Butterfield, D. A. (2003	2007	x	x					x						
Prime, Carter & Welbourne	2009								x					

Reference	Year	Women In AA leadership	AA women leadership	Underrepresentation of African American women	AA Central	Female K-12 Central Office	African American Central Office	Importance of AA	Gender and Racial Barriers Strategies	American Women and Intersectional it structural	Intersectionality	foundations, Critical Race Theory, Social Role	Scarcity of Research
Randolph, M. A. (2015).	2015		x						x			x	
Recker	2018												
Rhode,	2017	x											
Rhode, D. L.	1997	x											
Richardson, Altheia,	2021												
Roberts,	2010	x											
Robinson et al	2017	x	x					x		x		x	
Robinson, et al	2017	x											
Roseberry, L., & Roos, J.	2022												
Ross, Y. O.	2017							x					
Rudman et al,	2012	x											
Rudman, L.A., Phelan J E	2008	x											
Ryder, M., & Briles, J. (2003).	2014												
Sanchez, J. E., & Thornton, B.	2022												
Sanchez-Hucles & Davis	2010												
Sandberg S (2015)	2015	x	x	x			x						
Sandler, B. R.	2010												
Sandor, A. L.	2003												
Schmidt M and Mestry R	2007												
Shakeshaft et al. (2007)	2007	x											
Shindler et al. 2016	2014	x											
Skria et al., 2000	2016												
Source (2018)	2000							x					
Starks, T. J. S. (2019)	2018	x											x
Strange 2020	2020	x											
Superville, 2017	2017												
Suyemoto & Ballou, (2007)	2007		x	xx								x	x

Reference	Year	Women In AA leadership	AA women leadership	Underrepresentation of African American women	K-12 Central Office	AA Central Office	Female K-12 Central Office	African American Central Office	Importance of AA	Gender and Racial Barriers Strategies	American Women and Intersectional	foundations, Critical Race Theory, Social Role	Scarcity of Research
Tabassum, N., & Nayak, B. S.	2018								x				
Tilman	2021				x								
Tilman, L.	2013												
Townsend, T., & MacBeath	2004												
U.S. Federal Glass Ceiling Commission	2016				x								
USDOE, 2016	2008	x											
Wagner, W. E.	2011												
Waters & Marzano (2006)	2006												
Wiley & Sons. Warner, J.,	2016	x											
Winslow, B.	2018								x				
Yeakey et al.	1995												
Yellen, J.	1986								x				
Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009	2020												
Zenger, J., & Folkman, J.	2022				x								
Zenger, J., & Folkman, J.	2012				x								
Zheng, W., Surgevil, O., & Kark, R.	2019												

APPENDIX B

**Interview Questions**

1. Can you briefly share a little about your African American female background, upbringing, and family?
2. Can you tell me a little about your career journey that brought you to the role you currently serve in today? What positions did you hold, and for how long?
<p><b>GENDER BARRIERS</b></p> <p>As a leader with knowledge of women’s issues, you are aware that women often encounter gender specific barriers throughout their careers; that is, barriers experienced because they are women. Gender barriers can be divided into two categories:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) EXTERNAL- group and societal that we cannot change and</li> <li>2) INTERNAL- those personal barriers we can control and change. So first, we are going to talk about any external barriers that you may have experienced.</li> </ol> <p><b>External Barriers:</b> External barriers include sex-role stereotyping. These barriers include patterns of employment discrimination, such as promotion and advancement, and lack of a mentor, role models, and sponsors.</p> <p>As you think back on your career leading up to your current leadership role, please reflect on any external barriers you experienced related to being a woman.</p>
3. Can you share an example or story of one or more of these external barriers you experienced as a woman?
4. Can you describe any strategies you used to address or overcome these barriers?
<p><b>Internal or Personal Barriers:</b> Internal barriers include a reluctance to take risks, low self-esteem, a lack of assertiveness, and a lack of confidence. As you think back on your career leading up to your current leadership role, please reflect on any internal or personal barriers you experienced related to being a woman.</p>
5. Can you share an example or story of one or more of these barriers you experienced due to being a woman?
6. Can you describe any strategies you used to address or overcome these barriers?
<p><b>RACIAL BARRIERS</b></p> <p>People of color often encounter barriers due to their ethnicity or the color of their skin. Barriers include racial bias, discriminatory hiring practices, low expectations, and questioning of one’s qualifications and effectiveness.</p> <p>As an African American female, think back on your career leading up to your current leadership role; please reflect on any racial barriers you experienced related to being African American female.</p>
7. Can you share an example or story of one or more of these barriers you experienced due to being African American female?
8. Can you describe any strategies you used to address or overcome these barriers?

**INTERSECTIONALITY**

The intersection of two separate identities such as gender and ethnicity impacts one’s social interactions and experiences. They compound to construct novel experiences that are distinctive and not necessarily divisible into their component identities.

We talked about gender barriers, those experienced because of being female and racial barriers experienced being African American female. As a woman of color, gender and race make up your full identity; they compound and are experienced as one. Please reflect on how these combined identities impacted your advancement to your current leadership role.

- Multiple identities construct novel experiences that are distinct, not divisible into component identities
- The term was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw who insisted that studies cannot ignore the intersectional experiences of those who subscribe to two minority identities  
*“...identity is not additive. In other words, Black women are not white women plus color, or Black men plus gender”* (Wing, 1990, p. 7).

9. Can you share an example or story of a barrier experienced during your career due to being both a woman and African American female?
10. Can you share an example or story of how intersectionality impacted your career advancement?
11. Can you describe any strategies leveraged to counteract intersectional barriers while advancing throughout your career?
12. Do you have any advice for African American female women in their journey to gain access to higher-level positions in their careers?
13. Are there any final comments you would like to make before we conclude?

APPENDIX C

Alignment Table

Research Questions	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
What barriers do African American females experience due to gender while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?			x		x								
What barriers do female African Americans experience due to race while advancing to K-12 central office leadership positions?							x						
How does the intersectionality of gender and race impact advancement to the K-12 central office leadership positions as perceived by African American females?									x	x			
What strategies do African American females leverage to address and overcome barriers due to intersectionality while advancing to a K-12 central office leadership position?				x		x		x			x		

## APPENDIX D

### Field Test Protocols

#### Field Test Participant Feedback Questions

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?
2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was okay?
3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?
4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?
5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview?



## APPENDIX E

### **Participant Interview Protocol**

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: A Phenomenological Study: The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers created by Gender and Race on African American Female's Advancement to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

Time of Interview:

Duration:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer: Mariyon Thompson

Interviewee:

You are invited to take part in a research study about the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on African American women's advancement to a k-12 central office leadership position.

I am inviting African American females in Riverside and San Bernardino County in public school leadership positions who have held or currently hold positions as central office administrators for at least one year. The purpose of this study is to explore the challenges for African American females in educational leadership. The purpose for the proposed study is to utilize interviews conducted with African American female educational leaders to gain a better understanding of their lived experiences as district administrators. You will be asked to participate in an interview. The interviews are expected to last 30-60 minutes that will occur via Zoom platform on a date convenient for you. You will have your responses transcribed via Zoom using a recording device.

Approximately eight central office administrators will be enrolled in this study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. I have these criteria to participate in this study: (a) participant has

minimum experience of one year as a central office administrator in a K-12 public school, (b) participant is knowledgeable of women's issues in educational leadership, and (c) participant exhibits strong verbal and non-verbal communication skills. In participating in this research study, you agree to partake in an interview.

There are no major benefits to you for participation, but a potential may be that your input may help add to the research regarding the impact of intersectional barriers of race and gender on African American women's career advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position and identify the strategies that help overcome these barriers. Additional details of the study are provided in the attached description of the study. If you have any questions about this study, please e-mail me at [redacted] or call my dissertation supervisor, Dr. Marilou Ryder, at [redacted] or by email at [redacted] I very much appreciate your time and consideration in participating in this study.

Very Respectfully,

Mariyon Thompson Doctoral Candidate,  
Organizational Leadership Program  
UMass Global University

## APPENDIX F

### **Invitation to Participate in a Research Study Expert Panel**

**STUDY:** A Phenomenological Study: The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers created by Gender and Race on African American Female's Advancement to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

Dear Potential Expert Panelist:

This letter is an invitation to participate in a phenomenological research study as a professional expert. My name is Mariyon Thompson, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Organizational Leadership Doctoral program at the University of Massachusetts Global. I am currently conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Marilou Ryder on the impact of intersectional barriers created by gender and race on African American women's advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position.

#### **What is the purpose of this research study?**

The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the perceived impact of intersectional barriers of gender and race on African American women's advancement to a K-12 central office position.

#### **What will your involvement in this study mean?**

As a professional expert, your involvement will encompass reviewing and critiquing the research instrument and field test. To prevent researcher bias and ensure the participants' safety, I would like you to scrutinize each interview question and provide feedback on ways to improve the instrument. Upon completing a field test, I will be sharing the results with you and asking that you review the data to ensure the instrument's accuracy and reliability and ensure the interview questions are aligned with the research questions.

If you have any questions regarding this phenomenological research study, please do not hesitate to contact me at [redacted] or email at [redacted]. You can also contact my dissertation chairperson Dr. Marilou Ryder at 760-900-0556 or email at ryder@umassglobal.edu.

Thank you very much for your interest and assistance in this phenomenological study.

Sincerely,

Mariyon Thompson

APPENDIX G

**UMass Global Institutional Review Board Approval**

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu>

3:19 PM (3 hours ago)

to me, ddevore, ryder, irb

Dear Mariyon Thompson,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at [IRB.umassglobal.edu](http://IRB.umassglobal.edu)

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

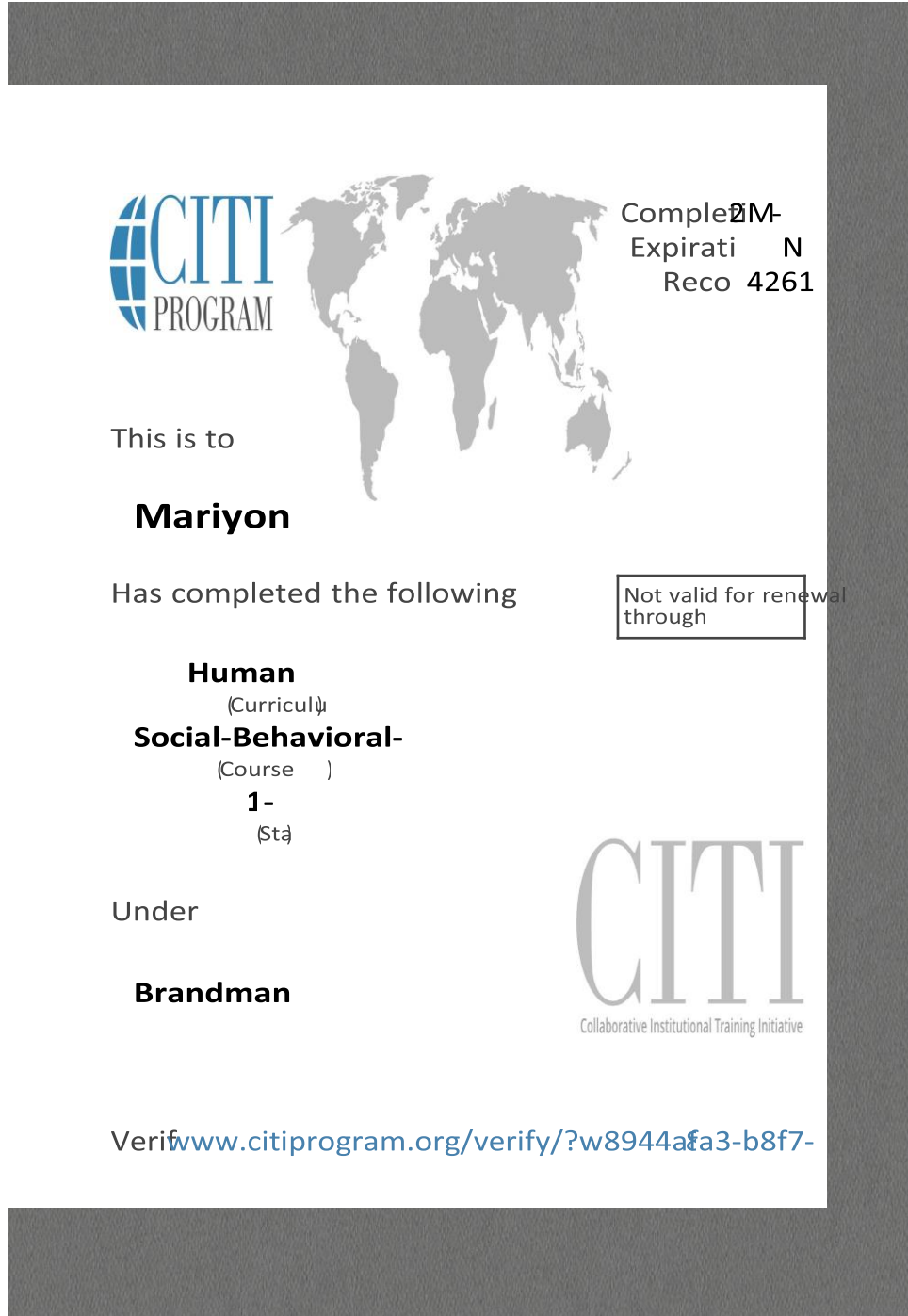
Thank You,

IRB  
Academic Affairs  
**UMass Global**  
16355 Laguna Canyon Road  
Irvine, CA 92618  
[irb@umassglobal.edu](mailto:irb@umassglobal.edu)  
[www.umassglobal.edu](http://www.umassglobal.edu)

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at [irb@umassglobal.edu](mailto:irb@umassglobal.edu).

APPENDIX H

**Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative Certification of Completion**



## APPENDIX I

### **Informed Consent Document**

**INFORMATION ABOUT:** The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers created by Gender and Race on African American Female's Advancement to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position.

**RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR:** Mariyon Thompson, UMass Global Doctoral Student

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:** You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Mariyon Thompson, a doctoral student from The School of Education at UMass global. The purpose of this research study is to explore the perceived impact of the intersectional barriers created by gender and race on African American Women's advancement to a K-12 central office leadership position. This study will fill the gap regarding the underrepresentation of African American women in central office leadership and their impact on district office decision-making, and support for increasing student achievement for all students. More research is needed regarding the perceived impact of the intersection of race and gender of African American women. The results of this study may assist other African American administrators in strategies for hiring to a central office position. District office officials learn strategies to increase diversity in hiring and the importance of representation from other cultures.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an (individual and/or group interview). The interview(s) will last approximately 45 – 60 minutes and will be conducted electronically via Zoom platform and recorded). The transcription will be sent to you once completed for corrections.

I understand that:

- a) There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the Investigator will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identifying codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the researcher.
- b) I understand that the interview will be audio recorded. The recordings will be available only to the researcher and the professional transcriptionist. The audio recordings will be used to capture the interview dialogue and to ensure the accuracy of the information collected during the interview. All information will be identifier-redacted, and my confidentiality will be maintained. Upon completion of the study all recordings will be destroyed. All other data and consents will be securely stored for three years after completion of data collection and confidentially shredded or fully deleted.

- c) The possible benefit of this study to me is that my input may help add to the research regarding coaching programs and the impact coaching programs have on developing future school leaders. The findings will be available to me at the conclusion of the study and will provide new insights about the coaching experience in which I participated. I understand that I will not be compensated for my participation.
- d) If you have any questions or concerns about the research, please feel free to contact Marilou Ryder at ryder@mail.umassglobal.edu or by phone 760-900-0556; or at bbrown@umassglobal.edu.
- e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer questions during the interview if I choose. I understand that I may refuse to participate or may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the Investigator may stop the study at any time.
- f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be so informed, and my consent re-obtained.

I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMass global, at 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the “Research Participant’s Bill of Page 2 of 3 IRB Written Informed Consent Rev: October 2021 pg. 5 of 8 Rights.” I have read the above and understand it and hereby consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

Signature of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Principal Investigator \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Mariyon Thompson Doctoral Candidate,  
Organizational Leadership Program  
UMass Global University

## APPENDIX J

### Participant Bill of Rights



#### UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

UMass Global IRB Adopted 2021



APPENDIX K

**Audio Release Form**

**RESEARCH STUDY TITLE:** A Phenomenological Study: The Perceived Impact of the Intersectional Barriers created by Gender and Race on African American Women's Advancement to a K-12 Central Office Leadership Position

**UNIVERSITY of MASSACHUSETTS GLOBAL  
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD  
IRVINE, CA 92618**

I authorize Mariyon Thompson, University of Massachusetts Global Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give the University of Massachusetts Global and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release any and all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Participant or Responsible Party**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**