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Personal Power Tactics African American Female Superintendents Employ to Overcome Four Identified Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

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A Dissertation by

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my first grandson, Kashus Jackson Brantley. May the Mattison-Davis-Brantley legacy of faith in God and love of people continue in you and all the generations to come.

ABSTRACT

Personal Power Tactics African American Female Superintendents Employ to Overcome Four Identified Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

by Angela L. Brantley

Purpose: The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012), Ryder and Briles (2003).

Methodology: This study identified and described the lived experiences of seven female African American superintendents across the United States. This research design encompassed a sequential data collection method using an electronic survey instrument followed by one-on-one interviews. Based on the quantitative and qualitative data, the researcher was able to triangulate data using the trends, categories, and patterns of four identified self-sabotaging behaviors: (a) Thinking Too Small, (b) Fear and Worry, (c) Holding Back, (d) Not Taking Time for Reflection.

Findings: Data analysis revealed that African American female superintendents engaged in various aspects of the four self-sabotaging behaviors. The findings illuminated the power tactics women used at the top executive seats in K-12 education. They employed the following power tactics: Take ownership of life experiences, Manage negative self-talk, Take advantage of opportunities, Focus on improving student outcomes, Reach out for help when needed, Are intentional about speaking the truth at the appropriate time, Draw strength from their community, Embrace their faith and prayer, and Focus on self-care, including mental health.

Conclusions: African American females participate in self-sabotaging behaviors throughout their leadership careers. However, with increased education about self-sabotaging behavior and the power tactics that can be used to overcome them, African American female leaders overcome these behaviors and successfully navigate their career paths. The number one power tactic identified in this study was building a power web of support.

Recommendations: Recommendations include leadership training for African American female leaders regarding studies on self-sabotaging barriers and overcoming power tactics. Research needs to be included in university credentialing programs and used by professional organizations as a catalyst to empower more African American female leaders into executive leadership. This study should be replicated to expand the sample size of African American female superintendents and other female racial groups.

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PREFACE

Three faculty researchers and three doctoral students discovered a shared interest in exploring four identified self-sabotaging behaviors of women in leadership and the strategies, or power tactics, used by these leaders to overcome self-sabotage. Through their shared interest, a thematic study was conducted by the three doctoral students to identify and describe to what degree female leaders experienced the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. A secondary purpose of the study was to identify strategies, or power tactics, employed by female leaders to overcome self-sabotaging behaviors. An explanatory sequential mixed methods study was developed utilizing a theoretical framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003) to group female self-sabotaging behaviors within nine overarching domains of women's personal power.

To ensure thematic consistency and reliability, the three doctoral students collaborated with three faculty members to develop the purpose statement and research questions. The survey instrument, interview questions, and study procedures were utilized in previous thematic research studies by Pianta (2020), Thomas (2020), and Crews (2020). All instruments were compiled through collaboration and research of the thematic group, and alterations were supported through alignment with Ryder and Briles's (2003) theoretical framework. Each researcher administered an online survey to female leaders to identify to what degree each female leader experienced the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. Following the survey, the researchers interviewed their study participants individually to explore the strategies or power tactics that the study participants employed to overcome the behaviors.

The term peer researchers was used throughout the dissertation to refer to the other researchers conducting this thematic study. The peer researchers studied female leaders in the following fields: Angela Brantley, female African American superintendents; Jennifer Cordova, female executive directors of behavioral health nonprofits; and Kelli Jakubik, female superintendents.

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Effective leadership is a critical aspect of the success of any organization. Crowley (2011) states that the traditional leadership model is archaic. Since the Industrial Age, leadership has not adequately evolved to address the rapidly changing needs of 21st century organizations (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Crowley, 2011). The type of leader needed to keep pace with the social, technological, economic, and political landscapes of the 21st century must understand the elements and drivers of transformational change (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010). In the field of K-12 educational leadership, there is a demand for leaders who understand cultural and organizational imperatives as change drivers that can improve how they lead their teams and improve outcomes in their organization (Ackerman Anderson & Anderson, 2010; Crowley, 2011).

This change driver must address the issue that leadership in American education has been dominated for centuries by White men (Arriaga et al., 2020; L. Davis, 2022). This fact alone speaks to a lack of gender and racial diversity in the leadership pool for the transformational leaders needed to impact the current educational landscape. Moreover, the intentional system of male-dominate leadership has disproportionally left women behind (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019; L. Davis, 2022). Although women are more represented in the workforce than ever, and 52% of women hold all management-level jobs, they do not keep pace with men in top executive leadership roles (Milenkovic, 2022). This lack of proportionate representation of women is even more profound for women of color in education (Blount, 1998; Chiefs for Change, 2019; L. Davis, 2022).

The lack of representation of women of color in executive leadership roles in K-12 education is largely due to structural, societal, and personal barriers. These barriers have impeded women's access to the general workforce, specifically leadership (Blount, 1998; Cassidy et al., 2021; Chiefs for Change, 2019; Grogan, 1996). These barriers have been external and internal. External barriers have included discrimination, lack of mentors, and gender stereotyping (Grogan, 1996; Ryder & Briles, 2003). Internal barriers such as lack of self-confidence and conflict with family commitment have historically impeded women from working in growing numbers in all industries as well as serving in leadership roles (Arriaga et al., 2020; Ryder & Briles, 2003).

With the growing diversity of the student population, there is a need for more female representation, African Americans, and other females of color in the higher ranks of the K-12 educational system. The responsibilities of a superintendent are greatly influenced by the makeup of the school district, including size, location, socioeconomics, and race (Grogan & Nash, 2021). If public education is to fulfill the promise as an equalizer to ensure the achievement of diverse demographics and learners, there must be more diversity at the superintendent level (Nix, 2022; Tienken, 2021; Webb, 2022). The goal of gender and racial diversity in the role of the superintendency will require intentionality as females who aspire to leadership positions work to remove both external and internal barriers that impede their progress to the top executive seat in the field of K-12 education, the superintendency (Nix, 2022; Tienken, 2022; Webb, 2022).

Background

Women in the Workforce

For centuries, women have traditionally been responsible for raising children and tending to the duties of the home. During the 18th and 19th centuries, women's roles began to shift, and they were increasingly employed in the workforce outside the home (Sandor, 2022). The 20th century saw a dramatic increase in women in the workforce. From 1950 to 1999, the percentage of American women in the workplace increased from 33% to 61% (Connell et al., 2015). This increase demonstrated women's persistence to take control of their contribution beyond the home.

Women in Leadership

Historically, women have struggled to gain both equality and equity in the highest leadership roles in all industries (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1996; Milenkovic, 2022). Although gains have been made over the last century, where 52% of women now hold all management-level jobs, women do not keep pace with men in top leadership roles (Milenkovic, 2022). As a result, women persist in falling behind men in the number of females in the top leadership roles in the United States. In addition, women comprise 50.8% of the population and hold 57% of all undergraduate degrees and 60% of master's degrees (Milenkovic, 2022). Hence, women make up the majority of the most well-educated Americans and continue to grow in the share of the talent available for leadership (Rhode, 2016). Yet, the gender leadership disparity can be seen dramatically in K-12 education.

K-12 Education Leadership

The field of education has a population of students and staff who have become more racially and ethnically diverse. This diversity calls for understanding the leaders who create effective school systems (American Association of Superintendents and Administrators [AASA], 2021). Education is an industry in which the majority of its workforce is women, yet the disproportionate representation of women at the top ranks persists (Glass, 2019). In K-12 education, women are 74% of the workforce education, yet they make up 26.7% of the superintendents (Grogan & Nash, 2021). Although the percentage of women superintendents has almost doubled during the 1990s—from 6.6% to 13.2%, in 2020, the majority of school superintendents, 72.9%, are male (Glass, 2019; Grogan & Nash, 2021). Grogan (1996) found that a framework around barriers to power, gender, and leadership roles contributes to understanding the path of aspiring female superintendents.

African American Females in the Superintendency

As the student population becomes more diverse, there arises a conversation regarding the necessity of diversity in the leadership that serves the students and their communities, namely the superintendency. African American female superintendents increased from 6% in 2010 to approximately 8% in 2020 (Modan, 2020). Yet the issue persists that African American women, even more so than their White counterparts, have struggled to be proportionally represented in the high executive levels in the workforce, including the K-12 superintendency (L. Davis, 2022).

History of Barriers Preventing Women from Gaining Advancement

Historically, structural and personal barriers have impeded women's access to the general workforce, specifically leadership. These barriers have been external and internal. External barriers have included discrimination, lack of mentors, and gender stereotyping (Grogan, 1996; Ryder & Briles, 2003). While internal barriers, such as lack of self-confidence and conflict with family commitment, have historically served to contribute to impeding women from working in growing numbers in all industries as well as serving in leadership roles (Arriaga et al., 2020).

External Barriers

Women have persistently encountered various challenges on their path to attaining leadership positions throughout the course of history (Miller, 2022). There are a variety of barriers that impact the gender gap. External barriers are steeped in discrimination, lack of mentors, and gender stereotyping (Grogan, 1996). Although much progress has been made, discrimination based on gender persists. Discrimination can be seen in how much harder women work to be perceived as equal to men (Miller, 2022). The lack of mentors and the need to develop support groups or other female sponsors contribute to the barriers (Grogan, 1996). Moreover, women must confront problems of gender inequality that involve unconscious bias, in-group favoritism, and challenges with work-family structures (Rhode, 2016). Barriers such as the glass ceiling and career pathway choice continue to keep women from achieving high career levels (Rhode, 2016).

Glass Ceiling and Gatekeeping

Women have long fought to remove barriers that have impeded their road to executive leadership roles in the professional arena. While navigating the ladder of upward mobility, they continue to face workplace bias (Gloor, 2020). Marilyn Loden (1978) coined the term *glass ceiling*, to describe the external barriers women and people of color face as they move up in the workplace (as cited in Lockert, 2022). In addition, gatekeeping, which impedes women's access to higher positions, was built on the belief that barriers are influenced by widespread social changes (Cassidy et al., 2021).

Career Pathways

Research on barriers strongly indicates that men and women take different pathways into the superintendency (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019). Men tend to have the advantage of being promoted more quickly into administration positions (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019). Historically, men have taken the pathway of secondary teacher, secondary assistant principal, secondary principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent (Sperandio, 2015). Whereas women have often started as elementary or middle school teachers and held leadership at that level before moving to district-level directors in such areas as curriculum leadership before they even have an opportunity to move into executive-level positions (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Miller, 2022; Sperandio, 2015). While women use district-level positions to gain leadership experience, they often remain there for many years, unlike their male colleagues (Sperandio, 2015). Additionally, women are not supported with career planning and, hence, not as prepared to enter executive administrative positions (Cassidy et al., 2021; Chiefs for Change, 2019). Thus, intentional planning and practical guidance are key

factors for women who believe they are called to lead at the executive level (Sperandio, 2015).

Internal Barriers

A woman's psychological sense of power affords the individual a wide range of benefits (Fontaine, 2019). Yet, internal barriers also influence the obstacles women face in moving into executive leadership. Internal barriers, such as the conflict between work and home life balance, as well as self-sabotaging behaviors, can manifest in a variety of ways and can be both intentional and unintentional (Ryder & Briles, 2003; Sandor, 2022).

Home and Work-Life Conflict

Despite the great numbers of women graduating from college and finding fulfillment in the workforce, many women are still the primary caregivers for their children (Chiefs for Change, 2019). Women continue to work to find the balance between meeting the needs of their family and their work responsibilities. Slaughter (2012) discusses the societal implication that parenting and the commitment to a woman's profession would be substandard. Women continue to wonder if they can take on all their family and work responsibilities and still thrive personally and professionally (Slaughter, 2012).

Power Versus Self-Sabotaging Behavior

Women play a significant role in navigating the path to executive leadership. However, women often exhibit behaviors that impede and sabotage their progress. Arriaga et al. (2020) state that women must "neutralize the self-sabotaging patterns" (p. 7) that have blocked them from reaching their full potential. When women find the power in who they are, they will move beyond those behaviors and progress toward their career

goals (Lerner, 2012). This power then allows women to respond out of "strength rather than react out of fear and intimidation" (Lerner, 2012, p. xv).

Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical foundations bring context to the study. As we better understand the impact of barriers in the path of women who aspire to high-level leadership roles, foundational theories such as feminist post-structural theory, social role theory, and role congruency theory will provide the contextual foundation.

Feminist Post-Structural Theory

A feminist post-structural framework provided a theoretical basis for analyzing barriers to women in the workforce. These barriers included: (a) lacking role models, (b) being placebound, (c) wanting the support of other women, (d) missing the sponsorship of influential mentors, and (e) feeling constrained by personal responsibilities (Grogan, 1996). These factors contributed to women not moving into the superintendency in K-12 systems (Grogan, 1996). Grogan (1996) looks at the feminist post-structural theory as it relates to issues of leadership, gender, and power and how it provides insight into understanding the contemporary perspective of the superintendency. Since the 1960s, there have been increasing studies on feminist research. The work became increasingly sophisticated throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Young & Skrla, 2003). The field has been significantly influenced by feminist epistemology and advocacy over the past 20 years (Grogan, 1996; Young & Skrla, 2003).

Social Role Theory

Women's social roles in relation to men have dominated societal norms for centuries. These roles and stereotypes suggest that women are more communal, selfless,

and concerned with others, whereas men are more agentic and self-assertive (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). These differences are the foundation for social role theory. Established by A. H. Eagly and Wood (1999), this theory suggests that the gender differences observed between men and women are shaped by the social roles and stereotypes they are assigned at birth and how they adapt to them. These roles are indoctrinated in youth at an early age (Arriaga et al., 2020).

Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory has a foundation in social role theory's treatment in the context of gender roles. The focus of role congruity theory is a comparison of the behavioral expectations of each gender and the more common behaviors exhibited (A. H. Eagly et al., 2000). This comparison leads to the existence of what A. H. Eagly et al. (2000) see as prejudice. Role congruity theory examines the prejudice that can arise from the "relations that people perceive between the characteristics of members of a social group and the requirements of the social roles that group members occupy or aspire to occupy" (A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). Many individuals hold the belief that female leaders do not possess the stereotypical characteristics commonly associated with leadership roles, leading to prejudice against them (A. H. Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Conceptual Framework

The feminist post-structural, Black feminism, social role, and role congruity theories all provide a strong foundation for the framework created by Ryder and Briles (2003) and Lerner (2012). The theoretical framework of self-sabotaging behaviors and nine domains of women's personal power is adapted from *In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self* (Lerner, 2012) and *The SexX Factor: Breaking the Unwritten Codes*

that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives (Ryder & Briles, 2003). Table 1 lists the nine domains of women's personal power framework, combining the internal harmful behaviors of women and the empowering approaches to overcome their damaging effects on a woman's career (Sandor, 2022). Women who recognize the self-imposed obstacles can use deliberate techniques to surpass them and progress in their professional lives. (Sandor, 2022).

Table 1

The Nine Domains of Personal Power and Related Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

Self-sabotaging behaviors	Personal power to overcome
Disempowering other women	Empowering other women
Dishonesty	Expressing yourself genuinely
Fear and worry	Accepting discomfort
Holding back	Acting with confidence
Infusing sex/gender role confusion in the workplace	Embracing one's sexuality
Isolation	Building a power web
Lack of self-reflection	Cultivating self-intimacy
Misunderstanding oneself	Owning all of yourself
Thinking too small	Recognizing your unique destiny

Note. Adapted from "In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self," by H. Lerner, 2012, Atria Paperback; "The SexX Factor," 2003, New Horizon Press.

Lerner (2012) defines power as the ability to act from a "position of strength" (p. xv) as opposed to fear or intimidation. The framework is grounded in the idea that women must "neutralize the self-sabotaging patterns" (Lerner, 2012, p. 7) to move beyond the barriers and reach career fulfillment. Lerner and Ryder and Briles (2003) state that women's personal power is key in overcoming the barriers and the behaviors women exhibit to move beyond self-sabotaging behavior and into top leadership roles.

A team of six doctoral students from the University of Massachusetts Global have conducted thorough research on self-sabotaging behaviors exhibited by women in

executive leadership roles. Their study implemented a theoretical framework based on Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003), which classified female self-sabotaging behaviors into nine broad domains of women's personal power. Through a combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis, the researchers analyzed the outcomes of six studies. The results of this research have identified various instances of self-sabotage and the effective strategies to overcome them. While all female participants engaged in the nine self-sabotaging behaviors to varying degrees and provided examples to explain the effects of these behaviors on their career development, four top behaviors were identified by all participants: (a) Thinking Too Small, (b) Fear and Worry, (c) Holding Back, (d) and Not Taking Time for Reflection (see Table 2).

Table 2

Top Self-Sabotaging Behaviors from Original Comparative Studies (Interviews)

Researcher	Self-sabotaging behavior	Participant profession
Crews (2020)	Holding back Thinking too small Fear and worry	Government leaders
Pianta (2020)	Holding back Thinking too small Fear and worry	Superintendents
Allen Thomas (2021)	Fear and worry Thinking too small Holding back	Judges
Miller (2022)	Holding back Misunderstanding oneself Fear and worry	Assistant superintendents
Sandor (2022)	Holding back Not reflecting Dishonesty	Secondary principals
Vennes (2022)	Thinking too small Misunderstanding oneself Fear and worry	Charter school CEOs

The current research suggests that there needs to be more studies that examine how these four top self-sabotaging behaviors impact female careers and the strategies used to overcome these behaviors (Sandor, 2022). Because this is a relatively new framework, there is a need for more studies, even in the populations that have been researched, specifically African American female executives in K-12 leadership (G. Davis, 2022). G. Davis's (2022) study of African American female superintendents suggests that these leaders are "inclined to engage in self-sabotaging behaviors in response to the structural and systemic duality of sexism and racism" (p. 199). There is a need for additional research on which strategies African American female superintendents employ to overcome these top four behaviors.

Problem Statement/Research Problem

For centuries, the field of education has been dominated by White males. The first public school in the United States started in 1635 and was operated for White males by White males (Tienken, 2021). Women and people of color were not a part of the education system; thus, the system was not designed with this population in mind. It was not until the 1800s that women were allowed to enter the field of teaching (Blount, 1998). The introduction of women into the teaching field was in large part due to the growing need for more teachers. The men who were educated and could take the positions chose to undertake promising careers in the ministry, law, medicine, business, or politics (Blount 1998). Although women began to grow in numbers as teachers, to this day, they still have not been well-represented in the highest seat in the K-12 industry, the superintendency.

Women have fought for many years to earn their place in the workforce and compete at the top executive levels of leadership. In K-12 education, women comprise 74% of the workforce, yet they make up 26.7% of the superintendents (Grogan & Nash, 2021). The American Association of Superintendents and Administrators (AASA) (2020) decennial study shows this as an improvement since the 2010 study that reported females making up 24.1% of the superintendents. This increase represents a 2.5% growth in the proportion of female superintendents (Grogan & Nash, 2021). However, only 12.9% of the female superintendents are women of color (Grogan & Nash, 2021). Although this growth is promising, it does not represent the changing demographics of the student population. In 2017, only 51% of school-age children identified as White (NCES, 2019). Consequently, there is a need for more leaders who represent the students and communities they serve.

The lack of women in K-12 superintendent positions means that the female perspective on decisions and policy changes is limited (Pianta, 2020). Extensive research has indicated that women are more inclined to exhibit transformational leadership qualities, resulting in better outcomes for both staff and students (Connell et al., 2015; Pianta, 2020). For that reason, to positively transform education and improve student outcomes, there is a need to bring the voices and experiences of women of color to the table. As a result, the barriers that impede women of color from gaining access to the superintendent must be addressed. Specifically, women need to overcome not only external barriers but also internal barriers that hold them back from moving into the superintendency (Lerner, 2012; Ryder & Briles, 2003).

There are various reasons for the disproportionate underrepresentation of women of color in leadership. Studies have explored external behaviors such as gender discrimination and sexism. Women continue to fight these external barriers. However, there are internal barriers that women experience that have not been studied significantly (Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). The theoretical framework of Lerner (2003) and Ryder and Briles (2003) suggests that women use strategies to overcome self-sabotaging behavior to move up into the executive ranks. Research grounded in this self-sabotaging framework reveals that internal barriers such as Thinking Too Small, Fear and Worry, Holding Back, and Not Taking Time for Reflection are four self-sabotaging behaviors that can impede women's access to higher-level leadership positions (Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). There is limited research on how African American females overcome these self-sabotaging behaviors to move up the K-12 superintendency. Thus, more research needs to be done on this specific population to increase their representation at the superintendent level.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003).

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small?

2. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry?
3. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back?
4. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection?

Significance of the Problem

Today, in K-12 education, women comprise 74% of the workforce. However, they only comprise 26.7% of the top executive leadership position, the superintendent (Grogan & Nash, 2021). Researchers suggest there are societal benefits when women are empowered professionally and personally. Therefore, there is a substantial need for continued research on this topic in the context of gender imbalance in education (G. Davis, 2022; Webb, 2022). Various reasons have been documented to account for the absenteeism of women in leadership in education. Many studies have been conducted to understand external barriers such as gender discrimination and sexism to explain the lack of women leaders in education. However, few studies examine the internal barriers as self-sabotaging behaviors (Ryder & Briles; Webb, 2022). It is important to emphasize that the racism, sexism, and discrimination that African American females must regularly confront and overcome play a significant role in how they navigate their personal and professional lives. African American female leaders have limited control over these external barriers. However, this research is meant to get to the core of personal areas in which women have a greater level of control, and that is self-sabotaging behaviors.

Despite the qualifications of African American women and the need for more representation and access, there continues to be unequal access to the top leadership roles in education (G. Davis, 2022; Miles & Grogan, 2022). Empowering African American women to advance to executive leadership positions in education will create a more diverse and effective educational learning environment (L. Davis, 2022).

Knowing more about how African American women overcome self-sabotaging behaviors to make their way to the superintendency is important for women of color. This information can play a significant role in adding to the understanding of the existing phenomena of empowering women to use their personal power to dismantle and overcome these barriers. This study's outcome could inform the practices of women throughout the nation. Women of color, namely African American women, could use this study as a tool for reflection on their own self-sabotaging behavior and use identified power tactics to move into executive leadership in education. In the larger scheme, including this population of leaders is critical to creating more gender and racial diversity in hiring transformational leadership whose varied experiences and perspectives can transform schools and improve the outcomes of the nation's students. Additionally, organizations such as the AASA, state-wide organizations such as the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA), and the California Association of African American Superintendents and Administrators (CAASA) would benefit from this research in creating training and professional development. Updated and relevant professional development can aid in targeting the increase of African American female representation in the top executive seat of the superintendent.

Consequently, this study will contribute to the body of research by looking into an understudied population and identifying the methods African American women use to become empowered by dismantling self-sabotage and advancing in their careers.

Definitions

The following terms are both theoretical and operational terms that are relevant to the study. Theoretical definitions are cited from the literature, and operational definitions are the working definitions for this study.

Operational

Barriers. Individual and institutional social constructs of a career path, such as career advancement, mentoring, leadership styles, and selection processes, that function as negative core values and impede advancement in leadership roles (Arriaga et al., 2020; Cassidy et al., 2021).

External barriers. Those behaviors, attitudes, actions of others, or societal standards that are out of their personal control inhibit their success at achieving executive career advancements (McCullough, 2020).

Gender bias. The preconception or judgment based on gender alone (A. H. Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Gender discrimination. The unjust or prejudicial treatment of a person or group based on their gender (Sandor, 2022).

Gender stereotype. Consensually shared beliefs that reflect the innate abilities of each of the sexes (A. H. Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Glass ceiling. A metaphor used to describe an artificial barrier that keeps women from advancement to managing and executive roles. The phrase is frequently used to

describe the challenges women encounter when attempting to advance in a male-dominated organization (Nix, 2022).

Glass cliff. A metaphor referring to situations where women are promoted to leadership roles during times of crisis and set up for failure (Ryan & Haslam, 2005).

Imposter syndrome. The belief is that regardless of accomplishments, an individual feels that they are going to be unmasked as a fraud (Bahn, 2014).

Internal barriers. Thoughts, behaviors, and actions that individuals take that inadvertently create obstacles to their own success (Sandor, 2022).

Labyrinth. A metaphor referring to various obstacles and obstructions women face as they move to higher-level leadership positions (A. Eagly & Carli, 2007).

Personal Power. The discovery, ownership, and activation of inner authority (Lerner, 2012; Sandor, 2022).

Phenomenological study. A qualitative research method is used to understand the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a person or group of people (Patton, 2015).

Sequential explanatory mixed-method. A mixed method design in which a quantitative phase is followed by a qualitative phase (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Self-sabotaging behaviors. A set of internal and avoidable behaviors that undermine or destroy one's personal and/or professional credibility, resulting in the degradation of one's self-worth and self-confidence (Ryder & Briles, 2003; Sandor, 2022).

Stereotype. Beliefs about people's attributes are classified into a social category as the simplistic ideas of people who ought to know better (A. H. Eagly & Koenig, 2021).

Sexism. A term used to describe oppressive, unfair treatment or discrimination based specifically on gender (Burgess, 2021; L. Davis, 2022).

Sticky floors. The concept is that women are denied opportunities to advance and are stuck in their current position (Bishu & Alkadry, 2017).

Structural barriers. Factors that impede the progress and advancement of an individual or society based on "historical, cultural and social psychological aspects of our currently realized society" (Institute Staff, 2016, Systemic Racism section).

Systemic barriers. "A system in which public policies, institutional practices, cultural representations, and other norms work in various, often reinforcing ways to perpetuate racial group inequity" (Institute Staff, 2016, Structural Racism section).

Underrepresentation. When a population is not demographically represented appropriately (Haley, 2015).

Theoretical

Black feminism. A theoretical framework used to interpret the unique experiences of African American women based on their culture, personal, and social contexts, which differ from men and women who have not experienced racial and gender oppression (Allen Thomas, 2021; Collins, 2000).

Expectancy value theory. A theory based on people's actions influenced by their beliefs and how they weigh their possibilities (Ungvarsky, 2022).

Feminist post-structural theory. A theoretical framework based on analyzing barriers to women in the workforce. These barriers included lacking role models, being place-bound, wanting the support of other women, missing the sponsorship of influential mentors, and feeling constrained by personal responsibilities (Grogan, 1996).

Gendered organizational theory. A theory focused on biases in leadership as a dominant male structure (Benschop & Brink, 2019).

Queen bee theory. A theory implying that women in a predominantly male-dominated industry become competitive with other women rather than mentoring other women (Sandor, 2022).

Role congruity theory. A theory based on social role theory's analysis of gender roles' content and their significance in encouraging sex disparities in behavior (A. H. Eagly, 2002).

Social role theory. A theory based on the roles of males and females that have been accepted in society (Agnes, 2007).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to female African American K-12 public education superintendents in four United States regions. Only K-12 superintendents who: (a) identify as African American, (b) are of the female gender, (c) currently hold the position of superintendent, and (d) have held the position for a minimum of one year were asked to participate in this study.

Organization of the Study

This study is composed of five chapters, as well as references and appendices. Chapter II delves into a literature review on the self-destructive habits that women experience and the methods they use to overcome them. Chapter III details the research design and methodology used in the study. It also describes the data collection instrument and procedures, as well as the sample selected. Chapter IV presents an analysis of the data gathered and a discussion of the findings. Chapter V concludes with a summary,

conclusion, and recommendations based on the study. Finally, the study ends with a references section and appendices.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review aims to better understand the historical context of women in leadership, examine seminal studies and authors, identify key characteristics based on leading theoretical frameworks, and describe opportunities for future research through the lens of women in K-12 executive leadership, namely the role of the superintendent.

History of Women in Leadership

Historical Context of Women in the Workforce

Women have traditionally been responsible for raising children and tending to home duties. During the 18th and 19th centuries, women's roles began to shift, becoming increasingly present in the workplace outside the home (Arriaga et al., 2020; Miller, 2022; Sandor, 2022). The 20th century saw a dramatic increase in women in the workforce. So much so that from 1950 to 1999, the percentage of American women in the labor force increased from 33% to 61% (Connell et al., 2015; NCES, 2017). The increase in women actively engaging in the workforce showed their determination to take charge of their roles beyond household responsibilities.

Despite considerable progress made by women in the workforce from the late 1970s to the early 21st century, it is concerning that the labor force involvement rate for women in their prime age dropped from 78% to 74% between 2000 and 2016 (Arriaga et al., 2020; Miller, 2022). This decline of women in the workforce was ascribed to issues of childcare and early childhood education. This circumstance was only one of the numerous external impediments that women have encountered in the workplace that contribute to the underrepresentation of women overall and in high-powered jobs. (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019; Miller, 2022). These themes can also be

seen in women in leadership, as there have only been iterative improvements in female representation in leadership roles.

Women in Leadership

Many women are hesitant to move toward higher levels of administration. This reluctance is imparted due to the apparent costs to themselves, their personal goals, and the additional challenges they would face. Historically, women have struggled to gain both equality and equity in the highest leadership roles in all industries (Milenkovic, 2022; Miller, 2022; Sandor, 2022). Although gains have been made over the last century, where 52% of women hold all management-level jobs, they do not keep pace with men in top leadership roles (Arriaga et al., 2020; Milenkovic, 2022; Sandor, 2022). Women continue to fall behind men in the number of females in the top leadership roles in the United States, notwithstanding the fact that women make up 50.8% of the population and hold 57% of all undergraduate degrees and 60% of master's degrees (Milenkovic, 2022). Hence, women make up many of the most well-educated Americans and continue to grow in the share of the talent available for leadership (Arriaga et al., 2022; Rhode, 2016).

Female leaders consistently endure bias in the workplace in comparison to male leaders (Gloor et al., 2017). Although gender roles have evolved significantly over the past 50 years, women aspiring to hold prominent positions still face many challenges. Unfortunately, women continue to be underrepresented in leadership roles and are more prevalent in lower-level political and occupational positions (Arriaga et al., 2020; Rhode, 2016). College presidents, for example, are only 25% women, while Congress is only 19%, corporate boards 19%, law firm equity partners 18%, governors 12%, and Fortune

500 CEOs only 4% women (Rhode, 2016). At the current rate of advancement, it will take more than a century to bring about gender equality in leadership. While women's individual choices play a role in the gender gap, gender inequalities in society also affect women's career decisions. Studies show that women tend to be underrepresented in political office, take longer breaks from work, and reduce their overall workforce participation (Arriaga et al., 2020; Rhode, 2016). Moreover, women receive less encouragement, mentoring, and support for their leadership aspirations. Additionally, the disproportionate responsibilities women face at home limit their options for career advancement. Despite having career ambitions comparable to men's, young women face more obstacles on the path to achieving their goals (Arriaga et al., 2020; Gloor et al., 2017; Rhode, 2016). This gender leadership disparity can be seen greatly in K-12 education (Change, 2019; Pianta, 2020).

Women in K-12 Educational Leadership

For decades, there has been significant research on the leadership of men. However, there has been significantly less written about female administrators and even less about women of color who are educational leaders (Burton, 2022). The field of education has a population of students and staff who have become more racially and ethnically diverse. This diversity calls for an understanding of who the leaders are that create effective school systems (AASA, 2021; Grogan & Nash, 2021). Education is an industry in which the vast majority of its workforce are women, and yet the disproportionate representation of women at the top ranks persists (Glass, 2019; Grogan, 2021). In 2019, Glass reported that although 72% of K-12 educators are women, approximately 26% of the 13,728 K-12 superintendents are women (Glass, 2019). While

the percentage of female superintendents nearly doubled during the 1990s from 6.6% to 13.2%, most superintendents continue to be male (Glass, 2019). Grogan (1996) found that a framework around barriers to power, gender, and leadership roles contributes to understanding the path of aspiring female superintendents.

Historical context is important to understand the significance of Grogan's (1996) framework. The superintendent position first appeared in Buffalo, New York, USA, and Louisville, Kentucky, USA, in 1837 (Tienken, 2021). By 1850, 13 large cities had instituted the position of superintendent of schools (Robinson et al., 2017; Tienken, 2021). Since the creation of those first positions, the superintendency has been well established as having been defined as men's work (Blount, 1998; Grogan, 1999; Robinson et al., 2017). "This stereotype was perpetuated by the perceived skills of the position" (Robinson et al., 2017, p. 2). The role of the superintendent focused on management with the goal of improving overall school system operations by prioritizing time and efficiency (Robinson et al., 2017; Tienken, 2021). Emphasizing the managerial side of the superintendency ensured that men dominated the role almost entirely for decades.

Since the 1980s, there has been a continuous disproportionate representation of men in the role of superintendent. The data indicates a significant gender disparity in the field of education, specifically in leadership positions. Despite comprising the majority of the teaching profession, women remain underrepresented in positions of leadership. Table 3 illustrates the stark difference between the proportion of women in teaching and their representation in higher leadership positions.

Table 3

Distribution of Women in Educational Positions Over Time by Type

Timeframe	Percent of women in teacher positions (NCES, 2017; 2019)	Percent of women in principal positions (NCES, 2017; 2019b)	Percent of women in superintendent positions (Miller, 2022)
1980-1989	70.5	25.0	1.2
1990-1999	71.9	34.5	6.6
2000	74.9	43.8	13.2
2001-2009	75.9	50.3	23.0
2010-2015	76.3	51.6	24.1
2017-2018	76.5	54.2	26.7

Note. Adapted from "Female Assistant Superintendents: Using Personal Power to Overcome Self-Sabotage," by K. Miller, 2022 (Order No. 28967896) [Doctoral dissertation] (https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434. 2021.19223750; "Digest of Education Statistics," by National Center for Education Statistics, 2017, Table 209.10 (https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d17/tables/dt17_209.10.asp); "The Condition of Education 2019," by National Center for Education Statistics, 2019, (https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2019144)

A study by Chiefs for Change (2019) supports the pattern found by Miller (2022). Chiefs for Change found that in 2018, women comprised 77% of teachers, 54% of principals, 64% of cabinet-level leaders, and 31% of district superintendents. The Chiefs for Change study reveals a positive trend in the representation of women in educational leadership positions. Yet, a significant gap persists between the number of women in cabinet-level leadership and those serving as superintendents (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Miller, 2022). The disproportionately small number of female executives in K-12 education is the result of a system that favors men (Cassidy et al., 2021; Chiefs for Change, 2019). As more women actively work their way to chief positions within K-12 education, a wide range of studies has shown that the pipeline to executive-level leadership has an increasing number of barriers impeding the progress of women into the ranks (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Sperandio, 2015). Women will need to be intentional

about addressing these barriers to gain access to elevated levels of K-12 leadership (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019).

Current Status and Need of Women in Executive Leadership

An increasing number of male leaders are acknowledging the importance of gender equity. Organizations that prioritize diversity in leadership have found their employees to have a wider array of skills and perspectives compared to those that do not prioritize diversity (Rhode, 2016). Rhode (2016) stated that diverse groups are more effective at problem-solving and avoiding group thinking. In today's competitive workplace, failing to attract, value, and retain qualified women has significant costs. Women tend to outperform men in most leadership-related skills. Allowing women access to leadership positions promotes the principles of equality and increases the chances of women's interests being represented in the decision-making process. As female politicians prioritize women's issues more often than their male counterparts, it is common for many female CEOs and university presidents to be attentive to women's concerns (Arriaga et al., 2020; Rhode, 2016). It is imperative that women take an assertive role in actively seeking leadership positions, promoting policies for gender equality, and supporting political and organizational leaders who prioritize these policies (Rhode, 2016).

Women in K-12 Education Leadership

Historically, women have dominated the field of public education as participants and as educators, particularly at the elementary school level (NCES, 1993). In the last 20 years, women have been represented in increasing numbers in the enrollment and completion of four-year institutions seeking teaching degrees (Burton, 2022; NCES,

2021). Despite representing the majority of enrollment in college and university leadership-preparation programs, the number of women employed in K-12 administrative roles is not reflective of this trend; this is especially true when examining the employment statistics for women of color (NCES, 2020).

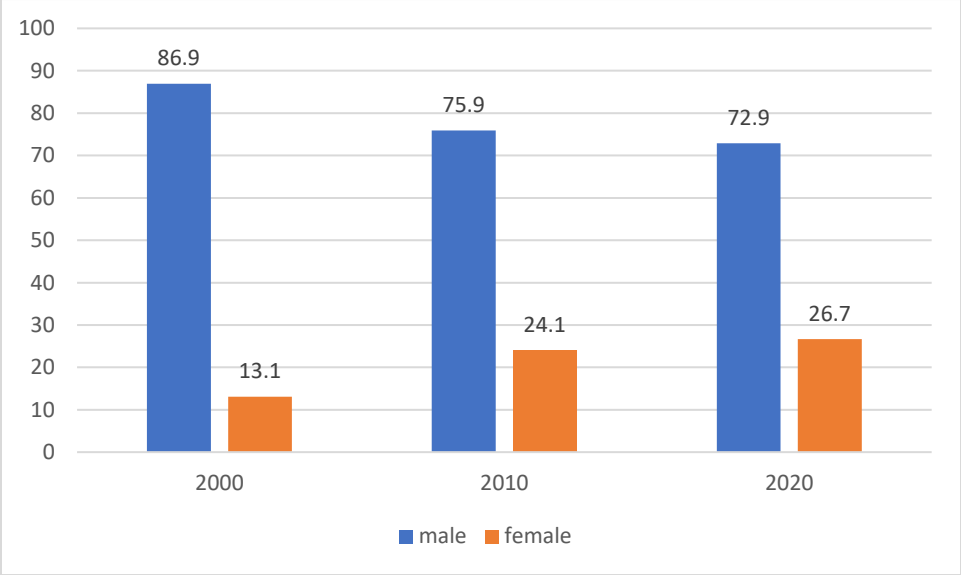
Surveys done by Robinson et al. (2017) suggest that this disproportional representation is even more evident at the superintendent level. To understand this disparity, one must look at how leaders matriculate up to the top leadership role in a school district. Achieving the position of superintendent can be done through various pathways, with many starting as an assistant superintendent or holding a cabinet-level post (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chief for Change, 2019). As per a report by Chiefs for Change (2019), in 2018, most teachers (77%) and principals (54%) were female, as well as cabinet-level leaders (64%), but women only made up 31% of superintendents.

In previous decades, the profiles of female superintendents were much different from those of their male counterparts (Robinson et al., 2017). Studies now show more similarities between men and women (Robinson et al., 2017; Tienken, 2021). For example, relocation seems to be less of a priority for both men and women. Women and men spend comparable amounts of time as teachers before transitioning to superintendents, and the stress levels in this position appear to be similar for both genders (Robinson et al., 2017; Tienken, 2021). In addition, more women reported receiving some level of mentorship, and Robinson et al. (2017) confirmed that there are various paths to the superintendency, offering opportunities for women who have not followed the conventional teacher/principal/central office administrator trajectory. Although Chiefs for Change (2019), Robinson et al., and Tienken (2021) studies show significant signs of

improvement, these improvements are not at a pace that will bring equality in the near future. This is evident in Figure 1, which shows that the percentage of female superintend has doubled in the last 20 years. These figures would have to double again in the next 20 years to demonstrate numerical equality.

Figure 1

Gender Trends of the American Superintendent From 2000 to 2020



Note. Adapted from "The American Superintendent: 2020 Decennial Study," by C. Tienken, 2021.

Changing Student Demographics in Education

When reviewing the need for equity and representation in the superintendent role, the student population must be considered. It is crucial to highlight that the makeup of a school district influences the responsibility of the superintendent (Grogan & Nash, 2021). Tienken's (2021) 2020 Decennial Study showed women are the superintendents of some of the largest districts in the country; they led 33% of districts with enrollments between 50,000 and 99,999 and served 75% of the districts with enrollment greater than 100,000 (Grogan & Nash, 2021). Not only is there variation in the size of the district that female superintendents serve, but the 2020 Superintendent Survey also shows "an increase in the

percentage of racial/ethnic minority students being served" (Grogan & Nash, 2021, p. 21). Almost 52% of the districts serve between 6% and 50% of racial/ethnic minority students compared to 39% in the 2020 Decennial Study (Grogan & Nash, 2021). This change also led to 15.44% of school districts serving 51% or more students who were non-White. Districts with more than 26% racial/ethnic minority students "appear to attract proportionally more women and more superintendents of color than other districts" (Grogan & Nash, 2021, p. 22). These changing demographics call for leaders who can confront issues of race and gender as they lead to improved outcomes for all students.

Historical Context of African Americans in Education

Before the 1954 Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka ruling, the United States public schools were segregated. Black schools were fully staffed with Black administrators and teachers. With the Brown ruling and the desegregation of schools, many African American educators lost their jobs (Webb, 2022). More than 40 years after the Brown ruling, African American educators represented 6.5% of the teaching population (Lyons & Chesley, 2004; Webb, 2022). According to the NCES, during the 2015/2016 school year, African American teachers made up 7% of the teaching population; this representation was a decrease from the 2003/2004 school year (NCES, 2015). After the passage of Brown, the African American teaching population has not seen significant growth in over 50 years.

When the Brown ruling was enforced, African American educators were methodically released or demoted (Lyons & Chesley, 2004; Webb, 2022). During the time of legal discrimination in America, African Americans contended with Jim Crow laws, and "African American educators were not first in line to maintain their jobs at the

newly integrated schools, especially if replacing tenured [W]hite educators" (Webb, 2022, p. 32). Following the Brown v. Board of Education decision, there was a considerable drop in the representation of Black teachers and administrators. Specifically, in 17 Southern and Border states, 38,000 out of the original 82,000 Black educators had lost their jobs by 1964 (Lyons & Chesley, 2004).

Historical Context of African American Females in Executive Leadership

Given the decline of African American educators, it is critical to understand the historical context of African Americans, particularly women, who made it to the executive level in education, the superintendency. Before 1956, African American women in the position of superintendent was an obscure idea (J. A. Alston, 2000). However, Delma Dolphin Ashley was an exception. She was an African American woman who led the Boley, Oklahoma, school district from 1944 until 1956 (J. A. Alston, 2000). By 1978, the number of African American female superintendents had increased to five. In 1984, there were 29 African American female superintendents, and the number increased to 168 by 2017 (J. A. Alston, 2000; Horford et al., 2021).

African American Women in K-12 Education Leadership

Research on the employment rates of African American women superintendents in the United States did not begin until the 1984–1985 academic year (Webb, 2022). Revere conducted an important issue study in 1986 on the experiences of African American women superintendents in the United States. According to Revere (1986), "During the 1984-1985 school year, there were 29 Black female superintendents employed, representing 0.18% of the over 16,000 public school districts in the United States" (p. 512). The states of New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio,

Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, the District of Columbia, and California were all represented by these 29 African American women superintendents (Revere, 1986; Webb, 2022). This study found that while these 29 African American women superintendents represented such a small number, it was still a significant increase from 1970.

Even with the limited representation of African American women superintendents, Allen Thomas (2021) asserted that African American women have been an important influence in their journey from schoolteacher to superintendent. In the past, there were fewer African American women working in education, with those who did being concentrated mainly in southern states due to the significant population of African American students (Allen Thomas, 2021). Because education provided them with opportunities, African American men and women were tenacious in their pursuit of education. During the post-slavery era, African American women founded schools and worked as teachers and administrators (Allen Thomas, 2021; Webb, 2023).

With the growing diversity of the student population in the United States, recent studies propose that the different perspectives of women, White and of color, in leadership may assist in bringing about new aspects of leadership and the necessary knowledge, understanding, and skills needed for supporting diverse school populations (Blount, 1998; Gardiner et al., 1999; Grogan 1996).

Several studies suggest that academic leaders and community representation significantly impact students and their educational goals (Allen Thomas, 2021; Thompson, 2023; Webb, 2023). The lack of representation can present a problem with understanding minority students, their needs, and their culture, which may impact student

achievement (Thompson, 2023). Robinson et al. (2017) report that 5.2% of superintendents are individuals of color, while 2.2% of the superintendents are women of color (see Table 4). With research reinforcing that representation is essential for students, the assumption confirms that leaders of color are vital.

Table 4

Superintendents by Race and Gender

-	Superintendent of color	White superintendents	Total by gender
Female	2.2%	24.6%	26.8%
Male	3.0%	70.2%	73.2%
Total by race	5.2%	94.8%	100%

Note. Adapted from "Necessary but not Sufficient: The Continuing Inequality Between Men and Women in Educational Leadership," by K. Robinson et al., 2017, *Frontiers in Education, 2* (https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00012)

When females, particularly Black females, are in the position of superintendent, "it creates more opportunities for females of color to be employed in upper-level positions" (J. Alston, 1999, p. 33). Since the principalship can be a gateway to central office positions, more African American females need to be hired to increase the number employed in the district office. Thompson (2023) states that when African Americans are hired in district leadership roles, there is a likelihood that more African American females will be hired. These factors contribute to how external barriers can cause internal conflict and insecurities in women's belief in their capacity to be effective leaders (L. Davis, 2022).

Positively impacting a system that was not designed for the population it currently serves will require a transformational leader to meet the needs of the diverse population. Many studies have found that women are significantly more likely to possess transformational leadership skills that lead to increased productivity of staff and students,

ultimately improving student outcomes (Connell et al., 2015; Webb, 2022). Those transformational characteristics include: (a) collaboration; (b) relationship development; and (c) management of fairness, trustworthiness, and transparency, making women excellent candidates for the superintendency role (Connell et al., 2015; Webb, 2022).

Barriers Preventing Women from Gaining Advancement

Structural and personal barriers have impeded women's access to the general workforce, specifically leadership. These barriers have been external and internal. External barriers have included: (a) discrimination, (b) gender bias, (c) lack of mentors, and (d) gender stereotyping (Grogan, 1996; Ryder & Briles, 2003). Internal barriers such as lack of self-confidence and conflict with family commitment have historically served to contribute to impeding women from working in growing numbers across all industries as well as serving in leadership roles (Arriaga et al., 2020; L. Davis, 2022; Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022).

The low proportion of women in leadership positions is largely due to external impediments, but internal barriers, such as one's belief system, can also be quite important. Beliefs establish a foundation for behavior. According to L. Davis (2022), women frequently become mired in self-doubt, which develops into habits that are challenging to break since they are unaware of the effects these ideas have on their lives. Gaining an understanding of this issue can help women in the field of education develop their leadership skills (L. Davis, 2022). Miles Nash and Grogan (2022) noted that societal and structural gender bias is a major cause of the self-destructive behaviors that women engage in. In addition, when race is taken into account, African American women who are underrepresented frequently experience invisibility and insecurity, which leads them

to isolate themselves and create barriers for themselves (L. Davis, 2022; Miles Nash & Grogan, 2022).

External Barriers

Over time, women have encountered considerable external impediments that have prevented them from achieving leadership roles (Arriaga et al. 2020; Blount 1998; Grogan 1996; Miller 2022). The gender gap is a result of several different obstacles, including discrimination, a lack of mentors, and gender stereotypes are major external hurdles (Grogan, 1996). Despite significant advancements, gender-based discrimination still exists. The roles that men and women play in society are established by sociocultural variables (Nix, 2022). The level of effort required for women to be treated equally to men can be perceived as discrimination (Miller, 2022). The barriers are a result of a shortage of mentors and the requirement for the creation of support networks or other female sponsors (Arriaga et al., 2020; Grogan, 1996). In addition, women face issues with work-family structures, implicit bias, and in-group preference due to gender inequity (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Rhode, 2016). Women still face obstacles in their pursuit of high-level careers, such as the glass ceiling and their choice of professional path (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Rhode, 2016). "Barriers such as career advancement and career pathways, mentoring, leadership styles, and selection processes are impacted by gender" (Cassidy et al., 2021, p. 128).

Discrimination

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 eventually incorporated the policy into its expectations of employers. In 1972, Title IX of the Civil Rights Act was implemented to prohibit discrimination based on sex in any educational program or activity receiving

federal funds. This legislation created many inroads for women and people of color in educational fields (Burton, 2022). "The female perspective of social reality is that women have not been given equal opportunities for advancement in education and other professions in comparison to their male peers" (Cassidy et al., 2021, p. 129).

Although discrimination based on gender is a violation of the law, gender bias continues to present several obstacles, particularly for women of color, who often face questioning of their competence and credentials (Rhode, 2016). Compared to their White male colleagues, women's mistakes are less tolerated and more easily remembered (Rhode, 2016). In addition, inadequate mentoring and in-group favoritism further exacerbate this issue (Rhode, 2016).

Rodriguez (2019) stated that the position of superintendent has been the slowest of all K-12 administrative positions to integrate women, especially women of color. Studies have shown that leadership based on women's intuitive manner of leadership can facilitate equity and more inclusive school environments (Rodriguez, 2019). These studies have shed light on White female leadership, but they leave out the concerns of women of color. Women of color are aware that they will face more obstacles than their counterparts in the White gender community. The "politics of fit and misguided perceptions related to race and ethnicity" (Rodriguez, 2019, p. 54) is the source of these additional obstacles.

Lack of Mentors

Mentoring is a process of affording practice opportunities, role-modeling, and problem-solving (Nix, 2002). The literature on mentoring highlights the argument that for women, mentoring is infrequent and that when they do have an opportunity to receive

mentoring, for women too often, their experience is not empowering but rather debilitating (Gardiner et al., 1999). In the area of educational leadership in the public school system, mentoring has customarily been a part of the culture of educational administration. However, women have faced conflicts concerning mentoring and leadership. The unspoken conventions that people seeking administrative roles in public school systems frequently do not know provide a hurdle for women, and mentoring can be crucial in forming women's educational leadership (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Gardiner et al., 1999).

Mentoring is a crucial tool for women to navigate the conflicts inherent in traditional educational leadership roles and empower themselves. As female leaders, women often hold positions of power while simultaneously facing oppression in their professional lives. To effectively mentor women, it is imperative to gain a deep understanding of their daily experiences, goals, dreams, and aspirations. By supporting women in resisting dominant forces and seeking change, mentors can help them develop innovative approaches to leadership that challenge the status quo. It is noteworthy that conflicts with traditional educational leadership can actually foster creativity and inspiration, encouraging women to explore new directions and strategies for leadership (Gardiner et al., 1999).

When asked about their mentor-mentee relationships, female superintendents discussed the inspiring voices of their mentors. After thorough analysis, it is evident that a number of women were deprived of authentic mentorship and instead had a passive association with their mentor (Robinson et al., 2017).

Gender Bias and Stereotyping

Motherhood is frequently penalized by gender bias and stereotypes in ways that fatherhood is not. Women are frequently denied opportunities and tasks that could showcase their strengths, which tends to perpetuate this attitude (Rhode, 2016). In addition, women are hampered by competing notions of femininity and leadership. It can be difficult to strike the correct balance between assertiveness and passivity, in part because behavior that is considered assertive in men may be viewed as abrasive in women. Gender preconceptions regarding "women not being as tough as males" or "women not being as able to understand economic matters or manage money" has a negative impact. Even though women may actively work to dispel these misconceptions, they believe that public perceptions of them may contribute to increasing their worries about taking on high-level leadership positions. A woman leader who is introspective, critical of herself, and holds herself to an extremely high standard can doubt her ability to perform all the duties associated with the role (Gardiner et al., 1999).

Education is populated primarily by women; however, gender bias is prevalent and consistently affects women negatively. Allen Thomas (2021) noted that the trials that women experience in the superintendency are dissimilar from men. Women in the role of superintendent experienced higher examination by the public stakeholders and encountered hindrances when women were classified by gender first and administrator second (Allen Thomas, 2021). Women superintendents explained the noteworthy impact gender bias had on their emotional anguish and how that bias negatively impacted their personal lives (Allen Thomas, 2021; G. Davis, 2022).

G. Davis (2022) asserts that women are often unfairly regarded as being emotionally weaker and less intellectually capable than men, which serves as a justification for their underrepresentation in leadership positions. This has resulted in a patriarchal culture within the K-12 public school system that, unfortunately, hinders the career advancement of African American women (G. Davis, 2022).

Glass Ceiling and Glass Cliff

The Glass Ceiling Act of 1991 was adopted by the federal government to prevent gender discrimination in the workplace. With the legislation came recommendations for improving the representation of women and people of color (Burton, 2022). The idea of the glass ceiling is an invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational biases (Glass, 2019; Gloor et al., 2020; Grogan, 1996). The term describes the external barriers that women and people of color face as they work to move up in the workplace (Lockert, 2022). Ironically, the notion that glass makes potential opportunities visible while continuing to uphold invisible growth-stunting hurdles to advancement creates a psychological barrier. Despite the barriers of the glass ceiling, women have long fought to remove barriers that have impeded their road to executive leadership roles in the professional arena (Gloor, 2018). In addition, gatekeeping, which impedes women's access to higher positions, was built on the supposition that barriers are influenced by prevalent social changes (Cassidy et al., 2021).

The glass ceiling contributes to the oppressive discrimination experienced by African American females during their quest for leadership positions (L. Davis, 2022). The glass ceiling has a double impact when the concept of intersectional discrimination is considered (Atley McCurry, 2022; G. Davis, 2022). There are several factors of

marginalization attributed to the intersecting dual identities of female African Americans. As a result, systemic invisible barriers are in place, making breakthroughs of the glass ceiling and advancement seemingly impossible (L. Davis, 2022).

Atley McCurry (2022) states that differences still arise in the way women of color are regarded in accessing positions of leadership. Despite these challenges, African American women still seek to shatter the glass ceiling and break the concrete wall. Once glass ceilings are broken, and women and women of color advance to executive leadership roles, they are often greeted with the phenomenon of the glass cliff (L. Davis, 2022). The term glass cliff describes the situation when organizations place leaders in situations that can inherently lead to failure. Often, female leaders are placed in organizations that are in detrimental crisis and on a downward slope. This extension of the glass ceiling presents an ideal situation that places women, and in this case, specifically African American women, in unstable environments to encourage failure (L. Davis, 2022).

Career Pathways

Research on barriers strongly indicates that men and women tend to take different pathways to the superintendency (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019). The career pathways are significantly different between men and women in the education field. Men tend to have the advantage of being promoted more quickly into administration positions (Arrieaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019). Historically, men have taken the pathway of secondary teacher, secondary assistant principal, secondary principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent (Robinson et al., 2017; Sperandio, 2015). Whereas women have often started as elementary or middle school

teachers and held leadership at that level before moving to district-level directors in such areas as curriculum leadership before they even have an opportunity to move into executive-level positions (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Miller, 2022; Sperandio, 2015). Before assuming superintendent roles, women frequently transition from teaching to positions such as central office directors and elementary school principals (see Tables 5 and 6). Women still have difficulty getting high school principalships, which are considered stepping stones to the top, despite their strong representation in elementary school leadership. While women use district-level positions to gain leadership experience, they often remain there for many years (Robinson et al., 2017; Sperandio, 2015). Additionally, women are not supported with career planning and, hence, not as prepared to enter executive administrative positions (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Cassidy et al., 2021). Thus, intentional planning and practical guidance are key factors for women who believe they are called to lead at the executive level (Sperandio, 2015).

Table 5

Career Paths of Superintendents by Gender

Role	Percent of female superintendents	Percent of male superintendents
Assistant principal	44.8	56.1
Assistant superintendent	53.9	40.6
District coordinator	52.6	29.4
Master teacher	27.8	20.6
Military	0.4	6.5
Non-educational experience	10.4	7.6
Paraprofessional	8.3	5.2
Principal	70.4	86.6
Teacher	95.2	97.3

Note. Data is sorted by Role in ascending order. Adapted from "Necessary but not Sufficient: The Continuing Inequality Between Men and Women in Educational Leadership," by K. Robinson, C. Shakeshaft, M. Grogan, and W. Sherman Newcomb, 2017. *Frontiers in Education, 2* (https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00012)

Table 6

Career Paths of Women Superintendents by Race

Role	Percent female superintendents of color	Percent of White female superintendents
Assistant principal	55.6	43.9
Assistant superintendent	44.4	54.6
District coordinator	55.6	52.2
Master teacher	33.3	27.2
Military	5.6	0.0
Non-educational experience	16.7	10.2
Paraprofessional	22.2	7.3
Principal	66.7	71.2
Teacher	88.9	96.6

Note. Data is sorted by Role in ascending order. Adapted from "Necessary but not Sufficient: The Continuing Inequality Between Men and Women in Educational Leadership," by K. Robinson, C. Shakeshaft, M. Grogan, & W. Sherman Newcomb, 2017. *Frontiers in Education, 2* (https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2017.00012)

Internal Barriers

A woman's own psychological sense of power affords the individual a wide range of benefits (Fontaine & Vorauer, 2019). Yet, internal barriers also contribute to the challenges women face in moving into executive leadership. Internal barriers, such as the conflict between work and home life balance, as well as self-sabotaging behaviors, often manifest in a variety of ways and can be both intentional and unintentional (Ryder & Briles, 2003; Sandor, 2022).

Home and Work-Life Conflict

"One of the many joys of life is having a family and experiencing the love and prosperity that comes with it" (Griffin, 2021, p. 41). Traditionally, women have been ascribed to stay-at-home-mom gender roles; however, this changed as more women chose to pursue their dreams of reaching their personal goals and earning an income (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019; Griffin, 2021). Despite the substantial numbers of

women graduating from college and finding fulfillment in the workforce, many women are still the primary caregivers for their children (Chiefs for Change, 2019). Women continue to work to find the balance between meeting the needs of their family and their work responsibilities. Slaughter (2012) discusses the societal implication that either parenting and/or the commitment to a woman's profession would somehow be substandard. Women continue to wonder if they can take on all their family and work responsibilities and still thrive personally and professionally (Slaughter, 2012). Additionally, achieving a sustainable equilibrium between work and family life with the support of a partner is important. Women who attain leadership positions should also reflect on their purpose and consider ways to create opportunities for other women (Rhode, 2016).

One obstacle for women in pursuing a superintendent position is the challenge of balancing work and home responsibilities. The role typically demands long work hours, which can make it difficult to spend quality time with their families and children (Griffin, 2020). Many women face a conflict between their career aspirations and their desire to manage their households.

Power vs. Self-Sabotaging Behavior

Women play a significant role in navigating the path to executive leadership. However, often, women exhibit behaviors that impede and sabotage their progress. Arriaga et al. (2020) state that women must "neutralize the self-sabotaging patterns" (p. 7) that have blocked them from reaching their full potential. When women find the power in who they are, they will move beyond those behaviors and progress toward their career

goals (Lerner, 2012). This power then allows women to respond out of "strength rather than react out of fear and intimidation" (Lerner, 2012, p. xv).

The body of knowledge about recognizing and overcoming external impediments is always expanding. The notion that "women also impose internal challenges on themselves that make it difficult to advance their careers" (Sandor, 2022, p. 39) has been investigated by a number of scholars. When women adopt specific techniques to regain control over their jobs, these self-destructive tendencies can be overcome. By lessening the detrimental effects of self-sabotaging behaviors on their professions and ultimately eliminating them, increasing personal power enables women to take charge of their careers (Crews, 2020; Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Ryder & Briles, 2003; Sandor, 2022).

Based on a Fontaine and Vorauer study (2019), men reported a greater sense of power than women when in lower power positions. However, there was no significant difference between genders in terms of power perception when holding higher power positions. Additionally, women exhibited more variability in lower power roles than men, which contradicts the ceiling account (Fontaine & Vorauer, 2019). The results of the study indicate that both men and women are willing to utilize the sources of power available to them despite differences in available resources. Furthermore, the study suggests that gender plays a role in how individuals experience feelings of power across various positions of power. These findings align with previous research that suggests anxiety levels can also impact reactions to situational power (Fontaine & Vorauer, 2019).

Women often underestimate their abilities in comparison to men, particularly when it comes to promotions and testing. They predict that they will perform worse on tests and may not feel as prepared for upward mobility in their careers (Griffin, 2021). As a result,

women often "hold themselves back from imagining or pursuing high-level careers for longer" (Griffin, 2021, p. 42). Additionally, the lack of confidence results in women taking a longer pathway to elevate in their careers compared to men. Research showed factors contributing to the confidence gap include: (a) glass ceilings, (b) glass cliffs, (c) discrimination, (d) stereotypical attitudes, and (e) racism (Arriaga et al., 2020; Cassidy et al., 2021; Griffin, 2021). Research shows that many women are hesitant to pursue leadership roles in education because they believe that these positions are better suited for men. Unfortunately, this mindset often leads to self-doubt and negative thoughts, especially among high-achieving women who attribute their success to luck or charm instead of their own skills, knowledge, expertise, and abilities. It is worth noting that this phenomenon is more common among women than men (Griffin, 2021).

Theoretical Foundations

Theoretical foundations bring context to the study. As we better understand the impact of barriers in the path of women who aspire to high-level leadership roles, foundational theories such as feminist post-structural theory, social role theory, and role congruency theory will provide the contextual foundation.

Feminist Post-Structural Theory

The inception of the feminist movement started during the late 19th and early 20th centuries at the Seneca Falls Declaration, where more than three hundred American men and women gathered around the subject of women's equality (L. Davis, 2022; Rampton, 2015). The Seneca Falls Declaration was one of the most crucial moments in history that ignited the suffrage movement focused on women's right to vote. In fact, according to the 15th Amendment of 1868, only men were distinct as voters and U.S. citizens. The

assertion that feminism speaks for all women is not entirely accurate. Rather, the core belief of feminism is to advocate for equal opportunities for women as compared to men (G. Davis, 2022). Collins (1996) suggested that a feminist ideology aims to address the challenges faced by women in the areas of education, employment, political rights, and poverty by promoting collective social action for women's political rights and economic development. The global agenda of feminism includes issues related to women's human rights, legal aspects of marriage and divorce, sexual assault, as well as health and reproductive rights. These are matters that men often have authority over despite being the primary concerns of women. Feminism is a political movement that aims to confront sexism and challenge the societal power dynamics that allow men to control social relationships (Collins, 1996; Hill Collins, 2000).

Feminist post-structural theory combines concepts from poststructuralism, such as language and discourse, subject and subjectivity, common sense, and power, with feminist theory (Grogan, 2008). The combination is helpful in deconstructing women's experiences in a largely male discourse (Grogan, 2008). A feminist post-structural framework provided a theoretical basis for the analysis of barriers to women in the workforce. These barriers included: (a) lacking role models, (b) being place-bound, (c) wanting the support of other women, (d) missing the sponsorship of influential mentors, and (e) feeling constrained by personal responsibilities (Arriaga et al., 2020; Grogan, 1996). These factors were found to contribute to women not moving into the superintendency in K-12 systems (Grogan, 1996). Grogan (1996) looks at the feminist post-structural theory as it relates to issues of power, gender, and leadership and how it provides a context for understanding the present context of the superintendency. Since

the 1960s, there have been increasing studies on feminist research. The work became increasingly sophisticated throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Young & Skrla, 2003). Over the last twenty years, feminist epistemology and advocacy have had a significant impact on shaping developments in the field (Grogan, 1996; Young & Skrla, 2003).

Black Feminist Theory

Black feminism theory is the belief that women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities— intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual, [and] economic (Allen Thomas, 2021; Collins, 1996; G. Davis, 2022). The term was first coined by Hill Collins (1989, 1998, 2000) and explains that Black feminism concentrates on the specific experiences and narratives of Black women, thus decentering White male dominance. It is imperative to acknowledge that the narratives of Black women are highly credible as they are influenced by their firsthand experiences and those of their peers who share their identities. This exceptional perspective significantly enhances the value of their viewpoints (L. Davis, 2022). Black feminist theory goes beyond simple observation, creation, or dismantling of social realities. It is a powerful approach to existence that illuminates the obstacles and battles that women of color face. Black feminist scholars stress the fact that even accomplished Black female leaders must navigate through the stereotypes imposed on them by others, despite their background, behavior, or achievements. American Black feminist Pearl Cleage reminds women of color that "we have to see clearly that we are a unique group, set undeniably apart because of race and sex with a unique set of challenges" (as cited in Hill Collins, 2000, p. 22).

Although racial segregation in the United States has evolved over time, African American women still face familiar challenges in both their professional and personal lives due to their gender and skin color (Hill Collins, 2000, p. 24). Black feminist thought provides a lens to investigate the lived experience of American women of color and the intersectional ways oppression impacts their experiences and limits their aspirations for leadership attainment (Burton, 2022; G. Davis, 2022; L. Davis, 2022; Hill Collins, 2000).

Social Role Theory

Social role theory was developed by Eagly and Wood (1999). According to the social role theory, gender differences arise from individuals adapting to societal expectations based on stereotypes. This theory suggests that cultural norms perpetuate the idea of gender differences between men and women. Moreover, it posits that men, being biologically bigger and stronger, tend to choose jobs with higher status (Eagly & Wood, 1999; Pianta, 2020). As a result, they became more dominant, while women were required to be accepted by being subordinate. Gender stereotypes stem from the societal distribution of work based on gender roles, as established by gender role theory (Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020). Women's social roles in relation to men have dominated societal norms for centuries. These roles and stereotypes suggest that women are more communal, selfless, and concerned with others (Eagly & Steffen, 1984), whereas men are more agentic and self-assertive (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). This is the foundation for social role theory. Developed by Eagly and Wood (1999), this theory proposes that the dissimilarities in gender between males and females result from their response to the societal assumptions and stereotypes enforced upon them. These roles are indoctrinated in youth at an early age (Arriaga et al., 2020; Eagly & Wood, 1999). Miller (2022) states

that women often get pigeonholed into caretaking jobs, such as maids, childcare workers, hostesses, housekeepers, and waitresses, all in alignment with gender role theory. Additionally, recent research conducted by Chiefs for Change (2019) revealed that female leaders are only present in 5% of Fortune 500 companies. Moreover, women hold only 25% of mayoral and state legislative positions, while a mere 18% of governors are women. These statistics clearly indicate that gender role theory can function as a major obstacle for women aspiring to achieve high-level leadership roles (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Miller, 2022).

Women in the workforce are impacted by the social roles assigned in their formative years. Nursery rhymes and fairy tales depict boys as "the hero, protector, and leader" (Arriaga et al., 2020, p. 55.). Conversely, girls are depicted as "the caretaker, the nurturer, the follower" (Arriaga et al., 2020, p. 55). Arriaga et al. (2020) state that as children become men and women, these seemingly innocent experiences have a direct impact on the confidence and choices of women. This hidden agenda can lead to a sense of inferiority as girls find their way into adulthood (Arriaga et al., 2020). The social role theory research suggests that gender stereotypes, the beliefs that women differ from men, will not change until societal roles are divided equally (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). This would mean childcare and domestic obligations are shared equally by women and men and that this belief is taught early in the life of children (Arriaga et al., 2020; Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Until then, the impact of social roles and the impact on leadership will continue to favor men (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019).

Role Congruity Theory

Role congruity theory is rooted in social role theory, specifically in the context of gender roles. This theory compares the behavioral expectations of each gender and the more commonly exhibited behaviors that can lead to prejudice (Eagly et al., 2000). The focus of role congruity theory is to examine the prejudice that arises from the perceived relationship between the attributes of social group members and the constraints of the social roles they hold or aspire to hold (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p. 574). Many individuals perceive prejudice towards female leaders due to the alleged incongruity between the attributes of women and the requirements of leadership roles (L. Davis, 2022; Eagly & Karau, 2002). Eagly and Karau (2002) conducted a study on the biases associated with role congruity. Their findings clearly show that female communal attributes such as nurturing, kindness, affection, and sensitivity are unfairly associated with women, while male agentic traits like assertiveness, ambition, independence, and dominance are deemed as leadership qualities. This distorted perception of gender traits has contributed significantly to discrimination and prejudices against women seeking leadership roles. It is crucial to recognize the impact of gender and leadership styles to address this ongoing debate (Arriaga et al., 2020; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Eagly et al., 2000).

Historically, men and women leaders have been perceived to fall into societal pre-defined roles. There is an expected style difference in leadership based on gender differences (Arriaga et al., 2020). There is role congruency when men and women conform to those roles. Yet, women have proven that effective leadership does not require that they be consigned to the behavior of the social role perpetuated by gender prejudice and inequality. Men tend to be seen as "transactional managers" (Arriaga et al.,

2020, p. 67). Whereas women tend to be seen as "collaborate/communal" (Arriaga et al., 2020, p. 67) leaders. However, in the 21st century, both skills are highly desirable in men and women.

Theoretical Framework

Nine Domains of Self-Sabotaging Behavior

The feminist post-structural, Black feminist, social role, and role congruity theories all provide a solid foundation for the framework developed from the work of Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). The theoretical framework Self-Sabotaging Behaviors and the Nine Domains of Women's Personal Power is adapted from Lerner's *In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self* and Ryder and Briles's *The SexX Factor: Breaking the Unwritten Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives*. Table 7 identifies the nine domains of the Women's Personal Power Framework, combining the internal harmful behaviors of women and the empowering approaches to overcome their damaging effects on a woman's career (Crews, 2020; Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). When women become aware of the obstacles that they impose on themselves, they can use deliberate tactics to conquer them and make progress in their professional lives. (Crews, 2020; Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022).

It is important to acknowledge that women have more control over their self-imposed limitations than those imposed by external factors. With the right knowledge and education, women can confidently reclaim their personal power and feel empowered to achieve their goals. "By increasing women's power, self-sabotaging behaviors can be eliminated" (Pianta, 2020, p. 36). Women's Personal Power conceptual framework includes:

- Recognizing women's unique destiny, which is living to one's potential;
- Constructive preparation, which is embracing, understanding, and accepting fear;
- Owning all of oneself, which is owning and appreciating one's accomplishments and limitations;
- Honest self-expression, which is accepting one's strengths and weaknesses;
- Acting with confidence, which is approaching obstacles with confidence;
- Having the courage to step forward;
- Cultivating self-intimacy, which is getting to know oneself more deeply;
- Building a power web, which is building a network of personal and professional advisors for support;
- Inspiring other women, which is the ability to empower other females;
- Embracing one's sexuality, which is an awareness of gender roles and sex role stereotypes (Lerner, 2012; Ryder & Briles, 2003).

Table 7

The Nine Domains of Personal Power and Related Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

Self-sabotaging behaviors	Personal power to overcome
Disempowering other women	Empowering other women
Dishonesty	Expressing yourself genuinely
Fear and worry	Accepting discomfort
Holding back	Acting with confidence
Infusing sex/gender role confusion in the workplace	Embracing one's sexuality
Isolation	Building a power web
Lack of self-reflection	Cultivating self-intimacy
Misunderstanding oneself	Owning all of yourself
Thinking too small	Recognizing your unique destiny

Note. Adapted from "In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self," by H. Lerner, 2012; "The SexX Factor: Breaking the Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives," by M. Ryder and J. Briles, 2003.

Four Dominant Behavior from Thematic Research

Lerner (2012) defines power as the ability to act from a "position of strength" (p. xv) as opposed to fear or intimidation. The framework is grounded in the idea that women must "neutralize the self-sabotaging patterns" (Lerner, 2012, p. 7) to move beyond the barriers and reach career fulfillment. Ryder and Briles (2003) and Lerner (2012) state that women's personal power is key in overcoming the barriers and the behaviors women exhibit to move beyond self-sabotaging behavior and into top leadership roles. Based on the studies done in alignment with this framework, there are four top identified sabotaging behaviors: (a) Thinking too Small, (b) Fear and Worry, (c) Holding Back, and (d) Not Taking Time for Reflection (Crews, 2020; L. Davis, 2020; Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020; Ryder & Biles, 2003; Sandor, 2022). Overcoming these behaviors will be critical in improving the representation of women in the highest ranks of leadership. The research suggests that women will not only need to reflect and identify these four behaviors but then use specific strategies, or power tactics, to overcome these behaviors.

Thinking Too Small

Thinking Too Small is: (a) underestimating one's value, (b) being unwilling to step out of one's comfort zone, and (c) not being willing to take on new challenges (Lerner, 2012; Miller, 2022; Ryder & Briles, 2003; Sandor, 2022). The Thinking Too Small domain manifests in women in several ways, including blaming others for their own problems, undervaluing their worth, being too scared to try new things, staying too comfortable in their routines, and striving for impossible perfection in every aspect of life (Hauser, 2018; Miller, 2022; Ryder & Briles, 2003). Research by Hauser (2018) suggests

that women tend to underestimate their worth and are hesitant to assert themselves with male colleagues out of concern for appearing aggressive. Moreover, Mohr's (2014) findings indicate that women are more likely to seek jobs where they fulfill all the requirements, while men are comfortable applying even if they only meet 60% of the qualifications. According to Mohr (2014), women's self-sabotaging behaviors, such as undervaluing themselves, being afraid to leave their comfort zone, and striving for perfection, directly affect their chances of professional advancement. Other researchers have also reached the same conclusion based on personal accounts of their own journeys to leadership positions (Arriaga et al., 2020; Crews, 2020; Montgomery, 2019; Pianta, 2020; Ryder, 2020).

Success in one's job is directly correlated with underestimating one's talents and moving beyond one's comfort zone. Women who downplay their achievements are less likely to advance because they are less likely to pursue promotions for which they do not feel fully qualified. Women are less likely than males to apply for promotions when they lack confidence and minimize their abilities (Mohr, 2014; Sandor, 2022). Studies show that women are less assertive than men when applying for new jobs. They do not intentionally proclaim their credentials and accomplishments, which then makes them appear timid and unsure of themselves to hiring committees (Sandor, 2022). Mohr (2014) shares that women often adhere closely to application guidelines and qualifications due to a learned behavior of following rules that are encouraged and praised from an early age.

When thinking too small, women undervalue themselves and question their capabilities, influenced by societal norms that have been deeply ingrained in them over time. This often leads them to believe that they are less competent than their peers and

raises doubts about their academic and professional accomplishments (Arriaga et al., 2020; Sandor, 2022). It has been observed that some women struggle with the imposter syndrome. This phenomenon entails feeling undeserving of recognition, downplaying one's achievements, and avoiding self-promotion. Conversely, men tend to be more assertive in promoting themselves, taking credit for their work, and overestimating their abilities (Arriaga et al., 2020; Eagly, 1984; Eagly et al., 2000; Sandor, 2022). Women struggle to admit they achieved promotion based on their own merits. Women frequently undermine their own achievements by attributing them to chance or circumstance rather than acknowledging their own hard work and determination. They attribute success to being "lucky or in the right spot at the right time" (Sandor, 2022, p. 42).

Recognizing Women's Unique Destiny

Recognizing one's unique destiny and preparing for upward mobility are considered power tactics that women may employ in their goal of executive leadership (Lerner, 2012; Ryder & Briles, 2003). To unlock their full potential and overcome the limiting belief of thinking too small, women must tap into their diverse range of skills and embrace their individuality with courage and innovation (Lerner, 2012). Despite facing numerous challenges and engaging in self-destructive behaviors, women have the power to take control of their lives and leave excuses from the past behind (Lerner, 2012). By confronting discomfort and remaining open to new opportunities, women can discover their unique destiny and achieve greatness (Brown, 2018; Lerner, 2012). According to Brown (2018), courage and vulnerability go hand in hand - one cannot be truly courageous without being willing to be vulnerable.

Pianta (2020) states that recognizing one's unique destiny means having the capacity to have a significant impact by living up to one's potential. "Reclaiming one's power requires courage" (Pianta, 2020, p. 44). Girls are conditioned to mask their true selves and power (Arriaga et al., 2020; Pianta, 2020). Women must first acknowledge, value, and accept their power before they can reclaim it. Being courageous is putting comfort aside and being open to new experiences, even when one is uncomfortable doing so (Brown, 2018; Pianta, 2020). It is crucial for women to acknowledge that utilizing their talents can make them highly effective in the world (Arriaga et al., 2020; Brown, 2018; Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Ryder & Briles, 2002). Lerner (2012) stated that for women to discover their unique selves, they need to engage in self-inquiry. Engaging in self-inquiry demands self-awareness and utilizing one's inner power to interact with others, unleash creativity, and bravely embrace new experiences by shattering old patterns (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009; Brown, 2018; Pianta, 2020). Thus, it is vital for women to be mindful of their inner voice and make a deliberate effort to confront their customary ways of thinking.

Table 8 shows the necessary shifts that women who think too small need to implement in recognizing their unique density and preparing themselves for upward mobility.

Table 8

Thinking Too Small and Necessary Shifts for Recognizing Women's Unique Destiny

Thinking too small characteristics	Necessary shifts for recognizing women's unique destiny
Blaming others for why things did not go well	Looking internally for how to make things go well
Minimize personal value	Maximizing personal value
Not being open to new experiences	Embracing new experiences
Not having the courage to step out of comfort zone	Taking a productive risk and stepping out of comfort zone
Perfection as the life standard	Recognizing the toxicity of the perfection standard and embracing internal imperfection

Note. Data is sorted by Thinking too small characteristics in ascending order. Adapted from "In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self," by H. Lerner, 2012; "Female Assistant Superintendents: Using Personal Power to Overcome Self-Sabotage," by K. Miller, 2022, [Doctoral dissertation], ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434. 2021.1922375); "The SexX Factor: Breaking the Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives," by M. Ryder and J. Briles, 2003.

Fear and Worry

The Fear and Worry domain includes elements such as:

- Becoming anxious
- About career changes
- Feeling out of control in unfamiliar situations
- Resisting change
- Fearing looking stupid
- Feeling like an imposter on the job
- Overthinking and overanalyzing mistakes
- Fearing being rejected (Ryder & Briles, 2003)

Specifically, the "imposter syndrome" is defined as the feeling that, regardless of your accomplishments, you are still about to be unmasked as a fraud (Bahn, 2014; Miller,

2022). Many other symptoms of the fear and worry group, such as anxiety, the fear of looking foolish, worry about mistakes, and the fear of rejection, are probably caused by this syndrome. In their studies of women achieving leadership positions in a number of areas, other researchers have discovered comparable accounts of fear and worry (Crews, 2020; Miller, 2022; 2019; Pianta, 2020).

In her book, *The Light We Carry*, former First Lady Michelle Obama (2022) discussed the power that women have to decode fear and feel more "comfortably afraid" (Obama, 2022, p. 63). Obama asserted that worry and fear manifest due to the possibility of embarrassment, rejection, or the idea that things will go wrong. However, she assures the reader that "jeopardy is woven into the experience of being human" (Obama, 2022, p. 65) and, thus, should not incapacitate one from taking vital risks in life. Fear becomes paralyzing when it robs women of their hope and personal agency. Although fear and worry are natural emotions, research shows that there are means by which women can navigate and overcome these behaviors (Crews, 2020; Miller, 2022; Obama, 2022; Pianta, 2020).

Constructive Preparation

Constructive preparation is the necessary shift that women who operate in fear and worry must make to prepare themselves for upward mobility. These actions are considered power tactics that women may employ to constructively prepare for their goal of executive leadership (Lerner, 2012; Ryder & Briles, 2003). Lerner (2012) claims that women often react to distress and change through patterns rooted in the past. Women need to go over their history and turn fear into an ally rather than cling to behaviors designed to preserve themselves (Lerner, 2012). Brown (2018) claims that practicing

shame resilience is one way to achieve this. The capacity to exercise honesty when we experience shame, to get through the experience without compromising our principles, and to emerge on the other side is known as shame resilience (Brown, 2018, p. 136). Recognizing and confronting fears is crucial for women. Through the power of self-forgiveness, they can turn their shame into a powerful force of empathy (Brown, 2018; Sandor, 2022).

Women must be mindful of their fear and worry. It is not the case that women can shed all fear. Fear is helpful in keeping humans safe. This is why it is critical that as women prepare to move up in their careers, they learn to filter rational and irrational fear (Obama, 2022). Is fear due to actual danger or to a new or unique experience? As women intentionally respond appropriately to fear, they begin to practice being prepared when the moments arise again in their lives. This is part of the preparation to translate this skill into their professional life as they move into executive leadership (Crews, 2020; L. Davis, 2020; Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020; Ryder & Biles, 2003; Sandor, 2022). Table 9 displays the characteristics identified in the Fear and Worry domain as well as the necessary shifts women must make for constructive preparation.

Table 9

Fear and Worry and Necessary Shifts for Constructive Preparation

Fear and worry characteristics	Necessary shifts for constructive preparation
Becoming anxious when thinking about career changes	Embracing career changes
Fear of looking stupid	Feeling the fear of looking stupid, but continuing to move forward
Fear of rejection	Feeling the fear of rejection but continuing to move forward
Feeling like an imposter	Understanding imposter syndrome is genderless and embracing the unknown
Feeling out of control in unfamiliar situations	Taking control in unfamiliar situations
Mulling over mistakes	Learning from mistakes and moving on
Resisting change	Embracing change

Note. Data is sorted by Fear and worry characteristics in ascending order. Adapted from "In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self," by H. Lerner, 2012; "Female Assistant Superintendents: Using Personal Power to Overcome Self-Sabotage," by K. Miller, 2022, [Doctoral dissertation], ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434. 2021.1922375); "The SexX Factor: Breaking the Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives," by M. Ryder and J. Briles, 2003.

Holding Back

The Holding Back domain includes elements such as:

- Not reaching out for help when needed
- Avoiding criticism
- Making inflections rather than bold statements
- Apologizing unnecessarily
- Talking down to oneself
- Sitting in the back of the room
- Not answering questions for fear of what others will think
- Feeling insecure about work-life-family obligations and balance (Ryder & Briles, 2003)

The characteristics that make up this category of self-defeating conduct are often influenced by social constraints and gender stereotypes. Although historically serving as the major caregivers for their families, women have been striving to stay up with males in achieving leadership roles. As a result, women trying to advance in many fields find it particularly difficult due to the internal guilt connected with work-life balance (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019; Fontaine & Vorauer, 2019; Griffin, 2021).

Pianta's (2020) study supported findings that women may limit their opportunities by failing to seek assistance when required, apologizing excessively, sitting in the back during conferences or meetings, fading into the background, and declining career prospects due to concerns about balancing work and family responsibilities. Women frequently experience disappointment when trying to reach the top due to the glass ceiling. When faced with these challenges, women lack the persistence to endure (Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). Women continue to hold lower-level roles rather than asking for assistance. The scarcity of female superintendents may be to blame for this lack of persistence. Men, on the other hand, continue to create networks to advance (Pianta, 2020). Many women do not vigorously seek superintendent roles; instead, they are inclined to wait and see whether the right opportunity arises. Women lack self-assurance, which leads them to give up and stop pursuing their aspirations (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Eagly et al., 2000; Gloor et al., 2020; Pianta, 2020).

Additionally, negative self-talk is another aspect of women's behavior that can lead to holding back. Engaging in negative self-talk can be detrimental to a woman's confidence and may even result in a state of inaction. It's important to recognize the harm this kind of self-talk can cause and work to replace it with positive affirmations (Obama,

2022; Pianta, 2020). This thinking can thwart women from making progress and is unrealistic. Some women may hesitate to speak up during meetings or conferences due to self-doubt and flawed thinking. This may stem from the fear of being perceived as incompetent if they make a mistake (Pianta, 2020).

Researchers have shown that coordinating family obligations is a significant obstacle for women seeking superintendent posts (Arriaga et al., 2020; Chiefs for Change, 2019; Fontaine & Vorauer, 2019; Griffin, 2021; Pianta, 2020). When vying for leadership roles, men are frequently seen as supporting their family's problems, whereas women are seen as deserting their homes (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Griffin, 2021).

Acting With Confidence

Acting with confidence actions are considered power tactics that women may employ in their goal of executive leadership (Lerner, 2012; Ryder & Briles, 2003). Women can actively combat their inclination to hold back and act with confidence by acting confidently and using confident body language, verbal inflections, and actions (Lerner, 2012). Speaking with authority is one method to project confidence in your actions. Although women are frequently interrupted by men and have become accustomed to apologizing before even speaking, they should become aware of how frequently they apologize, only do so when it is absolutely necessary, and place more emphasis on finding solutions than on apologizing for their mistakes (Sandor, 2022). Women frequently soften their statements or views in the workplace by using weak phrases, which weakens their thoughts and diminishes their influence. To enhance communication effectiveness, it is recommended that women employ direct substitutes like "I am confident" or "I expect" in place of passive verbs such as "I merely," "I think,"

or "I believe." Women can accept praise while remaining humble when receiving credit for their efforts (Griffin, 2021; Learner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022).

Table 10 shows the necessary shifts that women who hold back need to implement in order to prepare themselves to act confidently and achieve upward mobility.

Table 10

Holding Back and Necessary Shifts for Acting with Confidence

Holding back characteristics	Necessary shifts for acting with confidence
Apologizing unnecessarily	Apologizing only when necessary
Avoiding criticism	Embracing criticism as a catalyst of personal change
Making inflections instead of bold statements	Making bold statements with confidence
Making internal put-downs	Utilizing positive self-talk to boost confidence
Not reaching out for help when needed	Reaching out for help when needed
Not volunteering the correct answer or response for fear of the other people's impression	Volunteering the correct answer and embracing one's intelligence
Preferring not to speak up during meetings or discussions	Actively participating during meetings or discussions
Sitting in the back of the room for meetings and conferences	Sitting in the front of the meeting and conference

Note. Data is sorted by Holding back characteristics in ascending order. Adapted from "In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self," by H. Lerner, 2012; "Female Assistant Superintendents: Using Personal Power to Overcome Self-Sabotage," by K. Miller, 2022, [Doctoral dissertation], ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434. 2021.1922375); "The SexX Factor: Breaking the Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives," by M. Ryder and J. Briles, 2003.

Learner (2012) states that mentors can assist women in identifying their talents and abilities. A woman's spirit can be raised by a man or a constructive reality check, which can lead to her developing resilience (Pianta, 2020). The support of a mentor can assist women in navigating mistakes and failures and developing a mindset of seeing them as an opportunity to gain experience and grow (Chiefs for Change, 2019; Dweck,

2016; Pianta, 2020). Ryder and Briles (2002) stated that successful people do not fear failure and see it as the key to growth. This lack of holding back and not fearing failure calls for a growth mindset (Dweck, 2016; Pianta, 2020). To help women acquire the persistence needed to reach executive leadership, women will need to adopt a growth mindset.

Not Taking Time for Reflection

The Not Taking Time for Reflection domain includes elements such as: (a) keeping busy to avoid being alone, (b) not allowing oneself to mourn losses or cry, (c) not taking vacations or time off, (d) not allowing oneself to experience "downtime," (e) hating being wrong, and (f) holding a grudge with someone (Ryder & Briles, 2003). The fear of rejection combined with handling domestic and professional duties for women makes it more difficult to engage in self-reflection. In addition, women must prioritize self-reflection if they want to break down barriers in educational leadership (Crews, 2020; Hauser, 2018; Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020).

Not taking time to reflect can also be demonstrated by not taking time to care for oneself. To maintain one's well-being, it is crucial to avoid certain behaviors such as suppressing grief and refraining from crying, neglecting breaks or vacations, failing to admit one's mistakes, holding onto grudges, and denying the need for personal growth in certain areas (Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Ryder & Briles, 2003). Women often "take on more than they can manage in an effort to please others" (Pianta, 2020, p. 58). This statement holds particularly true for women who aspire to become superintendents. Women often feel the weight of balancing their personal and professional lives, while men typically have the advantage of their spouses' support during career progression

(Brown, 2018; Chief for Change, 2019; Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020). Balancing work, family, professional development, and networking can be overwhelming for many women, especially when pursuing a superintendent position. This demanding role requires an immense amount of time and dedication, often leaving little downtime for women. In an effort to keep up with their responsibilities, women may use their breaks to catch up on work instead of taking a break and may even miss vacations or socializing with friends. It's important to acknowledge the immense effort and commitment required for this role and the sacrifices that come with it (Pianta, 2020).

According to Lerner (2012), the frequent female culture of false personification fosters a disengagement of self-acceptance, self-knowledge, and authenticity and creates blinders to the need for transformational development. Furthermore, it is imperative to understand and reflect on both strengths and opportunities for growth as it fosters relationship building as well as effective leadership (Allen Thomas, 2021; L. Davis, 2022). L. Davis (2022) noted that for female African American leaders, worrying about work-life balance and the effects of the present epidemic and social unrest on their families, colleagues, and students' achievement is stressful and crippling. Intersectional gender and racial discrimination also make these stressors more likely to occur (L. Davis, 2022). Because of this, women strive to continually demonstrate and validate their aptitude for hard labor and positional mastery, particularly in industries where males predominate, rather than taking some time to savor life.

Cultivating Self-Intimacy

To address a lack of self-reflection, Lerner (2012) proposed that women should work on developing self-intimacy. This involves avoiding self-judgment, letting go of the

past, and focusing on the present moment. Women can achieve this by taking time to center themselves or scheduling alone time purposely to avoid the distractions that come with being too busy (Lerner, 2012). Self-reflection enables women to take a closer look inside themselves and accept every aspect of who they are, including the areas in which they want to improve. To do this, women must be vulnerable enough to recognize and embrace their feelings and then use them to change themselves (Brown, 2018; Lerner, 2012). Women must let go of the pressure to be flawless and multitask in order to be true to themselves. According to Ryder and Briles (2003), "Women are burning the candle at both ends [and] they cannot continue to work twice as hard as men in today's workplace" (p. 105). For female leaders establishing their professional identities at work, finding a work-life balance can be challenging, but it is crucial for women's physical and mental health (Pianta, 2020; Ryder & Briles, 2003). For women to thrive in both their personal and professional lives, achieving a work-life balance is absolutely essential. It not only contributes to their overall well-being but also enhances their productivity and success in their career.

Thus, in cultivating self-intimacy, women take the time to learn themselves on a deeper level (Crews, 2020; L. Davis, 2022). Women with high levels of emotional intelligence understand the value of seeking feedback as a strategy to learn one's authentic self (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Bradberry and Greaves (2009) state that opening up to the feedback of friends, mentors, family, and supervisors will provide a holistic picture of oneself and the impact of their actions on others (Bradberry & Greaves, 2009). Women could develop self-intimacy by setting aside time for introspection, engaging in activities that encourage reflection, accepting their emotional states, and

refraining from self-criticism (L. Davis, 2022). According to L. Davis (2022) and Lerner (2012), women run the risk of losing their capacity for growth when they decide not to reflect on themselves, which reduces their authority. Self-intimacy brings about balance and gives women the ability to fulfill their potential.

Table 11 shows the necessary shifts and power tactics that women who lack self-reflection need to make to cultivate self-intimacy and prepare themselves for upward mobility.

Table 11

Not Taking time for Reflection and Necessary Shifts for Cultivating Self-Intimacy

Not taking time for reflection characteristics	Necessary shifts for cultivating self-intimacy
Hating "being wrong"	Utilizing "being wrong" as a means to learn about oneself and constructively change
Holding grudges against people	Letting go of past wrongs to make room for new personal growth
Keeling busy to avoid being alone	Embrace alone time
Not allowing "downtime" to recuperate	Incorporating "downtime" as a consistent part of one's routine
Not allowing time to mourn losses or cry	Giving oneself time to mourn losses or cry
Not taking vacation	Taking vacations and breaks when possible

Note. Data sorted by Lack of Self-Reflection Characteristics in ascending order. Adapted from "In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self," by H. Lerner, 2012; "Female Assistant Superintendents: Using Personal Power to Overcome Self-Sabotage," by K. Miller, 2022, [Doctoral dissertation], ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global (https://doi.org/10.1080/13632434. 2021.1922375); "The SexX Factor: Breaking the Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives," by M. Ryder and J. Briles, 2003.

Gap in Research

There have been a moderate number of studies around Ryder and Briles's (2003) self-sabotaging framework. These studies have included population samples from judicial officers, superintendents, county government executives, law enforcement officers,

higher education deans, African American higher education chief executives, assistant superintendents, secondary principals, and charter school administrators (Crews, 2020; Miller, 2022; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). There is a recommendation that a meta-analysis be done to compare the results of these populations (Sandor, 2022).

There is a need to continue this research and add criteria where demographic information is used to identify the participants. These criteria may include age, culture, race, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This data would increase the body of research that examines how these factors impact self-sabotaging behaviors, the influence on one's career, or strategies to overcome them (Crews, 2020; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). Because this is a new framework, there is a need for more studies, even in the populations that have been researched. The body of research is not vast enough to have sufficient data on female executive K-12 leaders. This includes studying district directors, assistant superintendents, and superintendents.

Synthesis Matrix

A synthesis matrix is provided, highlighting how the academic and professional literature matches the variables of this study (see Appendix A).

Summary

The literature review provided a thorough examination of the research as it applies to internal and external barriers African American female superintendents may have faced in their career path. The chapter began with an overview of the history of women in the workforce and the history of women in education and educational leadership. The chapter then highlights the history of African American females in educational leadership and their ascension to the superintendency. Next, the study

examined the external obstacles that women have encountered over the years, including gender bias and stereotypes, as well as the challenges of reaching the upper echelons of companies addressing the glass ceiling and glass cliffs, juggling family commitments with work demands, and the absence of mentors. Theoretical foundations that ground the study were analyzed next, including feminist post-structural theory, Black feminist theory, social role theory, and role congruity theory. The theoretical framework upon which the research was conducted was analyzed from a literature perspective, including (a) Thinking Too Small, (b) Fear and Worry, (c) Holding Back, and (d) Not Taking Time for Reflection. The framework effectively identifies self-sabotaging domains and provides actionable solutions for overcoming them. These solutions empower women to recognize their unique path, prepare constructively, act confidently, and cultivate self-awareness. Additionally, the chapter highlights research gaps and emphasizes the utilization of all sources through the synthesis matrix.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

Lerner (2012) defines power as the ability to act from a place of strength rather than react out of fear and limitation. Thus, for women to reclaim their power, they must Acknowledge and address the barriers. The framework developed by Lerner delineates nine common self-sabotaging categories that impede women's personal and professional progress and is coupled with Ryder and Briles' (2003) book *The SexX Factor: Breaking the Unwritten Codes That Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives*. The framework outlines female self-sabotaging behaviors within nine primary domains. Chapter III outlines the methodology used in the study to identify the self-sabotaging behaviors of African American female superintendents throughout their careers and the strategies used to overcome four identified behaviors.

The chapter begins with identifying the purpose statement and research questions. Next, the research design demonstrates the process used to have the research questions answered. The study's research design outlines the population, sampling frame, and the manner by which the sample was decided. After the research design, there is an explanation of the research protocols utilized, the method of data collection, and how the data are organized. This is followed by the analysis of the data. The limitations of the study are outlined next, including the procedures used to protect the study participants. Lastly, the chapter closes with a review of the methodology.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents

employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self-Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003).

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small?
2. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry?
3. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back?
4. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection?

Research Design

The researcher used a sequential explanatory mixed-methods study design to identify and describe self-sabotaging behaviors displayed by African American female superintendents. The rationale for the sequential explanatory mixed-method design was to obtain an in-depth understanding of women's experience "from their own point of view, in their voice" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 323). In addition, the sequential explanatory mixed-method study design identified strategies the African American female superintendents employ to counter the self-sabotaging behaviors. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design requires collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). More specifically, according to McMillan and

Schumacher (2010), researchers use a sequential explanatory mixed-method study design to gain a deeper understanding of a problem and to explain their initial findings. The design has a "primary emphasis on quantitative methods" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 401). The study commences with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data, thus allowing the researcher to elaborate on the initial quantitative findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The mixed method design of the study is significant because "using solely a quantitative or qualitative method would be insufficient to provide complete answers that meet the goal or purpose of the study" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 395).

Quantitative Research Design

The initial phase of the study was a quantitative survey administered online through Google Forms. The survey asked participants to recognize any self-sabotaging behaviors they have experienced and their perception of the effect of these behaviors on their leadership pathway to the superintendent position. By completing the survey prior to the qualitative interviews, participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the considerations of the study prior to the qualitative interview. The survey was designed to determine African American female superintendents' perceptions of the strategies used to overcome four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the framework of Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). The framework outlines women's personal power and corresponding categories of sabotaging behavior. The survey collected information on participants' perceptions of the prevalence of self-sabotaging behaviors and the impact they have had on the participants' career development. It was requested that female superintendents from four regions in the United States respond to an online survey with

28 items about self-sabotaging behaviors and the impact they have on career development. The survey used a Likert format for responses with a four-category continuum ranging from (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, (3) *Agree Somewhat*, (4) *Disagree Somewhat*, (5) *Disagree,* and (6) *Strongly Disagree*. The six-point scale was selected because it requires participants to identify either an indicator of agreeing or disagreeing as opposed to having an opportunity to offer a neutral option (Pianta, 2022). The main purpose of the data collection was to gain descriptive data such as the mean and mode (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher collected a frequency analysis of the self-sabotaging behaviors.

Qualitative Research Design

The next stage of this sequential explanatory mixed-methods design study was the collection of qualitative data. A qualitative research design is employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participant's perspectives. This approach allowed for a thorough exploration of the problem and a detailed analysis of the findings (Creswell, 2007; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), exploratory qualitative research aims to better understand people's views, opinions, beliefs, or attitudes toward a given problem, occasion, or group of people. A "better understanding of behavior" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322) was reached because of the qualitative component of the study, which provided "rich descriptions that cannot be achieved by reducing pages of narration to numbers" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322).

The qualitative phase of the study involved one-on-one virtual interviews with seven African American female superintendents to learn in-depth details about the self-

sabotaging practices that have hindered their professional development and the tactics they have employed to combat them. Open-ended interview questions were included in the interview protocol that was created for the study. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain a more profound comprehension of the lived experiences and significance of African American female superintendents (Patton, 2015).

A phenomenological approach describes the common meaning for people of their lived experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain a more profound comprehension of the lived experiences and significance of African American female superintendents, the behaviors that have impacted their career development, and the tactics they used to counteract them.

The qualitative data-gathering process allowed for additional development and adjustment of questions for the qualitative process; additional questions were asked as needed. All interviews were recorded with transcripts to safeguard the accuracy of the information gathered. The primary objective of the data collection was to obtain descriptive data, upon which analysis was done to reveal the main aspects of the phenomenon in question. Significant statements from the participants were analyzed to generate themes, which will subsequently be utilized to create a detailed textual and structural portrayal of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Method Rationale

More research needs to be done on how women in leadership address self-sabotaging behaviors as they navigate moving into the executive level of their fields. Hence, a thematic study was formed to develop additional research in this area. Based on

the self-sabotaging framework of Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003), three faculty researchers and three doctoral students established a common goal to further explore four specific self-sabotaging behaviors of women in leadership and the strategies used by female leaders to overcome self-sabotage. The four specific self-sabotaging behaviors were: (a) Thinking Too Small, (b) Fear and Worry, (c) Holding Back, and (d) Not Taking Time for Reflection. The three peer researchers joined in a thematic study to describe the power tactics that female leaders used to overcome the four identified behaviors. The study served to learn what female leaders faced throughout their leadership career pathway and explore the influence these behaviors may have had on their career development. These researchers also wanted to identify strategies female leaders used to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors.

To ensure a structured and logical approach to interpreting research findings, the researcher needs to determine the appropriate research method and rationale. For this study, a mixed methods research design was chosen as it combines the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative research, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the research subject. As described by Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), the mixed-methods approach involves two phases - the gathering and analysis of quantitative data and the further investigation and justification of the results by the gathering of qualitative data. The four categories of self-sabotage and the four domains of women's personal power were the main focus of this explanatory mixed-methods study. For each topic, the researchers chose female leaders in educational and public institutions, and each researcher spoke with 7 to 10 of these women.

Establishing thematic consistency was achieved through collaboration on the purpose statement, research questions, quantitative and qualitative instruments, and research procedures. The team of researchers worked independently on their individual focus group of female leaders. The researchers utilized identical methods, including explanatory mixed methods, interviews, and surveys, to gather data from a single selected sample population. The researchers were able to conduct a thorough study by utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, which helped to expand the depth and breadth of their research. The mixed-methods approach is justified by the fact that the quantitative results give a general picture of the participant's perceptions of the four identified self-sabotage behaviors women exhibit and the extent of their impact, while the qualitative data and analysis refined and explained those statistical results by exploring the four identified self-sabotage behaviors in more detail and the power tactics used to counter them. Additionally, by linking together quantitative data from the qualitative phase of the study, mixed methods assist the researcher in creating a conceptual framework to support qualitative results. Researchers have the opportunity to combine the macro- and micro-levels of the study due to the mixed-methods approach (Pianta, 2022).

The qualitative interviews allowed the researchers to gain additional understanding and facilitated the expansion of what was learned from the quantitative survey results. Utilizing a mixed-methods research design allowed the researcher to conduct more complex research into the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors and power tactics used to overcome them. By triangulating data from both qualitative and quantitative sources, the researcher could ensure a more comprehensive and valid study

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In all, the mixed-methods approach assisted the researcher in understanding the complexity of the topic by investigating what is on the surface through the quantitative survey and what may be underlying perceptions through the qualitative interview.

Population

A research population is a group of individuals who conform to specific criteria and to which the researcher has a goal to generalize the results of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The theoretical study population of this study was the subgroup of African American female superintendents out of the 16,800 school districts in the United States. The population of African American female superintendents is the group to which the results of the study can be generalized to the larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Before 1956, African American women in the role of superintendent was an obscure idea (J. A. Alston, 2000). One exception was an African American woman named Velma Dolphin Ashley, who led the Boley, Oklahoma, school district from 1944 until 1956 (J. A. Alston, 2000). By 1978, the number of African American female superintendents had increased to five. In 1984, there were 29 African American female superintendents, and the number increased to 168 by 2017 (J. A. Alston, 2000; Horford et al., 2021). Current data shows that less than 1.5% of U.S. superintendents are African American females (Superville, 2023). Using this current data, it can be estimated that 252 of the 16,800 school districts are being led by African American female superintendents. These numbers only included African American female superintendents from public school districts and did not include female superintendents from nonpublic, private, or county office positions.

Sampling Frame

Creswell (2018) defined the target population as a small percentage of the total population limited to specifically defining participants who exhibit clear attributes of significance and concern to the study. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) use the term sampling frame to describe a reduced subgroup of the general population for a study. McMillian and Schumacher stated the key importance researchers hold in "carefully defining both the target population and the sampling frame" (p. 129). The sampling frame represents the total group of individuals from whom the study sample could be extracted (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

For this study, the delimitations set by the researcher included: African American female superintendents in the four regions of the United States and African American females who worked as district superintendents for one year or more. To collect equitable national representation, the researcher grouped states meeting the criteria into the following regional areas: (a) West - CA, (b) Midwest - IL and OH, (c) East - CT and MA, and (d) South - GA (see Table 12 and Figure 2). The geographical breakdown was based on the concentration of superintendent positions heavily concentrated in regional areas.

Table 12

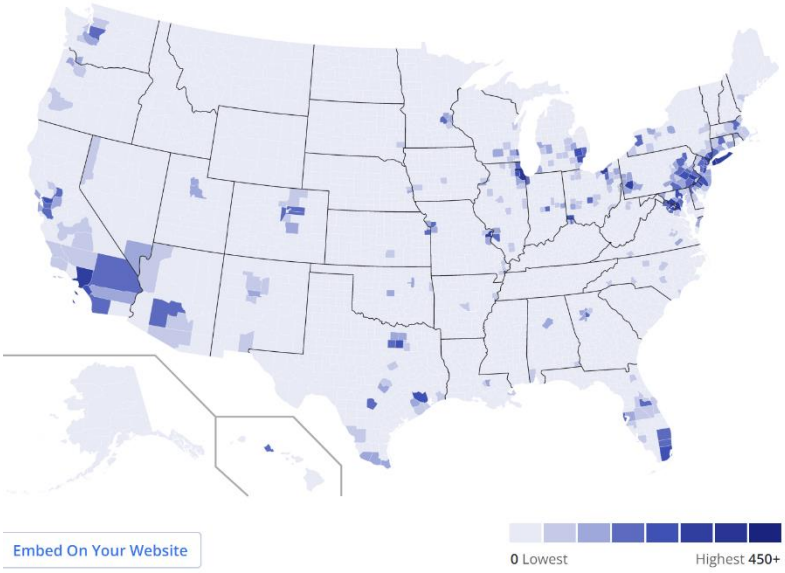
Regions From Which Participants Selected

U.S. region	Number of participants
West (CA)	2
East (MA and CT)	2
Mid-West (IL and OH)	2
South (GA)	1
Total Participants	7

Note. CA = California; MA = Massachusetts; CT = Connecticut; IL = Illinois; OH = Ohio; GA = Georgia.

Figure 2

Concentration of Superintendent Jobs



Note. From "School Superintendent Location Demographics," from Zippa, 2023, (https://www.zippia.com/school-superintendent-jobs/demographics/)

Sample

The sample size of the study was an important consideration in obtaining credible results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A sample is described as a "group of individuals from whom data are collected, often representative of a specific population" McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 490). However, there are "often constraints to the number of participants" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 141). Constraints may include access and availability of participants. The sample for this study was a subset of the African American female superintendents in four regions of the United States. The targeted sample size was seven African American female superintendents with a target of at least two participants from each of the four regions.

The sample for the study was chosen using snowball, convenience, and intentional selection for the sampling frame. According to Creswell (2007) and McMillan

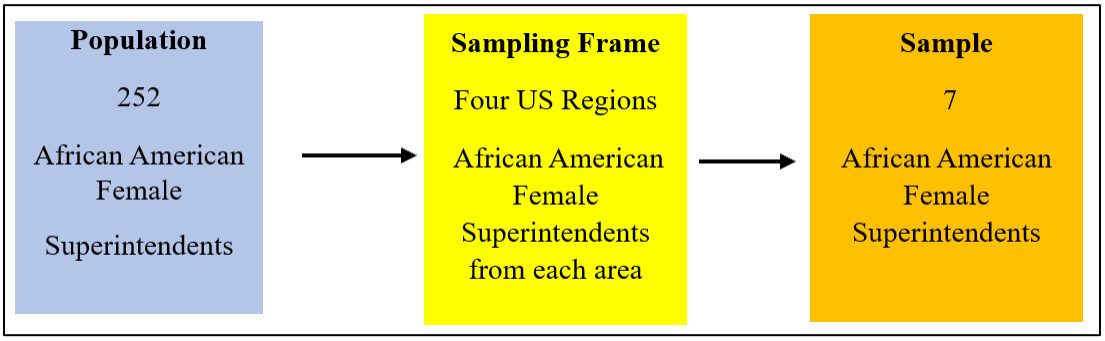
and Schumacher (2010), intentional sampling occurs when a researcher deliberately chooses individuals who are typical of the population based on their familiarity with the phenomenon. The researcher can concentrate on the traits of the African American female superintendents due to this sampling technique. Convenience sampling is a non-probability technique for choosing study participants who are readily available or easily accessible (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A technique known as snowball sampling, sometimes known as network sampling, involves having a previous participant identify each new member in the process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The criteria for selecting participants were purposeful. Participants in the study met the qualification as K-12 superintendents who: (a) identify as African American, (b) are of the female gender, (c) currently hold the position of superintendent, and (d) have held the position for a minimum of one year. Participants were then selected through convenience and snowball sampling. The convenience sampling began by identifying participants from the state of California because the researcher was able to identify the African American female superintendents through the state organization CAAASA. The AASA was the national organization used to identify African American female superintendents in the other regions of the study.

The sample for the study was seven African American female K-12 public school superintendents from four regions of the United States. The small sample size allowed the researcher to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) (see Figure 3).

Figure 3

Population, Sampling Frame, and Sample



Sampling Size

A critical consideration in conducting and designing research is the sample size or the number of participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This sequential mixed-method design considered the factors that impact studies that have a qualitative element. Although there are statistical requirements for probability sample size related to quantitative designs, "there are only guidelines for qualitative sample size" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 328). The sample size is dependent on the purpose, the research problem, the data collection process, and the availability of participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The goal of this study was to understand the phenomena related to the experience of African American female superintendents. Purposeful sampling is a method that allowed the researcher to select participants who would provide rich information and offer a "useful manifestation of the phenomena of interest" (Patton, 2015, p. 46). Hence, the decision to have a sample size of seven participants is aimed more at the insight into the phenomenon, "not the empirical generalization from a sample to a population" (Patton, 2015, p. 46).

Sample Selection Process

Location and access to African American female superintendents were strong considerations for the researcher in studying this phenomenon. There are 16,800 K-12 public school districts in the United States. The researcher used convenience sampling to identify two African American female superintendents in each state. The researcher identified the participants from the states by reviewing the list of African American females in those states, and based on access availability or snowballing, the other participants were identified. A purposeful sampling process was created from the list and used to select superintendents who were female and had at least one year of experience.

Once the participants were identified, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and the benefits and answered the participants' questions. After the participants agreed to take part in the study, the researcher e-mailed the participant form that included the Informed Consent, Invitation to Participate, Qualitative Survey Protocol, Qualitative Interview Protocol, and the UMass Global Institutional Review Board approval (see Appendix B- F). The participant's preferred day and time were taken into consideration while scheduling the interviews. The researcher then informed the participants of the interview details via email. The interviews were conducted and recorded using the transcribing function of Zoom, an internet video conferencing platform. The participants received a list of the interview questions, self-sabotaging behaviors, and the subcategories to refer to while being interviewed. To achieve uniformity across all interviews, the researcher employed an interview protocol.

Instrumentation

For the study, three peer thematic researchers utilized an explanatory sequential mix-method design for data gathering. The explanatory sequential mixed-method design allowed the researchers to first collect quantitative data. 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 quantitative and qualitative tools were crafted by the initial thematic team and faculty advisor. After the survey was completed, the researcher conducted interviews with each participant using an interview protocol that was also created by the original thematic team and faculty member. The process allowed the researchers to use the phenomenological inquiry process consisting of a quantitative survey and a qualitative interview.

Creswell (2007) suggests that utilizing mixed methods in a study can enhance the depth and scope of the research. This approach can significantly improve the depth and scope of the study, leading to better comprehension and validation of the analyzed data. The researchers effectively utilized both quantitative and qualitative tools to gather information from the participants. The combination of these methods offers numerous benefits in addressing research inquiries. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) note that the mixed-methods approach provides more thorough data, allowing for the inspection of complex research questions and improving the integrity of findings from a single method. Researchers must combine quantitative and qualitative instrumentation to gain unique insights that cannot be obtained through either approach alone (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). When quantitative and qualitative methods are used together, the advantages of

one approach are balanced out by the disadvantages of the other (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The original thematic team, peer researchers, and faculty members produced an online survey that was used to gather the quantitative data. Following the completion of the survey, a follow-up interview was conducted using a protocol created by the thematic team of peer researchers to find out more about the participants' actual experiences with the four self-destructive behaviors that had been identified, as well as the methods they had employed to overcome them.

Quantitative Instrumentation

The first phase of the study was a quantitative online survey used to understand the perception of the four identified behaviors of African American female superintendent participants and their experience through their career development. Using an online survey has many benefits, including quick responses, easy follow-up, and reduced cost and time (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Four of the nine categories of women's personal power were used as the foundation for the instrument constructed by the peer researchers and faculty advisor, using a framework that was modified from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). There was a list of behaviors that were related to each group. For each conduct, the researcher utilized a 6-point scale. The participants described how, as they advanced in their occupations, they personally displayed each behavior over the course of their professional lives. The purpose of the survey was to learn the methods African American superintendents employed to combat the four self-sabotaging behaviors that were identified. The questions were predefined response scales with a closed-ended format. They ranged from *Strongly Agree* to *Strongly Disagree*. Google Forms was the online application used to administer the 27-item survey.

Qualitative Instrumentation

Qualitative interviews were used during the second phase of the study. This allowed the researcher to gain insight into African American female superintendents' experiences of the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors, the impact on their career pathway, and the strategies they used to overcome them. The qualitative tool was composed of eight open-ended questions that were developed to align with the purpose of the study. Standardized open-ended interviews are designed with the precise wording of open-ended questions. Their sequence of questions is determined in advance and is posed to all subjects in a standard format (Patton, 2015). The participants were made aware that the aim of the study was to paint a clear picture of the self-sabotaging behaviors that can undermine women's aspirations to advance their careers. The objective also included investigating any methods participants employed to stop engaging in the four self-destructive behaviors they encountered during the course of their careers.

Qualitative interviews were used because they allow for direct communication with participants and are adaptable (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Interviews can be used for a variety of challenges and populations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). An interview protocol was created by the thematic peer researchers and faculty advisor based on the four identified domains of the Women's Personal Power framework, which was adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). The interview protocol included both structured and semi-structured questions. Creswell (2007) stated having an interview protocol allows the researcher to maintain the organization of the research and ensures uniformity across interviews with the various participants. For the structured questions, participants needed to describe how the four identified self-sabotaging

behaviors impacted their career development and the strategies they used to overcome them.

The interviewing procedure was coordinated with the study's objectives and research questions by the peer researchers. To ensure alignment with each of the interview questions and alignment with the goal of the study, an alignment table was created (see Appendix G). Zoom is an internet video conference tool that was used for the interviews. Each interview began with introductions and small talk from the researcher in an effort to establish rapport and trust with the participants. The researcher then gave a summary and explanation of the study's objectives. The participants were then given a breakdown of the procedural protections. The interview was captured, and transcription was done. NVivo, a program for qualitative analysis, was used to code the transcript.

Researcher as the Instrument

In qualitative research, the researcher is an instrument of inquiry. The researcher interacts closely with subjects to capture rich details through in-depth interviewing and thorough observation. To prompt reflections and insights that provide valid data, the interviewer must establish rapport and demonstrate that they are nonjudgmental, trustworthy, and authentic. The researcher must indicate that they hear and connect with the interviewee (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014; Patton, 2015). Patton (2015) emphasized that the quality of the data obtained during interviews is dependent on the interviewer's skills, experience, perspective, and background are integral to the process. During the interview process, a skilled interviewer must not only use a well-planned interview structure and build a good relationship with the interviewee but also effectively manage the flow of interaction. It is recommended that the researcher monitor the pacing

of questions and responses to maintain the flow of the conversation (Patton, 2015). 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 (Patton, 2015).

The researcher as an instrument does have disadvantages. The primary challenge of the interview is its potential for subjectivity and bias (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To mitigate the potential bias, the researcher must be as neutral as possible while collecting data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). To address biases in research, it is crucial to start by recognizing and acknowledging our own biases. When researchers become cognizant of their prejudice, they can begin taking deliberate steps to avoid or minimize the detrimental consequences that bias has on their research (Pianta, 2022).

Quantitative Field Test

A field test for the quantitative instrument was carried out to ensure there was no bias in the methods, interviewer, or questions (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). An online survey and interview were used to pilot the instruments with the researcher and two other researchers on the same thematic team. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a subject with similar traits to those employed in the study should be used. An African American female superintendent who recently retired from her position as superintendent of a school system in California served as the subject of the researcher's survey and field test interviews. The field-test survey was created by themed peer researchers (see Appendix H). The feedback form was created by the faculty adviser and theme peers and was completed by the participant after the survey (see Appendix I).

After the participant completed the feedback form, the thematic peer researcher discussed the feedback, and slight changes were made to incorporate the input from the field test participant.

Qualitative Field Test

Three thematic peer researchers organized a field test for the qualitative instrument. The researcher interviewed the same retired African American female superintendent who participated in the survey field test. The interview of the researcher's field test participant was held online through the Zoom video conference application. A thematic peer researcher participated by observing the field test interview to provide feedback related to the observations from the interview. After the field test interview, the participant responded to questions from the participant feedback form, and the peer observer responded to questions from the observer feedback form. During the field test, the participants were required to provide feedback on various aspects of the interview process, including the questions asked, the directions given, and the pace and length of the interview. Additionally, the observer was tasked with providing feedback on the length of the interview, the researcher's comfort level, and the quality of the questions asked. Following this, the researcher held discussions with the thematic peer researchers and faculty advisor to review the feedback and make necessary revisions to improve the clarity of the interview questions.

Validity

Validity in mixed-methods research is employing appropriate strategies that address possible threats to drawing conclusions from the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is of utmost importance to ensure the precision of the measurement tool

employed in a study. There is no flawless research instrument. Hence, validity cannot be deemed an absolute certainty (Patton, 2015). Quantitative validity indicates the answers from the survey were relevant indicators of the construct being measured. Qualitative validity entails analyzing whether the information collected from the interviews is accurate, credible, dependable, and confirmable (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Multiple methods were used to increase the validity of the study. This included multimethod strategies, multiple researchers, and thematic team member checking. 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. It is important to note that validity in phenomenological studies is established due to the claim of the truth of the lived experiences of the participants (Patton, 2015). Additionally, to make sure the findings accurately reflected the participants' experiences, the transcription of the interview was also sent to the participants once it had been completed. Before drawing any conclusions, the researcher triangulated the data to check for consistency of findings among survey data and interview data in order to guarantee that the research study had internal validity.

Reliability

The researcher employed procedures to ensure reliability. This included providing consistency in the structure of the studies and a standardized data collection process (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, the researcher used open-ended interview questions to ensure that the interviewee was provided sufficient opportunity to fully express their opinion about what was being asked. Quantitative reliability means

that the results from participants' responses are consistent and stable over time (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The researcher used internal reliability and intercoder reliability to ensure the findings were reliable.

Intercoder reliability is a method for a researcher to check for bias while coding. 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). The three thematic peer researchers updated the survey and interview questions as an additional strategy to the research's personal bias. A script and questions were used to ensure consistency with the interview data collection. The thematic peer researcher was used as an expert observer to review the field test interview.

Each question was coded to identify common themes from the data. This was done after the interviews were transcribed and verified. The themes were sorted and categorized by each research question. The researcher and a thematic peer sorted and coded the data to determine intercoder reliability. To establish intercoder reliability, the researcher evaluates a "Kappa value" as evidence of reliability (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010, p. 183). The researcher had one thematic peer code at least 10% of the data, with an agreement of 80% or higher (McMillian & Schuster, 2010). Once the data had been coded, a narrative analysis was conducted to identify the recurring themes present in each research question. The aim was to weave together a cohesive narrative that captured the interconnected experiences of the different participants.

Data Collection

Data collection for this study involved the use of an electronic survey for quantitative data collection and interviews for qualitative data collection. The interviews were conducted via Zoom, the online video conference application. Before collecting the data, the researcher became certified by the National Institutes of Health Office of Extramural Research to conduct human research (see Appendix J) and obtained approval from the UMass Global Institutional Review Board to conduct the study. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board, the researcher started the data collection process. The seven participants received a copy of the Institutional Review Board Informed Consent and Invitation to Participate and an e-mail with a link to the survey. Each participant gave their agreement to participate in the study prior to the start of the quantitative and qualitative data collection process. The researcher was the only one who had access to the data acquired throughout the research study and saved it on a password-protected digital device.

Quantitative Data Collection

The informed permission form and electronic survey were emailed to participants as the initial step in the data collection procedure. The computer-generated web application Google Forms was used to administer the electronic survey. The informed permission specified how the data would be used and ensured privacy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Participants were given access to the survey after reading it and agreed to take part in the 10 to 15-minute survey. Two weeks were given to the participants to complete the survey. Prior to the survey window being closed, the researcher sent the participants two reminder emails.

Qualitative Data Collection

The second phase of the study included qualitative data collection. Upon the completion of the initial surveys, interviews were scheduled with the participants. Permission was acquired before the recorded interviews, and each interview lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes. At the onset of the Zoom meeting, prior to beginning the formal interview, the researcher began the process with introductions and a review of the purpose of the study. Although the interview was recorded and transcribed through the Zoom application, the researcher took notes, which allowed the researcher to recognize the participant's body language and identify nonverbal cues, adding to the richness of the data. Participants were asked eight main questions, four of which were based on the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. These four questions had a subset of two questions, each relating to the identified four behaviors.

Validity and dependability were ensured by using a script and interview process. For a deeper understanding of the questions, the researcher included further in-depth inquiries. The Zoom application's audio-to-text transcription capability was used to record and transcribe all of the interviews. This aided in ensuring the accuracy of the interview data collected. A copy of the completed transcription of the interview was emailed to the participants for accuracy confirmation. The confirmed transcript was then uploaded to NVivo for theme analysis.

Data Analysis

To conduct comprehensive research, the explanatory sequential design approach was employed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The first phase must be quantitative, followed by a qualitative phase to provide further explanation and

understanding of the quantitative findings. This approach ensured the research implemented the study thoroughly and effectively (Creswell, 2007; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). This mixed methods study integrated quantitative and qualitative data. The qualitative phase of the study was implemented with the objective of explaining the initial quantitative results in more depth. Hence, the rationale for selecting the explanatory design is to use qualitative data to help explain the quantitative results. The researcher then triangulated the data from the quantitative and qualitative data to better understand the extent of the phenomena.

Quantitative Data Analysis

The researcher implemented the quantitative phase with an online survey of 27-questions aligned with the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. The participants answered 27 questions on a Likert scale. The use of the Likert scale allowed the data to be collected in a format that would produce numerical values that could then be used to obtain descriptive statistics (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Descriptive statistics were applied to summarize, organize, and consolidate the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data for the survey was collected with Google Forms, and frequency distributions were established to analyze the results of each research question asked.

Qualitative Data Analysis

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). Patton (2015) further described qualitative analysis as a challenging endeavor in which one must make sense of voluminous data by identifying patterns and "constructing a framework for communicating the essence of

what the data reveal" (p. 521). Hence, the researcher codes the data, making meaning and drawing conclusions based on emerging themes.

For this study, the researcher enhanced the qualitative research questions and protocols, so they followed the quantitative results. Interviews were conducted to reveal the significant aspects of the phenomena. Hence, the qualitative phase was incorporated with the quantitative results (Creswell, 2007). Integration in an explanatory sequential study requires connecting the results from the primary quantitative phase to inform the following qualitative data collection phase (Creswell, 2007). Next, the researcher used the Zoom application during the interviews to collect, transcribe, and analyze the qualitative data. The transcripts were then sent to the participants to review for accuracy. Once verified by the participants, the researcher uploaded the transcription to NVivo to be coded and analyzed for themes. NVivo is qualitative software that is used to help researchers evaluate and interpret the results; coding is the method of synthesizing data for themes and then categorizing similar passages of text with a code label so the data can be counted to determine high-frequency themes (Patton, 2015). To establish inter-rater reliability, the transcript was checked and coded by the researcher and a second coder. To create themes, the researcher compared and contrasted the codes' similarities and differences. Once potential themes were identified, they were placed in sentence frames and reworded to ensure accuracy of alignment with research questions.

Finally, to assess the extent and the manner in which the qualitative results were explained and provided more insight into the quantitative results, as well as what was discovered generally in response to the study's goal, the researcher triangulated the data from the survey and interviews. Triangulation is the process of utilizing multiple data

sources to confirm data and deepen understanding of the phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The study's quantitative and qualitative components were then combined to form conclusions (Creswell, 2007).

Ethical Consideration

The UMass Global Institutional Review Board gave approval to the research study. The study was conducted with the participants' written agreement. For the study's African American female superintendents, measures were taken to respect their rights and guarantee their confidentiality. The study's participants had the right to withdraw at any point in time, and the researcher complied with all ethical guidelines. The researcher was the only one with access to the study's data, which were all stored on a password-protected digital device.

Limitations

Limitations are constraints that occur in the study that are independent of the researcher's control (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). These limitations may affect data collection, analysis, and reporting of findings. The researcher identified the limitations that could affect the study's results. These limitations contained the study location, sample size of the participants, time constraints, and researcher bias.

Location of the Study

Because the researcher sought a national study with participants in four regions of the United States, the researcher utilized purposeful and convenience sampling to identify participants who met the criteria of the study and were willing to participate in an online process. Hence, the researcher limited the participants to African American female superintendents from school districts in California, New York, Ohio, Texas, and Georgia.

In addition, the participants only included African American female superintendents from public school districts and did not include female superintendents from private, nonpublic, or county office positions.

Sample Size of the Participants

A total of seven participants were included in the study. Though Patton (2015) stated that the sample size for this mixed-methods study was appropriate, the study's results cannot be applied to the total population of African American female superintendents in the United States.

Time Constraints

Time was also a barrier in this study due to the sample participants' interview time restrictions. Superintendents have demanding schedules with many competing priorities. Thus, the interview could not go beyond 90 minutes. Limiting the interviews to 90 minutes minimized the amount of time allotted to the study, which may unintentionally limit the participant’s ability to go in-depth during the interview. In addition, because this is a national study, the time zone of the researcher versus that of the participant provided an additional time consideration that may impact the extent of the interview.

Researcher Bias

The researcher must remain neutral and be aware of personal bias (Creswell, 2007; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Since the researcher is an African American woman, the topic may influence data analysis, data collection, themes, and code development. Because the researcher is part of a thematic team of researchers, the team practiced neutrality during the field-testing of instruments to ensure that opinions and emotional responses were not a part of the interview process. Additionally, because

qualitative research is interpretive in nature, researcher bias might have affected how the results were analyzed. Another consideration is that because the researcher has engaged in self-destructive behaviors throughout her career development and wants to a greater degree of leadership in the field of education, her bias may have influenced how the results were interpreted.

Summary

Chapter III outlined the mixed methodology and describes a general overview of the methodological organization used in the study. The chapter began with an introduction, the purpose statement, and research questions. The section on research design explained the reason for the selection of a mixed-methods approach, quantitative data from surveys, and qualitative data from interviews. There was an examination of the population for the study, the sampling frame, and the sample selection process. The quantitative and qualitative instrumentation, as well as the validity and reliability, were then reviewed. Lastly, the data collection and the analysis were explained, as well as ethical considerations and limitations.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

This mixed-method study identified and described the self-sabotaging behaviors experienced by African American female superintendents throughout their career development and explored the impact these behaviors had on their career development. In addition, the study identified power tactics or strategies African American female superintendents used to overcome four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. The basis for this study was a framework adapted from Lerner's (2012) book, as well as Ryder and Briles' (2003) work that categorized female self-sabotaging behaviors within the nine overarching power domains. Chapter IV provides an overview of the purpose of the study, the research questions, the research methods, the data collection process used in the study, the population, and the sample. Chapter IV concludes with a presentation of the data utilizing the research questions and a summary of the findings.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003).

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small?
2. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry?

3. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back?
4. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection?

Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-method study design was used to identify and describe self-sabotaging behaviors displayed by African American female superintendents. The rationale for the sequential explanatory mixed-method design was to obtain an in-depth understanding of women's experience "from their own point of view, in their voice" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 323). In addition, the sequential explanatory mixed-method study design identified strategies the African American female superintendents employ to counter the self-sabotaging behaviors. A sequential explanatory mixed-methods design requires collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). More specifically, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), researchers use a sequential explanatory mixed-method study design to gain a deeper understanding of a problem and to explain their initial findings. The design has a "primary emphasis on quantitative methods" (McMillan &Schumacher, 2010, p. 401). The study starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data, thus allowing the researcher to elaborate on the initial quantitative findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). The mixed-method design of the study was significant because "using solely a

quantitative or qualitative method would be insufficient to provide complete answers that meet the goal or purpose of the study" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 395).

Quantitative Research Design

The first phase of the study was a quantitative survey administered online through Google Forms. The survey asked participants to identify any self-sabotaging behaviors they had experienced and their perception of the impact these behaviors had on their leadership progression to the superintendent position. By completing the survey prior to the qualitative interviews, participants had the opportunity to familiarize themselves with the parameters of the study prior to the qualitative interview. The survey was designed to determine African American female superintendents' perceptions of the strategies used to overcome four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the framework of Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). The framework outlines women's personal power and corresponding categories of sabotaging behavior. The survey collected information on participants' perceptions of the prevalence of self-sabotaging behaviors and the impact they have had on the participants' career development. Female superintendents from four regions in the United States were invited to respond to an online survey with 79 items about self-sabotaging behaviors and the impact they have on career development. The survey used a Likert format for responses with a four-category continuum ranging from (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, (3) *Agree Somewhat*, (4) *Disagree Somewhat*, (5) *Disagree*, and (6) *Strongly Disagree*. The six-point scale was selected because it forces participants to select either an indicator of agreeing or disagreeing as opposed to having an opportunity to offer a neutral option (Pianta, 2022). The main goal of the data collection

was to gain descriptive data such as the mean and mode (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher collected a frequency analysis of the self-sabotaging behaviors.

Qualitative Research Design

The next phase of this sequential explanatory mixed-method design study was the collection of qualitative data. A qualitative research design was employed to gain a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. This approach allowed for a thorough exploration of the problem and a detailed analysis of the findings (Creswell, 2007; McMillian & Schumacher, 2010). Qualitative research is explanatory and seeks to comprehend an individual's perceptions, opinions, beliefs, or attitudes about a specific issue, event, or organization (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The qualitative portion of the research offered "rich descriptions that cannot be achieved by reducing pages of narration to numbers" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322) and led to a "better understanding of behavior" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 322).

The qualitative phase of the study consisted of one-on-one virtual interviews with seven African American female superintendents to gain rich information about the self-sabotaging behaviors that have impacted their career development and the strategies they used to counteract them. An interview guide that included open-ended interview questions was developed for the study. The study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain a more profound comprehension of the lived experiences and significance of African American female superintendents (Patton, 2015).

A phenomenological approach describes the common meaning for people of their lived experiences of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Patton, 2015). The study utilized a phenomenological approach to gain a more profound understanding of the lived

experiences and significance of African American female superintendents, the behaviors that have impacted their career development, and the strategies they used to counteract them.

The qualitative research data collection process allowed for further development and evolution of questions for the qualitative research process; additional questions were asked as needed. All interviews were recorded with transcripts to ensure the accuracy of the information gathered. The primary objective of the data collection was to obtain descriptive data, upon which analysis was done to reveal the main aspects of the phenomenon in question. Significant statements from the participants were analyzed to generate themes, which were subsequently utilized to create a detailed textual and structural portrayal of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Population

A research population is a group of individuals who conform to specific criteria and to which the researcher has a goal to generalize the results of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The theoretical study population of this study was the subgroup of African American female superintendents out of the 16,800 school districts in the United States. The population of African American female superintendents is the group to which the results of the study can be generalized to the larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Before 1956, African American women in the role of superintendent was an obscure idea (J. A. Alston, 2000). One exception was an African American woman named Velma Dolphin Ashley, who headed the Boley, Oklahoma School District from 1944 until 1956 (J. A. Alston, 2000). By 1978, the number of African American female superintendents had increased to five. In 1984, there were 29 African American

female superintendents, and the number increased to 168 by 2017 (J. A. Alston, 2000; Horford et al., 2021). Current data shows that less than 1.5% of U.S. superintendents are African American females (Superville, 2023). Using this current data, it can be estimated that 252 of the 16,800 school districts are being led by African American female superintendents. These numbers only included African American female superintendents from public school districts and did not include female superintendents from private, nonpublic, or county office positions.

Sampling Frame

Creswell (2018) defined the target population as a small percentage of the total population narrowed down to define participants who display clear characteristics of significance and concern to the study. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) use the term sampling frame to describe a smaller subset of the general population for a study. McMillian and Schumacher noted the critical importance researchers hold in "carefully defining both the target population and the sampling frame" (p. 129). The sampling frame represents the total group of individuals the study sample could be drawn from (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

For this study, the delimitations set by the researcher included: African American female superintendents in the four regions of the United States and African American females who worked as district superintendents for one year or more. To collect equitable national representation, the researcher grouped states meeting the criteria into regional areas: (a) West - CA, (b) Midwest - IL and OH, (c) East – CT and MA, and (d) South-GA.

Sample

The sample size of the study was an important consideration to obtain credible results (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). A sample is described as a "group of individuals from whom data are collected, often representative of a specific population" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 490). However, there are "often constraints to the number of participants" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 141). Constraints may include access and availability of participants. The sample for this study was a subset of the African American female superintendents in four regions of the United States. The targeted sample size was seven African American female superintendents.

From the sampling frame, purposeful, convenience, and snowball were used to identify the sample for the study. Purposeful sampling is when the researcher purposefully selects participants representative of the population based on their experience with the phenomena (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This sampling method allows the researcher to focus on the characteristics of the African American female superintendents. Convenience sampling is a non-probability method of selecting participants who are easily accessible or available to participate in the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Snowball sampling, also called network sampling, is a method in which a preceding participant names each successive participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The criteria for selecting participants were purposeful. Participants in the study met the qualification as K-12 superintendents who: (a) identify as African American, (b) are of the female gender, (c) currently hold the position of superintendent, and (d) have held the position for a minimum of one year. Participants were then selected through

convenience and snowball sampling. The convenience sampling began by identifying participants from the state of California because the researcher was able to identify the African American female superintendents through the state organization CAAASA. The AASA was the national organization used to identify African American female superintendents in the other regions of the study.

The sample for the study was seven African American female K-12 public school superintendents from four regions of the United States. The small sample size allowed the researcher to provide an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

To maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of the study participants, their names and identifying information were omitted from the findings. The seven study participants were numerically identified from 1 through 7, as outlined in Table 13. The sample included African American female superintendents from seven districts within four regions of the United States. The sample included one African American female superintendent from Connecticut, one from Massachusetts, one from Ohio, one from Illinois, one from Georgia, and two from California. All interviews occurred in September 2023. For the purpose of this study, a small district is defined as having less than 5,000 students, a medium-sized district is defined as having 5,000 to 30,000 students, and a large district is defined as having more than 30,000 students. For the purpose of this study, the largest student racial population is defined as the group of students enrolled with the largest percentage of students identified in a racial category.

Table 13

Participant Demographic Information

Participant	Superintendent tenure	Month/year of interview	District size	Largest student racial population
1	1 year	September 2023	Small < 5,000	White
2	7.5 years	September 2023	Small < 5,000	White
3	8 years	September 2023	Small < 5,000	African American
4	15 years	September 2023	Small < 5,000	African American
5	2 years	September 2023	Large > 30,000	Hispanic/Latino
6	1 year	September 2023	Medium 5,000-30,000	White
7	7.5 years	September 2023	Large > 30,000	African American

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Quantitative Data Analysis

This study first used an electronic survey to collect quantitative data. Following the initial collection of data, interviews were conducted for qualitative data collection. This is known as a sequential mixed-method research design. A sequential mixed-method design is when a quantitative phase is followed by a qualitative phase (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The following section provides the data analysis of the quantitative and qualitative data. The electronic survey was developed utilizing the web-based program Google Forms. The survey results were collected and analyzed to gain descriptive data, such as the mean and mode of each aspect of the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. The mean is used to measure the average of each self-sabotaging behavior, and the mode (*n*) is used to measure the central tendency (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher assessed the mean to determine how prevalent each self-sabotaging behavior existed for all participants. The mode was used to determine which self-

sabotaging behavior occurred most frequently. The Google Form survey consisted of 27 closed-ended questions and was based on a predetermined response scale, utilizing a 6-point Likert scale, which included the following numerical assignment: (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, (3) *Slightly Agree*, (4) *Slightly Disagree*, (5) *Disagree*, and (6) *Strongly Disagree*. The instrument did not offer an option of neutrality to avoid participants' tendency to cluster responses within the neutral zone (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative interview phase provided participants with the opportunity to expand the depth of their responses as reported in the online survey. Additionally, the interviews allowed participants to expand on self-sabotaging behaviors they experienced and the power tactics or strategies they used to overcome them. The researcher used an interview protocol based on the top four self-sabotaging behaviors identified in previous research using the nine domains of the Women's Personal Power framework (Lerner, 2012; Ryder & Briles, 2003). The focus of the qualitative interviews was to gain an understanding of the power tactics or strategies that the African American female superintendents used to overcome self-sabotaging behaviors. The interview questions were structured and semi-structured. Each interview lasted between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted using Zoom, an online video conference software. Each interview was recorded and transcribed utilizing the features of Zoom. The interview transcripts were then coded using the Microsoft Office Excel Spreadsheets.

Research Question 1: Thinking Too Small

The first research question asked, *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of*

Thinking Too Small? The survey analyzed which women experienced any of the self-sabotaging behaviors in the category of *Thinking Too Small*. The interview questions were meant to delve deeper into the power tactics or strategies that the participants used to overcome the self-sabotaging behaviors of Thinking Too Small. The following sections discuss the findings from the survey and the interview responses.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 14 highlights the responses to five survey questions related to the Thinking Too Small category. The data is organized by the highest average rating. Based on the structure of the Likert scale, the higher average rating indicated that fewer participants engaged in the specific behavior. The number and percentage of participants who rated either (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, or (3) *Agree Somewhat* is the descriptive data point of the mode (*n*). It also includes the percentage of participants who reported engaging in the specific behavior.

None of the seven participants reported that they "Blame others for why things aren't going well." None of the participants reported that they were "Not open to new experiences." Only one participant reported that she "Did not have the courage to step out of her comfort zone." The highest-rated self-sabotaging behaviors related to Thinking Too Small were "Minimizing my value" and making "Perfection the standard for life." Seventy-one percent, or 5 of 7 of the participants, stated that they have exhibited these behaviors.

Table 14

Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Thinking to Small

Sabotaging category: Thinking too small	Average rating	*n*	Percent of participants
Question1- I blamed others for why things aren't going well	4.86	0	0
Question 4- I was not open to new experiences	4.86	0	0
Question 3- I did not have the courage to step out of my comfort zone	4.43	1	14
Question 2- I minimized my value ("I'm just a…")	3.43	5	71
Question 5- I often made perfection the standard in my life	2.86	5	71

Note. *n* = Number of participants who rated either Strongly Agree, Agree, or Agree Somewhat. Sorted by Average rating in descending order.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As a result of the qualitative interview question in the Thinking Too Small category, three themes were identified regarding the experiences of African American females in the area of power tactics they used to counteract the area of Thinking Too Small. Each theme was aligned with the responses of each participant. All participant responses were organized on a chart by the number of respondents for each theme and the number of responses called frequency counts. As a result of the analysis, three themes were identified based on the power tactics used to overcome Thinking Too Small. The themes are:

- Act on Encouragement/Support of Others
- Take Advantage of Opportunities
- Reflect and Persist Through Tough Times

Thinking Too Small Power Tactic 1: Act on Encouragement/Support of Others. The power tactic with the highest frequency was Act on the Encouragement/Support of Others. This power tactic was mentioned by six participants (86%) with 31 frequency responses. The participants recounted times in their careers when they were thinking too small, and they chose to act on the encouragement and support of others as a power tactic to counteract the self-sabotaging behavior.

Participant 3 recounted the story of how she was encouraged to leave the classroom after having already earned her Ph.D.:

> I had my master's. I had my doctorate. I was still teaching 7th-grade history. The principal at the school said to me at the middle school. 'We love you, Doctor [redacted], but you have to do something else,' she said. 'You're the only person in this whole building with a doctorate, and maybe one or two in the district, and you really need to do something else.' So I did take that advice, and I ended up working in a university for a couple of years. And then I came back into public education. But yes, I think I have underestimated myself for quite a while. I think I'm over it. Well, I think that, you know, at the time, I did know and value the advice of the principal. I liked her a lot. I knew she liked me. It wasn't a push-out. I knew it was a sincere saying to me, 'You need to do more.'

Participant 6 shared an example of a power tactic of Act on the Encouragement/Support of Others :

> There was an interim superintendent, but she was speaking, and she was a Black lady, and one of the other teachers was sitting next to me, who was a veteran in the district, said to me, 'She's like, you know. That's going to be you, one day.'

> And I'm like, 'What, now? I don't want that.' However, along the way, people have always tapped me on my shoulder and said to me, 'This is what you're going to be, or this is who you can be,' and I always thought, 'That's not me.' Every career transition was because someone asked me to do something and saw more in me than I saw, you know. I may not have been able to see myself or ready to openly admit that it was inside of me.

Participant 7 communicated that her power tactic was to "act on the encouragement and support of others" and explained that it was important to have what she called "good covering," stating:

> Good covering is you have like-minded people who can support you. People in a position to offer guidance and support. I aligned myself with people who are in power so that I could count on them as personal advisors. Superintendents who navigate well have good coverage or good advocacy. So it just means that you have really given lots of consideration to whatever it is, what's the step you want to take. And so you're looking for the indicators and people and influencers in that environment that will support me if I make a step number one you need to talk with God. Number two, your family. You don't want to attempt anything and not have the support of your family and the people that you come home to, the people who are in your house, who you need to support you and lift you when things get really tough. And then, who are the influences in that environment? You're trying to go into that level that can see you, support you, mentor you, and advise you. Who are the critical friends who would say to you, 'You need to think about this'.

Thinking Too Small Power Tactic 2: Take Advantage of Opportunities. Every participant in the study referenced Taking Advantage of Opportunities That Present Themselves. This power tactic was mentioned by all seven participants with 27 frequency responses. All of the participants recounted times in their careers when they were presented with an opportunity for promotion, and they took advantage of the opportunity.

Participant 1 shared the time when she was a teacher and received a phone call from the central office. She stated:

> I was not in a rush to make these career moves…I received a phone call from the special education director, who stated, 'You have done wonderful things in the classroom, and you're well respected…. I'd like to know if you would like the job of special education supervisor?' I became a special education supervisor, overseeing 17 elementary schools all over the district and a few other high-incident programs.

Participant 3 had earned her Ph.D. while in the classroom. She shared that while serving as a high school principal for eight years, she decided to apply for a superintendency. She commented,

> I didn't resist the change or anything. Overthink it. I just put out applications and decided to give it a try. Actually, I really just wanted to know what the questions were on the superintendent's interview. I really was thinking, 'Maybe I'll get a central office position,' you know. So, I went straight from a high school principal to superintendent because I got the job.

Participant 6 shared that after having been a teacher and a reading specialist at the district level, she was offered the opportunity to be the principal at the school where she was

formerly a teacher. She expressed, "What am I going to say, 'No?'" (Participant 6). She took the position "for a couple of years and was doing great work" (Participant 6).

Thinking Too Small Power Tactic 3: Reflect and Persist Through Tough Times. The power tactic of Reflect and Persist Through Tough Times was referenced 24 times by 5 (71%) of the participants. The participants recounted times in their careers when this tactic allowed them to counteract the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small.

Participant 2 shared the time when she resigned from a superintendency and returned to the classroom and how this power tactic of reflecting and persisting allowed her to counteract Thinking Too Small, which led her back to a superintendency:

> I actually resigned from that superintendent position, and I came back to [redacted] and took a while to find another job. I mean, I had to actually take a lesser job to be able to survive. You know, there was a time when I was actually just subbing. Then, I ended up landing an assistant principalship. So I'm coming from superintendent back to assistant principal, and then principalship. And so I will say this, though, you know, when you think about the fact that you care for something, you will do what you have to do just to continue back to get to that point.
>
> You know, in hindsight, it's been over 10 years, and people are like, 'You know, you were too innovative for the time. You were too innovative. It was too much for them to take.' I did move slowly. But this was a district that the State wanted to take over. So how slow can you go when you know when, when there was such neglect in certain areas that really needed to be addressed so that that experience

it? It was challenging; it was hurtful. It really caused me to reflect, and it also caused me to be cautious in other districts in which I start and try not to make similar mistakes or to go too fast. Try to get the pulse of people.

Participant 4 expressed that her confidence and power tactic come from her reflection on her heritage and persisting through tough times:

> My power tactic is reflecting on the intellectual capabilities of Black people. I mean, we survived slavery. There's nothing that we can't do. That's where my confidence comes from. And so, in every journey and every task related to creating environments of success for Black and Brown children, I persist. I've never thought what is the least that can be done here because I go back to our ancestors and all that they experienced and all that they endured. I use that as my benchmark for where I should actually start the work.

Participant 5 recounted a story of the power of Reflect and Persist Through Tough Times:

> Some power tactics, I would say, are just having a mind of my own and doing what I want to do despite what anybody might tell me. An example of that is when I had a superintendent who had a favorite group of people. He actually created an assistant superintendent position for one of his people. He basically told me not to apply, which I chose not to listen to and still applied. Of course, you know, it went to his person, but I think that's what lined me up to be offered the assistant superintendent position after that because I had gone through the process, and people knew what things I had done and what I was able to do, and what interests I had.

Table 15 shows the references (frequency) made by participants during interviews to the power tactics used to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small. The number and percentage of participants who reported using the power tactics are also indicated in the table. The top power tactic referenced in interviews was Act on the Encouragement/Support of Others, which was referenced 31 times by six (86%) of the participants. However, Take Advantage of Opportunities is the power tactic that 100% of the participants reference 27 times. Reflect and Persist Through Tough Times was referenced 24 times by five (71%) of the participants.

Table 15

Power Tactics for the Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Thinking Too Small

Themes of power tactics for: Thinking too small	References (frequency)	*n*	Percent of participants
Act on encouragement/support of others	31	6	86
Take advantage of opportunities	27	7	100
Reflect and persist through tough times	24	5	71

Note. $n = 7$. Data sorted by References in descending order.

Research Question 2: Fear and Worry

The second research question asked, *What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry*. The survey analyzed which women experienced any of the self-sabotaging behaviors in the category of Fear and Worry. The interview questions were meant to delve deeper into the power tactics or strategies that the participants used to overcome the self-sabotaging behaviors of Fear and Worry. The following sections discuss the findings from the survey and the interview responses.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Twenty-nine percent of the participants, or 2 of 7, reported: "I resisted change." Forty-three percent, or three of the seven participants, reported positively to three questions: "I felt like an imposter on the job," with a 4.29 average rating, "I felt out of control in an unfamiliar situation," with a 4.14 average rating, and "I feared looking stupid," with a 3.86 average rating. Fifty-seven percent, or four out of seven participants, reported "I feared being rejected," with a 3.57 average rating, and "I became anxious when thinking about change in my career," with a 3.43 average rating. The most frequent Fear and Worry behavior was "I mulled over my mistakes," with a 2.86 average rating.

Table 16 highlights the responses to seven survey questions related to the Fear and Worry category. The data is organized by the highest average rating. Based on the structure of the Likert scale, the higher average rating indicates that fewer participants engaged in the specific behavior. The number and percentage of participants who rated either (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, or (3) *Agree Somewhat* is identified. This is the descriptive data point of the mode (*n*). It also includes the percentage of participants who reported engaging in the specific behavior.

Table 16

Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Fear and Worry

Sabotaging category: Fear and worry	Average rating	*n*	Percent of participants
Question 8- I resisted change	4.29	2	29
Question 10- I felt like an imposter on the job	4.29	3	43
Question 7- I felt out of control in an unfamiliar situation	4.14	3	43
Question 9- I feared looking stupid	3.86	3	43
Question 12- I feared being rejected	3.57	4	57
Question 6- I became anxious when thinking about a change in my career	3.43	4	57
Question 11- I mulled over my mistakes	2.86	5	71

Note. *n* = Number of participants who rated either Strongly Agree, Agree, or Agree Somewhat. Sorted by Average rating in descending order.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As a result of the qualitative interview question in the Fear and Worry category, four themes were identified regarding the experiences of African American females in the area of power tactics they used to counteract the area of Fear and Worry. Each theme was aligned with the responses of each participant. All participant responses were organized on a chart by the number of respondents for each theme and the number of responses called frequency counts. As a result of the analysis, four themes were identified based on the power tactics used to overcome Fear and Worrying. The themes are:

- Focus on the Students/the Work
- Lean on Your Faith/Called to Serve
- Seek the Best fit
- Lean on Your Network/Ancestors

Fear and Worry Power Tactic 1: Focus on the Students/the Work. The top power tactic mentioned by seven of the seven participants, 100%, was to focus on the students and the work. This power tactic was referenced 21 times. These seven participants recounted times in their careers when they focused on supporting students as a means to counteract their feelings of Fear and Worry.

Participant 3 expressed that when fear and worry came due to having to address the behavior and the possible continued employment of an underperforming employee, she focused on the impact on students to inspire her to address the employee. She stated, "Before the end of the day, I let her know that I was not going to let her come back…She can't do the work that I need for the students" (Participant 3).

Participant 6 described her sense of responsibility to students of color and how it served as a power tactic to motivate her to move forward. She stated:

> I'm not just trying to have a happy district, you know, for education to maintain the status quo. I'm trying to disrupt some things. And I'm trying to disrupt things specifically for some key populations. And I, because I say that out loud and because I'm saying that as a Black woman out loud, what comes in response to that is a whole bunch of questioning. Statements like, 'You're just doing this because you're Black. You want to take care of the Black kids because you're Black.' I ask, 'Is it the Brown kids because you're Brown?' A whole lot of just resistance because, you know, folks don't want to change. The system is very stubborn. So, because of all that, I always have a level of fear and anxiety that I'm not going to do it. And the reason why that exists is not because of me; I got it because I understand that if I don't do it, or if I don't make progress towards those

> goals, the babies who are listening and looking will get another message that they are impossible. Or they can't do it. I have a huge sense of responsibility because I have something to prove to the little girl in me, but also to babies.

Participant 7 articulated how she used intentional language to inform others of her intent to focus on the students as her power tactic to address fear and worrying. She stated:

> What I want you to know is this is not about me, it's not about us. It's about making sure that we secure our future with kids who have unearned disadvantages. By that, I mean they don't dictate who they're born to, where they're born, how their families operate, or how their neighbors operate, but I need them to be equipped to manage the future, and the way to do that is for us to do this work. If you have other suggestions, I'm willing to take them. But in the meantime, this is where we're going. Some people saw that as arrogant and pushy. But I just said if I didn't do that, then I wouldn't do anything. So, my worry was okay. This is what you want to think. You'll think it's about me. But it's not really about me. So, I decided to just be more forceful in my language and more and clearer about my language in terms of who would benefit.

Fear and Worry Power Tactic 2: Lean on Your Faith/Called to Serve. Four of the seven participants, 57%, recounted times when leaning on their faith and the belief that they were called to serve in their capacity as superintendent was how they addressed feelings of Fear and Worry.

Participant 2 expressed in detail how she relies on her religious faith to address feelings of Fear and Worry. She stated:

> A key scripture is that there is a renewal of the mind. And so, how do you renew the mind? You speak of those heavenly things you talk about. Remind yourself of who God says you are. You know who He says you are. You know you were made in His image, and when you start to do that, you also start to realize that when you're interacting with someone, that may just be totally off the wall. But they, too, were also made in His image. And so you kind of learn how to respond to people who are speaking out of themselves like a little crazy. But for me again, some strategies to deal with my internal kind of fear and worry is again just really speaking those things about who God says I am and reminding Him that you know He has taken care of me all throughout my life, from that crazy situation where I was unemployed to the times where I had to step back and go back into the classroom, even be a substitute teacher while trying to press on to get back to where I saw myself as a superintendent. And it really is, just that it's kind of like your seasons and your levels. Each season, I learned something different that strengthens me to press on, that strengthens me to say, 'Yes, this is where God has placed you. There is an opportunity here, and you're here for a purpose and for a reason. You may be a little uncomfortable in it, but I've given you everything that you need,' and to be more reliant on Him.

Participant 4 shared that her faith is the power tactic she uses to overcome Fear and Worry. She stated:

> You just have to have a lot of faith. I don't know who people pray to, but it is the only thing that has kept me sane. I mean, I've experienced every high. That's what I say about the superintendency. The highs are high, and the lows are low, and if

> you do not have faith, you will not make it. You will not make it. That is the power tactic, right? Your faith is the power tactic. My faith. That's my secret. That's my secret weapon. That's my superpower. and I don't know if I would have been able to say this to you 10 years ago. It is not a cliché. It is absolutely my superpower. (Participant 4)

Participant 7 conveyed that her faith in God helped her address the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry. She stated:

> I always had good coverage through a prayer. That's probably my most powerful coverage. I did find time to talk to God and listen to God. And He would say to me, for instance, when I was contemplating a particular superintendency, He said to me, 'This is not your time,' literally, He said, 'This is not your time,' and probably within four months, my husband was diagnosed with terminal cancer. So, it's not my time. So, listening. I just say you have to be spiritually grounded, and you will get the direction that you need in terms of taking your next steps.

Fear and Worry Power Tactic 3: Seek the Best Fit. Although this power tactic was only referenced by three of the seven participants with a frequency of 13, some lessons can be learned by the sharing of the idea of seeking the school district that is the best fit for the individual as a way to address Fear and Worry.

Participant 2 reflected on working in multiple districts and seeking the best fit for new experiences:

> I have to tell you that my first experience in [redacted] district is always in the back of my mind. I am always wondering, 'Am I going to make it through the three years? Am I going to have a contentious issue? Will there be that one person

> who's going to fight and challenge me, and I'm not going to have the support from the greater community to help push through this?' So, it's always lurking in the back of my head, and I quickly try to dismiss that. You know, it's like this is a new opportunity. This is a different community. There are different circumstances. You know, enjoy what you're in at the moment in this new community.

Participant 3 shared that when a new superintendent was hired, she needed to transition to a new opportunity to Seek the Best Fit. She recounted her experience:

> The superintendent was new. She hired a new assistant and new assistant superintendents. She had been in the district as the previous high school principal. That's the biggest job in the district. So every superintendent sort of wants to pick their own principal of the high school, you know what I mean. And so I believe that was why she removed me from the position. But for me, I didn't resist the change or anything or overthink it. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 communicated her thoughts on when to Seek the Best Fit:

> Angela, I'm going to give this to you for free with regard to fear and worry. The first thing I want to tell you is at 52, with all the experiences I've had, I'm going to say to you that if I knew then what I know at 52, I would worry a lot less. In one district, fear and worry were associated with one of the leaders, and I recognized at some point it was time for me to go. It wasn't good. The district was no longer a good match. My interactions with superiors were no longer of any benefit to me, detrimental to my health. So I left.

Participant 7 offered that when recommending to someone how to find a district that is the best fit, she gave the following advice:

> You want a good place, and you need to get prepared. So you're looking for a place where you've got good advocacy, good support, good coverage, and good advice. They won't penalize you for saying, 'Hey, I don't understand how to make this work. Can you give me some advice on it? Who should I talk to? How should I approach that person? Can you open the door for me?' That's what I mean by good coverage, advocacy, support, and advice in your own home and in the environment you want to go into.

Fear and Worry Power Tactic 4: Lean on Your Network/Ancestors. The power tactic of Lean on Your Network/Ancestors was mentioned by six of the seven participants, 86%. This power tactic was referenced 12 times. These 6 participants recounted times in their careers when they leaned on their network or their ancestral heritage to counteract their feelings of Fear and Worry.

Participant 1 expressed,

> I got it! I can do all things like I had the superwoman complex. For some reason, I think it's because I'm a Black woman, and we do all the things right!? This is how we make it happen. So, just allowing myself to be able to ask for help and recognizing that asking for help is not a sign of weakness is not a sign of incompetence. There is actually power in understanding and recognizing your own personal limitations in areas where you can grow.

Participant 4 shared that she relied on her sorority network as support to counteract fear and worrying. She communicated, "I am a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Incorporated. I'm pretty close to my sisters, and they share my struggle. That's been very helpful. So that's a power tactic, aligning yourself with a support system. It's absolutely necessary" (Participant 4).

Participant 5 shared that leaning on the advice of a mentor was a power tactic, stating, "I've been cautioned by mentors to not say negative self-talk in public." Participant 6 shared her strategy:

> I think what helps me is just remembering that I'm not doing it alone, that there's a whole bunch of folks … I have some Blacks on my board who are super supportive, and I kind of just breathe. I use what I've used before; like I told you, I'm able to rally folks to do something they wouldn't have otherwise done. And I will just tell the story. I will tell the story of our babies, and I will show the data. I say that, you know, we just had an article that came out that again reiterated that we're the second largest gap in the nation. What the hell! So, my strategy for fear is to remind myself again of who I am, where I come from, and who I come from.

Table 17 shows the references (frequency) made by participants during interviews to the power tactics used to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry. The number and percentage of participants who reported using the power tactic are also indicated in the table. The top power tactic referenced in interviews was Focus on the Students/the Work, which was referenced 21 times by seven (100%) of the participants. The power tactic of Leaning on Your Network or Ancestors was referenced 12 times by six (86%) participants. The power tactic of Leaning on Your Faith or Being Called to Serve was referenced 14 times by four (57%) of the participants. Although only three of the seven (43%) participants referenced Seek the Best Fit, it was referenced 13 times.

Table 17

Power Tactics for the Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Fear and Worry

Themes of power tactics used for: Fear and worry	References (frequency)	*n*	Percent of participants
Focus on the students/the work	21	7	100
Lean on your faith/called to serve	14	4	57
Seek the best fit	13	3	43
Lean on your network/ancestors	12	6	86

Note. $n = 7$. Data sorted by References in descending order.

Research Question 3: Holding Back

Research Question 3 asked, *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back.* The survey analyzed which women experienced any of the self-sabotaging behaviors in the category of Holding Back. The interview questions were meant to delve deeper into the power tactics or strategies that the participants used to overcome the self-sabotaging behaviors of Holding Back. The following sections discuss the findings from the survey and the interview responses.

Quantitative Data Analysis

No participant reported Interview Question 13, "I did not reach out for help when I needed it." This survey question had the highest average rating of 4.71. Twenty-nine percent, two of seven participants, reported, "I preferred not to speak up in a meeting or group discussion." This question had an average rating of 4.57. "I have talked down to myself" was reported by only one of the seven (14%) participants, with an average rating of 4.29. Two of the seven participants, 29%, reported, "I preferred to sit in the back of the room at conferences or meetings." This question had an average rating of 4.29. Three of the seven participants, 43%, responded favorably to three questions: "I felt insecure about balancing work and home life obligations" with an average rating of 4.14, "I have held

back when I had the answer, question, or thought because I was concerned about what other people think or the impression they will have of me" with an average rating of four, and "I made inflections rather than bold statements," with an average rating of 3.86. The lowest average rating of 3.43 was in response to the question, "I have apologized unnecessarily." Four of the seven participants, 57%, reported positively to this question.

Table 18 highlights the responses to nine questions related to the Holding Back category. The data is organized by average rating. It includes the number and percentage of participants who rated either: (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, (3) *Agree Somewhat*.

Table 18

Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Holding Back

Sabotaging category: Holding back	Average rating	*n*	Percent of participants
Question 13- I did not reach out for help when I needed it	4.71	0	0
Question 19- I preferred not to speak up in a meeting or group discussion	4.57	2	29
Question 17- I have talked down to myself	4.29	1	14
Question 18- I preferred to sit in the back of the room at conferences or meetings	4.29	2	29
Question 21- I felt insecure towards balancing work and family obligations	4.14	3	43
Question 20- I have held back when I had the answer, question, or thought because I was concerned about what other people think or the impression they will have of me	4	3	43
Question 14- I have avoided criticism	4	2	29
Question 15- I made inflections rather than make bold statements	3.86	3	43
Question 16- I have apologized unnecessarily	3.43	4	57

Note. *n* = Number of participants who rated either Strongly Agree, Agree, or Agree Somewhat. Sorted by Average rating in descending order.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As a result of the qualitative interview question in the Holding Back category, three themes were identified regarding the experiences African American female superintendents used as power tactics to counteract the area of Holding Back. Each theme was aligned with 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, three themes were identified based on power tactics used to overcome Holding Back. The themes are:

- Speak Truth at the Appropriate Time
- Challenge/Commit Yourself to Network/Speak
- Have an Accountability Partner

Holding Back Power Tactic 1: Speak Truth at the Appropriate Time. The most frequently used power tactic was Speak Truth at the Appropriate Time. This power tactic was mentioned by six of the seven participants with a frequency of 22. These participants recounted times in their careers when they counteracted the behavior of holding back by being intentional about when to speak their truth.

Participant 2 recounted an experience where she stated:

> We need to learn to recognize that in order to come together, there's going to have to be some give and take. We don't need to penalize individuals for their own lens, their contextual lens, which is what was happening in the discussion. So, I held back while she was talking. When I finally spoke, I was cognizant that I did not want to upset or offend anyone within the conversation, but yet speak the truth about where we are and the tendency to use race as a scapegoat in terms of other

> issues that actually may be involved. So, you have to know when to hold your tongue until there's an appropriate space where you feel psychologically safe to be able to share your frustrations. And then to know what limits, even in that sharing, because some people may not be ready to receive it. That's not just some kind of trick, but that's discernment.

Participant 4 offered her perspective when the environment you are in expects you to hold back:

> So, the holding back may sometimes be a direct result of you being told explicitly to do just that. I have experienced that while serving as a Black school district administrator in a district where you're the only Black at that level, and the district had a majority White student population. You're in meeting after meeting, and you recognize that, yeah, the district does a really good job of analyzing student assessments, but everybody in the room who's not Black failed to address the elephant in the room - which students that are failing to make progress? You notice some consistent students who were failing to make the type of academic gains that we all knew in the room, Black and White, that they were capable of making. So I'm sitting in this room. It's like trauma. When I think about sitting in this room with all these sophisticated intellects looking, I can still see the actual room where I was sitting, kind of like I'm in a therapy session, and I'm looking like you all see that we're right there where it says that the Black children are like for the last five years have made no statistically significant improvements in performance.

> So, now we actually have the subcategories listed, and we act like we don't zoom in to see it. Everybody in the room acted like they didn't see that the children who weren't making gains were Black. So, very often, as I worked in this suburban school district, I would address that. 'Hello! Hello! Hello!' I'm like in the room saying to the administrators in this room, 'I think that we should have a conversation about the fact that the Black children are not achieving.' And I actually did that so many times. I can still remember having an assistant superintendent come to me, essentially telling me that the superintendent told me that I should no longer have that conversation out loud. I am no longer with that district.

Participant 5 described a time when she left a district when her values were not in alignment with the superintendent. She shared with the superintendent the reasons she could no longer stay and support his leadership. A few years later, he contacted her. She explained the conversation:

> The superintendent called me to let me know that one of the people who he brought was leaving. He was calling me back to be chief academic officer. To his credit, he said, 'I remember the talk that we had when you left, and you had four specific things that we talked about, which were the reasons why you left. And I want to talk to you about how those four things will be different when you come back.' He knew he was not likely to finish his contract as superintendent; he had lost a child to suicide and just some other things in his life. He let me know that the current chief academic officer has an opportunity someplace else, and he would like to know if I would come back as chief academic officer and then agree

to interim if he didn't fulfill the rest of his contract. So that's what I agreed to do. Then, when he talked to the board about leaving, they said, instead of me being interim, would I be superintendent?

Participant 6 communicated that Holding Back is not a challenge that she has and that she will speak the truth:

> So, what I will say to you is holding back is not my issue, and I say that because I'm not a hierarchical person. I'm not like, you know, position and title-focused. I love people. I relate to people very well, and I feel comfortable with people across diverse groups, regardless of titles or roles. So I've always been me. I come as who I am, and I think that helps me be able to relate across groups. I would say that, of course, as a Black woman, I'm always thinking about how I'm seen and how people interpret what I say and what I do. So, I probably was a little bit cautious at the beginning of my career. Now I've been in this game for a long time, like 20 plus years as an educator, and I don't know if it's my age or how long I've been in the role or in the work, but you know I'm tired of waiting, like wait no more! And so, at this point, not to be cliché, but I'm kind of unapologetic like it is what it is. I've never really feared, man, which again, what are you going to do, fire me? I already know what I'm called to do. You know, whatever I'm called to do, it's going to happen. So, I don't get scared that I'm going to lose my job. So, I do speak up, but I will say that I speak up more now. And I'm really clear now about what I'm trying to do and more transparent. I'm always communicating with respect, love, and compassion. But I mean, we can't wait. The people have been held back for a long time, and our babies are held back as a result of it. So I'm

done with the hold of the back. We got work to do. You know they want to come along, and if you don't want to come along, get out the way, and if you don't get out the way, that's on you. But it's going to happen. Because, like I said, the babies can't wait.

Participant 7 communicated the following perspective:

So I think all of us have held back at one point or another, just based on people's insecurity or concern of a misunderstanding who we are, and so that probably played itself out in several situations. If I've had an opinion that did not go along with everyone else based on some personal belief I have or some assessment I have with the situation, yeah, I've often held back and scanned the room. Took time to kind of figure out what's the best words to use so that I don't keep people from hearing me. They need to get the message. Either through an example or maybe it's because I wait and choose my time, or it could be I choose the venue. So, it could be that I chose to talk with someone one-on-one about a particular situation when I may not have expressed their opinion to the group because I don't think the group is ready. I may speak to individuals within that group and let them know, 'Here's what I'm thinking about that…' and see how well they're pen to a different opinion.

So I've used that strategy before, so I call it breaking the group down where I just kind of go to the individual influencers within the group and express my concern or express my opinion and then wait until the next time that conversation comes through. If it is a situation of urgent nature, then I tend to choose my words carefully. Use examples, often employing the names of the people in the room

because it draws their attention, draws them in, and allows them to humanize my position or to recognize my position. And I will always say, 'I want people to consider this position.' It doesn't mean they have to agree. But I'll just say I'd like you to consider this instead of pushing my dear forward. I just say I want to be open to it.

So I use language a lot. It all depends on the context. Is it urgent? If it's urgent, I'll do it then and there and do it in a particular way. If it's not urgent, then I take my time and use individual conversations to get the ground fertile.

Holding Back Power Tactic 2: Challenge/Commit Yourself to Network/Speak.

Five of the seven participants, 71%, recounted times when they had to challenge or commit themselves to networking or speaking up in meetings as a strategy to Holding Back.

Participant 1 stated:

> In that work environment, I had no desire to share or to, you know, put those ideas out there, and I don't know if it was really so much of a fear of what people said because I'm also pretty self-aware and ironically, extremely confident, like, I know what I know, and if I don't know, I now know I can ask for it, or I have the skills to go and get the information. It was just a general personality piece, I think, where I just chose not to speak, and as I recognized that about myself, I just made it a challenge for myself. I made it a personal growth area. That's how I powered through. That was my power tactic to make it a challenge for myself and say, 'Okay when you go to each of these meetings. You're going to talk with three new people.' You know something. It sounds kind of simple. Somewhat silly, but I've

> created accountability partners for myself in this area. So when I made that a goal for myself. I told my administrative assistant that I was going to go to this meeting and that I was going to 'people' today. It's kind of like a running joke. But it really did help me recognize that when I go to these meetings, there is an expectation, not just that I am representing my district well, and putting us in the best light, but that I go out and I work with colleagues, and I have those conversations. And you know, I always said, like I said, I started out with a goal of 'I'm going to talk with three new people about whatever the topic is that we're discussing on that day. I'm going to share my idea with them. And then I'm going to ask them what they're going to do.' Now, it has become part of my regular behavior.

Participant 3 described how she committed herself to speaking up and not Holding Back. She shared:

> When you're in a meeting like when we have our superintendents conference, and it's almost all men, and you're the only Black female in the room. Raising my hand sometimes in those scenarios, with 20 male superintendents, sometimes I know that I would not speak up, I would not do it. So what did I do? I have started to understand that a lot of times, the things they say were either things I was thinking or my idea might even be better. So I push myself to raise my hand and make the comment. Because there is nothing more frustrating than you're thinking it already, and some guy says it, and it becomes brilliant, you know. So I just have to intentionally speak up because that's really the type of environment.

Holding Back Power Tactic 3: Have an Accountability Partner. Two of the seven participants, 29%, recounted times when having an accountability partner was a power tactic to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back.

Participant 1 shared how she addresses the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back; she disclosed, "I created accountability partners for myself in this area. So when I made that a goal for myself, I told my administrative assistant that I was going to go to this meeting, and I was going to 'people' today."

Participant 3 expressed that her accountability partners include the other African American female superintendents. She offered:

> Across the country, we've just started a Black female superintendent's group. We thought it was 50 of us, and as it turns out, it's closer to 80. But that's across 50 States. Eighty Black female superintendents right now, and on any given day when you go on the group chat, somebody might be saying, 'You know, I don't think I'm going to do this anymore,' or somebody's being welcomed into the group.

Table 19 shows the references (frequency) made by participants during interviews to the power tactics used to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back. The number and percentage of participants who reported using the power tactic are also indicated in the table. The top power tactic referenced in interviews was Speak Truth at the Appropriate Time, which was referenced 22 times by six (86%) of the participants. The power tactic of Challenge/Commit Yourself to Network/Speak was referenced 11 times by five (71%) participants. The power tactic of Have an Accountability Partner was referenced six times by two (29%) of the participants.

Table 19

Power Tactics for the Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Holding Back

Themes for power tactics used for: Holding back	References (frequency)	*n*	Percent of participants
Speak truth at the appropriate time	22	6	86%
Challenge/commit yourself to network/speak	11	5	71%
Have an accountability partner	6	2	29%

Note. $n = 7$. Data sorted by References in descending order.

Research Questions 4: Not Taking Time for Reflection

Research Question 4 asked: *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection*. The survey analyzed which women experienced any of the self-sabotaging behaviors in the category of Not Taking Time for Reflection. The interview questions were meant to delve deeper into the power tactics or strategies that the participants used to overcome the self-sabotaging behaviors of Not Taking Time for Reflection. The following sections discuss the findings from the survey and the interview responses.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Only two of the seven (29%) participants reported, "I have kept busy to avoid being alone," with an average rating of 4.29. Three of the seven (43%) participants reported, "I have not allowed myself to mourn losses or cry," with an average rating of four. Two of the seven (29%) of the participants reported, "I have hated to 'be wrong,'" with an average rating of four. Three of the seven (43%) of the participants reported, "I have held a grudge with someone," with an average rating of four. The highest reported self-sabotaging behavior for Not Taking Time for Reflection was, "I have not allowed myself to experience 'downtime.'" This was reported by five of the seven (71%) at an average rate of 3.43. Table 20 highlights the responses to six questions related to the Not

Taking Time for Reflection category. It includes the number and percentage of participants who rated either (1) *Strongly Agree*, (2) *Agree*, (3) *Agree Somewhat*.

Table 20

Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection

Sabotaging category: Not taking time for reflection	Average rating	*n*	Percent of participants
Question 22- I have kept busy to avoid being alone	4.29	2	29
Question 23- I have not allowed myself to mourn losses or cry	4	3	43
Question 26- I have hated to 'be wrong'	4	2	29
Question 27- I have held a grudge with someone	4	3	43
Question 24- I have not taken vacations when I could	3.71	4	57
Question 25- I have not allowed myself to experience "downtime"	3.43	5	71

Note. *n* = Number of participants who rated either Strongly Agree, Agree, or Agree Somewhat. Sorted by Average rating in descending order.

Qualitative Data Analysis

As a result of the qualitative interview question in the Not Taking Time for Reflection category, five themes were identified regarding the experiences of African American female superintendents in the area of power tactics they used to counteract the area of Not Taking Time for Reflection. Each theme was aligned with 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, five themes were identified based on power tactics used to overcome Not Taking Time for Reflection. The themes are:

- Address Feelings With Faith/Prayer/Forgiveness
- Build/Lean on Your Community
- Address Physical and Mental Health (Self-Care)

- Reflect/Process Feelings/Situation
- Plan Vacation/Down Time (Self-Care)

The power tactic Address Feelings with Faith/Prayer/Forgiveness was referenced 17 times by five (71%) participants. The power tactic referenced by the majority of the participants in interviews was Build/Lean on Your Community, which was referenced 16 times by six (86%) of the participants. The power tactic Address Physical and Mental Health was referenced 16 times by four (57%) of the participants. The power tactic Reflect/Process Feelings/Situation was referenced 15 times by five (71%) of the participants. The power tactic Plan Vacation/Downtime was referenced 11 times by four (57%) of the participants.

Not Taking Time for Reflection Power Tactic 1: Address Feelings With Faith/Prayer/Forgiveness. The power tactic of Addressing Feelings with Faith/Prayer/Forgiveness was mentioned by five of the seven participants with a frequency of 17. These participants recounted times in their careers when they counteracted the behavior of not taking time for reflection by addressing negative feelings with faith, prayer, and/or forgiveness.

Participant 1 disclosed, "I don't hold on to grudges because that is something that takes more energy from me as a person. I pray on it and let it go."

Participant 3 communicated, "I don't hold grudges. As a matter of fact, I laugh at the fact that I think maybe God knew not to have me keep grudges because He didn't give me a long enough memory to even keep grudges."

Participant 7 articulated:

> So what I decided now is instead of holding a grudge against someone, [I] try to understand the behavior and then respond accordingly. I recognize that the one thing I don't want to do is get caught up in grudges because it takes so much energy and it eats you up. So, I try not to hold grudges. I have held grudges before, but they're not helpful. It's very hard to do, but I think just deciding. That's what you're going to do. As well as pray about it.

Not Taking Time for Reflection Power Tactic 2: Build/Lean on Your Community. The most frequently used power tactic was Build/Lean on Your Community. This power tactic was mentioned by six of the seven participants with a frequency of 16. These participants recounted times in their careers when they counteracted the behavior of not taking time for reflection by Build/ Lean on Your Community.

Participant 2 stated:

> I have a couple of groups. I have a particular group of friends with similar experiences. I have three other friends who are also superintendents, all females, all women of color, who also were going through similar things and were looking for that next superintendency after having to leave their positions without finishing their contracts. It was a challenge. And so we literally would console and talk to each other, and mainly through the prayer and the encouragements and the meditation good things, on positivity.

Participant 5 described the support she gets from her community in reflecting on decisions:

> I think there are five of us superintendents on a thread, and sometimes, I'll throw a question out. You know, like, 'What do you think about doing this?' And I'll get four different answers. So, I think that overcoming the behaviors is important for that because you have to recognize when you are getting in your own way and what can you do to get out of it because nobody's going to be able to give you all the answers. You just kind of have to make your way to your answer, implement it, and be confident to do it.

Participant 6 offered:

> I have an executive coach. One other thing that's helping me with that is that I'm really transparent with the folks who are working with me and supporting me. This is something I'm working on and, so they can help me hold myself accountable.

Participant 7 shared about the community that she relies on. She expressed:

> My church is where I go for my spiritual empowerment. I also have a very small but very supportive family. We don't discuss work stuff in my family, but we discuss how we support each other. I have three sisters and a brother, and so we are very, very supportive, and my two daughters are also in leadership. So, we support each other by just saying that this is a time when there's no conversation about work and the names of people. We are just going to talk about what you need to keep your soul and keep your cup filled. So, we give advice to each other, and we support each other.

Not Taking Time for Reflection Power Tactic 3: Address Physical and Mental Health (Self-Care). This power tactic was mentioned by four of the seven participants with a frequency of 16. These participants recounted times in their careers when they counteracted the behavior of not taking time for reflection by focusing on their physical and mental health as a form of self-care.

Participant 1 shared:

> There is a woman, an African American woman, who works at the universities, but she's also a fitness coach and therapist. I had never been to therapy. I probably could have had it years ago, but she only works with African American women who are in high-stress jobs or executive leadership- heads of state departments, heads of school districts, those types of positions. My friend recommended her and thought she would be great for me to work with, so I started working with her. So, a strategy is just finding someone else who is not necessarily steeped in all the same work that I'm in, or that is even local, you know. We work together on areas of wellness, and it's not just physical fitness. Once a week we have a Zoom call. We've got text threads and group chats and all of those kinds of things, and it's all Black women who are in these high-power positions just trying to hold each other up. And it's just such a strong sense of community.

Participant 4 offered how she addresses her mental health:

> We are talking about taking care of your mental capacity to do the work. I read a book that suggested high performers see therapists. And that's about where I'm at right now like that's required for me to function. Just like you take all the time that

you take with your physical health, you have to take it with your mental health. And so that's what I do. I did that, and I pray, and I meditate a lot, absolutely.

Participant 6 shared:

> It becomes hard to give yourself that time to again say, 'This is a lot, or I'm weak, or I'm scared, or I'm, you know, whatever.' So, I am in therapy for that. That's how I address that. Again, I continue to surround myself with strong women leaders, but I have really now been honest about needing therapy, particularly after losing my mom. I'm learning in therapy that it is okay to make time for me.

Not Taking Time for Reflection Power Tactic 4: Reflect/Process Feelings/Situation. This power tactic was mentioned by five of the seven participants with a frequency of 15. These participants recounted times in their careers when they counteracted the behavior of not taking time for reflection by being intentional to Reflect/ Process Feelings/Situation.

While sharing how she used her time to process situations, Participant 2 shared:

> There's no downtime. You sleep with a pad next to your bed because you're constantly thinking about what you have to do or some other things. So it's really kind of a challenge. So, for me, one of the strategies that I used to get beyond that was the writing. You know, it was cathartic, the writing, the journaling, really reflecting back on the experience, you know, again, the interplay of my faith.

Participant 3 imparted a strategy that she is aware that some superintendents have used to make time for vacation:

> I've seen some other female superintendents make as part of their contract that they will take their vacations. If you are looking to do this, the best time to get the

best contract is when you initially go in. They've already said they want you because if you're that far, they've selected you out of the group. And so, knowing how important reflection is, the time to do things for yourself, take care of your family and yourself, it would be wise to make it part of the contract. Because if you don't have a clear understanding of the value of vacation and self-care, ultimately, you will burn out.

Participant 4 expressed:

> We don't take time for reflection. That's because we're doing too much. It's not because we don't recognize the importance of being reflective practitioners. We're doing a lot. We're doing a lot more than our peers in many instances. So now you happen to be interviewing someone who is very much committed to reflecting. I didn't have time to think about that when my kids were younger and all of that. But I recognize now that a part of what I want to call my secret sauce is me seriously protecting my ability to think. Oh, I don't mess around with that because, see, I have to be able to think. I'm not a singer. I'm not a dancer. I'm an intellectual. I'm not better than most. But I think differently than the average person. I can get up to a microphone and talk for two hours with no notes. I've done it on national television. I can write a whole chapter of a book in six hours with no references. I'm an intellect, but I protect that space by knowing what type of environment is conducive to allowing me to do that.

Participant 5 offered:

> If I had taken time to reflect and strategize, dealing with this particular issue would have had a logical conclusion. And so, the lessons that I learned, or the

tactics or strategies that I would share in terms of addressing that is, just think, think farther out, you know, when people do things. So just think about moves that people might make and think about it farther out than I might otherwise.

Participant 6 stated, "I am learning to take time for reflection because I love what I do."

Not Taking Time for Reflection Power Tactic 5: Plan Vacation/Down Time Self-Care). This power tactic was mentioned by four of the seven participants with a frequency of 11. These participants recounted times in their careers when they counteracted the behavior of not taking time for reflection by intentionally planning vacations or downtime.

Participant 1 shared:

> I recognized that when I'm not my best self, I'm no good to anyone. I used to always think if I don't go to work, who's going to do all things? 'Oh, wait! The things will just be there when I get back. Oh, okay.' So, you know, it started out with just giving myself permission to take a sick day if I was sick and recognizing that I healed a lot faster if I wasn't trying to power through in the classroom or in the office. So, I just recognized my own importance and the need for self-care. And I know people really started talking about self-care and all those things post-pandemic. But this was something I started pre-pandemic, if you know, to be honest, because I was recognizing how rundown I was becoming and how things really just weren't going well for me because I wasn't taking the time to stop and relax for a while. You know, in my personal life. We were caregivers to sick parents from my husband's side and my side. And it was just kind of like, 'okay. We're doing all these things. We're ripping and running. We just need to stop.' And

so we decided it was a joint decision. My husband and I that we were going to take like little mini vacations, you know, even if it was just a long weekend. So Martin Luther King weekend became our weekend, and it was kind of just that opportunity to stop and rest and rejuvenate ourselves.

Participant 6 conveyed, "It's not that I don't know how to say no. I love this stuff. But I am learning to slow down and have me time."

Participant 7 imparted:

> Take your time for reflection. Yes, Lord. I think sometimes, the way the world works, we are moving so quickly, not taking time for reflection. However, I have over the years decided that between Saturday night and Sunday, 6 o'clock I don't do anything associated with work. It gives me time to reflect on the last week. Usually, every Friday night I try to reflect, but I have learned over the years that you have to declare time for yourself to reflect. If it's on a matter that's really pressing, or if this is on just a week, or a month, or an issue, I generally find that on the weekend, when I have more control over my time, I can just declare a time when everything else is quiet. There's no sound. I think you have to create the conditions first, even if it's in my car. I do call my car, my 'confession booth.' There's nobody in the car but me, and so I can go away somewhere where I'm not really engaging with anyone, and just think through how I'm feeling about something.

Table 21 shows the references (frequency) made by participants during interviews to the power tactics used to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time

for Reflection. The number and percentage of participants who reported using the power tactic are also indicated in the table.

Table 21

Power Tactics for the Self-Sabotaging Behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection

Themes for power tactics for: Not taking time for reflection	References (frequency)	*n*	Percent of participants
Address feelings with faith/prayer/forgiveness	17	5	71
Build/lean on your community	16	6	86
Address physical and mental health (self-care)	16	4	57
Reflect/process feelings/situation	15	5	71
Plan vacation/down time (self-care)	11	4	57

Note. $n = 7$. Data sorted by References in descending order.

Key Findings

Once the data had been collected, an analysis of the findings from the survey and interview transcripts was conducted. Key findings related to the power tactics African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors experienced by the superintendents were uncovered.

The quantitative data provided initial insights into the types of self-sabotaging behaviors experienced by the superintendents. Further analysis conducted on the qualitative data produced an even deeper understanding of the self-sabotaging behaviors experienced by the superintendents.

Power Tactic Key Findings

The findings from the qualitative data gave an in-depth understanding of the power tactics used to overcome self-sabotaging behaviors. Based on the research, the following findings are revealed.

Thinking Too Small

- None of the participants reported blaming others or not being open to new experiences.
- All of the participants reported in their interview that a power tactic for Thinking Too Small was to take advantage of opportunities.

Fear and Worry

- Only 2 (29%) of the participants surveyed reported resisting change. Whereas 5 (72%) of the participants reported mulling over mistakes.
- All of the participants reported in their interview that a power tactic for Fear and Worry was to focus on the students and the work that needed to be done.

Holding Back

- All of the participants surveyed reported that they reach out for help when needed.
- Six of the 7 (86%) participants reported in their interviews that a power tactic for Holding Back is speaking truth at the appropriate time.

Not Taking Time for Reflection

- Two of the 7 (29%) participants surveyed reported that they kept busy to avoid being alone and that they hated to be wrong.
- Five of the 7 (71%) participants reported in their interviews that they addressed feelings of Fear and Worry through faith, prayer, and forgiveness.
- Six of the 7 (86%) participants reported in their interviews that a power tactic for Not Taking Time for Reflection is to build or lean on their community (family, friends, mentors, etc.).

Power Tactics Unexpected Findings

- Two of the 7 (29%) participants interviewed experienced having to leave superintendent positions to return to positions in the school district.
- The power tactic these participants used was to persist through tough times to return to their desired career path.
- Only 1 of the 7 (14%) participants surveyed reported that they have talked down to themselves.
- Four of the 7 (57%) participants interviewed shared that their self-care routine included mental health support through therapy.
- Five of the 7 participants belong to organizations focused on African American women (i.e., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., LINKS Inc., etc.).
- African American females are not a monolithic group. They vary in their attitudes, backgrounds, and philosophies about how their experiences impact the barriers they face and the power tactics to overcome them.

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine the power tactics that African American female superintendents use to overcome four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. Chapter IV presented the methodology and the results of this study. Seven participants answered a 27-question survey regarding self-sabotaging behaviors, and they were then interviewed and responded to seven interview questions that were used to identify codes, themes, and analysis of power tactic data. The data was used to identify power tactic themes for each research question. There were 15 themes identified for this study, with a total of 256 frequency responses overall themes referenced. Chapter V will provide a

reflective discussion of data results, major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, and implications based on results identified in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This mixed-method study identified and described the self-sabotaging behaviors experienced by African American female superintendents throughout their career development and explored their impact on their career development. In addition, the study identified power tactics or strategies African American female superintendents used to overcome four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. The basis for this study was a framework adapted from Lerner's (2012) book, as well as Ryder and Briles's (2003) work that categorized female self-sabotaging behaviors within the nine overarching power domains. Chapter V provides an overview of the purpose of the study, the research questions, key and unexpected conclusions, implications for action, recommendations for future research, and concluding reflections.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003).

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small?
2. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry?

3. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back?
4. What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time for Reflection?

Research Design

A sequential explanatory mixed-method study design was used to identify and describe self-sabotaging behaviors displayed by African American female superintendents. The rationale for the sequential explanatory mixed-method design was that in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of African American female superintendents' experience, a multi-layered study design had to be employed. A sequential explanatory mixed-method design requires collecting quantitative data first and then explaining the quantitative results with in-depth qualitative data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). More specifically, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), researchers use a sequential explanatory mixed-method study design to gain a deeper understanding of a problem and to explain their initial findings. The design has a "primary emphasis on quantitative methods" (McMillan &Schumacher, 2010, p. 401). The study starts with the collection and analysis of quantitative data, followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data, thus allowing the researcher to elaborate on the initial quantitative findings (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015).

The sequential explanatory mixed-method design of this study first identified strategies the African American female superintendents employ to counter the self-sabotaging behaviors. The qualitative component provided a unique experience where we

heard "from their [participants] own point of view, in their voice" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 323). The mixed-method design of the study was significant because "using solely a quantitative or qualitative method would be insufficient to provide complete answers that meet the goal or purpose of the study" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 395).

Population

A research population is a group of individuals who conform to specific criteria and to which the researcher has a goal to generalize the results of the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The theoretical study population of this study was the subgroup of African American female superintendents out of the 16,800 school districts in the United States. The population of African American female superintendents is the group to which the results of the study can be generalized to the larger population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Current data shows that less than 1.5% of U.S. superintendents are African American females (Superville, 2023). Using this current data, it can be estimated that 252 of the 16,800 school districts are being led by African American female superintendents. These numbers only included African American female superintendents from public school districts and did not include female superintendents from private, nonpublic, or county office positions.

Sampling Frame

Creswell (2018) defined the target population as a small percentage of the total population narrowed down to define participants who display clear characteristics of significance and concern to the study. McMillian and Schumacher (2010) use the term sampling frame to describe a smaller subset of the general population for a study.

McMillian and Schumacher noted the critical importance researchers hold in "carefully defining both the target population and the sampling frame" (p. 129). The sampling frame represents the total group of individuals the study sample could be drawn from (McMillian & Schumacher, 2010).

For this study, the delimitations set by the researcher included: African American female superintendents in the four regions of the United States and African American females who worked as district superintendents for one year or more. To collect equitable national representation, the researcher grouped states meeting the criteria into regional areas: (a) West - CA, (b) Midwest - IL and OH, (c) East - CT and MA, and (d) South - GA.

Sample

The sampling frame was used to identify purposeful, convenience, and snowball as the appropriate sampling methods for the study. Purposeful sampling is when the researcher purposefully selects participants representative of the population based on their experience with the phenomena (Creswell, 2007; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). This sampling method allowed the researcher to focus on the characteristics of the African American female superintendents. Convenience sampling is a non-probability method of selecting participants who are easily accessible or available to participate in the research (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Snowball sampling, also called network sampling, is a method in which a preceding participant names each successive participant (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

The criteria for selecting participants were purposeful. Participants in the study met the qualification as K-12 superintendents who: (a) identify as African American, (b)

female, (c) currently hold the position of superintendent, and (d) have held the position for a minimum of one year. Participants were then selected through convenience and snowball sampling. The convenience sampling began by identifying participants from the state of California because the researcher was able to identify the African American female superintendents through the state organization CAAASA. The AASA was the national organization used to identify African American female superintendents in the other regions of the study.

The sample for the study was seven African American female K-12 public school superintendents from four regions of the United States. The small sample size allowed for an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Summary of Major and Unexpected Findings

The seven African American female superintendents shared their experiences regarding the strategies or power tactics they practice that allowed them to avoid the traps that hold women back from ascending to executive educational leadership positions. Their interview responses resulted in eight major findings, which are arranged according to the four research questions of this study.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 asked: *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Thinking Too Small?*

Major Finding 1: African American Female Superintendents Take Ownership of Their Life Experiences

All seven surveyed participants reported that they did not blame others and were open to new experiences. The participants have used power tactics to address the skill of taking ownership of their life experiences and have not allowed negative self-talk to keep them from being open to new experiences. Participant 3 shared, "I did not resist change or overthink it. I just put in applications and decided to give it a try. I got the superintendent job." The African American female superintendents have done what Arriaga et al. (2020) would call "Owning the story we tell" (p. 18). The participants were conscious of values, beliefs, assumptions, and expectations that aligned with their personal vision and mission (Arriaga et al., 2020).

Major Finding 2: African American Female Superintendents Take Advantage of Opportunities

All participants reported in their interview that a power tactic for Thinking Too Small was to take advantage of opportunities. For example, Participant 6 shared that many of her career transitions were due to her accepting promotions when opportunities presented themselves. The participants did not allow themselves to avoid new opportunities by thinking too small, using what Lerner (2012) describes as "Owning all of Oneself" (p. 42). This way of thinking allows women to appreciate all aspects of themselves. Lerner maintains that women need to find their passion and develop self-appreciation.

Research shows that "females continue to receive fewer opportunities than their male counterparts" (Arriaga et al., 2020, p. 5). As it relates to executive leadership,

females "must work harder and prove themselves repeatedly as they work their way up to senior positions" (Arriaga et al., 2020, p. 5). The African American female superintendents in this study demonstrate that the power tactic of taking advantage of opportunities when they present themselves will increase the number of women who move into executive leadership (Brown, 2018).

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked: *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Fear and Worry?*

Major Finding 3: African American Female Superintendents Embrace Change

Only two (29%) participants surveyed reported resisting change, whereas five (72%) reported mulling over mistakes. To move into executive leadership, women must take time to reflect on mistakes, yet not mull over them in a way that can be stagnant to progress. "Successful men and women are separated from those who are not successful by their attitude about failure" (Ryder & Briles, 2003, p. 176). The African American female superintendents in this study did not allow the mulling over of mistakes, failures, or change to keep them from embracing change and new opportunities (Brown, 2018; Pianta, 2020). This was exemplified by Participant 2, who resigned from a superintendent position when the position was no longer a fit. She expressed that she took teacher and assistant principal jobs to survive but worked her way back up to superintendent in a district that she now serves with excellence.

Major Finding 4: African American Female Superintendents Enhance their Confidence and Overcome Fear and Worry by Focusing on Improving Student Outcomes

All participants reported in their interview that a power tactic for Fear and Worry was to focus on improving student outcomes as a way to gain confidence. Challenging the system was believed to be worth the effort, if it improved outcomes for students. African American women examine their personal and professional experiences through their heritage lens (Arriaga et al., 2020). This influences their work for students to be centered around equity and inclusion for all students, especially for students of color who have been impacted by systemic oppression (Arriaga et al., 2020).

With the increasing number of students of color, there is a need for greater representation in the superintendency. Research shows that as of 2020, 15.44% of districts serve a population of 51% or more students who are non-White (Grogan & Nash, 2021). The demographics of a school district influence the responsibilities of the superintendent in varying ways. Hence, African American female superintendents bring a unique lens and experience to focus on the work of students of color.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked: *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Holding Back?*

Major Finding 5: African American Female Superintendents Reach out for Help When Needed

Extensive research emphasizes the power of allyship, mentorship, and sponsorship when it comes to the advancement of women in leadership. "Women benefit

from cultures of collaboration over competitive environments" (Arriaga et al.,2020, p. 64). The African American female superintendents expressed that at various times in their careers it was the support of family, friends, colleagues, mentors, and sponsors who were critical in supporting them through difficult times. Participant 7 imparted the importance of having what she called "Good Covering," which is like-minded people who support and advocate for you, which helped her through challenging times. This support system was also critical in the decision-making of career moves. This finding that African American female superintendents require a strong support system aligns with the research that says women who belong to a circle of close female work contacts are more likely to make their way to top-paying executive positions (Arriaga et al., 2020).

Lerner (2012) writes that as female leaders reach out for support, it should be to those who are committed to your growth and achievement in both your personal activities and work life. "They should be honest with you when you have a difference of opinion and extend compassion when needed" (Lerner, 2012, p. 131). The women in this study shared examples of those who supported them in their personal and professional lives and attribute some of their success to this support.

Major Finding 6: African American Female Superintendents are Intentional About Speaking Truth at the Appropriate Time

Women can be misunderstood in the workplace (Arriaga et al., 2020; Ryder & Briles, 2003). The African American female superintendents in the study were self-aware enough to know that it is important to think before you speak. Participant 7 disclosed that sometimes she would need to scan the room, assess the situation, and determine the best words to use so that people would receive the message. Ryder and Briles (2003) note that

successful women know how to use intuition skills and the act of subtlety to communicate and move ideas and initiatives forward. The women in this study exemplified that successful women know that their communication style is critical in their ability to navigate the workplace and progress in their careers. They moderate their tendency for "overabundant speech" (Ryder & Briles, 2003, p. 193). However, they are intentional about strategizing when, to whom, and how to speak truth and engage in conversations that have the desired impact of being heard and moving initiatives forward.

Research Question 4

Research Question 4 asked: *What personal power tactics do African American female superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of Not Taking Time to Reflect?*

Major Finding 7: African American Female Superintendents Dedicate Time to Reflect by Drawing Strength From Their Community (Family, Friends, Mentors, and Sponsors)

A key factor in the African American female superintendents' ability to Take Time for Reflection was in utilizing the support of those who cared about them. Support included family, friends, colleagues, and mentors. Lerner (2012) states that "the people you invite into your personal *power web* are the ones you can trust with your realizations, disappointments, and success (Lerner, 2012, p. 132). One participant stated that being a superintendent has the highest highs and the lowest lows. That is why the power tactic of leaning on your power web will give you the support you need in the tough times and the celebrations in the great times. The members of your power web encourage you to pursue

and fulfill your goals, and they open-heartedly contribute to your well-being (Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022).

Major Finding 8: African American Female Superintendents Navigate Difficult Times by Embracing Faith and Prayer

Five of seven (71%) participants reported in their interviews that they addressed Fear and Worry through faith, prayer, and forgiveness. The participants shared several stories of how their faith and prayer took them through difficult times. Some participants reported that they do not hold grudges, and that is due to their ability to forgive those who have harmed them. This allowed them to move forward with confidence grounded in their faith. They believed that they were where God would have them, and the experiences they went through were needed to get them to the place they were supposed to be. This finding is in alignment with the Black feminism theory, which is the belief that Black women are full human beings capable of participation and leadership in the full range of human activities— intellectual, political, social, sexual, spiritual, [and] economic (Allen Thomas, 2021; Collins, 1996; G. Davis, 2022). In other words, the living experience is a foundational component to the narrative and storytelling of the duality of race and gender for Black women, and their spirituality is a significant component of navigating their unique experience in the workforce of America (L. T. Davis, 2022).

Major Finding 9: African American Female Superintendents Prioritize Self-Care With Mental Health as a Key Component

Self-intimacy is a power tool that women can use to be more authentic and engage with themselves and others (Lerner, 2012; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). The African

American female superintendent shared that to take care of themselves and be effective in their work, they included focusing not just on their physical health but on their mental health as well. More than half of the participants share that they include therapy as a power tactic to address not taking time for reflection. A participant shared that she works with a therapist who exclusively works with African American women in high-stress jobs or executive leadership. They meet via Zoom once a week, and the support has helped her stay grounded while navigating difficulties in the superintendency.

Unexpected Findings

Unexpected Finding 1: African American Female Superintendents Persist Through Tough Times

Two of the seven (29%) participants interviewed experienced having to leave superintendent positions to return to other positions in the school district. The power tactic these participants used was to persist through tough times. They chose to take different positions, including substitute teacher, teacher, site administrator, and deputy superintendent, until they could work their way back to the superintendency, as this is where they believed they were called to make an impact on students.

Unexpected Finding 2: African American Female Superintendents do Not Engage in Negative Self-Talk

Only one of the seven (14%) surveyed reported that they have talked down to themselves. "Negative self-talk sets you up for failure and an erosion of self-esteem and confidence" (Ryder & Briles, 2003, p. 178). The ability to notice when your mind is thinking negative thoughts and then be able to counter thoughts with positive responses is a valuable skill. This power tactic sets successful women apart from those who struggle

to overcome this self-sabotaging behavior. Participant 7 conveyed that she does not engage in negative self-talk. She stated that she reminds herself, "This is not about me. It's about making sure that we secure our future for our kids" (Participant 7).

Unexpected Finding 3: African American Female Superintendents Are Active in African American Community and Service-Based Organizations

Five of the seven participants belong to organizations focused on African American women (i.e., Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., LINKS Inc., etc.). Research shows the importance of mentorship and sponsorship. However, this study revealed the importance of African American females being supported by African American female organizations. They described a sisterhood of excellence that is a significant part of their power web of success.

Unexpected Finding 4: African American Female Superintendents are a Diverse Group

African American female leaders are not a monolithic group. They vary in their attitudes, backgrounds, and philosophies about how their experiences impact the barriers they face and the power tactics to overcome them (Thompson, 2022). The diversity of participants offered rich findings in the manner in which they approach self-sabotaging behavior and the power tactics used to overcome them.

Conclusions

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). The

following eight conclusions were drawn from the findings of this research and supported by the literature presented in Chapter II.

Conclusion 1: African American Female Superintendents Must Take Ownership of Their Career Path

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must take ownership of their career path. African American female superintendents are telling new stories of navigating the internal and external barriers to move to executive leadership. Like many women who aspire to executive leadership, "these women have confronted the barriers and are continuing to confront and overcome them today to fill the talent and gender gap created by systemwide inequalities" (Arriaga et al., 2020, p.21). When women own all of themselves and are intentional about the use of power tactics to overcome self-sabotaging behaviors, they more effectively navigate the pathway to leadership.

Conclusion 2: African American Female Superintendents Must Claim Their Power and be Open to new Experiences and Opportunities

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must claim their power and be open to new experiences and opportunities. African American women should be intentional in developing effective strategies to counter self-sabotaging behaviors and claim their power for successful career advancement. When new opportunities and experiences present themselves, African American female superintendents evaluate these situations and take advantage of opportunities that meet their career goals. This power tactic is supported by Lerner (2012), who states, "Our ability to get unstuck has nothing to do with IQ,

education, or professional credentials; it has everything to do with having the courage to step out of our comfort zone and open ourselves up to new experiences, even if that feels uncomfortable" (p. 5). This power tactic will help African American women break barriers and shatter glass and concrete ceilings to experience success in their career advancement endeavors.

Conclusion 3: African American Female Superintendents Must Engage in Introspection and Cultivate Self-Awareness to Embrace Change and Refrain From Dwelling on Mistakes

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must be reflective, yet not spend time mulling over mistakes. They must also be willing to accept change. Researchers have found that for women to advance their careers, they must be self-aware (Arriaga et al., 2020; Crews, 2020; Pianta, 2020; Sandor, 2022). Self-reflection was a frequently cited strategy to overcome self-sabotaging behaviors. The participants reported that they did not focus on mistakes but learned from them and were willing to accept change. Engaging in self-reflection, either through tools like journaling or being open to feedback from others, was a strategy that the participants felt had been developed throughout their careers. The participants were self-aware enough to know that the power of tactics of not mulling over mistakes and being willing to accept change would have a positive impact on their career goals.

Conclusion 4: African American Female Superintendents Must Counteract Self-Sabotaging Behaviors Rooted in Fear and Worry by Redirecting Their Focus Toward Their Passion and Purpose of Enhancing Student Outcomes

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must be motivated by the work of improving outcomes for students. They bring a perspective that can directly improve the culturally proficient response needed to support the success of diverse student populations. Improving student outcomes cannot be addressed without addressing issues of culture and race. In The American Superintendent 2020 Decennial Study, Tienken (2021) reported that the majority of superintendents (77%) stated they were the ones who led discussions related to equity in their districts (Tienken, 2021). Although approximately 90% of the superintendents responded that it was important or very important to lead conversations about race, there was a variation in those by racial groups who felt prepared to lead the conversation.

The African American female superintendents in this study recognize that with the diversity of the communities they serve and the persistent data that shows students of color continue to underperform academically, there is a critical need for superintendents with a culturally responsive lens. To counteract the self-sabotaging behavior of fear and worry, they focus on their passion and purpose of improving outcomes for students and constructively prepare themselves to meet the diverse needs of their diverse student populations.

Conclusion 5: African American Female Superintendents Must Focus on Their Passion and Purpose While Embracing their Faith as a Vital Aspect of Effective Leadership

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must focus on their passion and purpose. Women have confidence when they are grounded in their passion and purpose. The participants rely on their faith and the power of prayer to stay encouraged during tough times. This power tactic is used in the midst of opposition, challenges, barriers, and stress to keep a positive perspective, let things go, and move forward. This power tactic is supported by Lerner (2012), who confirms that women who have confidence based on their passion and purpose are not overly concerned about what others think and approach obstacles with the knowledge that they have the resources, in this case, faith and prayer, to deal with them.

Conclusion 6: African American Female Superintendents Need a Strong Support System to Succeed

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must create a community of support (family, colleagues, mentors, and sponsors). Embracing mentorship and maintaining a professional and personal network are essential to the career advancement of African American women (Griffin, 2021). The absence of mentorship in professional and personal circles leads to the self-sabotaging behavior of holding back. Based on this study, this may be considered the most important power tactic, as it manifested in all four of the self-sabotaging categories. The African American female superintendents shared

examples of the impact of their support systems when they addressed each of the four self-sabotaging categories.

Conclusion 7: African American Female Superintendents Must Employ Emotional Intelligence Strategies When Engaging in Crucial Conversations

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that emotional intelligence strategies assist African American female superintendents in speaking with confidence at times that will create the most impact.

Being mindful of when to speak and how to approach conversations is critical. African American female superintendents use self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship management to reflect and address critical conversations. Bradberry and Greaves (2009) assert that developing self-awareness is an essential step to knowing one's true self. Part of developing self-awareness is by engaging in honest conversations. According to Lerner (2012), one of the most genuine forms of expression is communication with others coupled with the authenticity of such thoughts. To counteract these barriers, Lerner has emphasized that remaining true to themselves, expressing their opinions, and connecting with listeners and motivators will effectively help them overcome self-sabotaging behaviors.

Conclusion 8: African American Female Superintendent Must Prioritize Mental Health and Self-Care as a Crucial Aspect of Effective Leadership

Based on the review of the literature and the research findings, it is concluded that African American female superintendents must take care of themselves both physically and mentally. To develop and maintain mental and physical wellness, African American female superintendents in this study find ways to create opportunities for downtime, self-

care, and reflection. All participants expressed the necessity of being mindful, taking breaks, having a close circle of friends, journaling, praying, and connecting with others to overcome the challenges and barriers as a superintendent. This allows the superintendents to use what Lerner (2012) calls using their inner resources: self-inquiry, spiritual power muscle, and inner compass.

Implications for Action

Based on the results of the study and a thorough review of the literature, the following implications for action are recommended:

Implication 1: Increase Awareness of Power Tactics for African American Female Leaders

The research findings must be shared with African American female leaders who aspire to executive leadership. This will increase the number of women who recognize the value of understanding self-sabotaging behaviors and can use the identified power tactics to overcome the behaviors.

Implication 2: Include Self-Sabotaging Behavior and Power Tactics in University and Credential Programs

Female leaders must be provided access to university preparation and credentialing programs that expose current and aspiring African American female leaders to the research of self-sabotaging behaviors and the power tactics to overcome them. The only way to address an issue is to be aware of it. Until this research is incorporated into university programs and becomes mainstream knowledge, women will continue to face the headwinds of internal self-sabotaging behaviors.

Implication 3: Increase Awareness of Allies to African American Female Leaders

African American female leaders must have allies who are aware of this research. These members of women's power webs will be even more effective allies when they are educated on the findings of the research on power tactics to overcome self-sabotaging behavior. This means increasing the opportunities for both male and female mentors, instructors, coaches, and sponsors to learn of this research and be informed in a way that supports African American female leaders in their goals of career advancement. The greater the general knowledge of this research, the more impactful it will be in preparing women to move into executive leadership.

Implication 4: Increase Awareness of the Number one Power Tactic- The Power Web

African American female leaders must be educated on the significance of both personal (family, friends, and organizational members) and professional (colleagues, mentors, coaches, and sponsors) power webs. This research exposed the one common power tactic consistently used to overcome all four self-sabotaging behaviors: the power web, or "the gathering of people who are committed to your growth and achievement" (Lerner, 2012, p. 129). These power webs serve to support women in good and bad times as they make their way up the career ladder to the executive seat.

Implication 5: Incorporate Emotional Intelligence Research

African American females must have a high level of emotional intelligence to navigate their role in educational leadership, especially in knowing how and when to speak with confidence to move initiatives. The combined application of emotional intelligence with overcoming self-sabotaging behavior will empower more women in their career advancement.

Implication 6: Actively Create Ways to Care for Oneself

To serve at their optimum level, African American female leaders must care for their physical and mental health. This includes the traditional means, such as taking time to reflect and rejuvenate. However, this research must change the way African American female leaders look at the use of therapy as a tool to care for themselves. In addition, African American female leaders who are in a position to negotiate a contract for their executive role must start including items such as mandated vacation time, self-care, and self-growth opportunities in their negotiated contracts with the school boards.

Implication 7: Utilize Professional Organizations as a Catalyst to Advance the Research

Professional organizations such as the CAASA, ACSA, and the AASA must host conferences, workshops, and open discussion sessions to assist women in recognizing their self-sabotaging behaviors and educate them on the power tactics needed to overcome them.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study explored the power tactics that African American female superintendents use to overcome four identified self-sabotaging behaviors. The major finding from this study concludes that these women have developed these power tactics and have navigated internal and external gender barriers, racial discrimination, and stereotypes to earn their way to the top executive leadership position in K-12 education. Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are presented to encourage further research into the perceived barriers African American female leaders face in K-12 leadership positions:

- This was a national study of African American female superintendents with a sample population of seven. This study needs to be replicated to increase the number of participants and add to the understanding of the experiences and power tactics of other African American female superintendents. By increasing the sample size, more voices can be heard. This will allow this study to continue impacting research conducted on this topic.
- This study focused on the top four self-sabotaging behaviors as identified by previous research on the framework developed by Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). This study should be replicated with all nine identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the framework to provide more information on behaviors not included in this study.
- Replicate this study with other racial groups to conduct a comparison study. Understanding the power tactics other female racial groups use to overcome these common self-sabotaging behaviors will benefit the educational community.
- Conduct a national study on the psychological effects associated with the intersectionality of race and gender of African American females as they advance to the superintendency. Very few studies focus on the psychological effects caused by barriers to the intersectionality of race and gender that impact African American female superintendents.
- Based on the power tactics identified in the study, further research should be conducted studying the impact of mentorship and support systems for African American female leaders to open more opportunities to the path of

superintendent. Limited data exists on the impact of mentorship of African American women as they pursue the role of superintendency. A qualitative study on the impact of mentorship for African American women could assist mentoring organizations in creating effective programs that support African American women superintendents as they pursue the position and serve in the role.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This study has been an important opportunity for the voice of the few African American female superintendents in the United States to be heard. There is little research on the experience of African American female education leaders on a national scale. This research is critical in understanding what it is about these women that sets them apart and allows them to excel to the top seat in the K-12 system. The opportunity to learn from these dynamic women reinforced the idea that African American women are not a monolith. Regardless of labels or stereotypes, these women exemplified the diversity among African American women. Their passions, pathways, and experiences were varied and allowed for a wealth of information on how they navigated their personal lives and careers. The participants have served as superintendent for a minimum of one year to 15 years in districts with student populations from less than 5,000 students to over 30,000 students and districts with majority racial populations of African American, Hispanic/Latino, and White students. The participants have lived all over the United States, attending public and private schools in their youth and some attending Ivy League universities. They are single, married, widowed, have children, no children, and ailing parents. Their path to the superintendency has been traditional: Teacher, assistant

principal, principal, district office, assistant superintendent, superintendent, and some took a non-traditional route of teacher, to university professor, to K-12 superintendent, and in some cases superintendent back to teacher, site administrator, and superintendent again.

Limited research exists on the lived experiences of African American women superintendents in our nation's school system. Therefore, this study will add to the literature by sharing the experiences of seven African American female superintendents. It is important to emphasize that the racism, sexism, and discrimination that African American females must regularly confront and have to overcome play a significant role in how they navigate their personal and professional lives. African American female leaders have limited control over these external barriers. However, this research is meant to get to the core of personal areas to which women do have a greater level of control, and that is self-sabotaging behavior. The findings of the study exemplify the need for institutions and organizations that support African American women in leadership to understand and educate these women on the common self-sabotaging behaviors and power tactics to overcome them and reach their career goals. Self-sabotaging behaviors are developed by women as coping mechanisms to deal with external forces like gender bias, sexual and gender discrimination, and societal expectations that are placed on women from the time that they are little girls. Although much research has been done on these external barriers, there is a need for more research on the impact of internal barriers. Women have to be equipped with the tools to realize that although external barriers exist, we have the power to prevent the additional obstacles that we place on ourselves. When we raise the level of awareness about the internal and external barriers

that we face, we can do something about it. We can also help educate the men in our lives who want to be allies and who do not want to repeat the mistakes of the past but are unsure of how to support us.

Previous research reinforces the notion that most women do not realize that they engage in self-sabotaging behaviors. As I have gone through the process of this dissertation, this has become even more clear to me. The study found that although the participants did not know of the research around self-sabotaging behaviors, they reported many areas of self-sabotaging behaviors in which they did not engage. Of the 27 questions in the quantitative survey, it is important to note that all of these women reported that they did not engage in three specific behaviors: blaming others, not being open to new ideas, and not reaching out for help when they needed it. The fact that they did not engage in these behaviors could be due to their early childhood development of who they are and the development of their confidence, or it could be due to the learning that took place during their career journey. In either case, it was clear that these women are where they are because they have learned to use specific power tactics to address the external and internal barriers that women commonly face in their careers. The results of this research can have a significant impact on the literature on women and leadership. The study revealed 15 power tactics for four identified behaviors that can be taught to help other women in their career journey. Women who are not aware of self-sabotaging research would state they do not realize they engage in self-sabotaging. This is why this research is so important. One cannot address a problem that one does not know exists. With this information, women could realize their self-sabotaging tendencies and engage in deliberate self-reflection. For the participants in the study, sometimes this occurred in

their career when something had not gone right (health issues, crises, or not getting a job that they had hoped for). Other times, the participants just needed a moment to think and reflect without the noise of the outside world.

The stories shared by the African American female superintendents who participated in this study validated my own experiences and inspired me to make changes to the way I respond to external and internal challenges. I cannot express how grateful I am that these women were vulnerable and shared intimate experiences that opened themselves to scrutiny. In every interview, I was in awe at the strength of these women—each of whom did things a little differently, but ultimately, all were powerful and intelligent and cared about their work deeply. I am forever grateful to all the participants of this study who graciously gave their valuable time to contribute to it. Their experiences touched my heart in a way that has forever changed me. As I reflected on my own behaviors, I chose to integrate their power tactics into my own life and career. As a result, I have seen new opportunities and growth. The application of these 15 power tactics has already influenced my career path and can be impactful for women all over the nation. This study revealed that the most commonly used power tactic is that of a woman's power web. It is my hope that these seven dynamic women are now part of my professional power web.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

References	Themes																								
	History of Women in the Workforce	History of Women in Education	History of Women in Educational Leadership	Female Superintendents	African American Female Superintendents	Barriers- External- Gender Discrimination/Bias	Barriers- External- Glass Ceiling	Barriers- External- Career Pathways	Barriers- Internal	Barriers Internal- Conflict between job and family	Theory- Feminist Post-Structural Theory	Theory- Black Feminist Theory	Theory- Social Role Theory	Theory- Role Congruity Theory	SB & Strategies- Thinking Too Small	SB & Strategies- Fear and Worry	SB & Strategies- Misunderstanding Oneself	SB & Strategies- Dishonesty	SB & Strategies- Holding Back	SB & Strategies- Lack of Self-Reflection	SB & Strategies- Isolation	SB & Strategies- Disempowering Other Women	SB & Strategies- Using Sex/Gender Role Confusion in the
Agnes (2007)						X							X												
Allen-Thomas (2021)			X	X	X	X						X													
Alston, J. (1999)			X	X	X	X		X																	
Alston, J.A. (2000)			X	X	X	X																			
Arriaga et al (2020)			X			X	X	X	X	X			X	X											
AASA (2021)		X	X			X	X	X																	
Bahn (2014)									X				X				X		X						
Bishu & Alkadry (2017)						X	X																		

Fontaine & Vorauer (2019)	X								X	X													
Gardiner et al (1999)		X	X			X		X															
Glass (2019)		X	X																				
Gloor et al (2020)		X				X	X																
Goethals & Hoyt (2017)	X																						
Griffin (2021)		X	X			X	X	X	X	X			X	X									
Grogan (1996)			X			X	X				X												
Grogan & Nash (2021)	X	X	X	X	X																		
Haley (2015)						X	X																
Hauser (2018)	X												X		X								
Hill-Collins (1989, 1998, 2000)	X											X											
Horford et al (2021)				X	X	X																	
Jabbar et al (2018)	X	X																					
Johnson & Thomas (2022)				X																			
Koenig (2018)						X	X						X										
Lerner (2012)									X	X					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lokert (2022)							X	X															
Lyons & Chesley (2004)				X	X																		
Manno (2021)	X	X	X																				
Milenkovic (2022)		X	X																				
Miles & Grogan (2022)		X	X			X																	

Miller (2022)						X	X	X															
Mohr (2014)		X				X									X								
NCES (2017b, 2022)	X		X																				
Nix (2022)				X																			
Obama (2020)																X							
Pianta (2020)	X	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Revere (1986)				X	X																		
Rhode (2016)		X	X			X	X																
Robinson (2017)		X	X	X	X	X			X														
Rodriguez (2019)						X	X	X															
Ryan & Haslam (2005)						X	X																
Ryder & Briles (2002)						X			X	X					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sandor (2022)	X								X	X					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Sawchuk (2022)			X																				
Slaughter (2012)									X	X													
Smith (2022)				X																			
Sperandio (2015)			X			X	X	X															
Superville (2023)			X	X	X				X	X													
Tienken (2021)		X	X	X	X																		
Thompson (2023)		X	X	X									X	X									
Webb (2022)		X	X	X	X																		
Young & Skrla (2003)	X										X												

APPENDIX B

Informed Consent

INFORMATION ABOUT: Personal Power Tactics African American Female Superintendents Employ to Overcome Four Identified Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR; Angela Brantley, UMass Global Doctoral Student

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: You are invited to take part in a research study conducted by Angela Brantley, a doctoral student from the School of Education at UMass Global.

The purpose of this sequential explanatory mixed-method study was to identify and describe personal power tactics that African American female superintendents employ to overcome the four identified self-sabotaging behaviors from the Self Sabotaging Framework adapted from Lerner (2012) and Ryder and Briles (2003). There is limited research on how African American females overcome these self-sabotaging behaviors to move up the K-12 superintendency. Thus, more research needs to be done on this specific population to increase their representation at the superintendent level. The results of this study may assist other African American females who aspire to the role of school district superintendent to learn strategies to overcome common self-sabotaging behaviors.

By participating in this study, I agree to participate in an individual interview. The interview will last approximately 45 to 60 minutes and will be conducted electronically and recorded via the Zoom platform. 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 Angela Brantley at [redacted] or by cell [redacted] or Marilou Ryder at mryder@umassglobal.edu.

e) My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide not to participate in the study, and I can withdraw at any time. I can also decide not to answer particular questions during the interview if I so 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 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_____

APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate

RESEARCH TITLE: Personal Power Tactics African American Female Superintendents Employ to Overcome Four Identified Self-Sabotaging Behaviors

August 4, 2023

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a qualitative methods research study about the personal power tactics that African American female superintendents use to overcome self-sabotaging behavior and advance in their careers. The main investigator of this study is Angela Brantley, a Doctoral Candidate in the UMass Global Doctor of Education program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are identified as an African American female superintendent and have served in your position for at least one year.

A total of seven African American female superintendents who meet the qualifications will participate in this study. Participation should require about one and a half hours of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

As part of the interview process, share any artifacts you have that confirm your experiences while advancing to your current position. Examples of artifacts could include, but are not limited to, flyers, newsletters, letters, emails, and other documentation that confirm your experiences.

PURPOSE: This study is being conducted for a dissertation for the Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program at UMass Global. This sequential explanatory mixed-methods study aims to identify and describe self-sabotaging behaviors displayed by African American female superintendents and the tactics used to overcome these behaviors.

PROCEDURES: Your participation in this study is voluntary. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share your experiences as a central office administrator. The interview session will be audio-recorded using Zoom. The transcription will be sent to you to confirm accuracy.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient for you to arrange a time for the interview.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to your participation in this study, but your feedback may help add to the research on central office administrators' experiences as they advance to higher-level positions in their districts.

ANONYMITY: Records of information you provide for the research study and any personal information you provide will not be linked in any way. Identifying you as the person who provided any specific information for the study will not be possible.

Thank you for your valuable time and feedback. You are welcome to ask questions at any time. You may contact me at [redacted] or [redacted], or you can also contact Dr. Marilou Ryder (advisor) by email at mryder@umassglobal.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 (949) 341-7641.

Thank you for the opportunity,
Angela Brantley
Doctoral Candidate,
University of Massachusetts Global

APPENDIX D

Quantitative Survey Protocol

SELF-SABOTAGING BEHAVIOR SURVEY
Included in the Electronic Survey: You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Angela Brantley, a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Global (UMass Global).

The purpose of this explanatory mixed-method study is to explore the dominant female self-sabotaging behaviors identified through former thematic research: (a) Thinking too small, (b) Fear and worry, (c) Holding back, and (d) Not taking time for reflection. Another purpose is to identify personal power tactics employed by female executive leaders to overcome these behaviors.

Your participation in this survey is voluntary. You are welcome to choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time.

The survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes to complete. Your responses will be confidential. Survey questions will pertain to your perceptions of identified self-sabotaging behaviors you may have experienced throughout your career.

Please review the following information:
I understand that no information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent, and all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowable by law. If the study design of the use of data is to be changed, I will be informed, and my consent re-obtained. There are minimal risks associated with participating in this research. I understand that the researcher will protect my confidentiality by keeping the identity codes and research materials in a locked file drawer that is available only to the principal researcher. I understand that I may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. I understand that if I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, University of Massachusetts Global University (UMass Global) at 16355 Laguna Canyon Rd. Irvine, CA 92618 (949) 341-7641.

If you have any questions about completing this survey or any aspects of this research, please contact Angela Brantley at [redacted] or by phone at [redacted]; or Dr. Marilou Ryder, Advisor, at ryder@umassglobal.edu.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below:

Clicking on the “Agree” button indicates that you have read this informed consent form and the information in this document and that you voluntarily agree to participate. If you don’t wish to participate, you may decline by clicking the ‘disagree” button.

Agree: I acknowledge receipt of the complete Informed Consent packet and “Bill of Rights.” I have read the materials and give my consent to participate in the study.
Disagree: I do not wish to participate in this electronic survey.

INTRODUCTION

"We have the power inside to be great," says women's advocate Helene Lerner, "but oftentimes, it's covered by false beliefs about ourselves." Lerner's book, *In Her Power: Reclaiming Your Authentic Self* (2012), maintains that women need to embrace their inherent power. "The world needs more women leaders," Lerner says. "That means we [women] need to step out in ways we haven't been." To achieve true power, Lerner says women must first recognize and overcome its barriers. She described nine common self-sabotaging categories that hold women back. A framework was adapted from Lerner's book, coupled with the work of Ryder and Briles from *The SexX Factor: Breaking the Codes that Sabotage Personal and Professional Lives* (2003), to group female self-sabotaging behaviors within nine overarching domains of women's personal power.

A group of doctoral students from the University of Massachusetts Global shared a common interest in examining how specific self-sabotaging behaviors among women in executive leadership roles affected their career progress. Their study also aimed to explore the strategies employed by these leaders to overcome such self-sabotage. By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data from six previous studies, the researchers uncovered a range of examples illustrating these self-sabotaging behaviors and the corresponding strategies utilized to combat them.

The female participants in the study unanimously acknowledged the negative consequences of these behaviors on their professional growth and access to advanced leadership roles. They openly discussed the varying extents to which they engaged in the identified self-sabotaging behaviors and shared specific strategies they employed to overcome them. Four specific behaviors consistently emerged among all participants: (a) Holding back, (b) Thinking too small, (c) Fear and worry, and (d) Not reflecting.

THE SURVEY

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research on women's personal power and self-sabotaging behavior. This study is focused on the following four domains of Women's Personal Power and corresponding categories of sabotaging behavior.

1. Recognizing Women's Unique Destiny: THINKING TOO SMALL
2. Constructive Preparation: FEAR AND WORRY
3. Acting with Confidence: HOLDING BACK
4. Cultivating Self-Intimacy: LACK OF SELF REFLECTION

It's best not to overthink the statements and respond with your first perceptual thought. It is anticipated you can complete this survey in 10 to 15 minutes. Upon completing and submitting the survey, the researcher will reach out to you to arrange an interview. During this interview, the aim is to delve deeper into your perspectives on these behaviors and to identify any personal strategies or tactics you have employed throughout your career to overcome any of the four self-sabotaging behaviors mentioned.

DIRECTIONS:

The following survey represents four categories of self-sabotaging behaviors. For each category there is a list of behaviors associated with each category. Using the 6-point scale for each behavior, please indicate how you have personally exhibited each behavior throughout your adult life as you progressed along in your career.

1= Strongly Agree
2= Agree
3= Slightly Agree
4= Slightly Disagree
5= Disagree
6= Strongly Disagree

POWER DOMAIN: Recognizing Women's Unique Destiny (Capacity to have a significant impact; living up to one's potential)

SABOTAGING CATEGORY: THINKING TOO SMALL

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
I blamed others for why things aren't going well						
I minimized my value ("I'm just a…")						
I did not have the courage to step out of my comfort zone						
I was not open to new experiences						
I often made perfection the standard in my life						

POWER DOMAIN: Constructive Preparation (Embraces, understands, and accepts fear)

SABOTAGING CATEGORY: FEAR AND WORRY

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I became anxious when thinking about a change in my career						
I felt out of control in an unfamiliar situation						
I resisted change						
I feared looking stupid						
I felt like an imposter on the job						
	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I mulled over my mistakes						
I feared being rejected						

POWER DOMAIN: Acting with Confidence (Approaching obstacles with confidence; having the courage to step forward)

SABOTAGING CATEGORY: HOLDING BACK

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I did not reach out for help when I needed it						
I have avoided criticism						
I made inflections rather than make bold statements						
I have apologized unnecessarily						
I have talked down to myself						
I preferred to sit in the back of the room at conferences or meetings						
I preferred not to speak up in a meeting or group discussion						
I have held back when I had the answer, question, or thought because I was concerned about what other people think or						

the impression they will have of me						
I felt insecure towards balancing work and family obligations						

POWER DOMAIN: Cultivating Self Intimacy (Getting to know oneself more deeply)

SABOTAGING CATEGORY: NOT TAKING TIME FOR REFLECTION

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Disagree Somewhat	Agree Somewhat	Agree	Strongly Agree
I have kept busy to avoid being alone						
I have not allowed myself to mourn losses or cry						
I have not taken vacations when I could						
I have not allowed myself to experience "downtime"						
I have hated to 'be wrong'						
I have held a grudge with someone						

APPENDIX E

Qualitative Interview Script and Interview Questions

Women's Power and Self-Sabotaging Behavior Interview Protocol
Interviewer's Copy

Participant: _____
Date: _____
Organization: _____

INTERVIEWER SAYS:

My name is Angela Brantley, and I (a brief description of what you do for a living). I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Global University (UMass Global) in the area of Organizational Leadership. I would like to thank you for participating in the Women and Self-Sabotaging Behavior survey and volunteering to be interviewed to expand the depth of your response.

As a female leader, you have broken through the barriers many women face when applying for top executive-level leadership roles. This research study is focused on learning about the Power Tactics (i.e., strategies) female leaders have used during their leadership journey to overcome the top self-sabotaging behaviors that were identified in previous research. The top four behaviors include (1) Thinking too small, (2) Fear and worry, (3) Holding back, and (4) Not taking time for reflection.

I will be conducting interviews with a number of African American Female Superintendents, such as yourself, to hopefully provide a clear picture of self-sabotaging behaviors that can impact women's career development efforts. In addition, I would like to explore any strategies you have used to overcome any identified self-sabotaging behaviors you experienced throughout your career. The questions I will be asking are the same for each female senior leader in the public/private sector participating in the study. The reason for this is to guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all participating African American female superintendents will be conducted in the same manner.

INFORMED CONSENT (Required for Dissertation Research)

Please let me remind you that your participation is completely voluntary and will greatly strengthen the study. If at any time you feel uncomfortable or would like to end the interview or not respond to a question, please let me know. Your information will be kept confidential, and your name will be changed to protect your identity. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via electronic mail so that you can check to make sure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

Did you receive the Informed Consent and UMass Global Bill of Rights I sent you via email? Do you have any questions or need clarification about either document?

I have provided a copy of the questions and list of self-sabotaging behaviors for the four categories of sabotaging behavior defined in my research that I will ask for your reference; however, I may have follow-up questions if clarity is needed. The duration of this interview will take approximately 60 to 90 minutes. Do you have any questions about the interview process?

PROTOCOL QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your career journey that brought you to the role you currently serve in today?

2. As you think back on your career, please reflect on your behavior related to the sabotaging behavior category of **THINKING TOO SMALL** (ex- underestimating one's value or not willing to take on a challenge)
    a. Can you provide an example or a story of a behavior in this category that you perceive had an impact on your career development efforts?
    b. Can you describe some power tactics (i.e., strategies) used to counteract any self-sabotaging behaviors in this category?

3. As you think back on your career, please reflect on your behavior related to the sabotaging behavior category of **FEAR AND WORRY** (ex.- resisting change or overthinking and overanalyzing mistakes)
    a. Can you provide an example or a story of a behavior in this category that you perceive had an impact on your career development efforts?
    b. Can you describe some power tactics (i.e., strategies) used to counteract any self-sabotaging behaviors in this category?

4. As you think back on your career, please reflect on women's behaviors related to the sabotaging behavior category of **HOLDING BACK** (ex.- not answering questions for fear of what others will think or apologizing unnecessarily)
    a. Can you provide an example or a story of a behavior in this category that you perceive had an impact on your career development efforts?
    b. Can you describe some power tactics (i.e., strategies) used to counteract any self-sabotaging behaviors in this category?

5. As you think back on your career, please reflect on women's behaviors related to the sabotaging behavior category of **NOT TAKING TIME FOR REFLECTION** (ex.- not allowing oneself to take downtime or holding a grudge)

a. Can you provide an example or a story of a behavior in this category that you perceive had an impact on your career development efforts?
b. Can you describe some power tactics (i.e., strategies) used to counteract any self-sabotaging behaviors in this category?

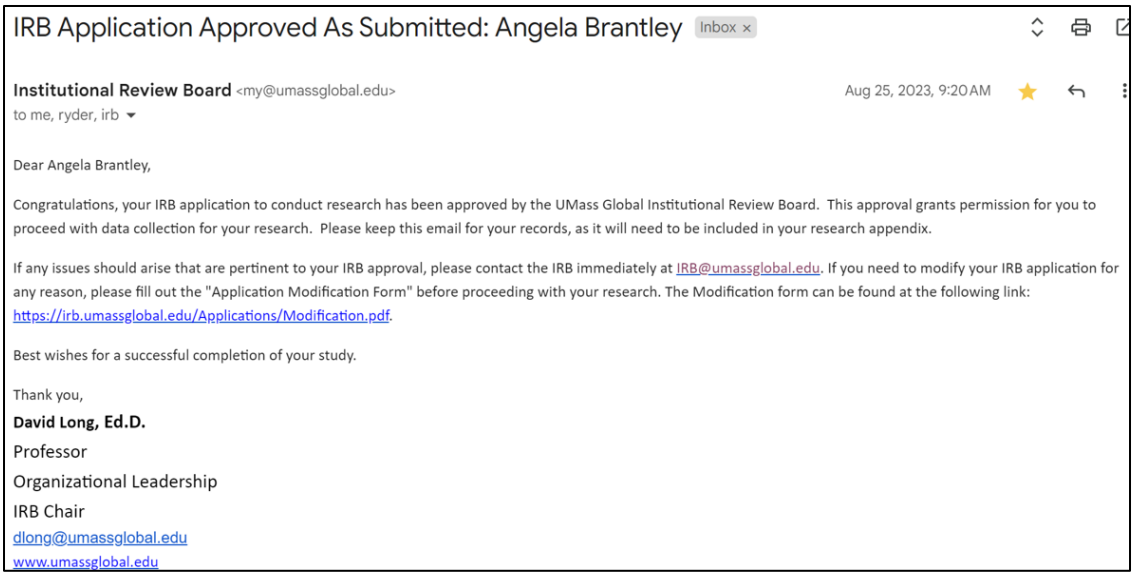
6. The top four sabotaging behaviors that the survey respondents identified as exhibiting throughout their careers were (1) Thinking Too Small, (2) Fear and Worry, (3) Holding Back, and (4) Not Taking Time for Reflection. Can you speak to your perception of how critical it is for women to overcome these behaviors as they relate to career development and promotions?

7. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding women and self-sabotaging behaviors?

"Thank you very much for your time. If you like, when the results of our research are known, we will send you a copy of our findings."

APPENDIX F

UMass Global Institutional Review Board Approval



IRB Application Approved As Submitted: Angela Brantley Inbox ×

Institutional Review Board <my@umassglobal.edu> Aug 25, 2023, 9:20 AM

to me, ryder, irb

Dear Angela Brantley,

Congratulations, your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. This approval grants permission for you to proceed with data collection for your research. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If any issues should arise that are pertinent to your IRB approval, please contact the IRB immediately at IRB@umassglobal.edu. 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 the following link: https://irb.umassglobal.edu/Applications/Modification.pdf.

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank you,

David Long, Ed.D.

Professor

Organizational Leadership

IRB Chair

dlong@umassglobal.edu

www.umassglobal.edu

APPENDIX G

Quantitative Alignment Table

Research Questions	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of holding back?												
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of thinking too small?	X	X	X	X	X							
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of fear and worry?						X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of not taking time to reflect?												
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of holding back?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			

Research Questions	Q 13	Q 14	Q 15	Q 16	Q 17	Q 18	Q 19	Q 20	Q 21	Q 22	Q 23	Q 24
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of thinking too small?												
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of fear and worry?												
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of not taking time to reflect?										X	X	X

Research Questions	Q25	Q26	Q27
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of holding back?			
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of thinking too small?			
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of fear and worry?			
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of not taking time to reflect?	X	X	X

Qualitative Alignment Table

Research Questions	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of holding back?				X		X	
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of thinking too small?		X				X	
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of fear and worry?			X			X	
What personal power tactics do African American Female Superintendents use to overcome the self-sabotaging behavior of not taking time to reflect?					X	X	

APPENDIX H

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 ok?

3. Were the questions clear by and large, 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 I

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight into your interview skills and their effect on the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Discuss the following reflection questions with your 'observer' after completing the interview field test. The questions are written from your perspective as the interviewer. However, sharing your thoughts with the observer and considering their feedback will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?

2. Were the questions clear, or were there places where the respondents were unclear?

3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the respondents?

4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared?

6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly, and why do you think that was the case?

7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle, and why do you think that was the case?

8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be, and how would you change it?

9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX J

National Institutes of Health Certificate

CITI PROGRAM

Completion Date 17-May-2022
Expiration Date N/A
Record ID 48927600

This is to certify that:

Angela Brantley

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

CITI
Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?wdd4632f5-4433-4331-8548-e9c745b3b024-48927600

APPENDIX K

Participant's Bill of Rights

UMASS GLOBAL
A nonprofit affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD 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