

2023

Herstory 101: Examining The Representation Gap of BIPOC Women Educational Leaders

Kinasha Brown
kinashabrown@msn.com

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ABSTRACT

HERSTORY 101: EXAMINING THE REPRESENTATION GAP OF BIPOC WOMEN EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

Kinasha Brown, Ed.D.

Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology and Foundations

Northern Illinois University, 2023

Kelly Summers, Director

Background/Purpose: The purpose of this study was to examine how lived experiences influenced perceptions of leadership self-efficacy amongst Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) women educational leaders to minimize future representation gaps in educational leadership.

Methods: Qualitative interviews were conducted with 14 BIPOC cis-gender female leaders who worked in a large school district in the southwestern region of the United States.

Results: Examining the social constructs of race, gender, leadership makes clear how BIPOC women are socially constructed as inferior and how that played out in this educational leadership settings. The interconnectedness of both approaches contributes to explaining the representation gap of Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color (BIPOC) women in educational leadership positions.

Conclusions: The actions of society indicate a vast acceptance of the ideology that women are subjugated to men. And if you are identified as part of a marginalized group, such as BIPOC women, you are subordinate to multiple groups. Representation gaps are the evidence of the pervasiveness of this ideology. Representation gaps are characterized by a difference in ethno-racial participation under circumstances that are comparable among subgroups. Representation

gaps are complex social phenomenon. Such gaps exist in most sectors of society, including educational leadership. In the context of educational leadership, the representation gap is substantially based on race and gender, particularly for women who identify as Black, Indigenous, or as a Person of Color (BIPOC).

Keywords: Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), Educational Leadership, Representation Gap, Self- Efficacy, Leadership Self-Efficacy, Social Constructs

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
DEKALB, IL

MAY 2023

HERSTORY 101: EXAMINING THE REPRESENTATION GAP OF BIPOC WOMEN
EDUCATIONAL LEADERS

BY

KINASHA BROWN
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A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY AND
FOUNDATIONS

Doctoral Director:
Kelly H. Summers

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the Queen Mothers whose shoulders I stand on as a woman of color. I would also like to acknowledge the Queens coming after me for whom I have laid a foundation to soar!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Queen Sojourner's words

Well, children, where there is so much racket there must be something out of kilter. I think that 'twixt the negroes of the South and the women at the North, all talking about rights, the white men will be in a fix pretty soon. But what's all this here talking about?

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me! And ain't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well! And ain't I a woman? I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full?

Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him.

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back, and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say.
(Truth, 1851)

Sojourner Truth's famous speech "Ain't I a Woman" is an ode to the female existence in America. The speech eloquently captures the obscurity and inferiority placed on women because of social constructs. Truth delicately layers the poisonous nature of race and class as a cloak of

femininity. Women have always taken on critical roles in social constructs dominated by men such as religion, politics, business, and education. Despite helping to advance these social constructs, women tend to be omitted from positions of the highest power as advancements in civil rights and social justice have been made in global society.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964 was America's first significant step toward advancing women in all social constructs. The Civil Rights Act prohibited discrimination based on sex and race. Despite the Civil Rights Act and subsequent amendments, advancements for women in leadership positions have been slow and stagnate in most social constructs, bringing about significant leadership representation gaps in religion, politics, business, and education. Out of the social constructs previously listed, education is most dominant as a career choice for women, which leads to the questions, why does a representation gap exist between men and women in educational leadership positions? In particular, when the intersection of race is overlapped with identifying as a woman, the representation gap in educational leadership positions widens substantially.

Representation Gaps in Education

A representation gap is characterized by a difference in ethno-racial participation under circumstances that are comparable among subgroups. In the context of educational leadership, the representation gap is substantially based on race and gender, particularly for women who identify as Black, Indigenous, or as a Person of Color (BIPOC). Representation gaps are complex social phenomena. In education, representation gaps can be seen as both a moral and organizational dilemma. Morally, systems of oppressions rob marginalized groups of equal rights, and representation gaps prohibit educational settings from capitalizing on the benefits of a

diverse workforce and employing best practices for improving student academic outcomes. As a woman who identifies as a cis-gendered, Black, Indigenous, Person of Color (BIPOC), professionally and personally I have experienced discrimination and microaggression. And as a result, I have battled, submitted to, and been delivered from imposter and superwoman syndromes. These experiences have certainly influenced my spaces of leadership both positively and negatively. My leadership space was positively influenced because the adversity of discrimination and microaggression created an internal motivation for me to enter the leadership space to make a change. Contrarily, discrimination and microaggressions created a hesitancy in me regarding pursuing superintendency, which my leadership and professional skills align too. The point, I seek to reiterate, is that representation gaps are complex and are layered with moral and organizational influences.

As school districts are nationally recognizing and prioritizing the importance of diversity across staff and leadership roles, there is an undeniable need to generate opportunities that attract BIPOC leaders. Key to understanding representation gaps among BIPOC educational leaders rests on acknowledging the lived experiences of BIPOC women. Lived experiences are representations of the activities, encounters, common experiences, and choices of a given person, and the knowledge and meaning constructed from these experiences and choices (Oxford, 2021).

Study's Purpose

“But what's all this here talking about?” (Truth, 1851)

For the most part, research has failed to acknowledge, understand, and give voice to the lived experiences of BIPOC women. My study sought to remedy this by employing both psychological and sociological frameworks to understand the lived experiences of BIPOC

women educational leaders. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to examine how the lived experiences influenced perceptions of Leadership Self Efficacy (LSE) among BIPOC women educational leaders to minimize future representation gaps in educational leadership. To clear up any misconception on the positionality of this study, let me explicitly assert that any form of inequality identified as gaps and disparities is oppression. To understand the entanglement of oppression, one must understand the historical context in which oppression emerges. Oppression cannot exist as an independent variable. Oppression's existence is dependent on social constructs. Social cognitive theory and social constructionism are the closest research frameworks that acknowledge how we as social beings come to construct meaning, behavior, and ways of building structures for social order.

Definitions

Critical to understanding how constructs and social order influence the human experience, the research frameworks adopted for this study acknowledge that learning and behavior are dependent on social context. The following are the theories identified in this study.

Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) is a psychological perspective on human functioning that emphasizes the critical role played by the social environment to influence motivation, learning, and self-regulation (Schunk & Usher, 2019, 2020).

Self-Efficacy Theory (SET) is a subcategory of SCT, which is defined as an individual belief in one's ability to perform, influence, and achieve an outcome (Bandura, 1994).

Social Constructionism (also referred to as constructivism) is a theoretical framework that accepts human experience within its social context as the primary source for cognitive knowledge development (Andrews, 2012).

Literature Review

“Then they talk about this thing in the head; what's this they call it? [member of audience whispers, "intellect"] That's it, honey. What's that got to do with women's rights or negroes' rights?” (Truth, 1851)

Understanding the lived experiences of BIPOC women in educational leadership positions necessitates an understanding of the ways in which lived experiences are shaped. The literature review that follows examines two major theories that contribute to creating lived experiences: social cognitive theory and social constructionism.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social cognitive theory (SCT) is a psychological perspective of human functioning that emphasizes the critical role played by the social environment in the contexts of motivation, learning, and self-regulation (Schunk & Usher, 2019, 2020). Over the years SCT has been widely accepted by scholars and applied to a range of domains, which include, but are not limited to education, business, and healthcare. The application of SCT is well supported through research. Setting the precedent in this context was Bandura's Bobo Doll experiment in 1961, which discovered that levels of aggression among children increased after observing aggressive behavior from adult models. SCT accepts that learning is a social activity and posits that the process takes place in two possible ways: direct experience and observational learning. Direct experience refers to learning that comes from performing. In contrast, observational learning is associated with learning that takes place through modeling.

Self-Efficacy Theory

A major tenant of SCT is self-efficacy theory, which is an individual's belief in their ability to perform, influence, and achieve an outcome (Bandura, 1986). Levels of self-efficacy are considered strong predictors of individual motivation to pursue a task, perseverance during the task, and identifying whether the outcomes of the task were successful or not. Research has shown that individuals with low self-efficacy perceptions within a given domain are, within that domain, less likely to attempt difficult tasks and more likely to have low aspirations and little commitment to attaining goals (Olivier & Shapiro, 1993; Sachs, 1988). In contrast, persons with high self-efficacy perceptions are more likely to accept challenges such as difficult problems and exhibit positive and effortful behavior to persist and solve them (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy is in a constant state of evolution. Bandura notes that self-efficacy beliefs are the product of a complex process of self-persuasion that relies on the cognitive processing of diverse sources of efficacy information conveyed vicariously, socially, physiologically, and through enaction (Bandura, 1986; 1996). Bandura (2001) illustrates the characteristics of high and low efficacious individuals in the excerpt below:

Participants try to figure out what is wanted of them; they construct hypotheses and reflectively test their adequacy by evaluating the results of their actions; they set personal goals and otherwise motivate themselves to perform in ways that please or impress others or bring self-satisfaction; when they run into trouble they engage in self-enabling or self-debilitating self-talk; if they construe their failures as presenting surmountable challenges they redouble their efforts, but they drive themselves to despondency if they read their failures as indicants of personal deficiencies; if they believe they are being exploited, coerced, disrespected, or manipulated, they respond apathetically, oppositionally, or hostilely. (Bandura, 2001)

Bandura (2001) posits that self-efficacy is primarily derived from four sources: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states. It is important to

note that one type of experience can never be the sole source of efficacy. These sources work in concert for the development of efficacy.

Mastery experiences. Mastery experience refers to the individual experiencing success in the previous performance of a challenging task (Bandura, 1997). This source creates opportunities for individuals to build resilience while facing both success and failure. Substantial research has shown that mastery experiences serve as the greatest source of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Pfitzner-Eden (2016), who carried out a study that examined teacher self-efficacy (TSE), found that it was directly influenced by the master experiences teachers gathered during their practicum. Williams (2018) conducted a study that suggests how mastery experiences can have positive impacts on the retention and sustainability of high-quality educational leaders. Effective mastery experiences include relevant high-quality staff development, action research projects, structured role-playing, and micro-teaching experiences with feedback.

Vicarious experiences. A second source for creating and strengthening self-efficacy is through the vicarious experiences provided by social models (Bandura, 1997). A pivotal study understood vicarious learning as a multi-faceted process with sub-processes and various influential factors (Manz & Sims, 1981). Hagen et al. (1998) found that aspects of self-efficacy were further increased through vicarious experiences as well as verbal persuasion. Effective vicarious experiences include observations, visual comparison, and media. Essential to maximizing the engagement of vicarious experiences is the context of modeling. Modeling is a type of vicarious learning that can lead to behavioral change without the learner performing the behavior or directly experiencing the consequences (Manz & Sims, 1981). Regarding BIPOC women in educational leadership positions, modeling is virtually non-existent due to the

underrepresentation of BIPOC women in these spaces. While investigating the inequality between men and women in educational leadership, Robinson et. al (2017) found that people most likely mentor those like themselves:

- White women mentor white women more than other groups.
- White males' mentor white males more than other groups.
- Females of color mentor females of color more than other groups.
- Males of color mentor males of color more than other groups. (p.8)

This research suggests that BIPOC women in educational leadership positions have less access to sources of leadership self-efficacy (LSE) than their counterparts. Pagils and Green (2002) noted that modeling and coaching significantly correlated to higher leadership attempts in organizational spaces (p. 232). My study duly notes that vicarious experiences alone is inadequate for strengthening self-efficacy. Instead, the study adopts the position that the sources of efficacy work synergistically to influence behavior. Regarding BIPOC women in educational leadership positions, social modeling is virtually non-existent due to the underrepresentation of BIPOC women in these spaces.

Verbal persuasion. The third source of efficacy is verbal persuasion, commonly referred to as social persuasion. Bandura (1997) noted that this source serves to strengthen self-efficacy rather than directly impact efficacy beliefs. Several research studies support Bandura's theories of verbal persuasion on human behavior. Luzzo and Taylor (1993) found that college freshmen who received verbal persuasion in terms of career counseling had significantly increased levels of career-related decision-making self-efficacy as opposed to college freshmen who did not experience verbal persuasion.

A study examining the impact of verbal persuasion to reduce gender disparity gaps in union environments found a positive relationship between same-sex gender verbal persuasion and the self-efficacy of individuals who are pursuing union leadership positions (Mellor et al., 2006). Additionally, their study confirmed the synergistic impact of modeling and verbal persuasion on self-efficacy. Tarosh and Yasri (2021) investigated the correlations between mastery and verbal persuasion and its impact on growth mindset and self-efficacy. The researchers concluded that verbal persuasion focused on effort can potentially help cultivate a growth mindset, while compliments on intelligence may potentially lead to the constant development of a fixed mindset. Opportunities for constructive verbal persuasion include performance appraisals, coaching, counseling, positive encouragement, praise, and feedback. In all cases, the contexts are what determine the effectiveness of verbal persuasion.

Emotional states. The fourth and final source of self-efficacy is termed physiological and affective states, also commonly called emotional states. This area of self-efficacy recognizes there are physical and psychological manifestations because of the success or failure of completing a task and the emotional responses that result from the activity. Studies that focus on the physiological and affective states of self-efficacy are primarily examined through a holistic lens of health and wellness. A study that examined the interaction among affective states, self-efficacy, and psychological wellbeing of first-year undergraduate students confirmed that certain protector variables, such as psychological wellbeing and academic self-efficacy, may predict affective wellbeing (Cobo-Rendon et al., 2020). In research that examined the relationship between teacher self-efficacy (TSE) and mental health, Muenchhausen et al. (2021) observed TSE was related to work-related psychological resistance and positive emotions. Additionally,

the study found that teachers with high levels of self-efficacy tend to have decreased levels of negative physiological and affective states such as stress, anxiety, and burnout.

Leadership Self Efficacy

Research on self-efficacy has evolved to include several branches across various sectors including leadership. Self-efficacy is a key variable for better understanding the effects observed in most organizations (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). Leadership is a complex cognitive and behavioral task that occurs within a dynamic social context (McCormick, 2001). It is widely accepted that successful leaders are charismatic, transformational, influential, confident, and possess high levels of leadership self-efficacy (LSE). LSE is defined as one's self-perceived capability to perform the cognitive and behavioral functions necessary for the regulation of group processes in relation to goal achievement (McCormick, 2001). LSE is a specific form of efficacy beliefs targeted at leadership behaviors. It is understood to be distinct from general self-efficacy, which involves belief in one's overall competence for a wide range of achievement situations (Eden, 2001; Eden & Kinnar, 1991; Ng, Ang, & Chan, 2008). Literature that focuses on leadership development generally accepts LSE as necessary for effective leadership. A study by Bracht et al. (2021) determined that leadership self-efficacy mediated the positive relationships among leadership self-awareness, leadership emergence, and promotion into a leadership position. Zaccaro, Tremble, and Masuda demonstrated that leaders with high leadership self-efficacy set higher goals and employed better task strategies, which in turn led to better group performance as cited in Mesterova et al., 2015. In the context of educational settings, LSE is regarded as an educational leader's perception of their ability to positively impact educational change regardless of the circumstances. Understanding the LSE of

educational leaders is important to creating school environments in which academic success is equitable for the entire student population. As Thomas and Kowalski assert, a greater emphasis must be placed on district superintendents who act as instructional leaders when important changes are to occur, such as increasing student achievement and decreasing the achievement gap within public-school districts as cited in Whitted et al., 2015. Additionally, effective leadership has the greatest impact on student achievement following direct instruction.

Literature focusing on the LSE of educational leaders is inherently in a state of conflict as it acknowledges both concerning and promising implications regarding student achievement. While examining LSE influences of school superintendents, Whitted et al. (2015) found that superintendents were disconnected from their perceptions of instructional leadership and student achievement. This disconnection was theoretically distributed into three categories: rejecting responsibility, supporting persistent racism, and sustaining deficit viewpoints. Despite the limitations of the study that included the number of participants and lack of diverse representation in race and gender (all participants were white males), the findings indicate long career tenures were observed in educational leaders who held both racist and deficit viewpoints. In contrast, Paglis and Green's (2002) study on LSE and managing motivation to lead change yielded positive relationships between LSE level and leadership attempts. For their study leadership attempts were identified in eight activities: pushing change in the organizations, seeking continuous improvement focused on getting work done, adapting work processes that were not effective; persisting in efforts at improving effectiveness, stimulating important innovation, addressing challenges, using creative approaches for establishing new goals, and initiating review of work process. Furthermore, their study accepted the influential role of organizational antecedents in the context of LSE. Organizational antecedents are practices and

processes that influences one's position in the work environment. Examples of organizational antecedents include support for change, access to resource supply, and job autonomy (Paglis & Green, 2002). Comparably, a study by Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) established a significant correlation between organizational conditions and LSE, thereby promoting a holistic approach to leadership development. The expected outcome of this approach was to indirectly impact student achievement positively. Collectively, these studies acknowledge the significant role of LSE in influencing educational outcomes.

Social cognitive theory explains the construction of learning as a process not done in isolation but in concert with social contexts. SCT was developed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s. Bandura was a white cis-gender male who held a tenured position at Stanford University. By any measure, Bandura held a highly privileged position, which likely impacted the lens through which he developed and refined his theories. Schunk and DiBenedetto (2019) note that SCT was developed during a time when societies were not as diverse as they are today, but even so, SCT can still be a useful framework through which to understand how BIPOC women in educational leadership build and experience self-efficacy. However, combining the tenets of SCT with social constructionism, a sociological theory, creates a union that serves as the foundation for understanding how oppressive representation gaps are situated in the human social system, including those representation gaps experienced by BIPOC women of color in educational leadership positions.

Social Constructionism

Theorists Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman introduced social constructionism in 1966. Social constructionism is a theoretical framework that accepts human experience within its

social context as the primary source for cognitive knowledge development. Social constructionism claims that society is part of a human world and is created, preserved, and navigated by individuals. Like social cognitive theory, social constructionism posits that change takes place through human activity. Reviewing research on social construction, DeLeon (2005) argues that the primary strength of the paradigm is the observance of social interactions, rules, and orders in virtually every facet of social and political life. The commonplace of social construction in everyday life supports the impact of human experience on knowledge development.

Several theorists have advanced the theory of social constructionism. Of these are prominent scholars Schneider and Ingram (2005), whose work examined public policy design from the lens of social constructionism. They postulated that the way a group is perceived determines the benefits or sanctions of public policies. Schneider and Ingram noted that groups are generally classified into four categories: advantaged, contenders, dependents, and deviants. These categories are polar, implying that those considered advantaged tend to have power, influence, and voice in influencing policy design, while deviants have little to no power or influence and are not included in policy design.

Storr (2010) advanced the theory of social constructionism in the market. He defined the market as a product of human action, stating that knowledge is socially distributed with a focus on the subjectively held, albeit socially mediated meanings actors ascribe to market activity. Markets are created through objective and subjective realities. The objective reality of the market is created through externalization and social orders, while the latter is created through interactions and communication. Using the vocabulary of the market (e.g., prices), individuals

speak to each other about their possessions, capabilities, and desires across vast geographic and social distances to communicate changes in the socio-economic world (Storr, 2010).

Research on social constructionism has also been conducted in the field of education as well. Brooks' (2012) work examines how the social constructionism of students has manifested itself in educational policy. He found that students were viewed from six socially constructed roles: friends and students of business, active consumers, dutiful citizens, the children of authoritative parents, 'good characters-in-the-making', and a unitary group. Classism influenced the benefit of policies in each group. Brooks concluded that the dominant social views of students were heavily influenced by conservative values. Thus, the study examined the impact of interactions with factors such as family, structure, race, gender, and socio-economic class, supporting the notion that the values were constructed from a privileged masculine perspective.

Social constructs can be used to define all social phenomena. For the purposes of this study, my body of work shall focus on the socially constructed phenomena of race, gender, and leadership.

Race

Empirically sound research attempts to comprehend the social construction and dichotomies of race. Race is the most influential social construct in American history; in fact America was built on racism. Prominent sociologists Omi and Winant explained racial categories and their social meanings as unstable and historically contingent as they remain the focus of persistent political struggle as cited by Saperstein et al., 2013. In America, race was a primary tool used to group humans based on shared characteristics, which resulted in a hierarchy of social order in which people of color remain subordinate to the white race. Historically, this

goes all the way back to the Founders. The writers of the Constitution used race to determine rights and access to civil liberties. BIPOC people were not recognized as men in the Constitution but were instead categorized as property. Relegating BIPOC people to property meant excluding them from roles and positions meant for men such as leadership. Oppressors who institutionalized racism did so without having forethought to the resiliency of the human spirit and the innovation that comes from enslavement. Resiliency and innovation have been critical to the survival and evolution of racial minority groups in America, especially African Americans. Famous poet and civil rights activist, Langston Hughes wrote the poem “I Too,” capturing the lived experience of African Americans in America. One of many powerful lines in the poem reads “Tomorrow, I too will be at the table.” Being at the table represents the hope of equality and desire for inclusiveness in all social constructs for minorities. Is such hope even attainable – considering social constructions of race were instituted out of the need to legitimize inequality? Nevertheless, “being at the table” charges those in power with creating spaces that eliminate racial inequality. Creating such spaces can lessen persistent representation gaps in many areas of society, including those found at all levels within the American educational system.

Studies have also illuminated the challenges of BIPOC professionals working in education. Endo’s (2015) study articulated the plight of female Asian-Americans teachers in educational settings. In particular, their daily experiences and interactions exemplified that they, as Asian American women, were dealing with a range of gendered, racialized, and sexualized expectations that made them question the common discourses promoted in K-12 schools. Burton et al.’s (2020) study on gendered racism asserted that black women in educational leadership are less likely to receive support but do receive extra scrutiny and lower performance evaluations. In examining the underrepresentation of BIPOC representation in Ontario’s educational system

Abawi (2021) recognized that the underrepresentation of BIPOC permanent teachers and school administrators points to significant discriminatory policies and practices that operate to inform racist conceptions of whose bodies are suited to hold authoritative positions.

Gender

Sex and gender are terms that are often used interchangeably. Most individuals are of the understanding that gender is a biological process. In response, social constructionists dismantle this belief, recognizing gender as the most archaic and omnipresent of all social constructs. As part of a social process based on the characteristics of sex organs, gender is assigned at birth.

Aaltio and Mill (2002) articulate the difference between sex and gender in their explanation:

Sex is a biological classification of humans into women and men, whereas gender is a cultured knowledge that differentiates them. To understand what gender means is to understand its cultural dimensions. Thus, feminine, and masculine genders consist of the values and ideals that originate from cultures. (p. 4)

In western culture, gender has been institutionalized into two groups: male and female. This grouping is used to assign roles, division of labor, and establish hierarchy, wherein women are historically socialized into an inferior role. Thus, gender by its very design is unequal and oppressive, akin to the assertion by Lorber (1994), who posits that social order in Western societies is organized around racial-ethnic, class, and gender inequality. Lorber claims that the consistent purpose of gender as a modern social institution is to construct women as a group who remain subordinate to men.

Gender inequalities are commonplace in many societies. In the United States, women tend to be paid less than their male counterparts. Men dominate leadership roles in religion, business, and education. In recent times, society has demanded equality between men and

women. Despite the demand for equality, an African American woman shall not be considered equal to a White male. This is due to the social construction of race, which intersects with the issue of gender.

Social constructionism can be viewed as a catalyst for gender disparities in leadership roles. As previously stated, gender disparities are prevalent in settings for educational leadership. Therefore, despite women dominating in the field of education as a career choice, top educational leadership positions such as superintendents are still predominantly held by white men.

Leadership Roles

Leadership is generally considered the cornerstone of organizational culture. This study accepts the argument that there is a direct correlation between leadership and outcomes. However, literature on leadership has become more inclusive of a social constructionism perspective that focuses on communication, meaning-making, and constructed realities (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010) This perspective remains in contrast with other work on leadership that focused on mechanics and process (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010)

Communication is recognized as a major source for constructing realities in a social system. Communicative practices – talks, discourses, and other symbolic media – occasioned by the context are integral to the processes by which the social construction of leadership takes place (Fairhurst, 2009; Fairhurst & Grant, 2010). Most organizations express the desire for excellent communication skills, with high expectations from both superiors and subordinates regarding leaders. This expectation has been legitimized through habitual practice and institutionalized as a characteristic of successful leaders.

Social constructionism also acknowledges the importance of meaning-making for roles of leadership. Constructionist leadership approaches place a premium on the ability of followers to also “make sense of and evaluate their organizational experiences” (Meindl, 1995, p. 332; see also Fairhurst & Grant, 2010, p.175). One way to view meaning-making is to consider it as an individual’s understanding of how social constructs are defined in their reality. Meaning-making is an internal process influenced by beliefs, culture, and values. From the lens of leadership, meaning-making guides our personality, behavior, and actions. It manifests itself into leadership principles and practice, both of which have been the focus in this research domain (Fairhurst & Grant, 2010).

The constructed reality of leadership offers both subjective and objective realities. The former may change based on how an individual internalizes the construct at a particular time, including leadership self-efficacy (LSE), philosophies, principles, etc. In contrast, objective leadership realities are fixed and detach themselves from the feelings associated with subjective realities. Examples of these include institutions, policies, stakeholders, etc. In terms of society, leadership as a social construct has mainly been associated with power and privilege. In most societies, the role of the leader is often reserved for men. It follows then that the objectification of leadership takes place from a masculine perspective.

Despite women mainstreaming into the workforce, data show significant gaps between men and women in leadership or positions of prestige, privilege, and power. In 2015, only 5 percent of the companies in the Standard and Poor’s 500 index had female chief executive officers (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2016; Catalyst, 2015). Historically, there has also been a disproportionately low number of female U.S. senators. For example, in 1992 there were only two female senators. The number jumped to 12 by 2001 and

currently stands at 24 in 2022. Of those 24 women, 21 identify as White. In both business and politics, White men still hold the most privilege, followed by White women. BIPOC women have yet to make real in-roads.

The educational sector is currently experiencing a gender disparity gap in leadership as well. The AAUW (2016) reported in 2014 that white women made up 18 percent of superintendents, black women made up 1 percent, and women of other races and ethnicities together made up about 1 percent. Table 1 illustrates the gender disparity gap in the educational sector.

Table 1

Gender and Race/Ethnicity of U.S. School Superintendents, 2014

	Men	Women
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.2 %	0.3%
Asian	0.0%	0.1%
Black or African American	0.6%	1.0%
Hispanic or Latina/o	0.5%	0.2%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	0.1%	0.0%
White (Non-Hispanic)	75.0%	18.5%
Other	0.6%	0.3%
Race/ethnicity not specified	0.6%	0.2%
Total	78.7%	20.5%

Note: n=1,711; 0.8 percent of respondents did not specify gender. (AAUW, 2016; Finnan et al., 2015)

In addition to demonstrating gender disparity, Table 1 illustrates the widening of the gap due to race and ethnicities. The table also supports the previous assertion that the social constructions of race have resulted in a hierarchy of social order wherein people of color remained subordinate to the white race. For social roles to thrive in any social construct, the actors in the construct must accept and engage in intentional roles. Historically, (especially in

American culture) social construct roles have negative implications that prevent certain groups from engaging full societal agency as part of the human experience. Further research studies examining the impact of social constructs on the experience of BIPOC women in educational leadership can provide insight and strategies for eliminating representation and disparity gaps.

Negative Implications of Social Constructionism

While social constructionism seeks to understand the human experience through a social context, there remains an adversarial relationship between constructionism and the human experience, which breeds trauma for those who are not legitimized as part of the privileged subgroup. Such trauma is integrated into the experience of the disenfranchised and marginalized, such as those identifying as Black, Indigenous, or Person of Color. The next section focuses on the social constructs that negatively impact their human experience, specifically discrimination, microaggressions, cultural taxation, and misogynistic male leadership. Taken together, these factors contribute to isolation, additional expectations related to identity, lack of support, and a work environment that can create feelings of marginalization and loss of efficacy and cause many women to speak up less or worry about how their advocacy or leadership might be perceived or attributed to their identity, gender, and/or race.

Bias. Bias is a semi-permanent belief based on repeated exposure to stereotypes (AAUW, 2016; Project Implicit, 2011). Using the social constructionist approach, biases can be interpreted as thoughts and preferences based on one's interpretation of subjective and objective realities. They are limited to human perception and do not account for variables other than what is experienced by the individual. More often than not, biases lead to discrimination against a person or group. The key to understanding the root of bias is acknowledgment of the limited information

associated with it. In other words, it is part of the human process to make inferences and assumptions based on the knowledge as recognized in social cognitive theory (AAUW, 2016; Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2019). The acceptance of Schunk and DiBenedetto work drives the position of this study that biases are not the result of natural inclination and can be addressed and/or eliminated through intentional social activities such as learning spaces.

Biases can be categorized as explicit or implicit. Explicit biases are overt and intentionally directed toward an individual or a group. Racism, ageism, and sexism are all examples of explicit biases. Meanwhile, implicit biases are subtle, covert, and unintentional demonstrated through actions and communication. These biases often lead an individual or group to experience microaggressions. Implicit biases are also more likely to be corrected through self-reflection and education when compared to explicit biases. An example of an implicit bias is the judgment that black assertion relates to aggression or defiance.

Biases against women have been well documented, particularly in the field of leadership. Forsyth, Haney, and Wright (1997) examined biases in appraisals of women leaders. Results revealed that the conservative or liberal views of the participants influenced the appraisal of women leaders. Those with conservative or traditional views evaluated women leaders more harshly. Similarly, Koenig and colleagues (2011) in a meta-analysis of 69 studies on stereotypes and leadership found that stereotypes about leadership are decidedly masculine (AAUW, 2016; Koenig et al., 2011). These stereotypes hide under the guise of characteristics of leadership, such as independence, aggression, competitiveness, rationality, dominance, and objectivity (AAUW, 2016; Crites et al., 2015). Socially constructed roles of executive leadership are not viewed as a traditional role for women. Furthermore, research substantially supports that when race intersects

with gender (e.g., an African-American woman), biases are experienced at exponentially higher levels (AAUW, 2016).

Discrimination. The most prominent negative implication of social constructionism is discrimination. Despite the widely accepted notion that discrimination is morally wrong, the act itself does not have a universal definition. In alignment with the intent of my study, I adopt the definition of discrimination as an action or practice that excludes, disadvantages, or merely differentiates between individuals or groups of individuals based on some ascribed or perceived trait – based on Kohler-Hausman’s (2020) work. Discrimination results in the production or perpetuation of political, economic, or social inequalities and is more likely to create resentment, resistance, and potentially even mobilization against the source of the perceived injustice (Karapin & Feldman, 2020). Moreau (2010) notes that discrimination is injurious to persons, as it suppresses deliberative freedoms to live insulated from the effects of normatively extraneous features of themselves such as skin color or gender (Moreau, 2010). In contemporary global society, the very notion of discrimination is explicitly rejected from most social systems. The United States has several federal laws that prohibit discrimination based on race, gender, sexual orientation, and religion. These laws appear to have been developed on the idea that all men are created equal. One could also argue that discrimination is necessary to legitimize the objectivation of groups who share similar characteristics. Thus, discrimination is complex, multifaceted, and intersects with many social constructs. For my study, discrimination will be approached through the lens of race and gender as part of American culture to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the context in which race and gender disparities exist in educational leadership.

In spite of federal laws prohibiting it, racial discrimination has a solidified place in the history of the United States, dating back to its inception as a country. While several racial and ethnic groups have experienced discrimination in the United States, none have experienced it as ubiquitously as African Americans. The very inception of the African-American discriminatory experience originated in the early 1600s due to slavery, which in colonized America evolved from social class to race distinction. To legitimize the oppression of deliberative freedoms of African Americans, laws were put in place that discriminated against citizenship, civil liberties, and human rights. One means by which legitimization of discrimination occurred was through the United States Constitution and its three-fifths compromise contained within the 14th Amendment. During the constitutional convention of 1787, members of the U.S. House of Representatives engaged in debate about how much of a human an African American was and decided they would be considered three-fifths human. There was no such debate for white people; they were counted as one whole person. In other words, African Americans in the United States were groomed for oppression from the very founding of the country. In his commentary on the Constitution and Race and Slavery, scholar David Azerrad (2015) noted:

Ironically, many Americans who are resolutely opposed to racism unwittingly agree with Chief Justice Roger Taney's claim in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857) that the Founders' Constitution regarded blacks as "so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect, and that the negro might justly and lawfully be reduced to slavery for his benefit." In this view, the worst Supreme Court case decision in American history was actually correctly decided. (p.2)

As the political and economic agenda of those with privilege and power has transitioned, so has the recognition of African Americans in U.S. society. However, the perceived inferiority of African Americans and the very real bias against them has persisted. A complete overview of the ways in which American society has (Jim Crow laws) and continues to (incarceration rates of

Black men) engage in systemic racism against African Americans is beyond the scope of my literature review; however, inequality in the representation of racial groups across sectors of leadership such as business, politics, and education is still very much present.

While the racial discrimination previously discussed affected both men and women, gender discrimination against women in American culture is also ubiquitous, although at times more overt than discrimination based on race. As recently as 50 to 60 years ago, the role of women in American society was limited to being the caretaker of the family, and it was socially unacceptable for women to be educated, enter the workplace, or hold positions of leadership. While women certainly have progressed in terms of reclaiming spaces in American society, inequalities persist; in 2010, women only made 77 cents for every dollar a man earned in the United States on average (National Equal Pay Task Force, 2013; see also Haile, Emmanuel, & Dzathor, 2016). Discrimination also takes place among women based on their race. For example, in senior executive-level positions and among elected politicians in the U.S. Congress, white women are better represented than all other groups of women (AAUW, 2016).

As a result of cultural transitions, social movements, and laws, blatant discrimination across sectors is being dismantled. In recent times, people of color, specifically women, are slowly advancing to positions once reserved for men. Parallel to the progressive developments in social systems, novel paradigms for people of color have also emerged. Two such paradigms are the experience of microaggressions and the cultural taxation of people of color, both of which are experienced in a variety of ways. In alignment with this study, these paradigms will be approached from the perspective of leadership.

Microaggression. Micro-aggressions, implicit and explicit, are defined as brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or

unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color (Sue et al., 2007). Sue et al. (2007) identified three types of microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Microassaults are explicit, intentional, and communicated in derogatory terms. An example of a microassault is the use of racial epithets such as nigger to describe African Americans. Microinsults are implicit communications wherein remarks that are rude and/or offensive are used. An example of this would be a co-worker saying to an African American colleague, “You are not one of *those* black people, you are smart.” Microinsults usually illuminate an unconscious implicit bias. Microinvalidation minimizes or negates the validity of an experience of existence. An example of microinvalidation is when one says to a person of color, “I don’t see color; we are all the same” or the negation of another’s name due to linguistic complexity.

Research argues that women of color have a substantially greater chance of experiencing microaggression than their male and female counterparts. Dissimilar to discrimination, microaggression can perpetuate and potentially stimulate inequalities in the social construct, thereby impacting leadership. Burton, Cyn, and Warner (2020) studied the experienced of African American female school leaders and noted that microaggressions endure because of gendered racism. A non-white female participant in the study described how the repeated exposure to microaggressions caused internal conflict.

In these workspaces with these behaviors toward you, that are diminishment, that are microaggressions, that is the selective incivility. All of these things that exist, right? From a social perspective. This kind of social science. These constructs. They’re real. But who am I supposed to be in the face of that, is the question? Am I supposed to be pumping my fist? Am I supposed to be strong but silent? Am I supposed to be resilient? Am I supposed to be like, “I can take it,” and then come out on the other side stronger? “You can’t break me.” I’ve been, not broken, but bent. (p.9)

In another case study, the pervasiveness of microaggressions toward an African American female newly appointed to the role of principal was illuminated. As a leader she experienced implicit and explicit microaggressions from students, families, staff, and at the district level. Her experiences are grounded in the experiences of many Black, female school leaders. Her narrative highlights the deep-seated racism and sexism that she, and so many female school leaders of color confront daily (Burton, Cyr, & Weiner, 2021). Experiencing microaggressions in education settings is not unique to African Americans. While minimal, studies that discuss microaggressions experienced by people of color include Endo (2015), who studied racial microaggressions experienced by Asian American teachers during their pre-service and professional tenure. As Asian American women, the microaggressions experienced were gendered, racialized, and sexualized expectations that made them question the common discourses promoted in K-12 schools and teacher-preparation programs that US educational institutions are colorblind, inclusive, and truly embrace diversity. These studies illustrate the pervasiveness of microaggression as common place in educational settings, which is a cultural taxation that BIPOC women bear for a seat at the table.

Cultural taxation. The paradigm of cultural taxation was introduced to academic research by Amado Padilla in 1994, who explained it as the additional burden of service responsibility encountered by minorities due to their perceived position within an institution. An example of cultural taxation is asking the Mexican American faculty member to serve on a committee to examine how well the curriculum represents Spanish speaking cultures. Cultural taxation is a subjective reality based on principles of collective culture that focus on groups and supporting others. Cultural taxation tends to be more prevalent where disparities of race and gender exist. Hirshfield and Joseph (2011) expanded the concept of cultural taxation to include identity

taxation, which occurs when faculty members shoulder any labor (physical, mental, or emotional) due to their membership in a historically marginalized group beyond that which is expected of other faculty members in the same setting.

Disciplines concerned with cultural and identity taxation acknowledge that women of color face multiple marginalities in social systems. Women who are double minorities face issues that white women and male faculty of color do not have to confront in departmental settings, such as the pressure to be a symbolic role model for female and minority students, increased visibility and bodily/presentational concerns, and isolation from collegial networks and departmental/institutional support (Aguirre, 2000; Essed, 2000; Ford, 2011; Hirschfield & Joseph, 2011; Kobayashi, 2002; Smith, 2010; Turner, 2002).

The social phenomena of cultural taxation has been documented in educational leadership as well. Dowdy and Hamilton (2011) conducted a study capturing the experience of a black female educational leader in a predominantly white institution that had never engaged a black female leader at an executive level. Her experience with cultural taxation was described as followed: “Willa struggled with the issue of how her orientation to a predominantly White environment with the demand of a sense of social responsibility and the fact that negligible attention tends to be paid to the preparation of academic department leaders” (p.191).

Later in the study, Willa acknowledged the importance of serving as a role model, especially for underrepresented students. The demand of social responsibility and tasking of being a role model/mentor are explicit examples of the cultural taxation that may never be experienced by white females and certainly is highly unlikely to ever be experienced by white males. To use urban vernacular, regarding cultural taxation: the struggle is real!

Misogynistic male leadership. Mysoginistic male leadership commonly referred to as the Good Old Boys Club demonstrates the exclusion of women as common practice. Historically, the term good old boys referenced the male construct of wealthy graduates from prestigious preparatory schools in England (Miller, 2011) and is the personification of white male power and privilege. The good old boys' social circle provides political, social, and even economic advantages for its members (Miller, 2011). Commonly noted in sociological research pertaining to the good old boys is the notion that women are outsiders and strictly excluded from participation. The good old boys' network has permeated all social sectors, including educational settings. In educational settings, research has shown women outperform male counterparts in academic and professional preparation (Tabin & Coleman, 1991); however, in areas of educational leadership, men still are more likely to advance and one reason for this are social connections with other men. Tabin and Colman's (1991) study participant observed women in her district whose resumes clearly outshone those of men who relied on the good old boys network and waited their turn for leadership positions. Male misogynistic leadership at minimal represents gender inequality and discrimination. As stated earlier, the positionality of my research asserts any form of inequality, such as those identified as gaps and disparities, is oppression. Conceptually, oppression cannot exist as an independent variable. Oppression's existence is dependent on social constructs.

Representation Gaps in Educational Leadership

Educational leadership remains a vital area of research for academics and educational practitioners. A multitude of studies have been conducted to identify characteristics, habits, and practices of effective leaders within educational settings. Followed by direct instruction,

effective leadership has the greatest impact on student achievement (Grissom et al., 2021).

Leadership emergence, perceived leader effectiveness, and group performance have been found to be powerful factors that enhance leader effectiveness (Merstova et al., 2015). Building on Merstova et al. (2015), Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) categorized successful education leaders as being skilled in four practices: setting directions, developing people, redesigning organizations, and managing instructional programs. Collectively, these studies do not discriminate against leaders by their gender or race, but they position ability and practice as critical to leadership effectiveness. However, there is a persistent representation gap of women, specifically BIPOC women, in educational leadership positions.

One way to address representation gaps is by diversifying educational leadership positions by race, ethnicity, and gender. Diversity has been a recognized asset of organizational performance. Ely's (2004) information and decision-making theories suggest that diversity improves performance by contributing to higher-quality decisions. This is also compounded by taking advantage of a broader range of alternatives and new ideas (Cox, 1994; Foldy, 2004; Ospina, 2001; Richard, 2000). In support, a study conducted by Foma (2014) found that a diverse workplace greatly improves productivity, creativity, and problem-solving. Another study examining gender diversity in the workforce found that when top management teams were more gender-diverse, knowledge combination capability was positively related to higher innovation (Ruiz-Jiménez, Fuentes-Fuentes, & Ruiz-Arroyo, 2016).

Based on extant literature, one could assert that both effective leadership and gender diversity positively impact the performance of organizations. However, one must note that despite the amount of research carried out in this area, a perpetual representation gap of women in CEO/Superintendent leadership positions remains. A representation gap is characterized by a

difference in ethno-racial participation under circumstances that are comparable among subgroups. In the context of educational leadership, the representation gap is substantially based on race and gender, particularly for women who identify as Black, Indigenous, or as a Person of Color (BIPOC).

Considering that quantitatively speaking, women dominate the educational field in terms of career engagement and as minorities make up 46 percent of students enrolled in elementary and secondary education, such a representation gap presents cause for concern (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2018). According to the 2017-18 report from the National Center for Educational Statistics, about 78 percent of public-school principals were White, 11 percent were Black, and 9 percent were Hispanic (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). Those who were of two or more races, Asian, or American Indian/Alaska Native each made up 1 percent of total public-school principals and those who were Pacific Islander made up less than 1 percent of the total public-school principals (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2021). Information regarding women in positions of executive leadership suggests that white males dominate these positions regardless of changing demographics. Exploring reasons for representation gaps through research could potentially support individuals who are responsible for creating safe spaces for leadership development of marginalized BIPOC women. To that end, my study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do the constructs of race and gender factor into leadership practice for BIPOC women in education?
2. What are BIPOC women's attitudes toward discrimination and microaggressions in their educational setting?

3. What influence do race and gender constructs have on the decision to pursue executive leadership positions for BIPOC women in education?

Current Study

This study is informed by social cognitive and social constructionism theories. The intersection and overlap of a psychological framework (social cognitive theory) with a sociological framework (social constructionism) is the lens I use to understand and make sense of race and gender disparities in executive-level educational leadership positions. Neither of these theories can examine the phenomenon of BIPOC women in educational leadership positions independently. These theories provide a synergistic relationship. As current social movements and laws are greatly supporting people of color, specifically women, in social systems, it is imperative to establish a detailed understanding of why disparities still exist and how we can start to rectify that situation. Additionally, research studies examining the experiences of BIPOC women can assist in retaining, recruiting, and developing culturally responsive leadership development programs. Success of such programs can indirectly impact representation gaps.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research for this study was approached through a qualitative process. The rationale for using this approach is result of my intent to examine the social phenomena of representation gaps intersected with race, gender, and leadership self-efficacy.

Description of Setting

To control for the variances in the organizational culture among school districts, it was intentional that a single school district was selected for this study. In addition to controlling for variances, accessibility to participants was also a key factor in the research setting. An urban school district in southwestern region of the United States was selected to conduct this study.

The school district serves approximately 43,000 students in 89 schools. School and community demographics for the school district indicate it is a majority minority district. Table 2 illustrates student demographic data as of SY 21-22. Like many other districts across the nation, the district's workforce is not reflective of the student population. The district has documented and reaffirmed publicly the commitment to a diversified workforce. Moreover, the district has developed several programs aimed at increasing the minority representation in administrative roles. Specific programs include the development of a Leadership Prep Academy (LPA); the hiring of a Director of Diversity Recruitment and providing incentives to entice minorities to see

employment. Despite the programs and initiatives, the school district still struggles with BIPOC representation in all levels of the school system.

Table 2

District Enrollment by Federal Ethnicity, SY 21-22

Ethnicity	Graduating students
White/Anglo	8,106
African American	2,792
Hispanic	28,058
Native American	1,662
Asian American	852
Multi-racial	1,783
Total	43,253

(District data, 2022)

Participants

The participants in this study were united by the following characteristics and identities: cis-gendered women – Black, Indigenous or Person of Color (BIPOC) – who provide direct supervision and serve in the capacity as principal or executive administration (see Appendix A). The participants confirmed their identification as cis-gender and BIPOC through completion of a questionnaire prior to the interview. Sixteen participants were invited to be in the study. Fourteen of the participants accepted and completed required documentation. One participant was removed from the study because of an unexpected change in leadership and reporting structure.

One participant did not respond to the invitation to participate. All fourteen participants identified as BIPOC and represented diverse racial subgroups.

Six of the fourteen participants identified as African American or Black, four identified as Hispanic or Latin X, two identified as Multiracial or Biracial, one identified as Asian or Pacific Islander, and one of the participants identified as Middle Eastern. In addition to the self-reported racial and ethnic orientations, six of fourteen reported an intersection recognized in the study questionnaire: Three of the participants reported immigrant status and three reported LGBTQIA orientation. Participants were also unified through professional responsibility. All participants conducted performance evaluations for direct reports; thus, they were in a leadership position within the school district. Direct reports included teachers, support staff, coordinators, and district level directors. All participants used the evaluation process set forth by district policy.

Procedures

The interviews were semi-structured with a set of pre-determined questions (see Appendix B). Prior to the interview, participants were given the questions to prepare. The interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes and were conducted via Zoom. It was explicitly stated to participants that the recordings would be for reference purposes during the transcription process of data collection. All procedures were reviewed and approved through the Institution Review Board (IRB), a part of Northern Illinois University's Office of Research Compliance, Integrity, and Safety.

Qualitative Interview Questions

The interview questions for this study were designed to evoke thick descriptions from the participants. Focus was given to academic and professional experience, leadership practice, and organizational culture. Interview questions were as follows:

1. What does good leadership look like to you?
2. What are potential barriers to good leadership?
3. Tell me about your educational background.
4. Tell me about how you came to this position.
5. How many years of experience do you have serving in an educational leadership capacity?
6. How does your cultural background influence your leadership?
7. What role does identity as a BIPOC woman play in your leadership style?
8. How has race impacted your leadership experience in this organization?
9. Tell of a time you experienced micro-aggression, bias, or discrimination in your professional life.
10. What steps do you take to communicate your professional needs within the organization?
11. Tell me about your ability to influence the culture of the organization.
12. What leadership opportunities do you see on the horizon within the organization?
13. How have your professional lived experiences influenced your decision to pursue leadership positions?

14. Do you feel that a “Good Old Boys” influence withing this organization? Please explain.
15. How would you prepare a BIPOC woman for a leadership position in this organization?

CHAPTER 3

RESULTS

“I could work as much and eat as much as a man - when I could get it - and bear the lash as well!
And ain't I a woman?” (Truth, 1851)

The paramount priorities of this study were to amplify the voices of BIPOC women in educational leadership positions and understand how their experiences influence the representation gap. This study was based on the following research questions:

1. How do the constructs of race and gender factor into leadership practice for BIPOC women in education?
2. What are BIPOC women attitudes towards discrimination and micro-aggressions in their educational setting?
3. What influence does race, and gender constructs have on the decision to pursue executive leadership positions for BIPOC women in education?

The study participants' narratives are presented through a deductive approach of qualitative analysis to investigate the research questions. The deductive approach includes study alignment to SCT and social constructionism clusters, thematic data set, and codes.

Table 3

Depicts the Deductive Approach Used for Study Data Analysis

Cluster	Themes	Codes
Social Cognitive Theory	Perception	Beliefs, philosophies, and ideology.
	Influence to pursue leadership opportunities	Mastery experiences: vicarious experiences: social persuasion, emotional states.
Social Constructionism	Social Constructs	Cultural experiences: cultural expectations
	Organization culture	Informal system: expectations, acceptance: biases, microaggressions, and/or discrimination: acceptance: validation

Cluster Summary

Bandura (2001) noted that personal agency operates within a broad network of socio-structural influences. The intersection of SCT and social constructionism were needed to capture the experiences of research participants. Neither theory could stand alone in explaining why the representation gap for BIPOC women in educational leadership persists. As they discussed their lived experiences, the participants did not separate the psychological influence from the sociological but rather wove the two ideologies together as part of an intimate human experience.

The SCT tenet of leadership self efficacy manifested more in participants who were in the latter part of their careers. Specific insights the participants discussed as sources of LSE are discussed in the thematic summary section. The participants' interviews suggested a relationship between time and LSE. However, time did not necessarily mean greater sources of LSE. In fact,

the participants had minimal access to sources of LSE, such as opportunities to engage in mastery and vicarious experiences. For some participants, this influenced their decisions to continue to pursue leadership advancement, which can be seen as a contributing factor to representation gaps for BIPOC women.

Under the tenets of social constructionism, an awareness of race and gender remained consistent for all participants in lived and professional experiences. Ideas of race and gender manifested more in the participants when they were discussing cultural expectations and experiences. While both cluster categories had significant impact on the participants' human experience, neither theory could be identified as the root cause for the representation gap for BIPOC women educational leaders in this geographic location.

Thematic Summary

This study yielded four themes: perception, influence to pursue leadership opportunities, social constructs, and organizational culture. Collectively the themes of the study synergistically align to SCT and social constructionism frameworks. Each theme is presented using a narrative and the participants' descriptions.

Theme One: Perception

For this study, perception was defined as the participants' thoughts, beliefs, and/or adopted philosophies that specifically focused on race, gender, leadership, and organizational culture. Perception emerged as the prominent theme in this study and often intersected cultural experience and cultural expectations. Oppressive constructs of race, gender, or socio-economic status were acknowledged by participant's household family members but were not allowed to

be a definitive outcome for participants. Participants' descriptions included growing up in households where persistence, work ethic, and accountability were demanded and instilled as core values. Their specific comments are elucidated below:

We were just brought up that there were no excuses. If we won by a little bit and we said something about the ref or the umpire, my dad would say, the next time you win by more stop. I don't wanna [sic] hear it. We always take accountability, be a team player and suck it up. And so that's how we grew up. Yeah, I know we're poor. I know we're Mexican. I know I'm a girl, but so what's your point? Do what you gotta [sic] do to get your seat at the table. (Herstory 101, Participant 8)

So, if you really dug deep into how I was groomed and how I was trained, I was groomed to be resilient. I was groomed by my dad. He would say, you don't let a MF [sic] stop you from nothing. Don't lose sight of your goals. They can't stop you. My dad is always like, no, you are a phoenix, and you will always fly. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

In my culture and growing up in my family and being around my people, the mother, is in charge of the household. What she says goes whether you like it or not. And dad brings in the money and supports financially and has a different type of authority. And I do also think that growing up, that directness and that bluntness and we don't cry. Get up, get your shit done and let's go. Like, I don't have time for this baby stuff. That's the house I grew up in. (Herstory 101, Participant 3)

For the participants this approach to race and gender created an efficacious belief that despite identifying as a BIPOC woman, they were all confident in their ability to serve and excel as leaders. Confidence in ability is characteristic of LSE necessary for effective leadership. However, regardless of their perceptions concerning their leadership ability, the participants recognized that their leadership practice was constrained by race and gender. They explicitly perceived the expectations of leadership practice were different for BIPOC women than their counterparts:

My leadership is negotiation. I'm constantly negotiating my spaces because of those three things (race, gender, identity). (Herstory 101, Participant 7)

You are not offered the same grace as others. You are supposed to walk the straight and narrow, make no mistakes, no left turn, no U-turns. And that's a lot of pressure. And that's

what BIPOC women experience in leadership. And so, whether you tell me or not, one thing I know for sure is that you're experiencing pressure to make sure you don't miss a step. And we all make mistakes as human beings, but for BIPOC women there's added pressure there because there's going to be intense judgment, ridicule, all of it. (Herstory 101, Participant 9)

I think it is harder for a woman. I think men are given more leeway in certain circles. Okay. Whether they're angry or if they're trying to bring something to the forefront. I think for women it's a little bit harder. (Herstory 101, Participant 1)

So, in my leadership, it's almost like you've gotta [sic] prove yourself so you're always doing more. Just more driven to succeed and constantly reaching for what I consider to be more perfection or whatever that idea of perfection is. (Herstory 101, Participant 6)

Analysis of the data suggests the constraints of race and gender on leadership practice experience by BIPOC women reinforced the superwoman phenomenon that posits BIPOC woman work at daunting levels that are not sustainable – trying to do it all to perfection. Perfection is not a realistic goal for any leader in any construct, especially in education. A finding of this study is that perception of the expectations of leadership practice were more likely to contribute to the representation gaps of these BIPOC women in educational leadership than their perceptions around their leadership ability. Essentially, the additional demands of leadership practice placed on BIPOC women educational leaders such as perfection, constantly having to prove yourself, working harder than counterparts, and continuously negotiating space presumably contributed to why representation gaps exist for these BIPOC women in educational leadership.

Theme Two: Influences to Pursue Leadership Opportunities

The participants' influences to pursue leadership opportunities were examined through the sources of LSE: mastery and vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional states.

Of particular interest to the researcher was analyzing sources of LSE as part of the organizational culture rather than outside of the organization.

Mastery Experiences

The participant interviews illuminated the scarcity of access to mastery experience as a source of LSE for BIPOC women within the organizational culture. Mastery experiences were defined as opportunities outside of professional role to build leadership capacity. This study identified one formalized program, the Leadership Prep Academy (LPA), that was designed to create leadership opportunities within the organization, and four of the fourteen had completed the LPA and had diverse viewpoints on their LPA experience.

So I did the first Leadership Prep Academy the district ever did. I got my book over there. I think it was like 2004. Afterward, I wouldn't apply for any jobs. And so after going back to teaching for three more years, they're like, could you please apply for a job? I said No, I'm not ready. (Herstory 101, Participant 4)

Another thing was the leadership academy the district offers; I participated in that back in 2020. So I was very happy to be a part of that. It gave me an opportunity to better understand how the district works and to network with the assistant superintendents who were really running it at the time. At that time we did a book study and we got together, and I noticed in the leadership academy there were quite a few black folks over there and since then several of them have been in leadership positions. So, I'm like that seems fertile ground that leadership academy. (Herstory 101, Participant 2)

I did the Leadership prep academy, but it didn't help me. A matter of fact when I came here, I had already had more than 10 years of experience. But they gave me a mentor who had less experience than me. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

I did participate in the Leadership Prep Academy through the district. I did participate in that for one entire school year. And what's interesting about that experience is, I used to straighten my hair permanently and it was almost blonde too. It was very different. So, when I started LPA, I had my straight light hair. Well, by December I was just over it. It had been five years of me straightening my hair, being a slave to the salon. And so, I said, I'm letting my hair go natural. And even when I didn't get those jobs, I was wondering, was it my hair? Hair, yes, I had gone back to my curly hair and I'm like, it's just crazy what comes to mind when you literally pour your heart and soul into something. And I

was just so devastated after those five interviews just questioning every single thing about myself, even my hair. (Herstory 101 – Participant 6)

A significant finding in analysis of the mastery experiences was not about the quality of the program but rather who chose to participate in the Leadership Prep Academy. All participants who engaged in the LPA identified as African American within the BIPOC structure. This could be the result of the intentional focus on the district's diversity efforts. Further research is needed to determine the effectiveness of such programs offered in school districts.

Vicarious Experiences

Effective modeling is critical for assessing the impact of vicarious experiences. Modeling is not merely concerned with the completion of a task, but it also extends to include self-representation in that the person modeling shares similar characteristics with the learner. The more similar the model is to the individual (for instance in terms of age, gender, or experience), the stronger the self-efficacy becomes (Capa-Aydin et.al, 2018). Similar to mastery experiences, the participant interviews illuminated the scarcity of access to vicarious experience as a source of LSE for BIPOC women educational leaders within the organization:

And that's what I'm telling you, when you came into this position, I was so excited. We don't work hand in hand, but just to have beautiful, smart, articulate, and proud of who she is, BIPOC woman here because it was really just me. Is there any other black woman who serves at the director level or above? I don't think so. (Herstory 101, Participant 6)

We've been othered, and we know what othered feels like. We are more mentors. We're willing to mentor. You have modeled that to me, literally, you have been there. Who does that? A black woman who is experienced the same thing, who talks to me on the phone who says, Hey, maybe this is how you should do this. Who says, okay, you know what? That's a good idea, but you should turn left instead of right. And come from somebody that looks like me in this district. I've been here four years. It is never happened before. (Herstory 101, Participant 9)

I would've loved to have had a woman mentor, but what I had access to was a male and a male of color. And so, I jumped on that. But if you had a program and you said, hey we have some women of color who are willing to mentor. Oh God yeah, I would love to do that. (Herstory 101, Participant 2)

Similar to analysis of the mastery experiences, only African American participants identified self-representation models within the organization leadership ranks. the participants identifying as Middle Eastern, Colombian, or Japanese within the BIPOC structure were the lone representation at the leadership level for the organization. The minimal representation of models created a camaraderie among the BIPOC women to unite and support each other regardless of racial subgroups.

Verbal Persuasion

Verbal persuasion is a source of LSE focused on coaching, feedback, and verbal encouragement. Verbal persuasion emerged as the most consistent source of LSE for the participants of the study. They reported receiving verbal persuasion from colleagues within the organization as well as from outside sources:

And then my colleague who's in this department, she mentioned, oh, we're going to be creating a program coordinator position. You should apply for it. Because her and I had worked together for several years. And so here I am. (Herstory 101, Participant 6)

I had friends, people, and coworkers that would say, you're going to be the next director. One gentleman, I told him, can you please not say that again? Not going to happen? And then suddenly, I became the director, and he just came in with this big old smile on his face. (Herstory 101, Participant 1)

So, then I was a program coordinator that helped run the inclusive preschool programs. My director kept saying, I'm leaving. I'm going to leave one day and I'm going to prep you for this position. And I said to her, you couldn't pay me enough to do your job. I have no interest whatsoever. Zero, zilch, please, not interested. She takes off. My colleagues and I are like, what are we going to do? And she's like, I've already recommended you. You need to apply. So, I stupidly did and I'm here now. (Herstory 101, Participant 3)

My friend always says I'm a good leader, but I don't know why she say that. But as a leader I want to work for people, students, teacher's, families, and the community who are marginalized in dominant society, I will just support them regardless of their gender, race, ethnicity, social economic status. (Herstory 101, Participant 11)

I had a conversation with an older African American lady, she was like, you know what? You have a chance to affect a lot of people. I know you love your kids here. But just imagine how many people you could reach. Everybody doesn't get those opportunities. And it made me see things differently. And since then, I've been on this leadership track, and I've been really happy with it. (Herstory 101, Participant 2)

Study analysis indicates verbal persuasion was powerful for influencing all of the participants' decisions to pursue advancement into leadership within the organization.

Interestingly, verbal persuasion participants received in the organization came from department colleagues. Participants did not provide any instances of verbal persuasion initiated by executive administration.

Emotional States

Bandura (1997) contended that high efficacy beliefs lead to enhancement of physical status, reduced stress and negative emotional proclivities, and accurate misinterpretations of bodily states. Bandura's assertion does not account for the scarcity of access to LSE among marginalized groups like BIPOC women. The participants consistently described the emotional taxation experienced as a result of occupying a leadership position within the organization:

To prove yourself. It's like you have to prove yourself over and over. And that's exhausting. Yes, it's exhausting. So, I think in part, that may have to do with being a person of color, being a woman. (Herstory 101, Participant 5)

I think I have experienced a great sense of isolation to a large extent. In the beginning this led to imposter syndrome where my perceived success was not deserved. It was not a direct result of my skill. (Herstory 101, Participant 7)

Well, nobody talks about the isolation here because I don't see a whole lot of people like me around me. And so I get here, wherever here is, and it's hard to sustain it. And there's a mental taxation that comes with that. And it's exhausting. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

Well anyway, it's all the bureaucracy. All the bureaucracy. And when you go up to bat, there's all these reasons why we cannot. And so it's hard it gets old, it gets exhausting and yeah, I don't know. (Herstory 101, Participant 1)

Analysis of the emotional state for these BIPOC women in leadership indicates a substantial amount of emotional stress was associated with leadership within this organization. Further research is needed to capture how this impacts leadership practice of over time. Sources of LSE must be analyzed collectively. Therefore, this study asserts that these BIPOC women in educational leadership positions at best experienced minuscule opportunities to experience LSE in professional settings. There is a constant need for BIPOC women to fill the gap to sustain them in leadership practice. A second finding of this study is that intentionally embedding equal opportunities for LSE will contribute to minimizing the representation gap for BIPOC women education leaders.

Theme Three: Organizational Culture

For this study, organization culture was divided into the following categories: 1) informal systems, 2) expectations, 3) acceptance, 4) validation, and 5) bias, micro-aggressions, and discrimination. The participants described feeling like an outsider, being subjected to informal systems such as the good old boys club and experiencing constant bias, microaggressions, and discrimination as well as the humiliation of having to be legitimized or validated before being respected as a leader. The organizational culture the participants were situated in stripped the organization from maximizing the potential of its leaders, especially BIPOC women.

Informal System

Informal systems exist in all organizational cultures. One type of informal system is known as the good old boys 'club' within this system, the exclusion and isolation of women is common practice. Interview data revealed ten of the fourteen participants asserted the existence of the good old boys' club as part of the organizational culture.

So the good old boys club in my mind has nothing to do with ability. It's just are you in the club or not? Which being in the club means I'm going to advocate for you, I'm going to open doors, I'm going to create avenues, I'm going to mentor you, I'm going to personally have conversations with you, I'm going to see about you, and I'm going to check on you. So because I'm not in the club, I don't get those things. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

They got there on their maleness. That's it. That's how they got there. And so you see women being trumped all the time because of the good ole boys club. (Herstory 101, Participant 9)

Oh yeah. Good old boys club. Absolutely. It's entrenched and it's difficult to figure out how to peel the layers because they won't let anybody in. So that is causing a lot of hindrance to make change. (Herstory 101, Participant 5)

For example, in meetings men from certain group, they're always giving power. They get to speak up, make discipline decisions, they're always at the center of the table. But I was thinking maybe it's a cultural thing, I don't know. Because women from that culture always give their men power to speak up. (Herstory 101, Participant 11)

Good old boys gonna [sic] be there no matter what. But yeah, I can't impact that. But I'm not gonna [sic] try to play that game. And a lot of people do. A lot of people in this district do, have, and will continue to try to be what they think they're looking for. (Herstory 101, Participant 4)

Informal systems created a balance of power that put BIPOC women at a disadvantage in exercising their leadership. Based on the homogenous make up of members and the exclusion of women the good old boys club it logical to infer that lack of diversity within informal systems contributes to representation gap, especially for marginalized groups such as BIPOC women.

Expectations

The interview data revealed six of the ten participants felt they were expected to perform at higher levels. Although not explicitly stated, the professional expectations for these participants had a racial and cultural undertone.

You gotta [sic] know more. (Herstory 101, Participant 7)

There's the issue because like I said, I feel like you always interview. (Herstory 101, Participant 2)

We have our, our parents, our kids, our husband. And it's so much more is expected of us. So much more is expected of us. (Herstory 101, Participant 1)

So I'm working two and three times harder because I'm balancing more than my counterpart and they show up and do less. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

The expectation that BIPOC women are expected to outperform their counterparts to maintain professional positions perpetuates the stereotype of superwoman syndrome. This stereotype demands BIPOC women being everything for everybody while sacrificing their needs to meet the needs of others. The superwoman stereotype is prevalent in the personal and professional lives of BIPOC women therefore BIPOC women tend to carry the weight of both.

Acceptance

The interview data revealed that acceptance among staff and peers for thirteen of the fourteen participants came over time. They commonly reported initially being met with hostile responses to their leadership. They also reported feeling like an outsider in the organization. The perception of being an outsider manifested feelings of isolation and exclusion for some.

During a conference I was sharing with the facilitator the difficulty of fighting for my kids to be seen when I'm not even seen in this district. And it's complicated that I am fighting for my kids. And the mental currency that takes. But I'm also battling my own

invisibility. I mean, I won't dare let you act like my kids don't exist while I'm fighting for you to see that I even exist. Right. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

We were wrapping up presentations with a book. I remember tears. I remember people that tore up our handouts. These are adults. We would do the color line step forward exercise. It was intense, I remember people ripping our stuff up. You're not going to come here and tell me I'm racist. I mean, they were hot conversations, but they were needed. When you're in places of discomfort, that is where you grow. (Herstory 101, Participant 10)

I'm going to give you an example of one of the things that happens here, when you talk about race. I can walk into a school and take my badge off and just walk in into the front office. And I feel, because of my race, I'm invisible. No one says anything. No one says good morning. No one says, can I help you? No one says anything until they realize I'm from a district department. Then it is oh, she's from a district department, why do they have to legitimize me? (Herstory 101, Participant 9)

I know my stuff and I am done negotiating my space with you. Okay. Because you treated me like an outsider, I'm not going to negotiate my space with you as an outsider. I'm not. (Herstory 101, Participant 7)

When I met my team, you could feel the tension in the air. Everybody was, who's this coming in to take this position? I remember going into the room and I could feel the tension from everybody. (Herstory 101, Participant 5)

I still think there's a hesitancy to trust the ability of women, of people of color, whatever. I feel like there's just a hesitancy. (Herstory 101, Participant 4)

I don't feel like I belong, if that makes sense. Not yet. Maybe that takes time. I keep telling myself it's going take time for you to belong, to be part of the group, but it doesn't feel like I'm ever going be there. (Herstory 101, Participant 5)

Participants answers establish trust as being a precursor to acceptance. None of the participants recognize feeling like an outsider as a barrier to leadership practice or influencing the decision to pursue leadership position. In contrast, the interviews indicate the lack of acceptance and resistance caused some participants mental angst.

Validation

The interview data revealed ten of the fourteen participants felt they were not validated in the educational leadership spaces they occupied. The participants often reported feeling invisible despite having a skill set comparable to or exceeding their counterparts'. The participants also experienced indirect validation, which included having work used without acknowledgement, being brought in to fix things, or having their workload increased because they achieved what needed to be done, which was known but not said.

Not, because of my experience, I have grown to accept that there will be no honor in this space yet I can go to outside agencies, organizations and be highly revered and respected and listened to outside of this district. I can do professional development though I'm never asked to do professional development in this district. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

I don't have credibility on my own. It is not until I start talking and really treating that critical space. Then things change, one time I had a counselor ask, could you please come to our school and talk to do sessions with students? It was such a cry from when I turned on the zoom and they were just staring at me. (Herstory 101, Participant 7)

So coming into this department, I am the first person to my knowledge who is a part of the racial subgroup but doesn't have the cultural literacy piece because I don't know my biological father. So a lot of my colleagues who are more native than me. And even just culturally experienced, they kind of discounted me and I understood why. But in this position, I can now give visibility to our kids in who are just like me. (Herstory 101, Participant 6)

And so there were some difficult meetings where I felt like is this racial? Is this because I got the position or is this because you didn't think a black person was going to get it or what? Now since then, folks have certainly come around, but it certainly crossed my mind when things were happening and there was some sharpness, there was some attitude, there was some questioning like excessively. I definitely felt at first is I'm black <affirmative>. Cause it's the attitude. (Herstory 101, Participant 2)

The participants describe validation no in terms of professional skill and competence but in terms of race and culture. An assumption could be made that these women were viewed by race before being viewed as a leader. This assumption would begin to explain the discounting of

skill and resistance to their leadership as leadership positions are often associated with the white male construct.

Bias, Microaggressions, and Discrimination

The interview data also revealed that 13 out of the 14 participants had experienced the trauma of bias, micro-aggressions, and discrimination within the organizational culture. To magnify these experiences, the approach was to present these instances separately from the collective descriptions above:

In meetings sometimes people will overcompensate and sometimes they'll just turn you off. I do feel that. I feel like sometimes my voice isn't heard and so I just stop talking. I just stop giving information, which isn't good. (Herstory 101 – Participant 1)

A person who was in, I would say a leadership position used the N word. So three different times in this district. I've heard people all white use the N word. And this is how it's kind of slick, they say somebody else said this so I'm going to repeat it. And they said the N word, not me. I'm just repeating the story. And you don't understand that that's hurtful. I don't want to hear that it's inappropriate. (Herstory 101, Participant 2)

Well, it's interesting. I had a teacher a couple years ago who also wanted the job, a male, white male. And he felt and made clear to everybody who would listen that I got this role because I was a minority. And that's why I got the position. And it got to a point where we had to go to employee relations because he wouldn't let it go, that I did not earn my position. And so it's impacted me in that way, that superficial way where people question my ability and think that we're just like a quota. (Herstory 101, Participant 3)

There was discipline with people of color. It was always okay, she's fair, she's understanding. There was none of that questioning. If it was with Anglo, it was always you're coming after kid, da da. [sic]. I had one parent say, I'm not talking to her. While I am sitting right here in my own office. That family had used the N word, they were clear. I was not one. (Herstory 101, Participant 4)

I would say I experience microaggressions probably every day a little bit, depending on where I'm at and the circumstances. People tell me about my language, when people say, oh, but your English is so good, or, well, why? (Herstory 101, Participant 5)

A principal, I think she said the student's name, but anyway, your student is saying N ----R [sic] and you need to come and get him. And so many emotions just went through me because I'm like, okay, did that really just happen to feel comfortable telling it over a radio directed at someone who, regardless of if the person is black or not knowing kids are listening to anything that's said on the radio and staff, it really set me back. And just the comfortability this principal had in doing that. (Herstory 101, Participant 6)

I'm going to start by sending back a rhetorical question to you. Okay. Doesn't this happen every day, every minute, more than I care to notice? Yeah, absolutely. I think there's always a value judgment when we are navigating space in the dominant culture, whatever that dominant culture is. (Herstory 101, Participant 7)

Yeah. I have never heard the N word so much. I have never heard teachers that utilize this word so much, students that use it rampant. It's just been interesting. I've never seen it before. Never encountered this type of situation before. And I think that this organization, has and it's my opinion, turned their backs. (Herstory 101, Participant 9)

Something that stands out to me very clearly is when I was first hired as an assistant principal there were a couple of Caucasian women that were bullies. I mean they were bullies. And one, who no longer works for the district told me flat out that I was probably hired because of my race. (Herstory 101, Participant 10)

Some people walking pass my office, and they said, they're happy when Americans dropped atomic bombing in Japan. They say they're happy. I don't know why they say that. Another time someone asked me my immigration status, and somebody told me that I'm not capable of working in my department because they said I'm Japanese, they think I'm outsider, and they don't know I'm American citizen. They don't know I'm working for educational field for more than 15 years in the United States. (Herstory 101, Participant 11)

And I experienced enough microaggressions, enough whiteness already sitting in this spot. One time, I'm called in to serve on this committee for this school. And they already appreciate my expertise. But then I get on a zoom call and all the other people in the committee are at home and I'm at a school site and I'm wearing my mask. And as soon as I get onto the screen, one of the older white men say, oh, I didn't know we were meeting with Jihads today. (Herstory 101, Participant 12)

My work ethic was attacked, my personal life was attacked micro aggressively in my face, they would try to counter any narrative that I came up with in professional development. So out loud and verbally. And so that is something I've had to definitely deal with. My integrity, my intellectual capacity has been challenged consistently. (Herstory 101, Participant 13)

Another microaggression is having my work be taken and other people take credit for it. (Herstory 101, Participant 14)

The interview descriptions are not indicative of an inclusive and supportive environment for these BIPOC women to thrive and ascend to leadership positions. Additionally, the interviews for this study illustrate the complex human experiences of these BIPOC women in educational settings as they often had to engage in psychological warfare and oppressive social constructs. An inference can be made that within institutions with negative organizational cultures these BIPOC women educational leaders have a higher probability of encountering barriers, biases, and discrimination that contributed significantly to their representation gap. The final finding of this study is that organizational culture played the most pivotal role in combating representation gaps for BIPOC women education leaders. Recommendations for any organization committed to addressing the representation gaps for BIPOC women educational leaders are presented in the final chapter of this study.

Collectively the interviews justified the approach of this study being informed by social cognitive and social constructionism theories to understand and make sense of the race and gender disparities in executive-level educational leadership positions. Neither of these theories can examine the phenomenon of BIPOC women in educational leadership positions independently.

Bandura (1986) postulated that self-efficacy is as an individual's belief in their ability to perform, influence, and achieve an outcome. Leadership Self Efficacy (LSE) is defined as one's self-perceived capability to perform the cognitive and behavioral functions necessary for the regulation of group processes in relation to goal achievement (McCormick, 2001). LSE is a specific form of efficacy beliefs targeted at leadership behaviors. Bandura's work affirms the

resilience, persistence, and the motivation of these BIPOC women in educational leadership positions, especially considering their sources for Leadership Self-Efficacy in the educational leadership settings were minimal at best. Examining the social constructs of race, gender, leadership makes clear how these BIPOC women are socially constructed as inferior and how that played out in this educational leadership settings. The interconnectedness of both approaches contributes to explaining the representation gap of BIPOC women in educational leadership positions.

CHAPTER 4

RECOMMENDATIONS

“If my cup won't hold but a pint, and yours holds a quart, wouldn't you be mean not to let me have my little half measure full.” (Truth, 1851)

Before any of the following study recommendations below can be implemented, individuals in positions of power must commit to the principles of allyship and equity. Allyship creates spaces in which diverse individuals are bonded as comrades against any socially constructed barriers that hinder an individual from agency. Equity in action liberates individuals from systematic oppression. The marriage of allyship and equity anchors the recommendations and are based on three focus areas: intentionality, investment, and building leadership self-efficacy.

Intentionality

Intentionality and commitment to inclusion of BIPOC women educational leaders in educational settings is necessary. Education's highest positions of leadership are male dominated. Intentionality can be addressed through diversity and a focus on inclusive experience. In other words, simply hiring BIPOC women is not enough. There must be an understanding of the complexities of gender, race, and identity and how they impact daily interactions in educational settings. In practice, an organization's intentionality to promote inclusion is going to be most evident in the culture. Organizations can engage in the following fundamental actions to advance a culture of inclusion for BIPOC women in educational leadership:

- Leadership teams must focus on inclusion in the organization's mission and vision statement.
- Leadership teams must engage in multiple ways for minority employees to share their professional experience. (e.g., questionnaires, lunch and learns, forums)
- Leadership teams must schedule protected time to review professional experience data, understand the organization's cultural dynamics, and develop actions that advance inclusion.
- Leadership teams must ensure decision making processes include diversity of lived experiences rather than checklist diversity.
- Leadership teams must disrupt practices of inequality (e.g., pay, access to leadership opportunities, distribution of resources)
- Leadership teams must develop an accountability structure that addresses biases and micro-aggressions.

Investment

An organization that prioritizes investment in activities that support the recruitment, retention, and advancement BIPOC women sends a powerful message of commitment to allyship and equity. Such investments acknowledge the historical exclusion of marginalized sub-groups and provides resources based on need rather than universalism. Organizations can engage in the following fundamental actions to advance investment for BIPOC women in educational leadership:

- Develop culturally responsive mentoring programs for BIPOC women looking to advance to senior educational leadership positions.

- Design deliberate and ongoing professional learning that is differentiated and tailored to address multiculturalism, allyship, implicit bias, and behaviors of inclusion for leaders.
- Create internal programs that eliminate barriers to leadership for minorities inside the organization. (e.g, Grow Your Own, Alternative Certification, Leadership Prep Academy).
- Provide social emotional support for those exposed to professional trauma as a result biases, microaggressions, and discrimination.
- Fund employee engagement in high quality equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) certificate programs.
- Institute financial incentives for BIPOC women to contribute their talents to projects outside of professional responsibilities.

Build Leadership Self-Efficacy (LSE)

LSE is a specific form of efficacy beliefs targeted at leadership behaviors. Based on the findings of this study, these BIPOC women tended to have minimal access to sources of self-efficacy. Research indicates high levels of LSE correlate with leadership effectiveness. Hannah et.al (2018) concluded that leader self-efficacy may be one of the most important ingredients in successful leadership and team performance. It would be advantageous for organizations to focus on creating a culture that acknowledges sources of leadership self-efficacy: mastery, vicarious, social persuasion, and emotional experiences. Organizations can engage in the following fundamental actions to advance access to LSE for BIPOC women in educational leadership:

- Generate opportunities for BIPOC women to contribute their leadership talents to projects outside of professional responsibilities.
- Develop coaching and mentoring opportunities for BIPOC women that spotlights social representation.
- Create safe spaces in which BIPOC women can network, exchange ideas, and discuss failures without fear of retribution.
- Support health and wellness offerings that acknowledge the lived experiences of BIPOC women. (e.g., mindfulness activities, tips for dealing with culturally induced stress, promotion of work, life balance, health choice lifestyles)

Concluding Remarks

If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down all alone, these women together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right side up again! And now they is asking to do it, the men better let them. (Truth, 1851)

Because race, gender, power, and privilege are triggering words in a divisive society, it is expected that this study will evoke appreciation from some and criticism from others. For some people, this study will create an uncomfortableness about who benefits from privilege. For others, this study will be an affirmation of what has been endured. Some people will be appalled as they righteously exclaim: “What is going on; this is not the Jim Crow era!” Some will cry blasphemy and discredit these lived experiences in the name of color blindness. Regardless of one’s emotional response to this study, it is an absolute truth that in America men (not just white men) almost always are in positions of power at greater rates than women. The actions of society indicate a vast acceptance of the ideology that women are subjugated to men. And if you are

identified as part of a marginalized group, such as BIPOC women, you are subordinate to both racial and gender groups. Representation gaps are the evidence of the pervasiveness of this ideology.

Representation gaps are characterized by a difference in ethno-racial participation under circumstances that are comparable among subgroups. Representation gaps are complex social phenomenon. Such gaps exist in most sectors of society, including educational leadership. In the context of educational leadership, the representation gap is substantially based on race and gender, particularly for women who identify as Black, Indigenous, or as a Person of Color (BIPOC). A fundamental question is why do representation gaps in educational leadership exist and how can representation gaps be addressed? Results of my study suggest the answer relies in allyship and equity. Allies are non-minority individuals who choose to support minorities while working to end discrimination and prejudice (Salter et al., 2019). More importantly allyship cannot exist without moral conviction and a commitment to the principles of allyship and equity.

Obliged to you for hearing me, and now old Sojourner ain't got nothing more to say
(Truth, 1851).

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APPENDIX A
RECRUITMENT SCRIPT

Recruitment Script

My name is Kinasha Brown and I am a doctoral student at Northern Illinois University in the Department of Leadership, Educational Psychology, and Foundations. I am completing my Ed.D. in Educational Leadership. The focus of my doctoral dissertation research is about giving voice to BIPOC women in educational leadership positions. As a current leader your insights are essential to this field of research. Therefore, I would greatly appreciate a brief zoom interview with you. If you are willing to participate, please sign and return the attach consent form to via email. Also please use the link below to sign up for an interview slot. Interviews are scheduled for approximately one hour. Interviews are scheduled to begin the week of November 8, 2022 and conclude December 15, 2022,

Participation in the study is voluntary, please feel free to reach out with any questions. Additionally, my dissertation director is Dr. Kelly Summers, Assistant Professor of Educational Leadership at Northern Illinois University. You are welcome to contact her as well with any questions you may have. Dr. Summers can be reached at [REDACTED].

Thank you in advance for your valuable time.

Warmest Regards,

Kinasha Brown

APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Herstory 101 Interview Questions

1. What does good leadership look like to you?
2. What are potential barriers to good leadership?
3. Tell me about your educational background.
4. Tell me about how you came to this position.
5. How many years of experience do you have serving in an educational leadership capacity?
6. How does your cultural background influence your leadership?
7. What role does identity as a BIPOC woman play in your leadership style?
8. How has race impacted your leadership experience in this organization?
9. Tell of a time you experienced micro-aggression, bias, or discrimination in your professional life.
10. What steps do you take to communicate your professional needs within the organization?
11. Tell me about your ability to influence the culture of the organization.
12. What leadership opportunities do you see on the horizon within the organization?
13. How have your professional lived experiences influenced your decision to pursue leadership positions?
14. Do you feel that a “Good Old Boys” influence withing this organization? Please explain
15. How would you prepare a BIPOC woman for a leadership position in this organization?