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Intersections: Black female school leaders' lived experiences of leading and mothering Black children

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INTERSECTIONS:
BLACK FEMALE SCHOOL LEADERS' LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CARING FOR AND LEADING BLACK CHILDREN

by

ROLANDRIA JUSTICE - EMENUGA

Under the direction of Dr. Sheryl Cowart Moss

ABSTRACT

The picture of six-year-old Ruby Bridges and her mom bravely leaving her school flanked by the U.S. Marshals amidst a torrent of fear and hate unleashes an equal surge of heartbreak and anger in me as a mother and school leader. Unfortunately, Black children in this country continue to experience marginalization in many schools. Research suggests that Black women as mothers and school leaders support Black children in ways that often go acknowledged (Cooper, 2009; Lomotey, 2019). This approach employed by Black women occurs because of their intersectional experiences as women, mothers, and school leaders. This hermeneutical phenomenology aims to unpack these lived experiences and further discover how their experiences as mothers and leaders impacted the ways they support Black children.

The journeys of four Black women were explored through three semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation, in which the participants selected and shared a photograph that best illustrated their lived experiences of caring for and leading Black children. As a hermeneutic study, my experiences as a Black woman, mother, and school leader to Black children along with the texts from my participants were analyzed using the hermeneutic circle. This involved an iterative process of enhancing my understanding of the phenomenon by comparing the individual parts of the experience to the whole with new and deeper understanding of each cycle. Findings from this study reiterated previous research that highlighted the ways that Black women serve as othermothers and advocate for Black children. However, a simultaneous concern that emerged from the study is the toll this intersectionality has on these women. Insight into their experiences may lead to a deeper understanding of how to connect with Black children and families and support a group of women who offer significant support to students, parents, and staff.

INDEX WORDS: *Dasein, fore-sight, gendered racism, intersectionality, microaggressions, motherwork, othermothers, photo elicitation*

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by

Rolandria Justice - Emenuga

A Dissertation

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in

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in

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in

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DEDICATION

To my husband, Emeka. There is no way that I would have been able to not only complete this journey, but do it successfully, without your love, support, and encouragement. This journey has brought us closer together and I am eternally grateful for you.

To my parents, Rhonda and Darrell - Mom, there is no me without you. You are not perfect. None of us mothers are. But I hope you know that you are so many of the best parts of me and I am so proud to be your daughter.

Dad, thank you for always being there. No matter what. You always tell me how proud you are of me, but I’m so honored that you chose me as your daughter.

Finally, to my children, Brandon, Adaora, and London, as hard as this was on me, I know that it has been just as hard for you at times. Thank you for being patient for mommy as I focused on this other baby. I love you more than you’ll ever know!

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1 THE PROBLEM

Introduction

At 24-months, my son’s daycare flagged a potential concern with his speech one day during pick up. Though I had over a decade of experience in education at the time, as both a teacher and school leader, I was a first-time mother and did not recognize that his communication skills were lagging his peers. I immediately made an appointment and soon he was attending speech classes, twice a week to address the identified concerns with his vocabulary and articulation. One year later, as I sat across from the Child Study Team at his public preschool, I could barely contain my frustration as not only was my knowledge as an educator and former principal being ignored, but so was my expertise as the mother to the beautiful 3-year-old we were all there to discuss. The teacher had nothing positive to share, the administrator was not even present in the meeting, and the school psychologist facilitating the meeting barely made eye contact with me while regurgitating information found in the folder in front of her labeled, “B. Emenuga”. While my input on my son had been requested in the various forms sent home, during the meeting it was obvious to me that that invitation was only superficially requested as I was “talked at” and not “talked with”. The speech pathologist who had met my son one time for less than 30 minutes, was viewed as the expert on him and his needs, while the value I brought went unseen. I looked around at all the smiles of women who did not look like me, listened to all the educational jargon being used and fought down the urge to express my anger and disappointment at the process for fear of being labeled as uncooperative, aggressive, or unfit.

However, as I left the meeting without speech services for him, I could no longer hold back the tears and wept openly in the hallway with my head on the shoulder of the school counselor. Not only did I worry for my child - What happens to him, as a Black boy, when he gets older and bigger, if he is not able to articulate his words and communicate his needs? How will his smaller, non-Black classmates react to him if they cannot understand him? While those fears swirled in my head, I concurrently cried as I thought about how many other Black mothers had left my previous school building feeling as unheard, unvalued, and frustrated as I was.

In October 2015, cell phone video of a violent confrontation between a police officer and a teenage Black girl resulted in her having a broken arm, swollen neck, back, shoulder, and carpet burn on her forehead. Her offense was taking her phone out in class and not giving it to the officer (Jarvie, 2015). In 2016, Marian Reed's third-grade daughter was removed during class by the Assistant Principal. Her offense was wearing her natural hair in a style considered inappropriate. Crying, she told her mom that no one would want to be her friend because her hair was not as pretty as the assistant principal's (Perkins, 2016). To learn of the trauma these children experienced breaks my heart for a multitude of reasons.

As a school leader and mother, it outrages me that they were not protected at school by the adults. While the intent given behind policies like these may appear innocuous (i.e., keep order, identify "appropriate"), they are harmful reinforcements of racist policies targeting Black children at school in a place where they should feel safe (Morris, 2016).

Problem Statement

Research has shown that people of color experience racism as an everyday occurrence (Dovemark, 2013; Essed, 1991). Social justice scholar, Dr. Philomena Essed (1955 -) has written several books on everyday racism and defines it as “injustices recurring so often that they are almost taken for granted, nagging, annoying, debilitating, seemingly small, injustices one comes to expect” (p. 203). She argues that this type of racism acclimates to the “culture, norms, and values of a society as it operates through the prevalent structures of power in society" (p. 209). These power structures include the schooling experience. Dovemark (2013) conducted a study examining nine years of educational experiences of students in secondary schools in Sweden. This study found that private everyday racism and public racism denial worked together to create an inequitable education for minority students. Additionally, presumptions made about the perceived differences of Swedish and immigrant parents led to a perception of the immigrant family being "less secure, needing education and upbringing" (p. 19).

Negative perceptions of minority families and children have an impact on Black women. As mothers and school leaders, Black women have an expertise when it comes to caring for and leading Black children that is often overlooked. Essed (1991) conducted a cross-cultural investigation of Black women in the US and the Netherlands and coined the term gendered racism, or the concurrent experience of oppression based on racist and sexist beliefs, to explain this marginalization. As a result, research suggests that Black women regularly feel silenced, disregarded, and as though their contributions are consistently "minimalized" (Lewis, 2016). This phenomenological study aims to highlight the lived experience of Black women who identify as mothers and school leaders to Black children and center their experiences of caring for Black children and provide insight for other leaders.

The research on parental involvement suggests that when parents engage with their child's school, it can positively impact multiple student outcomes, including achievement (Cooper, 2009; Knapp et al., 2017; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005; Wilder, 2014). However, when this conversation shifts to parent involvement within minority and low-income schools, the sentiment is often overwhelmingly negative. Lightfoot (2004) argues that phrases such as, parental involvement, are loaded with "complex, varied, and power-laden meanings" and are used so frequently that “they become invisible, difficult to question and difficult to change” (p. 92). These power dynamics, whether inadvertently or intentionally, portray middle-class parents as willing and able to support their children, while low-income, urban, culturally, and ethnically diverse parents are often represented as having little to give to their children. Additional studies have cited parent hesitation and discomfort with engaging with their child's school for a variety of reasons, including perceived differences in cultural practices, feeling as though the staff did not care about their children, and difficulty navigating the educational system (Ixa Plata-Potter, & de Guzman, 2012; Tuttle & Haskins, 2017; Westrich and Strobel, 2013). Hornby (2011) describes the tension that families, regardless of racial background, feel when interacting with schools and the "stress" felt by teachers when describing their attitudes towards interacting with parents.

This existing tension between schools and families intensifies in minority communities, often led by women of color (Prince, 2016). Ladson-Billings (2009) articulates that "Black womanhood is routinely debased and denigrated." This denigration supports the construction of a narrative that Black women are "unfit and unworthy as teachers and mothers" (p. 88). Much of the research about Black mothers often veers towards the barriers preventing their engagement with schools (Sheldon, 2002). However, Black mothers often support their children in ways not acknowledged by mainstream scholarship, such as their involvement in activism and employing various strategies to combat racist practices and policies (Cooper, 2009).

School leaders play a "central role" in either upholding oppressive practices and policies or actively addressing areas of inequity and marginalization (Khalifa, 2018). Black female school leaders have offered an effective model for bridging the school's needs with the needs of the families and communities (Horsford, 2012). However, a study examining the past 25 years of research on the leadership of Black female principals found that three out of every four studies in the review were dissertations (Lomotey, 2019). This lack of representation in scholarly journals perpetuates the silencing and delegitimizing of the specific ways that Black female leaders serve their communities. Despite the decades of research on improving schools in Black communities, the understanding and wisdom from Black women have been less than satisfactory. Watson & Bailey (2021) argue that “the educational advocacy of Black women on behalf of Black children is vital to culturally responsive school leadership that combats anti-Blackness and honors Black girlhood” (p. 144). Black women who are both mothers and school leaders have an expertise with Black children that warrants further investigation.

Black women often feel that their voices are negated as either mothers (Cooper, 2009) or as school leaders (Jean-Marie, 2013) when engaging them to support Black children. However, research also suggests that Black mothers can positively impact their Black children's achievement (Robinson & Werblow, 2012). Research also suggests that Black female principals can positively impact Black children, including serving as a protector against oppressive systems and practices (Cabral & Horsford, 2021). Bass (2012) argues that Black feminist caring in educational leadership is "provided by adults and educators who themselves have suffered acts of discrimination and oppression and are sensitive to social injustice because of their own personal experiences" (p. 74). By ignoring the experiences of these women who lead and mother Black children, schools are limiting their ability to engage and support Black children and families in authentic ways that incorporate more culturally relevant methods of support.

Statement of Purpose and Research Questions

This hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed to highlight the lived experiences of Black women who are school leaders and mothers as they care for and lead Black children.

Though research often overlooks the perspectives of Black women (Lomotey, 2019) it simultaneously magnifies a lens that often assumes a deficit-based approach to their care for Black children as mothers or school leaders (Collins, 2005). By interviewing these Black women, I described the phenomenon of leading and caring for Black children as a school leader and as a mother. Additionally, images have a powerful way of evoking deeper elements of the human consciousness than words alone (Harper, 2002). By incorporating photo elicitation and asking the participants to share an image that best illustrates what it means to lead and care for Black children, I hoped to further discover how their experiences as mothers and leaders impacted the ways they support Black children. As a result of this study, the voices and expertise of Black women as mothers and school leaders can be elevated and potentially used to enlighten other school leaders on additional ways to support Black children. As such, my research questions were:

- *What is it like to care for and lead Black children as a Black mother and school leader?*
- *What image(s) best illustrates what it means to care for and lead Black children as a Black mother and school leader?*

Phenomenological research differs from other qualitative studies in that it examines the common lived experience of multiple participants with the goal of exposing the essence of the phenomena. The goal in researching the phenomenon is to engage in unpacking and interpreting the experience to reduce it to the essential essence, the “what” behind their experience and the “how” they experienced it (Creswell, 2016, p. 75). Everyday experiences are a difficult phenomenon to explore because, by definition, they become mundane and fade in the background. The purpose of engaging in a phenomenological approach is to unearth the phenomena to make the participant deeply connect to the experience. Scholar Max van Manen,

(1997) author of several books on phenomenology, said, "A good phenomenological text has the effect of making us suddenly "see" something in a manner that enriches our understanding of everyday life" (p. 345).

Edmund Husserl (1859 – 1938), a 19th-century philosopher and mathematician, is commonly accepted as the father of phenomenology. He believed that phenomena, our experiences, provide the “building blocks of human science and the basis for all knowledge” and wanted to study the meanings and essences of knowledge (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). He believed that to examine these meanings, the researcher had to first set aside any presumptions they bring into the examination. He referred to this process as bracketing. It is the process by which the researcher makes explicit everything that encompasses the character of the world (Macann, 1993). By bracketing one’s assumptions, they are better able to get at the essence of the phenomena. This method of phenomenology is known as transcendental phenomenology.

Husserl's student, Martin Heidegger (1889 – 1976), diverged from his teacher in his idea of phenomenology. Like Husserl, he does highlight the importance of the researcher identifying their own experiences with the phenomenon to understand and describe the participant's experiences. However, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology rejects the notion that the researcher can completely bracket off the biases they bring to the investigation. He introduced the concept of *Dasein*, described as the “aspect of our humanness which is capable of wondering about its own existence and inquiring into its own Being” (Van Manen, 2016, p. 176). Everyone brings their Being to these phenomena they experience. Heidegger called this prior knowledge fore-sight or fore-conception (McConnell-Henry et. al., 2009). He contends that having fore-sight with the phenomenon is essential towards ensuring that the questions asked when investigating the phenomena are pertinent. The preconceived knowledge that the researcher brings to the research supports getting at the heart of ordinary experiences. Heidegger's emphasis on the interpretation of the phenomena was reinforced by his student Hans-Georg Gadamer who believed that reflective interpretation of the phenomena is vital towards obtaining a complete understanding of the lived experience of the situation (Moustakas, 1994, p. 10). With hermeneutic phenomenology, investigating the participant's experiences is only part of the process. The researcher's own experience with that phenomenon is incorporated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the experience. The philosophy assumes that because biases cannot be fully bracketed out, they need to be explicitly revised later as new understandings are revealed. According to Padilla-Diaz (2015) the emphasis while analyzing the data is on the essence (or common experiences) and on the significance, or context, of the experience.

Caring for and leading children as either a parent or educator is an idea that, while familiar to everyone, often varies in how it is experienced. Phenomenology offers an approach that involves my own experience with the phenomenon of caring for and leading Black children and is a part of the appeal of employing this approach. Phenomenology serves as a way to empower the subjects to fight against the dominant narratives that permeate and distort the "unexamined assumptions of our personal, cultural, political, and social beliefs" (Van Manen, 2016, p. 13).

Significance of the Study

In March 2020, schools across the world began to close as COVID-19 fears swept the world. Families gathered their children close to them, ordered masks, and fought fellow shoppers for toilet paper. Over 1.2 billion children were out of the classroom (Li & Lalani, 2020). Protests erupted in July when learning that Grace, a 15-year-old teenage girl in Michigan, would not be released from the juvenile detention center. She had been incarcerated in May for probation violation for not completing her homework despite her diagnosis of ADHD. Jailed during a global pandemic for an action that many of us find innocuous during pre-COVID times and barely worth a glance in the unprecedented times the world was experiencing. Though she and her mother received glowing reports about the progress they were making towards being reunited, the judge, Mary Ellen Brennan, denied the request to send her home to her mom, stating, "Give yourself a chance to follow through and finish something. The right thing is for you and your mom to be separated for right now" (Ortiz, 2020).

People all over expressed shock and sympathy for this young girl. However, I also felt anger. Upon reading about the brief exchange between Grace and her mother at the end of the hearing, anger turned to an internal rage as a Black mother and school leader. According to reports, as Grace hugged her mother at the end of the hearing, Charisse encouraged her daughter, saying, "stay strong." Grace replied with her head on her mother's shoulder, "I can't" (Cohen, 2020). The school leader in me immediately questioned why the principal was not advocating for her return home, knowing she has ADHD? How much did the school support Grace and her mother with remote learning? How much did the intersectionality of being Black and a woman impact the judge’s decision to not send Grace home? The Black mother in me was heartbroken at Charisse's inability to protect her baby at that moment from a system that has long marginalized the voices of people of color, particularly Black women (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The discussion around Black children and educational achievement often pivots from the systemic oppression of minority communities to asserting that the parents do not care about their children's schooling. This claim of indifference towards education is often levied against Black mothers. Unsurprisingly, given the popularity of reports like "The Negro Family: The Case for

National Action," which blamed low educational attainment, in part on the way the Black mother "deprives the children of the kind of attention, particularly in school matters, which is now a standard feature of middle-class upbringing" (Moynihan, 1965, p. 25). Or articles such as Lareau (1994) which highlighted the “angry and confrontational style” of a Black mother calling out her perceived mistreatment of her daughter, as an example of potential negative consequences to parent involvement in schools. Collins (2016) explains that for women of color, “motherhood occurs in specific historical situations framed by interlocking structures of race, class, and gender, where the sons and daughters of white mothers have ‘every opportunity and protection,’ and the ‘colored’ daughters and sons of racial ethnic mothers ‘know not their fate’ (p. 45). This fear and uncertainty experienced by Black mothers when it comes to the fate of their children is rarely discussed as accusations of “they don’t care” are continuously levied against them.

The limited amount of scholarly discourse examining Black, female school leadership, and Black motherhood makes this an area of clear need in women's studies, educational leadership, and Black feminist thought. The perception of Black mothers as unengaged and uncaring about their children's education is often based on stereotypical and deficit-based thinking. Khalifa (2018) presents data from an equity audit to highlight the large disconnect between the perceptions that school staff (teachers/administrators) held versus those of the students and families of the school. “One thing is clear: educators interpret behavior and education… very differently from students, parents, and community members” (p. 41).

Researchers such as Cooper (2009) attempt to dismantle the deficit beliefs about Black mothers and instead highlight how these parents are supporting their children. The 14 mothers interviewed in this in-depth, qualitative study shared that they felt that they were caring and involved mothers but that they could not live up to the "idealistic, middle-class norms of parent involvement". They declared other ways, such as sharing educational experiences and resources, as examples of how they are involved in their child's education. Cabral and Horsford (2021) explore the counter narrative of Black women principals as protectors and “othermothers” to Black children. They conclude that “caring in the Black community is a public and political undertaking and Black women educators and school leaders see mothering as a communal responsibility, not confined to caring for one’s own biological children” (p. 46). The study goes on to describe some of the actions these Black women principals took in protecting Black children including, removing uncaring teachers, shielding students from deficit-based perspectives, and pursuing unapproved, community-based strategies to support students, even when facing opposition from the district.

These and other strategies may be going unacknowledged. This research will identify ways that Black mothers and school leaders support and care for the Black children they are responsible for caring for and leading. In this study, I set out to offer significant insight into the lives of a group of women whose intersectional experiences have been overlooked in previous research. However, their understanding will provide a rich exploration of the challenges, successes, and tensions they balance as they care for and lead Black children.

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

One delimitation in this study is the decision to focus explicitly on Black mothers and not Black parents. Research has pointed out the gaps in research examining the ways intersectionality of race and gender impacts Black women (Annamma, 2019). While Black men and their relationship caring and leading for Black children is important, this study is particularly interested in highlighting the special and unique relationship women have as birthers of children. Research has shown that women's feelings of overwhelming love, protectiveness, and endless worry are connected to neurological reactions during pregnancy in areas of the brain that control empathy, anxiety, and social interaction (LaFrance, 2015). For instance, activity in a mother's amygdala, an area of the brain, heightens in the weeks and months after giving birth and is believed to correlate to the mother's hypersensitivity to her baby's needs. Additionally, a delimiting time frame of three years was decided as the minimum amount of total time the participants had to have been a school leader.

Limitations are defined as "external conditions that restrict or constrain the study's scope or potential outcome" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 13). This study includes some limitations that are consistent with critiques of qualitative research. For example, one limitation of this study is the small sample size of four participants as it could reduce this study's transferability. To address that concern, the participants were questioned during three separate interviews which allowed me to spend more time with the participants and obtain a more fully developed understanding of their experiences. Another limitation of this study is the possibility that my bias with this phenomenon influenced the study results. However, I took several steps to lessen the impact of that limitation including keeping a reflective journal used to record my biases and presumptions related to the phenomenon.

Another limitation of this study was the ongoing COVID pandemic gripping the world. Although the participants were interviewed individually multiple times, the resulting stress on the participant's time made incorporating a focus group more difficult to schedule. Thus, reducing the opportunity to have participants describe the phenomena in a different setting. Additionally, though multiple efforts were made to bracket my experiences as a Black mother and school leader, because I collected all the data, researcher bias may have impacted the data.

In summary, this chapter provided a detailed explanation of the methodological procedures used in this study. The hermeneutic phenomenological approach was utilized to characterize the phenomenon of leading and caring for Black children as a Black mother and school leader. Four participants engaged in three semi-structured interviews and shared a photo that best depicts the phenomenon. The data was analyzed using the hermeneutic circle and trustworthiness was established using several strategies, including data triangulation and the use of a reflexive journal.

Key Terms

Dasein - Heidegger concept introduced as the aspect of our humanness which can wonder about its own existence and inquiring into its own Being (van Manen, 2016).

Fore-sight - Prior knowledge that everyone brings with them (McConnell-Henry et. al., 2009).

Gendered racism - Concurrent experience of oppression based on racist and sexist beliefs (Essed, 1991).

Intersectionality - Ways in which race and gender oppression factor into lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately (Crenshaw, 1990).

Microaggressions - Brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group (Sue, 2007).

Motherwork - The individual and collective effort taken by women to create and maintain family life for their children and others (Collins, 1994).

Othermothering - A form of communal care offered by African American women and provided to assist others (Cooper, 2009).

Photo elicitation – Process of inserting a photograph into the research interview (Harper, 2002).

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of Black women who care for Black children in dual roles as mothers and school leaders in underserved, marginalized communities.

Extant research suggests that Black children need to be protected in schools (Love, 2019; Morris, 2016; Wesley & Ellis, 2017). The inequitable and exclusionary practices of American school systems have long been documented. From as early as preschool, Black children experience suspensions at rates much higher than their counterparts. Research has shown that while Black preschoolers made up only 19% of the overall preschool enrollment, they were almost half (47%) of the suspensions (Wesley & Ellis, 2017). The same was true for high schools where Black students' suspension rates were doubled that of White students (Heilbrun, 2015). Compared to White girls of the same 5 – 14 ages, participants perceived Black girls as less innocent and more adult-like. The study found that Black girls needed less protection, less nurturing, and comfort. They suggested that this perception of Black girls contributes to the documented harsher disciplinary punishments in the school and legal system (Epstein, Blake, & Gonzalez, 2017). Academically, things are not much better for Black children in schools.

Pearman et. al (2019) documented a link between discipline gaps and achievement gaps finding that districts with larger Black-White discipline gaps also have larger Black-White achievement gaps, in part because of the connection between achievement and discipline for Black students. In other words, Black students performed better academically in districts that suspended them less and vice versa.   The connection between achievement and discipline was not the same for White students suggesting that the mechanisms connecting the achievement gap to the discipline gap, such as teacher biases and feeling isolated at school, may be most salient for Black students” (p. 14).

However, Black women are fighting back against these realities as mothers and school leaders. Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) conducted in-depth interviews over a year with four African American female principals to examine how they address both individual and systemic racism in schools. One theme identified was the importance that the Black women felt around exposing unjust practices. Though the women did not necessarily name it social justice, many of their beliefs about school and leadership centered around concepts of "fairness, equality, and equity" (p. 662). The care these women provided to students was steeped in a strong commitment to eradicating inequities and focused on others and not on themselves.

This hermeneutical phenomenology is designed to elevate the voices of Black mothers and school leaders. Through three semi-structured individual interviews and photo-elicitation, the participants shared their experiences mothering and leading Black children to boil it down to its essence. This study will provide valuable insight into previously unsolicited perspectives of women central to the lives of Black children.

This chapter provided an overview of my research examining the lived experiences of Black female school leaders and mothers to Black children. In Chapter II, I review the existing literature on school leadership, motherhood, and the ways Black women experience the world as they lead and mother Black children. Additionally in this chapter the concept of intersectionality is further explored.

2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The gaps and deficits of Black children in schools have been extensively researched and identified. However, relatively little is known about the ways that Black women address and support the plight of Black children. This literature review establishes the general experiences of Black children in schools, beginning as early as preschool. It then highlights research describing Black parents' involvement and interactions with the school system, before narrowing down to discuss Black women more specifically as mothers and then as educators in schools. While the review initially shares the dominant narrative of Black women, each section also provides counternarratives to illustrate the perspectives of Black women as mothers and school leaders.

Black Children's Experiences in Schools

Schooling in the early formation of America was rarely designed to edify children of color. Angela Davis' book (1981), Women, Race, and Class, provides multiple stories of the ways Black people understood and appreciated the power of knowledge. Examples such as Frederick Douglass who she refers to as "an exceptional human being", "brilliant thinker", but also states "his desire for knowledge was by no means exceptional among Black people, who had always manifested a deep-seated urge to acquire knowledge. Far from not caring, Black people respected the significance of being able to read and write and appreciated the urgency behind gaining knowledge for both themselves and their children. Great numbers of slaves desired knowledge so that they could be deemed "unfit" for the harrowing existence they led" (p.100). Through threats, arrests, arson or death, Black people all over, such as six-year-old Ruby Bridges' family, did whatever they needed to do to ensure their children had appropriate schooling.

Though Black children were eventually allowed to attend schools, few changes were made to embrace and include Black children's culture or experiences into the schooling experience. Khalifa (2018) explained that "Schools were meant to build good citizens who would contribute to the economic viability of the society" (p. 51). He goes on to explain that contributing to the economic success of the society meant that as the government and White elites prospered, the Native American, Latinx, Black and other minority communities fell further, and further behind. Schools became a colonized space where children were stripped of their culture, indoctrinated to the dominant culture, and the voices of the community were systematically silenced and marginalized. Education was built on this foundation, and little has changed to effectively challenge this system.

According to research (Garcia, 2020), Black children in America are:

- Five times more likely than White children to attend schools highly segregated by race and ethnicity
- Twice as likely as White children to attend high-poverty schools
- More likely to be in high-poverty schools with a high share of peers who are both poor and students of color
- More than three times likely to live in poverty than White or Asian children

Additionally, Black children are almost three times more likely to be retained, score lower on proficiency assessments, be suspended, or expelled, or arrested and referred to law enforcement than White children (Cook, 2015). Being born Black in America means that the chances of being funneled into an unequal education, and subsequently the prison system, are higher from birth. This concept, called the school-to-prison pipeline (STPP) describes policies and practices in schools that, in effect, steer students directly to the juvenile and prison systems (Skiba et al., 2014). More researchers are acknowledging the impact of these types of exclusionary and unjust policies on Black boys, while the experiences of Black girls are primarily ignored. Like their male counterparts, their bodies are policed just as much, if not more than the boys. Annamma et. al. (2019) conducted a mixed-methods study in Colorado and found that even when referred to the office for the same behaviors, Black girls are punished more harshly than their counterparts. This same study also found that Black girls were more likely to be referred for subjective reasons (i.e., reasons based on perceptions) rather than objective referrals (verifiable actions with a permanent product). They see and experience this unfair treatment, have justifiable adverse reactions to the inequity, and experience more extreme punishments for that response. Morris (2016) highlighted this cycle plaguing Black girls in her book *Pushout* and called out society's "lack of consideration of what might be fueling their agitation" (p. 22).

Even when remaining in the classrooms, research suggests that Black students are met with implicit bias that impacts the quality of the instruction they receive. Jacoby-Senghor et. al (2016), explored the link between implicit and explicit racial bias and academic performance in two studies. The first study involved enlisting White college undergraduates to serve as instructors to plan and facilitate a seven-minute history lesson to either a Black or White student. The Black or White student would take an assessment at the completion of the lesson, the instructor’s implicit and explicit bias levels were measured, and the lesson was video recorded for additional analysis in study 2. The initial study found that when rated by objective emergent themers who were unaware of the undergraduate participant’s race, instructors with higher levels of implicit bias appeared more anxious and facilitated lessons that were less clear or engaging to

Black students than low-biased instructors. The researchers conducted a second study to rule out the possibility that the lower performance of the Black students occurred because of the responses of the Black students. The videotaped lessons were shown to a new group of non-Black student participants in the second study. Those non-Black students performed as poorly as their Black counterparts suggesting the increased anxiety around Black students left the instructors delivering lessons that were more difficult to follow and understand, thereby impeding the student's ability to accurately answer the assessment questions.

Black children attending schools that consistently expose them to these types of bias and inequitable policies can lead to an internalization of negative feelings about Blackness by Black children. A 2022 documentary by Aurélia Perreau and Alain Mabancko called *Noirs en France* (Blacks in France), recently recreated the "Doll Test" (USDarkskins, 2022). This test was a psychological experiment designed in the 1940's by Kenneth and Mamie Clark (1950). In both investigations, children were presented with a Black doll and a White doll and asked a series of questions about which doll was "good", "bad", "pretty". Results showed that Black children were aware of their Blackness and associated that Blackness with negativity more than they associated negative traits to White dolls or positive traits to the Black dolls. Experiments, such as these, have been recreated with children all over the country and with similar results. Most recently, Sturdivant and Alanis (2020), revised the study and instead of asking the White and Black children to choose between four dolls of varying skin tone, the team recorded observations of the children playing with the dolls. Even with this revision to the study, the researchers still found biases in the treatment of the dolls with the Black doll being played with the least by all the children, including the Black children. Though not explicitly linked to student achievement, the anti-Black rhetoric internalized by children impacts their experiences in schools.

Black Parents' Experiences in Schools

Black families, as well as students, share experiencing racial microaggressions in schools. Sue et al. (2007) defined microaggressions as "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (p.273). This work examined the subtle and contemporary forms of racism through reviewing available social psychological literature and further developed the research on the concept of everyday racism by creating a taxonomy of racial microaggressions. In the book, *Microaggressions in Everyday Life: Race, Gender and Sexual Orientation* (2010), Sue expands the work to include a visual representation and definition of three types of microaggressions. These include microassaults, microinsults, and microinvalidation. Microassaults are blatant racist acts such as violent verbal, nonverbal, or environmental attacks meant to hurt the intended victim. Microinsults are "communications that convey rudeness and demean a person's racial heritage." In comparison, microinvalidations are "communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color" (p. 29).

Research suggests that these experiences occur for Black families in a myriad of educational interactions. Suárez-Orozco et. al. (2015) found that microaggressions that frequently occurred on three community college campuses were most often committed by the instructor and centered around undermining the students' competence and intelligence. A study of Black middle-class men and their high school-aged sons by Allen (2013) collected data through interviews and field observations for ten mixed-income, Black male students, and their families. They found that even being a part of what is largely considered to be a more privileged socioeconomic class did not protect these Black men from experiencing microaggressions. Like the Suarez-Orozco study, many of the microaggressions the men described involved assumptions made about their intelligence, times when they were made to feel inferior, and experiencing differential treatment in discipline. For example, both the sons and fathers shared stories when teachers and administrators assumed deviance of their sons or misunderstandings leading to various forms of academic exclusion such as removal from class or suspension by White, novice or substitute teachers.

Black parents experience microinsults themselves, but also through less direct forms of microinvalidations in school contexts as well. Posey-Maddox (2017) highlighted research that suggested that Black parents commonly experience racial microaggressions in the form of low expectations for their children and negative assumptions about them being angry or threatening. Parsons (2018) found that the school staff's perceptions of parents of color and those in poverty shaped parental involvement expectations and parent roles in the school environment. When school staff believed that parents could not be involved or were not interested in being involved in their child’s education, those parents were essentially dismissed, and collaboration between the teacher and the family became non-existent. The school operated on the belief that the parents had little to offer to support their child's education. This mindset creates a loss for both the students and the school community.

Several studies, including Hill & Craft (2003), highlighted the impact of a teachers' perceptions of parental involvement in the educational lives of Euro-American and African American families. 103 African-American (*n* = 54) and Euro-American (*n* = 49) Kindergarten children and their mothers were interviewed in their homes. Additionally, for 93 of the 103 children, their Kindergarten teachers evaluated the mothers’ involvement in school. The mothers and teachers measured parental involvement using three subscales of the Parent Teacher Involvement Questionnaire. This study concluded that teachers' perceived beliefs about the importance that parents placed on education were positively related to children's academic skills, which was in turn related to reading performance. In other words, when teachers believed that parents placed a high value on education, those students saw gains in academic skills and increased academic performance. However, the study goes on to conclude that "teachers' perceptions may be unrelated to parents' actual value for education and may be based on stereotypes associated with demographic characteristics or whether parents are involved in school" (p. 80).

DePlanty (2007) studied parent involvement on academic achievement from the teacher, parent, and student perspectives. The research found that "parents' feeling of efficacy may drive their actions with the school. Parents may avoid involvement if they believe that their actions will not result in positive change" (p. 378). Lareau and Horvat (1999) found that when minority parents shared concerns about racial injustice, they were deemed unsupportive, upsetting and hostile by teachers and school leaders. Subsequently their concerns about the education of their children were discounted.

These experiences of microaggressions and subsequent avoidance of school by parents, creates dangerous beliefs that minority students and families "don't care" about education. In her book, *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela (1999) embarked on a three-year ethnographic study that explored the academic achievement and schooling experience of Mexican and Mexican American students at a high school in Texas. Her research elaborated on Nel Noddings (1929 -) concept of caring which birthed the idea that caring and relationships among teachers and students are foundational aspects of education. Valenzuela more specifically discussed the impact of caring relationships on children of color and the importance of challenging the notion that children of color "don't care" about their academic achievement. She highlighted examples that illustrated the way that when students in poor and minority schools are perceived to have uncaring attitudes makes them vulnerable and imperceptible. “The difference in the way students and teachers perceive school-based relationships can bear directly on students’ potential to achieve” (Valenzuela, 1999, p. 62). Schools with this type of thinking “not only fail to validate their students’ culture, but they also subtract resources from them”. She argued that to address this attitude and encourage academic achievement, “Students’ cultural world and their structural position must be fully apprehended, with school-based adults deliberately bring issues of race, difference and power into central focus” (p. 109). Zaretta Hammond, the author of *Culturally responsive teaching and the brain*, elaborates more on this idea stating, "We often talk about the problem of the achievement gap in terms of race - racial relations, issues of oppression and equity – while ironically the solutions for closing students' learning gaps in the classroom lie in tapping into their culture" (2015, p. 21).

While early ideas of parental involvement did not include room for the types of cultural support that Black parents provide their children, the concept is evolving into a more inclusive and comprehensive definition. Researchers such as Joyce Epstein (1987), who have extensively studied the concept, have modified, and revised their definitions over the years to include a deeper and more encompassing understanding of parental involvement. Though there is still more work to do to further investigate the idea of parental involvement, Epstein's initial model discussed in the 1987 study only highlighted four types of parental involvement: providing basic obligations, school-to-home connections, parent involvement at school, and parent involvement in learning activities at home. However, this framework was later amended to include participating in decision making at school and collaborating with the community as additional aspects of parental involvement (Lewis, 2011). These additions to the concept of parent involvement incorporate parenting aspects that Black mothers have long exhibited and incorporated a definition more inclusive of additional ways that Black families support their children in school.

This shift recognized three significant contexts in which students learn and grow – the family, the school, and the community (Epstein, 1995; Sheldon & Epstein, 2005). Epstein also acknowledged that these three spheres of influence could work together as one or as separate entities. "The way schools care about children is reflected in how schools care about children's families. If educators view children simply as students, they are likely to see the family as separate from the school" (Epstein, 1995, p. 701). When schools do not view the parents as partners in the job of educating the children, they are viewed as obstacles that schools must overcome.

Black Women as Mothers

Scant attention has been paid to the perceived lack of relationship between Black mothers and schools. However, Black women have an intimate knowledge of the ways in which racism reveals itself for Black children. Though theories such as Critical Race Theory (CRT) are currently under legislation designed to regulate how schools discuss racism, sexism, and issues of systemic inequality in the classroom (Sawchuk, 2021), they offer a valuable framework for examining the experiences of Black women. CRT assumes racism is a common, everyday experience for most people of color and these experiences of racial minorities have bestowed them with presumed expertise to speak on matters of race and racism. This theory also includes the tenet of intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw coined this term intersectionality and explained it as “the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women’s lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (Crenshaw, 1990, p. 1244). Intersectionality emphasizes the way that systems of racism and sexism intertwine to make the experiences of Black women unique from their Black male and White female counterparts.

Black women began to critique the feminist movement as one that did not acknowledge the intersection of multiple inequalities and forms of oppression that they experienced, that White women did not (Horsford, 2012). Cooper (2007) argues the idea that Black women and White women mother differently in part due to the historical conceptualization of power that has alluded Black mothers. "The racialized contexts of ensuring survival and seeking power influence Black women's daily lives and these contexts converge to make these women acutely aware of their positionality as marginalized people" (p. 494). Tubbs (2021) highlights that "when a Black woman is able to choose when she will bring children into the world of her own accord, it is a revolutionary act in the context of American history" (p. 83).

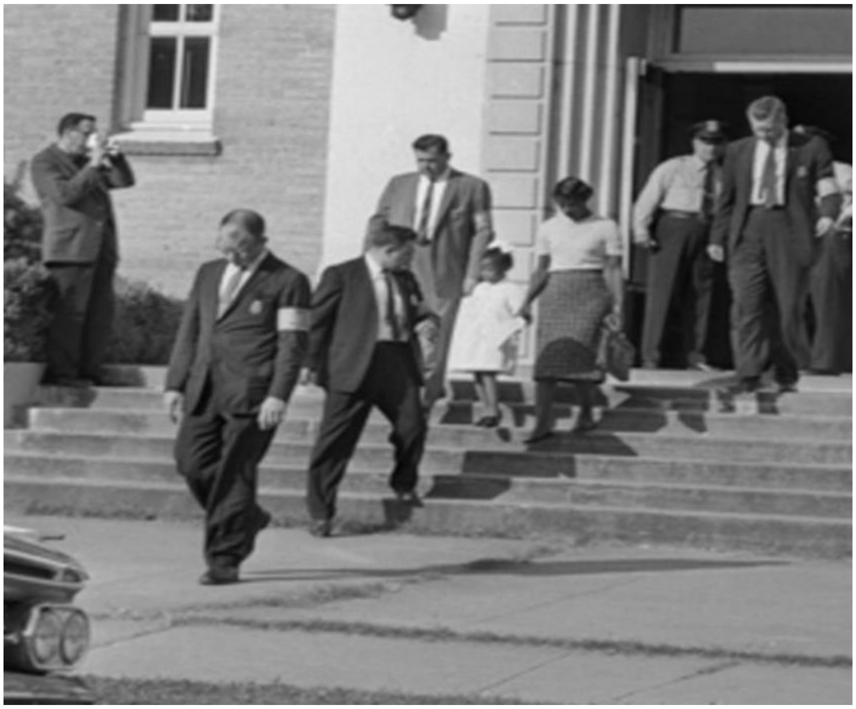
Studies have shown that women of color experience feeling invisible and Black women feel as though they are silenced and marginalized based on both gender and racial stereotypes (Lewis, 2016). Black women demanded that their perspectives as both Black and female be acknowledged. In other words, Black women have an intimate knowledge of the methods in which racism shows up for Black children. Instead of this knowledge being dismissed, CRT stresses that it should be centered and uplifted as essential to the body of research around caring for Black children.

Though underrepresented from the research, Black women have found ways to support, uplift and challenge the negative impact felt by the racist and sexist lens used to view them and

Black children. Research has shown the importance of storytelling, another tenet of CRT, as an important way of exploring race and racism in our society (Ladson-Billings, 2009). These stories help to advertise the experiences of Black women and provide more counternarratives to the dominant narrative that is generally accepted. For example, in *The Three Mothers*, author Anna Malaika Tubbs (2021) tells the story of Alberta King, Berdis Baldwin, and Louise Little; three Black women who played influential roles in fighting against racism. Though they are rarely mentioned by name, these women were the mothers of Martin Luther King, Jr., James Baldwin, and Malcolm X, respectively. Tubbs (2021) uses their stories to highlight their lives as women before they birthed their famous children, their roles as mothers, and how their intersectionality as Black women, “informed their ability to raise independent children who would go on to inspire the world for years to come" (p. 6). The experiences they had as children and women before giving birth, made them into the advocates and fighters of social injustice that their children learned from and modeled after. When Lucille Bridges, passed away in late 2020, her daughter, Ruby Bridges, praised the strength and resolve her mother had, even with her husband’s objections over his daughter’s safety, to demand that Ruby receive an equal education. She took her daughter’s hand and courageously braved the torrent of hateful messages hurled at them to ensure that her daughter and all Black children, would have access to a better education (see Figure 1). Ruby acknowledged her mother’s dedication to pursuing social justice writing, “Today our country lost a hero. Brave, progressive, a champion for change. She helped alter the course of so many lives by setting me out on a path as a six-year-old little girl” (Reneau, 2020).

Figure 1

Ruby Bridges Holds her Mother's Hand as They Leave her School



Research has shown that Black mothers advocate on behalf of their children. Cooper (2007) identifies ways mothers of color have had to fight for their children and their maternal authority in racist social contexts that left them feeling "relatively powerless" in dominant society (p. 493). This study found that the 14 Black mothers interviewed used school choice to assume educational advocacy roles for their children. Their choices of schooling for their children (traditional public, charter, private Afrocentric school, private Catholic school) were related to their goals for their children's academic success. "They each were inspired by their dreams of their children enjoying prosperity and their fears that their children will be relegated to a life of struggle and disappointment if they are not well educated" (p. 502). Williams et. al (2017) found that Black mothers considered themselves to be "protective agents" through their involvement in their children's academic lives. This looked like providing positive messages around racial pride to counter any potentially negative experiences and preparing children for dealing with incidents of everyday racism that they may encounter.

When provided the opportunity, studies show that Black mothers often advocate harder for their children in inequitable and oppressive school systems that seem "geared for them to fail" (Cooper, 2009, p. 386). Cummins stated, "When educators involve minority parents as partners in their children's education, parents appear to develop a sense of efficacy that communicates itself to children, with positive academic consequences (1986, p. 26). Research has also shown that despite having academic barriers and other “social impediments,” families of color care deeply about their children’s education. Stevenson et. al. (1990) conducted research examining the beliefs and achievement of Black, Hispanic and White families. This study interviewed 968 Black, Hispanic and White mothers regarding their beliefs and attitudes about their child’s schooling, interviewed 1,161 children about their performance and attitudes about school, and 120 teachers to examine their ideas about improving student’s academic performance. Findings showed that the Black and Hispanic families held enthusiastic attitudes about school and attempted to remove any barriers that their children experienced by creating supportive environments for academic achievement for their children. This research highlighted that the beliefs of minority children and their mothers were more comparable to those with higher levels of achievement refuting the belief that minority parents do not care about their child’s education.

Black Women as Educators

Little is understood about the ways Black female school leaders navigate the demands of caring for or leading Black children. Although public school students in the US have become more racially and ethnically diverse, the principalship has remained pretty much the same, with approximately 80 percent of principals in the US being White and 10 percent Black (Goldring et al., 2013). As such, much of the research on school leadership is currently highlighting the White or male perspective. A search of extant research found more studies eliciting the perspective of leaders of color, however, many of them featured the voices of Black men. While more studies examining the ways Black men lead and care for Black children are needed, research has shown that there are differences in the leadership styles of men and women. Eagly and Johnson's (1990) meta-analysis of gender and leadership styles identified women as leading with a more democratic and less directive style than male school leaders. Additionally, Lumby and Azaola (2014) conducted a mixed-methods study in South Africa which examined how gender and other factors influenced women’s access to the principalship and their leadership experiences. Findings suggested that there were multiple orientations to the ways in which the principals employed their mothering skill as leaders, including one group of female principals who believed that because they are mothers themselves, they are willing and able to deal with the societal issues that are brought into their schools every day. This group of principals emphasized the nurturing and caring aspects of their role as school leaders and were proud of being able to provide leadership that includes love and care to those students who need it. Though this research did not focus on racial aspects, it does suggest that Black female school leaders will lead schools differently than their Black male, White male, and White female counterparts.

A more recent line of research has focused on better understanding the relationships between Black students and Black educators at multiple levels. Griffin (2013) examined how 28 Black professors perceived the nature and importance of their interactions with Black University students. Findings showed that faculty members were especially focused on the development and achievement of Black students and that commitment was in part shaped because they have knowledge of the issues faced by the Black community. The 28 professors interviewed stressed an eagerness to see Black students perform well and a responsibility to supporting their development. Additionally, the research found that the professors felt a “distinct closeness and sense of comfort” with Black students (p. 175).

Egalite et al. (2015) conducted a quantitative study using 3rd through 10th grade test results and data provided by the Florida Department of Education from 2001 - 2002 through 2008 - 2009. This study found a small but positive effect on student performance when students were assigned to race-congruent teachers. Additionally, the study found that lower-performing Black and White students appeared to benefit from being assigned to race-congruent teachers. Nash & Peters (2020) employed a case study method to examine the leadership practices that Black educators incorporated as they supported Black girls in STEM. Participants in this study indicated that Black women educators employed several strategies to support the girls in STEM. These included, intentionally leading with the mindset that Black girls need schools that are more accountable to their experience, a commitment to partnering with the larger community, and introducing the girls to more social and academic experiences with other women of color in STEM. This approach embraced by Black women educators involves an asset-based approach to leading Black students and explicitly incorporated and exposed students to positive examples of their racial and gendered identities.

Bettina Love’s (2019) book, *We Want to do More than Survive*, introduces the argument that educators must not only address the systemic racism and anti-Blackness that students experience in our school systems, but also protect Black children’s joy and hope for the future. This concept, “abolitionist teaching” is defined as “the practice of working in solidarity with communities of color while drawing on the imagination, creativity, refusal, (re)membering, visionary thinking, healing, rebellious spirit, boldness, determination, and subversiveness of abolitionists to eradicate injustice in and outside of schools" (p. 2). She explains that a fundamental idea to abolitionist teaching is "to want freedom is to welcome struggle" (p. 9). Educators who combat the systemic oppression that Black students experience often share the struggles they experience as a result. Echols (2006) cites several challenges that Black principals face while leading including lack of connections or awareness of opportunities such as leadership institutes, mentors, stipends, co-publication offers, and other services or monies available to school leaders. These challenges make the difficult job of leading an underresourced school, even more arduous.

Even with those hardships, research shows the sense of responsibility often felt by Black women when supporting Black students. Griffin (2013) suggested that Black professors feel a sense of obligation to support Black students and want to see them perform successfully. Black professors were intimately aware of the challenges Black students faced within the university spaces and felt a commitment to support them which at times created additional challenges for them as they offered that assistance. For example, the professors cited the time and energy required to support Black students in need of additional academic support because of less rigorous P – 12th grade experiences. Or the mental energy used to provide psychosocial assistance to Black students in need of advice and nurturing.

Lomotey (1987) found that "Black principals in Black schools shared a common quality: a deep compassion for their students and for the communities in which they (the students) lived" (p. 178). Research has identified "Othermothering" as an example of how Black women show this compassion for students (Collins, 2016; Griffin, 2013). Cooper (2009) describes “othermothering” as a form of communal care offered by African American women and provided to assist others (p. 389). Griffin (2013) examined the concept of “Othermothering” at the higher education level interviewing Black faculty members and Black students to describe their relationships. Several of the Black female faculty members described having relationships with young women in which they describe themselves as serving as a mother-like figure. Two themes emerged from the study. First, professors spoke of their desire to see Black students perform well and succeed and expressed the sense of commitment they feel towards supporting their development. Second, professors discussed the closeness and sense of comfort they experienced with their Black students. These themes suggest the idea that Black faculty/student interactions are special for the faculty members as well as the students. The Black faculty members’ knowledge of the issues faced by members of the Black community within the academy appears to have helped to shape their commitment to Black students.

Witherspoon and Mitchell (2009) conducted in-depth interviews over a year with four African American female principals to explore the influence of the religious and spiritual values on how the leaders lead their schools and address both individual and systemic racism. One theme identified from the spiritual narratives was the importance that the women felt around exposing unjust practices. These leaders saw themselves as fighting not only for themselves but also for their students. They expressed a strong desire to “make things better for the students they serve” (p. 662) and indicated the idea that it may be necessary to break the rules in service of social justice. Additionally, research suggests that Black school leaders throughout the world are aware of the impact of institutional racism (McKenley & Gordon, 2002) and often engage in a "grass-roots leadership approach grounded in democratic practice, community work, and social change to improve the lives of the disadvantaged and underserved" (Horsford, 2012, p. 15).

However, this is not to imply that all Black female school leaders will automatically be able to connect with Black children or Black parents. As school leaders, the Black women in this study will undoubtedly have a higher socioeconomic status which may impact how connected they are to the minoritized communities they serve. Khalifa (2018) highlights that Black school leaders who ignore and do not connect with the communities they serve will have difficulty building trust in the community, regardless of racial and gender similarities. In other words, Black women are not uniform in their experiences caring for Black children. Therefore, they may or may not embody the culturally responsive lens in their leadership that creates a trusting relationship with the families and students.

Racism is ingrained in every aspect of our society, and power structures built on White privilege and supremacy have perpetuated the marginalization of people of color, particularly Black women (Ladson-Billings, 2009). By remaining blind to these experiences, schools are continuing to ignore the research that suggests the negative impact these attitudes have on not only the students, but families and communities of color. This lack of discussion on the impact of race on children and families of color effectively serves as another method of silencing and dismissing minority communities. Minority communities that have long considered schools to be harbingers of racist systems with little to no commitment to having open conversations about race. Schools routinely ignore these pivotal discussions, though studies have shown that race and racism influence urban school leadership at the "individual, dyadic, subcultural, institutional, and societal levels" (Brooks & Watson, 2019, p. 649). However, this same study also showed that because societal issues related to racism were not openly discussed at school, it led educators to believe the message that those conversations were unwelcome and should be avoided as a topic of discussion (Brooks & Watson, 2019). As of late 2021, eight states have even gone so far as to pass laws restricting how schools can teach about racism in the classroom (Belsha et. al, 2021).

Black female school leaders in marginalized Black communities often do not have access to the resources needed to make the necessary changes for their students, teachers, and families (Aldrich, 2019). This lack of resources often means that parental involvement in many low-income communities is necessary for the school's success. As such, Black women principals often need to incorporate a more community-centered lens to their leadership to ensure that their school receives crucial resources needed. Horsford (2012) introduced the term bridge leadership to "describe how the intersection of race and gender as experienced by the Black woman leader has resulted in her serving as a bridge for others, to others, and between others in oppressive and discriminatory contexts over time" (p. 17). The research suggests a common thread that Black women experience as they fight to ensure their voices are respected and valued when it comes to leading and caring for Black children. This project aims to center their voices, highlight the understandings they have learned to successfully relate to Black children, and provide strategies to support other school leaders as they educate Black children. By telling their stories and elevating their experiences, this study attempts to reject the deficit-based mindsets about these matriarchs and develop rich descriptions of their experiences as Black school leaders and mothers.

This chapter's review and discussion demonstrate that racism and its impact on the Black community is not something that Black women as school leaders or mothers can ignore. This study examines the ways these women deal with the complex process of leading and mothering Black children as they navigate their own intricate intersectional identities as Black, women, school leaders and mothers. Centering their perspectives could lead to a deeper understanding of what it means to connect and support the success of Black children.

3 METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to extract the essence of what it means to lead and care for Black children as a Black mother and school leader. This study assumes that the intersectional experiences of these Black women's participation in the education system as P – 12th grade children, mothers to Black children and school leaders to Black children, will have valuable insight that will add to the body of knowledge in the fields of educational leadership, social justice, and motherhood.

Hermeneutic researchers aim to "reveal aspects of phenomena that are rarely noticed, described or accounted for" (Crowther et. al., 2017, p. 827). By acquiring insight into the lived experiences of the participants familiar with this phenomenon, educators may gain an informed understanding of how to care for and lead Black children in ways that incorporate the knowledge brought by Black mothers and school leaders. Research has shown that Black women as mothers bring a "cultural wealth" when supporting their children's education, including their value of education and the educational expectations they have for their children (Allen & White-Smith, 2017). Additionally, as school leaders, Black women serve as protectors of Black children against the oppressive structure, policies, and practices they often face in school (Cabral & Douglass Horsford, 2021). However, an exploratory review of research on Black women principals over a 24-year period (1973 – 2017) found no studies on Black women principals before 1973, only 13 studies appeared in scholarly, peer-reviewed journals, and one study was published as a book chapter during that period implying that such perspectives are less legitimate (Lomotey, 2019).

This chapter provides an overview of the research methodology and describes in more detail the following areas: (a) rationale for the research design, (b) the researcher's role, (c) how and why the participants were selected, (d) the data collection and analyzation procedures, and (e) the limitations of the study. The chapter ends with a brief concluding summary.

Rationale for Research Approach

This study sought to examine the lived experiences of four participants who identified as Black mothers and school leaders to Black children by means of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. As Alsaigh & Coyne (2021) highlight, hermeneutics is the art of understanding and the theory of interpretation of "texts" (p.2). Texts in this context include things such as written or verbal communication, in addition to visual arts and music or other arts-based methods. Hermeneutic phenomenological studies are designed to "illuminate essential, yet often forgotten, dimensions of human experience in ways that compel attention and provoke further thinking" (Crowther, 2017, p. 827). Hermeneutic phenomenology involves both describing what the phenomena is and interpreting the phenomena to "search for the fullness of living" (van Manen, 2016, p. 12). It seeks to shed light onto a phenomenon as the researcher provides rich, written descriptions and interpretations to illuminate the experiences.

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology method asserts that researchers need to bracket, or set aside, the presumptions they have to better understand the true essence of the phenomena. This approach to phenomenology likens the researcher to an alien arriving to learn about a human experience. In this methodology, to learn about the phenomena, the researcher or "alien" must intentionally shelve any prior awareness that they have with the experience to accurately represent the phenomena as clearly and objectively as possible.

Integral in hermeneutic phenomenology is the place of the researcher's understanding in the interpretive process. This phenomenological approach maintains that the researcher's own experiences with the phenomena cannot be completely bracketed out as they provide valuable insight into the interpretation of the phenomena. In fact, researchers such as Moustakas (1994) contend that hermeneutic analysis is imperative to derive a "correct understanding" of the phenomena being explored (p. 8). He asserts that to describe the essence of the experience, both "what" they experienced, and "how" they experienced it must be captured. This method assumes that the researcher's prior awareness cannot be shelved as it is already understood as a part of the researcher's Being. Instead of attempting to bracket out the biases, the researcher must instead track and account for any ways that their prior awareness shifts and deepens their interpretations of the lived experience.

This research methodology connected to me on a personal level as it allowed me to incorporate my own experiences navigating my intersectional identities in society and the school system as a Black woman, mother, and school leader to Black children. In addition, the ability as a phenomenological researcher to also incorporate artistic mediums, such as poetry, photos, and art appealed to me as a method for providing additional descriptions of the phenomena. Van Manen (1997) argues that phenomenological research conducted by professionals in the field, such as poets, literary philosophers, educators, are vital in that they "are able to enrich our perceptiveness and contribute to our reflective understandings of the possible meaning and significance of everyday experiences" (p. 350). Photo elicitation is one way of incorporating visual arts into a phenomenological study as a means for participants to recall and make meaning of their experience.

Harper (2002) defines photo elicitation as inserting a photograph into a research interview and argues that images, even more than words at times, can "evoke deeper elements of human consciousness" (p. 13). This data collection method offers an opportunity for participants to provide additional awareness of their experiences with the phenomena under investigation. A phenomenological study by Yahalom (2013) explored the phenomena of mothers reflecting on memorable photographs of their children. The study found that as the women looked at their self-identified photographs, they experienced both an awareness and sadness that their children had become separate individuals with their own interests outside of them, while simultaneously experiencing a rediscovering of the maternal bond and realization that they are still mothering their children even as they grow and mature.

In this study, photo elicitation was added to the methodology to allow the participants an additional opportunity to provide valuable insight into leading and caring for Black children as a mother and school leader. Van Manen (2016) argues that one of the goals of phenomenological research is to help people to "become more fully who we are" (p. 12). Photo elicitation offers those from marginalized communities an opportunity to tell their own story and humanize themselves against the stereotypes, distortions, and misrepresentations that exist in educational research (Lewis Ellison & Enriquez, 2021). As such my research questions are:

- *What is it like to care for and lead Black children as a Black mother and school leader?*
- *What image(s) best illustrates what it means to care for and lead Black children as a Black mother and school leader?*

Researcher's Role

As the researcher, I have valuable insight into the phenomenon of leading and caring for Black children as a Black woman. I have a master's degree in Educational Leadership, have served as a school leader to Black children and have three beautiful, Black children of my own. Prior to conducting the study, I had successfully completed coursework in qualitative research and spent eight years as a consultant conducting interviews and focus groups with schools across the country. As a Black parent, the deficit-minded portrayal of Black parents, specifically Black mothers, does not resonate with me. Furthermore, as a Black female school leader, I realize that my voice has often been silenced or marginalized in a variety of ways as both a mother advocating for my children or as a school administrator leading a school.

However, it is imperative that while I was seeking to understand and interpret the meaning of the phenomena, I remained flexible and open to change as my awareness of the essence emerged. To ensure that occurred, I employed various “reflexive practices” throughout the study. As defined in Bloomberg (2019), these practices focus on allowing the researcher to examine how their own subjectivity and biases may shape the process. In addition to writing memos to capture specific reactions, I kept a research journal which allowed me a place to intentionally reflect on my thoughts, questions, and assumptions made throughout the duration of the study. This data was used as another tool in the data analysis and interpretation process.

As an educational consultant, I have years of experience in the process of interviewing leaders and capturing vital information to better understand their perspectives and identify clear, next steps. However, as part of the semi-structured interviews for this study, I had to intentionally take my consultant “hat” off and ensure that I was letting the participant describe their experiences without my inclination to propose solutions. Seidman (2019) asserts that as interviewers, we must keep our egos in check to get at the lived experience of our storyteller and not our own. To support myself with doing this, I created an interview note-taking sheet that included notes to myself providing the purpose of each interview and other important reminders to myself. For example, I shared that the purpose of the first interview would be to provide contextual background about their mothering and leading. This artifact gave me structure and an additional place to take notes as I listened during the interview (see Appendix D). It also reminded me to remain in my position as a researcher and not a consultant attempting to get solutions to a problem.

Participants

Participants for this study were chosen via purposeful sampling, a method in which the researcher develops specific criteria that the participants in the study must meet to be involved (Hays & Singh, 2012). In phenomenological studies, purposeful sampling is selected because it allows the researcher to identify participants who can provide the necessary amount of detail needed to understand the phenomenon more fully. This heterogenous group of participants may vary in size from three to four individuals up to 10 to 15 (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Researchers are encouraged to use their judgment to define the parameters for what phenomenon they are looking to explore. For this study, the participants were selected based on the following criteria:

- All participants identified as a Black or African American women
- All participants had at least three years as a school leader (e.g., Principal, Assistant Principal, District Leader) to Black children
- All participants identified as mothers to Black child(ren)

With research showing that principals and school leaders leave on average four years after they have been at their school (Levin & Bradley, 2021), a delimiting time frame of three years was decided as the minimum amount of total time the participants had to have been a school leader. Additionally, as school leadership positions vary significantly across the country and this study was not defined by a geographical location, leadership positions were defined as outside of the classroom, administrative positions including principal and vice principal. There were no set criteria for the types of schools that the participants were leading as data shows that as of 2017 – 2018, Black principals only accounted for 10% and 16.3% of traditional public and charter schools, respectively (Taie & Goldring, 2019). While this data was not disaggregated by gender, the assumption is that Black women would account for a much lower percentage, and I did not want to further exclude potential participants based on the type of school they lead.

The participants had to identify as mothers of Black children, but the ages of those children were determined to be irrelevant as research suggests that children of color experience negative attitudes and exclusionary practices in all levels of education, from as early as daycare (Bolin, 1989) to the P-12 level (Ofer, 2011) and above (Suarez-Orozco, 2015). While the ages of the children were unimportant, it was vital that the women and children both identified as Black as the interplay between racial and gendered discrimination is a vital component of the research. For example, Reich (2002) concluded that the White women raising multi-racial children in the study held widespread beliefs such as "color-blind thinking”, or a discomfort with awareness of race. Though Black women are not a monolith, this rationale is a contrarian experience for many Black women.

This finding was reiterated in Rauktis et. al. (2016) in a study which conducted focus groups with 18 White women parenting their biological Black/White bi-racial children. Findings suggested that while these mothers recognized that their interactions with the legal, educational systems and even their own families had changed when they became mothers to children of color, they continued to embrace a color-blind ideology. The researchers propose one reason for this is because “these mothers do not always recognize the many ways that race shapes American society and differentially affects whites and blacks… and do not have a lifetime of experience as people of color to help their children make sense of their treatment" (p. 441).

The women who participated in my study were between the ages of 37 and 49, were college graduates with multiple advanced degrees, and all worked full-time outside of the home. One participant was married, two were single and divorced, and one was engaged to her longtime partner. The women had between one and three children, ranging from the ages of 2 years-old to 30, and one participant is a grandmother to a 7-year-old.

Immediately upon approval of the Internal Review Board (IRB) proposal, obtained through Georgia State University, I shared recruitment flyers via email to colleagues and through various social media sites, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, and Instagram. While multiple women expressed interest in sharing their experiences, four women contacted me, signed the informed consent document, and scheduled their initial interview. To protect their identities, the women selected the emergent theme names, Ms. Brooklyn, Dani, Celeste and VitaButtafly. In the interest of transparency, Ms. Brooklyn and I were former co-workers, though at the time of the study, there were no conflicting interests or benefits obtained from her participation in the study. Celeste and VitaButtafly both worked in the same district that my children attend, though they had no previous interactions with me or my children before the study took place. An example profile is illustrated in Table 1 and a complete profile graphic can be found in chapter 4. The participants varied across the types of leadership positions they had, the types of schools they worked in, the grade levels served, their number of years of experience, ages, and number of children.

Table 1

Participant Profile Example

Celeste		
Woman	School Leader	Mother
Age: 43	Current Position: Assistant Director for Special Education	One daughter
Relationship Status: Divorced	Supports: 35 schools & programs	Age: 12 years old
Raised by grandparents	Students served: Over 26,000; 75% Black	Daughter has special needs (dyslexia; ADHD)
Teaching was a 2nd career	Years in Education: 20	Daughter also in a Gifted & Talented Program
First career in Marketing	Years in Leadership: 10	
	Certified in Special Education	

Instruments

Participants engaged in three, 45 - 60-minute semi-structured, individual interviews as outlined in Seidman (2019). He highlights that "at the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals' stories because they are of worth" (p. 9) and outlines a model for in-depth, phenomenological interviews that involve conducting three separate interviews. This format will "allow both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on the meaning" (p. 21). Seidman warns that interviewers who attempt to study their phenomena by arranging a one-time meeting with a participant that they have never met before may "tread on thin contextual ice" (p. 21). Interviews were conducted using Zoom due to COVID restrictions and the difference in locations between myself and two of the participants. To ensure that the participants felt comfortable with the virtual meeting, I remained on video, even when participants needed to go off-camera to allow them to see my facial expressions and the environment where the call would be held.

In alignment with Seidman (2019), the initial interview focused on gathering demographic data and putting the participant's experience into the context of their life history.

This included gathering information such as the participant’s age, number of years in education, ages of their children and more details of their life history as mothers and school leaders. They were asked to share their journeys into motherhood and leadership and were given the instructions to start from wherever they’d like to start.

The second interview provided an opportunity to dig a layer deeper into the phenomena by describing additional details of their experiences as mothers and school leaders. Participants explained and reflected on more specific aspects around the phenomena of being a Black woman who leads and cares for Black children. Peoples (2021) highlighted the importance of ensuring that the interview questions be carefully constructed to get the participants to reflect on the experience and not their thoughts, feelings, or perceptions. This is because thoughts and opinions are not always valid at uncovering the essence of a phenomena. Peoples (2021) gives the example of a person having an initial opinion about someone that later changes when they learn additional information (p. 53). Interview questions directed participants to explicitly describe what they have experienced as they cared for and lead Black children.

The third and final interview asked participants to ruminate more on the meaning of the phenomena and connect the personal accounts from interviews one and two. Questions asked during this interview including asking participants to reflect on what has made them successful, what challenges they have faced and what do they want people to know about leading and caring for Black children as a Black mother and school leader. The last question for every participant involved having them share the photograph(s) they had selected to best illustrate the phenomena.

In addition to the individual interviews, the IRB called for participants to attend a focus group meeting together to allow them space to share their experiences and connect with more prominent themes across their shared understandings. However, this group interview activity did not happen. Time constraints placed on both me and the participants as mothers and school leaders dealing with the COVID pandemic meant that there would be little opportunity for the five women to gather at the same time and collectively discuss their understanding of the phenomena and share their photos with one another. Instead, participants were asked to bring their illustration of what it means to be a Black mother and school leader to Black children to their final meeting with the interviewer.

Throughout the study, I kept a reflective journal to consistently capture my own understanding of the phenomena in relation to the participants sharing their own experiences. I wrote in this journal during and after interviews with the participants to explicitly name any assumptions or biases that arose for me. This gave me more informed insight into my own understanding of the phenomena and a record of how that understanding changed over the course of the study. For example, I entered this research with the preconception that because the participants are Black women and have experienced gendered racism that they would discuss the plight of Black girls in schools just as much as Black boys. While one participant did explicitly bring up the challenges that Black girls experience with disciplinary incidents, two participants with Black sons articulated having more concern for their male children than their female children. When asked to share more details about that worry, they mentioned having fears around the physical safety of their Black male children, such as concerns of police brutality. As a mom with a Black male child, I noted that distinction to determine if it was an essential part of the phenomena or was specific to those participants.

Van Manen (2016) highlights the difficulty of phenomenological studies by calling it “extraordinarily demanding of its practitioners” (p. 33) and writing is an integral part of why this methodology is arduous. Hermeneutical phenomenology requires the researcher to go beyond describing a phenomenon to create a rich and thick description of the lived experience. Thick description is a hallmark concept of qualitative studies that refers to the researcher’s task of describing and capturing the thoughts, feelings, “context and meaning as well as interpreting participant intentions in their behaviors and actions” (Ponterotto, 2006, p. 541). By providing this level of detail, a good phenomenological study can accurately portray the lifelong, often mundane experiences of a participant in a few hours of conversation. To indeed be able to write the story of the phenomena, the researcher must fully understand the descriptions of the events, the participant's interpretations of the events, the historical and cultural context, and a host of other known and unknown aspects. In other words, this process allows people to tell their stories, together we interpret those stories and find meaning within those stories (Schumacher, 2010).

Procedures

To analyze the data, I first transcribed the interviews verbatim. The twelve interviews lasted a total of 474 minutes. While I transcribed, I removed any identifying information about the participants, including names and places. Protecting the participants' identity was vital as studies have shown that Black women often feel pushed out of academia and leadership positions (Chambers, 2011) and I did not want to jeopardize their employment. To ensure that I stayed connected and focused, I transcribed the interviews by staying within each participant’s interview cluster. For example, I transcribed all of Celeste’s interviews in order before beginning to transcribe another participant’s interviews. After reviewing the transcriptions to remove any unnecessary information I added additional texture to the transcriptions, including any incidents of laughter with the participant, contemplative pauses, or interruptions by children. An example of unnecessary information that was not recorded included filler words repeatedly used such as “like” that did not change the content of the participant’s words. The video recordings of the interviews allowed me to view and distinguish any extraneous information that I was unsure about its importance but wanted to note. For example, I was able to use the recordings to better describe the locations of each interview. Regarding the use of software to support the data analysis process, Peoples (2021) encourages the use of hand coding to ensure that the researcher can sufficiently “dwell” on a text (p. 66). As such, I completed all transcription and analysis procedures via hand and without the aid of qualitative software.

The data analysis process was informed by Gadamer's description of the hermeneutic circle. In hermeneutic phenomenology, the researcher is constantly comparing the individual experience of the phenomenon with the other participants who have experienced the same phenomena. This interpretive process is achieved through a hermeneutic circle that moves from the parts of the experience to the whole experience and back and forth, again and again, to increase the depth of engagement with the understanding of texts (Laverty, 2003). Gadamer highlights the importance of the researcher staying focused on the phenomenon when interpreting the "texts”, stating that interpretation is, “the first, last, and constant task" (Gadamer, 1975, p.279). This process is described in more detail and illustrated in Figure 3.

Steps for the Hermeneutic Circle

1) Read the individual text to get an understanding of the phenomena
    a. I reread the transcription while playing the recorded Zoom video of the interviews. This allowed me to verify the accuracy of the transcript, ensure participant anonymity and to get a general understanding of the experiences shared by each participant.
    b. Like when transcribing, I stayed within each participant’s interview cluster and reread the interviews in order from the first to the last interview. This vertical

analysis of the data allowed me to form a preliminary understanding of the phenomena from each individual participant's stance.

2) Identify what stands out as significant in the text in relation to the phenomena.
    a. While reading and listening to the interviews, I periodically stopped the recording to extract any significant statements that stood out to me. Those statements, or emergent themes, were highlighted in the text and transferred to an online repository for each participant with a notification of where to find that statement again (see Appendix E). This was completed for each of the participant's three interviews.
    b. This was the first cycle within the coding process, so the statements identified varied from one to two words, such as "my babies" to longer sentences such as "spending too much time on other's children". This is consistent with Saldaña (2021) which stated, "first cycle coding processes can range in magnitude from a single word to a full paragraph, an entire page of text or a stream of moving images" (p. 5). Hays & Singh (2012) define this process of horizontalization as a "data analysis technique whereby researchers identify nonrepetitive, non-overlapping statements in participants' transcripts" (p. 424). During this stage, I identified some statements such as "wanting the best for our children" that recurred multiple times, while others such as "importance of therapy" only emerged once.
    c. I used a color system to differentiate across the participant's interviews. For example, any emergent themes identified in interview 1 were blue across all participants. Implementing this strategy allowed me to keep track of which

interview I was analyzing. Through this process, 475 emergent themes surfaced from the 12 interviews.

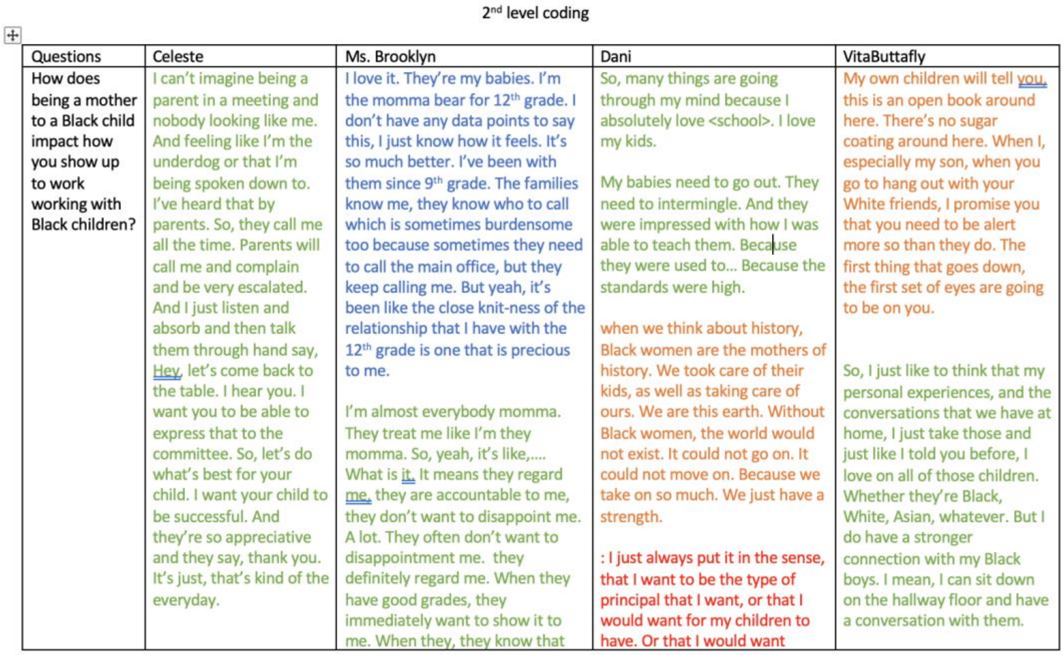
3) Make meaning by analyzing the statements identified in relation to the phenomenon.
    a. With my deepened understanding. I reread through the significant statements identified to formulate a meaning, condense emergent themes that were similar across the interviews and identify preliminary themes that emerged for each individual participant.
    b. These themes were added to the participant's repository with the significant statements and page numbers indicating where the statements were found in the text.
4) Compare the whole text with the additional understanding from the individual text.
    a. Once the vertical identification of preliminary themes was completed for each participant's individual interviews, an additional horizontal data analysis process was completed to identify experiences across each participant. This looked like comparing the participant's thoughts across each question. An example of this second level of coding is included in Figure 2.
5) Deepen understanding of the phenomenon
    a. Once I identified themes for each of the four participants, I then began to organize the themes across the participants based on my understanding of the participants' experiences, my experiences with the phenomena and the literature review.
    b. I clustered themes that fit with one another if needed. For example, the initial emergent theme of "connecting to others" morphed over the course of the data

analysis process to incorporate the theme of "othermothering". An additional repository was created to capture the themes across participants (see Appendix F).

c. I then began to create narratives aligned to each of the themes that emerged to provide a description and interpretation of the essence of the phenomenon.

Figure 2

Second Level Coding Example



2nd level coding

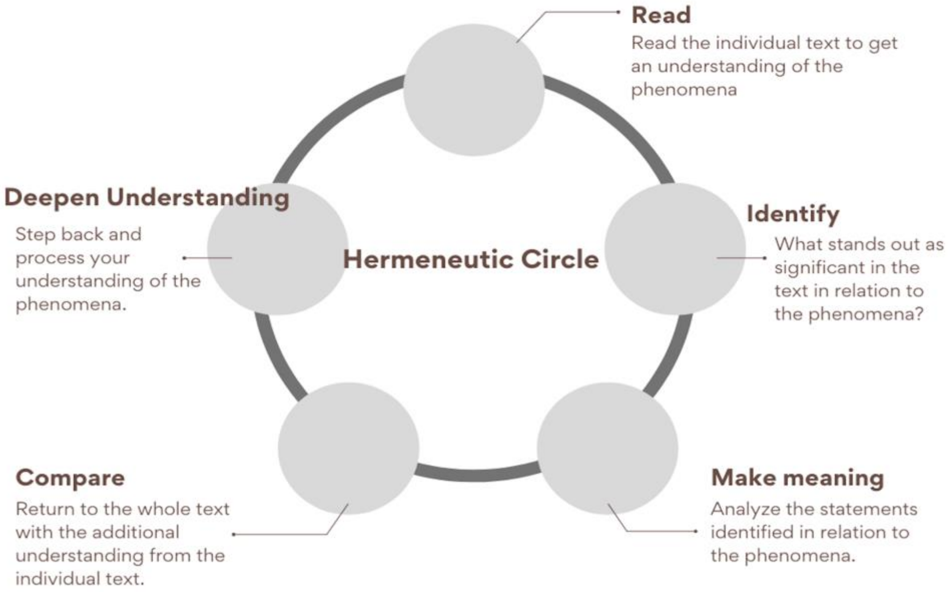
Questions	Celeste	Ms. Brooklyn	Dani	VitaButtafly
How does being a mother to a Black child impact how you show up to work working with Black children?	I can't imagine being a parent in a meeting and nobody looking like me. And feeling like I'm the underdog or that I'm being spoken down to. I've heard that by parents. So, they call me all the time. Parents will call me and complain and be very escalated. And I just listen and absorb and then talk them through hand say, Hey, let's come back to the table. I hear you. I want you to be able to express that to the committee. So, let's do what's best for your child. I want your child to be successful. And they're so appreciative and they say, thank you. It's just, that's kind of the everyday.	I love it. They're my babies. I'm the momma bear for 12th grade. I don't have any data points to say this, I just know how it feels. It's so much better. I've been with them since 9th grade. The families know me, they know who to call which is sometimes burdensome too because sometimes they need to call the main office, but they keep calling me. But yeah, it's been like the close knit-ness of the relationship that I have with the 12th grade is one that is precious to me. I'm almost everybody momma. They treat me like I'm they momma. So, yeah, it's like,…. What is it. It means they regard me, they are accountable to me, they don't want to disappoint me. A lot. They often don't want to disappointment me. they definitely regard me. When they have good grades, they immediately want to show it to me. When they, they know that	So, many things are going through my mind because I absolutely love <school>. I love my kids. My babies need to go out. They need to intermingle. And they were impressed with how I was able to teach them. Because they were used to… Because the standards were high. when we think about history, Black women are the mothers of history. We took care of their kids, as well as taking care of ours. We are this earth. Without Black women, the world would not exist. It could not go on. It could not move on. Because we take on so much. We just have a strength. : I just always put it in the sense, that I want to be the type of principal that I want, or that I would want for my children to have. Or that I would want	My own children will tell you, this is an open book around here. There's no sugar coating around here. When I, especially my son, when you go to hang out with your White friends, I promise you that you need to be alert more so than they do. The first thing that goes down, the first set of eyes are going to be on you. So, I just like to think that my personal experiences, and the conversations that we have at home, I just take those and just like I told you before, I love on all of those children. Whether they're Black, White, Asian, whatever. But I do have a stronger connection with my Black boys. I mean, I can sit down on the hallway floor and have a conversation with them.

The data analysis process was highly iterative, interpretive and describes the hermeneutic circle. As I read individual parts of the interviews, I identified emergent themes and themes that uncovered the participant's experience. While stepping back to reread the entire interview, I had an enhanced understanding from the newly identified themes and used that knowledge to achieve a deeper and more complete understanding of the participants' lived experiences. This process was repeated during the second level of coding in which I compared the individual participant's experiences to those of the group as a whole. This circle of moving from the parts of experience to the whole of the experience and back and forth again and again allowed new information to be gleaned and a new or deeper understanding of the phenomena to emerge. Van Manen (2016) shared that all interpretations are interpretations of an interpretation. This highlights the importance of being aware of and tracking the fore-sight brought into the hermeneutic phenomenological investigation and the various interpretations that emerge.

The importance of tracking my thinking during the data analysis process is why I transcribed, analyzed, and managed the data collection process on my own. As someone with experience in the phenomena, revisiting the data by hand allowed me to understand what resonated for me as significant. While the images, feelings, and connections that I made to the participants' experiences are not the final word, they do give credence to the importance of those ideas to the understanding of the phenomena. I turned to phenomenology because of my personal engagement in the topic, but during data analysis, I ensured that I did not allow my intimate knowledge of the phenomenon or the potential results for Black children in schools to dictate the direction of the results. I did this through contemplating my thoughts on mothering and leading Black children in my reflexive journal and reviewing themes with my dissertation chair and colleagues at work. Additionally, two of my classmates and I met weekly for several weeks during the data analysis process to share assumptions brought into the research and themes that materialized. I also recorded an audio memo of my initial thoughts of my study pre-data collection and returned to that audio several times during the duration of the data collection and analysis process to ensure that I remained flexible in my understanding the phenomenon while also ensuring that I did not allow the present context to shift the purpose of this work.

Figure 3

Data Analysis Process using the Hermeneutic Circle


Read
Read the individual text to get an understanding of the phenomena
Identify
What stands out as significant in the text in relation to the phenomena?
Make meaning
Analyze the statements identified in relation to the phenomena.
Compare
Return to the whole text with the additional understanding from the individual text.
Deepen Understanding
Step back and process your understanding of the phenomena.
Hermeneutic Circle

Issues of Trustworthiness

Hays and Singh (2012) describe several criteria used in qualitative studies to assure others of the trustworthiness of this research. Several steps were taken to promote the trustworthiness and validity of the findings. This section describes the credibility, and dependability, and confirmability of this phenomenological study.

Credibility

To ensure the credibility of this study, I used prolonged engagement with the participants and triangulated my data using not only the interviews, photo elicitation and my own reflexive journal. Each interview lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and was scheduled at least 1 week apart to give the participants and researcher time to process before reengaging. The participants and I spent an extensive amount of time together over the course of three separate interviews which allowed me to make the participant feel comfortable and build their trust enough to get them willing to share their experiences and reflect on their intersectional identities as mothers and school leaders to Black children. Additionally, the data analyzed in this study was collected from multiple sources of information to gather data on this phenomenon, including the participants' interviews on the phenomenon, the photos selected and their explanations of how it illustrates being a leader and mother to Black children.. The participants' lived experiences were collected via three separate semi-structured interviews and the photo elicitation.

Additionally, my committee chair and two of my colleagues in the doctoral program, served as resources to reflect with on my findings and my evolved assumptions and understandings of the phenomenon. We met together on a weekly or bi-weekly basis for several weeks during the data collection and analysis process. Furthermore, my reflective journal provided another source of data towards understanding the phenomena. For example, after my third interview with VitaButtafly, I reflected in my journal about her comment that she was "not doing enough" to fight injustice because I had experienced the same feeling. At the time, I had just completed my training to become a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA), a volunteer position as an advocate for children who are in the court system because of being abused and neglected. This training involved 30 hours of pre-service training, five hours of court observation, providing four personal references and passing a background check. Several times throughout the process, I asked myself why I felt compelled to add this volunteer opportunity to my full schedule. By capturing that reflection then, I was able to suspend that idea and reflect on it during the data analysis process to determine whether this idea of “not doing enough” would emerge as an essential part of the phenomena of leading and mothering Black children.

Dependability

Repetition of this study based on the detailed description in the methodology section should yield comparable findings. Chapter 3 included an extensive record of the steps taken to recruit and interview participants, manage and analyze the data collection process. I also included additional documents in the appendix including the signed consent form and the interview protocol questions, to provide more insight into the procedures taken in this study.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the researcher’s ability to “listen to the data” and report them as directly as possible” (Hay & Singh, 2012, p. 201). To allow the text to “speak” for itself, I kept a reflexive journal used to make my biases explicit as I attempted to understand the phenomena of leading and caring for Black children as a Black mother and school leader. Journaling also allowed me to capture my thoughts as they were at that moment and track any revisions made to my understanding as I spent more time with the data.

The themes identified in this study provide a deeper understanding of lived experiences of leading and caring for Black children as a Black mother and school leader. While the themes are categorized and divided into separate sections, each theme can be understood as being intertwined and possessing remnants of one another. One final way of ensuring confirmability in this study was through member checking. Member checking involves sharing the transcripts and findings of the interviews with the participants to provide an opportunity for them to confirm the text's veracity (Creswell, 2017). While I did not share the findings with the participants, I did share transcribed copies of their text with the open invitation to review and reach out to me if there were any inaccuracies or clarification that needed to be made. Two of the participants responded acknowledging receipt of the documents, but no one shared any changes or edits that needed to be made in the transcripts.

Ethical Considerations

I interacted with all participants in accordance with the University's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants received and signed a copy of the informed consent via HelloSign (see Appendix A). Considerations were taken to ensure the privacy and anonymity of the participants including the selection and use of a pseudonym name, removal of any identifying information, including their location. Confidentiality was particularly important as one of the participants is a former colleague of mine and two participants work in the same district that my children attend. Participants were assured that any video or audio tape-recorded conversations would be kept in a locked and secure location with myself having the only way to access the data. Participants also received copies of their transcribed interviews for the opportunity to review and request any changes be made before publication. Additionally, because the study asked the participants to share a photograph illustrating the phenomena of leading and mothering Black children, I ensured that all participants had and gave permission, including signed photo release forms when appropriate, for their photographs to be shared in the dissertation.

4 RESULTS

The purpose of this study was to discover the essence of leading and mothering Black children as a Black mother and school leader. In this chapter, I provide the setting of the study and the four participants, including information about their journeys to motherhood and leadership. Next, I describe the five emerging themes from the research to provide a textual description of the phenomena. This study was based on the research questions: What is it like to care for and lead Black children as a Black mother and school leader? What images would best illustrate that phenomenon? These results are presented along with quotations and stories from the women to provide a deeper understanding of their lifeworld through centering their voices and experiences. The five emerging themes identified are: Othermothering, Advocating, Professional authenticity, Deep connection to students and families and Finding Balance.

Setting

The setting of research should incorporate "all the important aspects of the context and environment in which the study takes place… and clarify what is unique about it" (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 253). I conducted semi-structured interviews via the online platform Zoom with participants who were leading schools in three states on the eastern coast of the US. Participants received a calendar invite with a secure link to join the Zoom call which allowed them to select the best place for them to take the call. Most participants joined calls from home and work and there were few problems with technology or connection issues. One participant did have problems with her connection during our first interview, but I made sure to keep my camera on to allow all participants to feel comfortable with the privacy of my location.

In addition to privacy, I made sure to host each interview from the location of my office for several reasons. The location provided a minimalist setting that allowed me to focus on participants' stories and gave them few distractions in my background. However, the few images that were visible in this setting, were intentionally placed in my background since I created my home office to promote beautiful images of Blackness. These images include pictures of my three children on the wall taken during school picture day two years prior. Plus, a vibrant 17" x 14" painting of a confident, smiling, Black woman with colorful paint splashes emanating from her afro. Though not visible to the participants, the question "Do you have to hide your hair to look prettier?" is written across the hair. This setting became unique when participants and I would discuss aspects of the environment that promote positive Black images or when referring to our children and reference was made to my children's images on the wall.

Celeste

My first two interviews with Celeste took place in her office and the third in her home. In both settings, the background observed felt like they were plucked from the latest Better Home & Garden magazine cover. While I do not know this to be true, I am inclined to believe that Celeste intentionally placed the large decorative "SUCCESS" sign on the top of her desk to create a perfectly placed banner behind her head. The environment was organized, professional with visible files and paperwork, yet projected a warmness with several pictures, plants and flowers.

She serves as an Assistant Director for Special Education in a mid-size district in the Southeast and is responsible for supporting 35 different schools and programs. She was raised as an only child by her grandparents, who told her early on that she would be a teacher. They were correct, though education was her second career after she briefly spent time in Marketing. She has spent 20 years as an educator, including as a Special Education teacher and 10 years in school leadership. Celeste is a single mom of a thriving 12-year-old daughter who has been identified as both Gifted & Talented and as having special needs, with a diagnosis of dyslexia and ADHD.

Ms. Brooklyn

Ms. Brooklyn currently serves as an Assistant Principal for a charter high school in the Northeast. She conducted all three of our interviews in her office and the first thing that stands out is the lighting of the office. Fairy lights wrap around a small bulletin board and a filtered light envelops the office in a soft blue or purple glow. The room emits a relaxing and calm impression not found in a stereotypical high school Assistant Principal's office. This may be explained in the fact that leadership was not in her initial plan. She enjoyed being successful in the classroom but was called upon by her administrators to support teachers as an instructional coach. Those opportunities provided her a chance to engage in her love of designing and facilitating quality professional development for teachers. She has been an administrator or coach for nine of her fifteen years in education. She is engaged and has two children, a 6-year-old son, and a 2-year-old daughter that she absolutely adores as evidenced by the way her entire face lit up when talking about them. Her son attended an African-centered Montessori preschool until recently.

Dani

Dani is the principal of an all-girls charter high school in the Northeast. This is her first year at this organization, though she has lived in the city her entire life, a fact that she proudly shared throughout our time together. Though our interviews took place at Dani's home, she used filters during all three of our calls. While I was greeted with a school logo background the first two interviews, by the third interview, the school logo was gone, and I was offered a blurred background of the home.

Dani was primarily raised by her single father and little brother as her mom left the home when she was 10 but remained a part of her children’s lives. Dani knew that she wanted to be a teacher as a little girl. Her family repeatedly told stories of her as a child playing teacher at family gatherings with young cousins. Like her current students, Dani is not only from the city where she serves as a principal but also attended an all-girls public school. She began her career as a Special Education teacher 20 years ago and “loves everything about Special Education”. This is her fifth year in leadership, and first year as a principal. Before becoming a principal, she started a nonprofit to support and uplift her community. She is married with two daughters, ages 18 and 8. She spoke highly of her children and shared that one daughter has been identified as Gifted & Talented and has ADHD.

VitaButtafly (Vita)

VitaButtafly is the Assistant Principal of a K- 5 traditional public school in the Southeast. Technology issues with Vita’s computer prevented her from being able to show her video on our first call and she used a blurred filter of her home during the second interview. But by our third interaction, Vita allowed an unfiltered view into her home. Though there was little to describe besides the bright red sweatshirt with the letters “HBCU” written in alternating green and yellow letters.

VitaButtafly is an only child and has a close relationship with her parents. In fact, she attended the same middle school where her mom worked as a teacher. She has been in education for 24 years, is certified in Special Education and has been a school leader for 4 years. Vita expressed a desire to have her own school as a principal and has shared this with district leaders.

Vita has three children, two daughters who are 30 and 12, and a 19-year-old son. More than any other participant, spoke extensively about her three children. While other participants brought one picture to the third interview, Vita shared a 13-slide presentation with a collage of pictures of her family members. She is extremely proud of all her children, including her son who has an IEP and is a part of the Gifted & Talented program at his school. She is also a loving grandmother to a 7-year-old granddaughter.

Table 2

Participant Profiles

Celeste

Woman	School Leader	Mother
Age: 43	Current Position: Assistant Director for Special Education	One daughter
Relationship Status: Divorced	Supports: 35 schools & programs	Age: 12 years old
Raised by grandparents	Students served: Over 26,000; 75% Black	Daughter has special needs (dyslexia; ADHD)
Teaching was a 2nd career	Years in Education: 20	Daughter also in a Gifted & Talented Program
First career in Marketing	Years in Leadership: 10	

Ms. Brooklyn

Woman	School Leader	Mother
Age: 37	Current Position: Assistant Principal	Two children (1 son; 1 daughter)
Relationship Status: Engaged	Charter High School	Ages: 6 & 2 years old
	Students served: 432; ~ 97% Black	Son attended an African-centered Montessori

	Years in Education: 15	Son & daughter stayed with an aunt while parents worked
	Years in Leadership: 9	

VitaButtafly

Woman	School Leader	Mother
Age: 49	Current Position: Assistant Principal at K - 5	Three children (2 girls, 1 son)
Relationship Status: Divorced	Traditional Public School	Ages: 30, 19, 12
Only child	Students served: 305; 34% Black	Has a 7-year-old granddaughter
Was a student at the middle school where her mom worked	Years in Education: 24	Son is a published author
	Years in Leadership: 4	Son has an IEP and is in a Gifted & Talented program

Dani

Woman	School Leader	Mother
Age: 30 - 40 Relationship Status: Married	Current Position: Principal Supports: Charter 6th - 12thGrade School	Two children (2 girls) Age: 18 & 8
Started a nonprofit to support the community	Students served: 520; 98 % Black	One daughter is Gifted & has ADHD
Has a catering business with husband	Years in Education: 20	
Always wanted to be a teacher	Years in Leadership: 5	
Raised primarily by her dad	Certified: Special Education; Masters in School Counseling	

The themes that emerged highlight and address the research questions examining the lived experiences of Black women caring for and leading Black children as both mothers and school leaders. Van Manen (2016) describes theme formulation as a “simplification” that we come up with and “immediately feel that it somehow falls short, an inadequate summary of the notion” (p. 87). To describe the themes more sufficiently as they materialized in this study, more details and specific quotations from the participants are used along with the photographs they provided which illustrated the experience for them.

All the women discussed the ways in which they support Black children and families as “othermothers”. This looked like acknowledging students and families in a motherly way, offering encouragement and thinking about them even when they are not at school. An additional emerging theme that all participants discussed was advocating for Black children and families. This looked differently for each woman but included actively reassuring parents and children to use their voices during meetings, promoting the use of mental health services or getting students to embrace their Blackness. A third theme that developed was the idea of professional authenticity. Participants each detailed a process of embracing their authentic selves in their work with Black children and families and shared the importance they felt for themselves, their children or the communities they work with.

The othermothering, advocating and exemplifying of professional authenticity all reinforce the deep connection to students and families that the participants recognized. The women spoke of a strong desire to create experiences for Black children and families that matched what they wanted for themselves and their children in schools. They felt a responsibility to ensure that they were not recreating but rather challenging systems of marginalization. This responsibility led to the final emerging theme which unfolded from the participants as they uncovered the phenomena of caring for and leading Black children. Each woman discussed the difficulty of finding balance in their intersectional identities as Black women, mothers and school leaders.

Theme 1: Othermothering

In her chapter, Shifting the Center: Race, Class, and Feminist Theorizing about Motherhood, Collins (1994) highlights the importance that “motherwork”, or the individual and collective effort taken by women to create and maintain family life for their children and others, plays in the survival of communities of color (p. 47). Research describes “othermothers" as women who aid bloodmothers by sharing the mothering responsibilities and play an integral role in supporting those mothers and their children (Case, 1997; Collins, 2005). While participants did not use the word “othermother”, they each described multiple ways in which they served the role of “othermother” in their school settings and engaged in motherwork to support their students. For example, as a Special Education teacher, Celeste described her relationship with her students saying,

> I love on them when they are with me, even when there’s snot coming down their face and they’ve torn up my room. At the end of the day, I would always come home and reflect and have a glass of wine and say, what can I do tomorrow?

Cabral and Horsford (2021) describe othermothering as “in essence the practice of Black women caring for Black children as if they were their own” (p. 45). This sentiment of “my babies” or “my kids” was also repeated when discussing students at the high school as well as elementary level. Ms. Brooklyn, who joined the school when her seniors were freshman in the school added,

> They’re my babies. I’m the momma bear for 12th grade. I don’t have any data points to say this, I just know how it feels. I’ve been with them since 9th grade. The families know me, they know who to call… And not only do they see me as a mother figure, but I also

> see them as my children. I want for them what I want for my son. I want them to have great lessons. I want them to have great teachers in front of them. I want them to be on time to their classes. I don't treat them in a way that I wouldn't treat my own children.

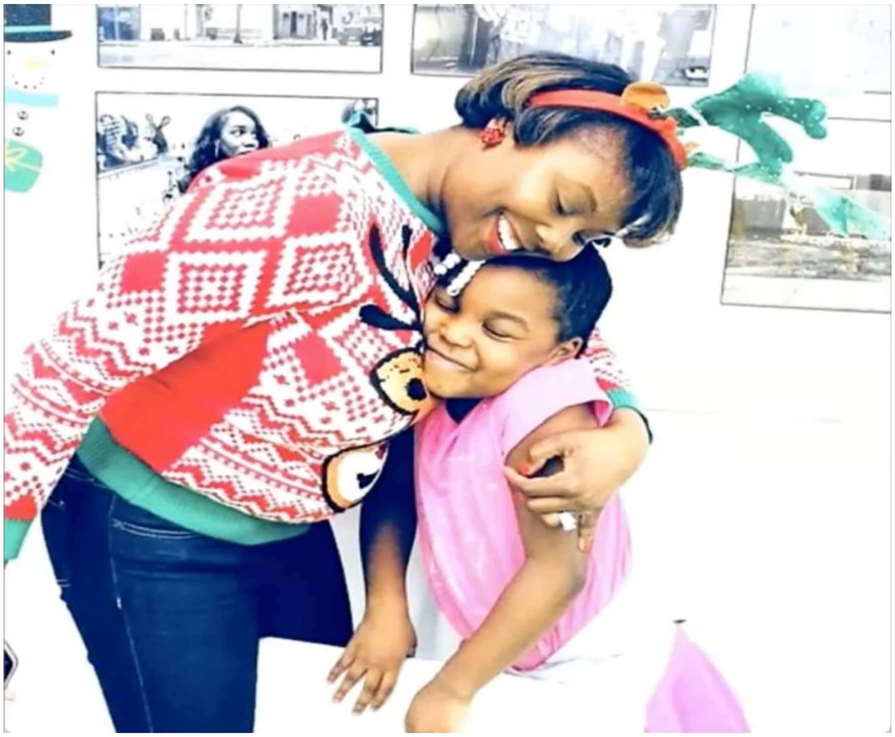
This protective aspect of othermothering as a school leader was shared by multiple participants, especially when describing the feelings, they receive when seeing teachers inappropriately disciplining Black children. Dani explained it this way,

> I become mother. I'm not principal when I'm at work. And when I see them [teachers] being a certain way with them [students], those motherly instincts kick in. It's a gift and a curse. Because I don't like to take it personally, but I take it personally. Like, don't ever get in a little girl's face, yelling and screaming. Don't do that because I see that as my child. And I want you to understand that you wouldn't want anyone to talk to your child like that. I take it extremely personal because I'm looking at that like, That's my daughter. And I wouldn't want anybody talking to my daughter that way. I wouldn't want them to not care that she's just sitting over there crying. No, I'm going to stop what I'm doing and show up for these girls.

Dani's commitment to othermothering was also illustrated through the selection of her photo seen in Figure 4. She shared that the student in the photo was the recipient of a Barbie dream house through Dani's nonprofit and was ecstatic to receive her gift. Dani recalled the little girl giving her a huge hug and saying, "This is the best day of my life". During our conversation, I called Dani's attention to the idea that this picture could have been one of her and her daughter. There is so much love, warmth and safety embodied in the image as Dani wraps her arms around this Black child who is not her child but could be.

Figure 4

Dani's Illustration of Leading and Mothering Black Children



Participants shared that as administrators, they were often viewed and treated as othermothers not only by the students, but also by families and teachers. All four participants shared stories of their students' parents feeling better, reassured and relieved during and after interactions with them. And Celeste shared this on her mothering interactions with staff and teachers,

> I have noticed that, and this is not me tooting my own horn, but the staff gravitates towards me when they need that reassurance. When they need a moment to be able to get themselves together. When they need guidance. "I know I'm supposed to be calling this person, but I really just want to talk to you about it because you seem so level headed".

While Celeste appreciated that recognition from the adults, not all the participants felt the same about the way this role of othermother thrust upon them by staff. Ms. Brooklyn was quick to clarify that she does not want the role of “mom” to her staff, instead preferring that they “get they shit together”.

Theme 2: Advocating

The second finding that emerged from this study on the lived experiences of Black mothers and school leaders was advocacy. Watson & Bailey (2021) argue that the advocacy that Black women engage in is a form of school leadership that is vital towards the physical survival, power and identity of Black children. These ideals of advancing and uplifting various sections of traditionally marginalized groups, were shared by the participants, though they did not narrow their advocacy solely to the children. For example, as a Director of Special Education, Celeste spent a lot of time sharing the importance of getting Black parents to advocate for themselves and their children. Her passion evident in the way her usually calm and collected voice would raise in excitement.

> I think that it’s interesting because our Black families know less about how to advocate for their children properly. They don’t strong arm the district into getting whatever they want and need. Our families are sitting at the table with no knowledge, no backing, no advocate to be able to speak to. I know I used to take a lot of time in meetings to say, “Mom, let me hear from you. Do you understand? There’s a lot of information that we’re sharing with you right now. Do you have any questions?” And very often they wouldn’t, but I would stop and give them an opportunity to know that you can [ask questions], you are part of this. You have a voice. I want you to use your voice.

Dani advocated heavily for the benefits and importance of counseling. In addition to her teaching and leadership certifications, she also completed a Master’s in School Counseling and expressed a strong desire to “break generational curses around therapy” in the Black community. One significant moment that illustrated the phenomena of leading and caring for Black children as a Black woman and mother involved her advocating for therapy with a father of one of her seniors. Her approach to supporting the student aligned to Epstein's revised beliefs of the significance of the family, school and community in helping students learn and grow.

> I've had a student who is struggling with grief but had never been to a therapist. Had lost her grandmother and lived with her dad. When she talked with me about it, I connected her with our social worker and gave her some resources. We had another conversation about 2 weeks afterwards and I said, "How did it go? Did you set up everything?" And she said, "Well, when I took it to my dad, he said nothing is wrong with me and that we don't need that".
>
> When I had the conversation with the dad, he ended up breaking down to me. Like, full blown breaking down. He said, "This [parenting] is hard. It's just me." And I said to him, "Dad, it's okay. I know this. This is why I'm saying that you need this [therapy]." And, I was vulnerable and shared, I wouldn't be telling you to do something that I'm not doing.

Dani went on to share how proud she was of herself that day for being vulnerable and building strong relationships with families and students. She embodied the belief that families and communities are valuable resources needed to effectively support Black children. She also reflected that she herself wished that someone had shared this same type of support with her dad when she experienced the loss of her mom from the home at age 10. Her contemplative pause emphasized the insight she received in that reflection and aligned with Bass (2012) which identified the personal connection Black school leaders have addressing injustice because of their own experiences with suffering.

Ms. Brooklyn promoted Black pride in her words and actions. Each interview occurred with her in her school office, a small, intimate room transformed with a beautiful soothing blue light and walls covered in Black art and Kente cloth. Though not visible to me, Ms. Brooklyn described having pictures of inspirational Black voices such as Zora Neal Hurston, Marcus Garvey and James Baldwin decorating the space. She advocated for Black pride in a way that exuded not only visually, but as she shared, the students called her office, "a vibe". She referred to students as “Queens”, “Kings” and spoke of one student who greets her every day with “Good morning, Black Excellence” when he sees her. This aligned with Valenzuela (1999) as she intentionally incorporated issues of race and difference into focus. Additionally, Ms. Brooklyn shared the experience of getting students to advocate for their Black pride as well.

> I had another interaction with a student where he came to me and said he had said something [in class] and used the wrong subject-verb agreement. The teacher addressed him saying, “How do you sound saying that? And he did not like it and wanted to be able to tell her that he did not like it and how it made him feel. And we discussed it, and I was like, “One point that you should share with her is that her ancestors brought your ancestors here out of their will and then refused to teach them the language so initially this was not our tongue. So, if we’re not using [the correct] subject-verb agreement, it’s because we taught ourselves this language.” And you know I had to break that kind of message down with him. But I live for moments like that. I live for those teachable moments about Blackness.

Cooper (2007) argues that Black mothers engage in motherwork through their choice of schooling for their children. She describes it as a form of political resistance. Ms. Brooklyn embodied that spirit as a school leader and as a mother. She chose for him to attend an all-Black Montessori school because she needed him to have the “same nurturing, Black mothering that I give to the students at this school. I wanted to him to be confident in his Blackness”.

VitaButtafly spoke of advocating strongly for everyone beginning when she was young. As a child, she shared a story of being responsible for taking her grandmother to the bank on the military base to cash checks. Her grandmother was illiterate as she had to drop out in elementary school. She shared,

> “As a little girl, I was responsible for helping her count her money when she cashed the check. And I remember her standing in line and when a White person would come up, she would back up. And as a little girl, I did not get it. So, years and years of doing this and this one time I was a little bit older, and I asked her, “Grandma, why do you move out of the way when White people come to the line?” And she explained it. I remember sitting outside eating a hot dog at the stand and she was talking to me about it. I said [in my mind], grandma is not getting out of this line anymore. Something about this idea was not right. So, weeks later, we come to get into the line, and I said, “Grandma, no.”

That was the last time that she and her grandmother would step back for a White person (not in uniform) in line. Since then, Vita has worked to ensure that that same spirit of advocacy and fighting for what is right is found in her children, especially her youngest daughter who attends rallies, protests and is known to be vocal about social injustice.

Theme 3: Professional Authenticity

Research has shown that Black women are more than 1.5 times more likely to be sent home from work because of their hair and 80% have shared that they have had to change their hair from its natural state to fit in at work (Carter, 2021). The CROWN Act of 2020 prohibits discrimination based on a person's hair texture or hair style and has been signed into law by multiple states. Though none of the participants specifically mentioned this law, they did all bring up wanting to be seen as their authentic selves as part of this phenomena of leading and caring for Black children as a Black woman. Interestingly, they, along with myself, all wear their hair in natural styles. The emerging theme of professional authenticity describes the way that the school leaders unapologetically and intentionally embraced their identities while maintaining their professionalism with stakeholders. Ms. Brooklyn explained her professional authenticity in this way,

> I'm intentional about my appearance. I'm intentional about how they [students] see me. I'm intentional about the styles in my hair. I'm intentional about how I speak to them [students]. I'm intentional about when it's time to teach them moments of advocacy or moments of history."

She read a note she had received from one of her Black female students which highlighted why this intentionality in her professional role is important. The note, included below, underscored the lens in which this student viewed Ms. Brooklyn using words such as "power" and "successful" to describe what she saw.

> Thank you, Ms. <Brooklyn> for the incredibly long hours you spend trying to make sure that each and every one of us has an amazing senior year. You are the perfect split image of a successful Black woman, taking initiative and power every time, you walk through the door. So beautiful and full of life. If no one else told you, I will. Thank you.

As a member of the community she leads, Dani's interviews included multiple examples of professional authenticity. She explained,

> I'm into a lot of the things that they [students] are. Like, my style of dress. Different things where you can still carry yourself like a professional and still be you. So, that's the main thing that I'm trying to get across to them. You can't let anyone dictate to you who and what you're supposed to be because I feel like I've gotten where I've gotten because I'm me. My speech may not always be as articulate but I'm still the principal of this school. I'm passionate. I love it. I love that I can be me. This is what you all get. I'm not going to talk different. I'm not going to change my appearance. I'm not going to change who I am because that does not take away from the job that I can get done.

Celeste discussed the way that she has had to overcome biases that have been a challenge to her ability to be authentic throughout her career as a Black school leader and mother.

> People have commented on the way that I present [facilitating meetings] and some people have said, "I was intimidated by you and your knowledge". And that's probably been the biggest challenge or barrier is breaking through that so that people can see the authentic me. Just really embracing who I am and being confident as a Black woman. We have to have that confidence. We have to lead consciously knowing that there is both explicit and implicit bias in America today and that it exists.…when implicit bias is carried, it impacts in a way that it can change the trajectory of another human being. I think we have to be more conscious about that."

Part of the professional authenticity is knowing when to change how you approach a person or situation. For example, Ms. Brooklyn offered that when speaking with difficult parents, she strategically drops her "professional tone" and engages in more "familial" conversation when needed.

> I just talk regular. I wasn't in my professional tone. And I was able to be like, Imma keep it real with you. And my mannerisms, I was able to shift and do those things with them. I'm also from the neighborhood. I'm from <city>, I understand the neighborhood. I'm able to recall streets. So, you mean over there by the Game Stop. It gets familial because I am familiar with the space and I also… I oscillated out of my professional talk to my regular, I need to be real with you about your baby right now.

Theme 4: Deep Connection to Students and Families

Another theme identified as essential in this phenomenon is the deep connection to the students and families that the participants reflected on. This is different, but adjacent, to the othermothering or advocating that the participants shared. Van Manen (2016) argues that hermeneutic phenomenology "encourages a certain attentive awareness to the details and seemingly trivial dimensions of our everyday educational lives" (p.8). During the interviews, the participants spoke not only of the relationships they felt to students and their families, but how much that connection reflected on their own intersectional identities and how much they see themselves in them. Celeste articulated this experience when sharing her selected photo in Figure 5. In this illustration, Celeste's daughter is seen traversing a ropes course while walking on a beam. Celeste describes this intersectionality saying,

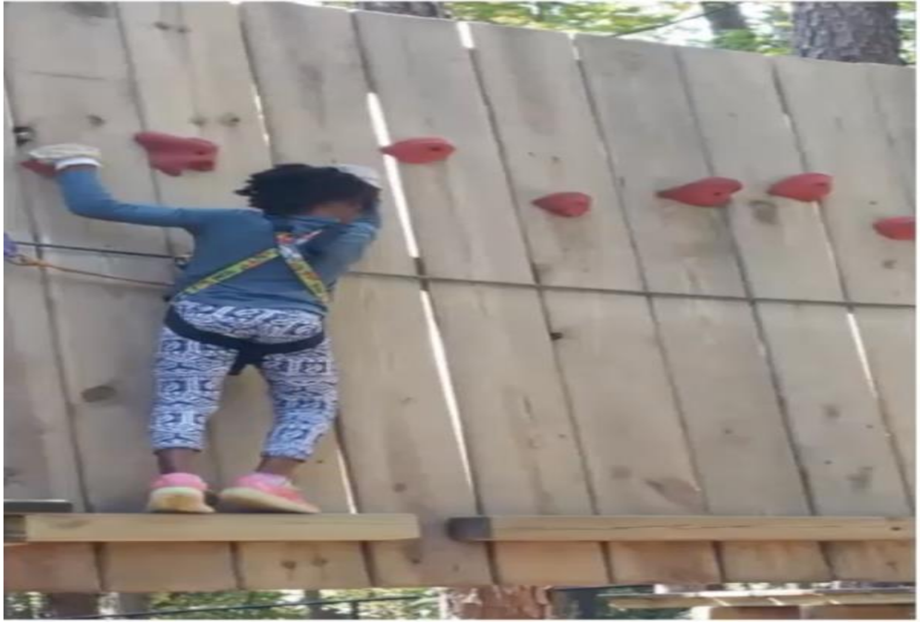
> One part of it is, she is me. And that beam that she walks on is the beam of society that I feel like we, as Black women, have to walk on. And the part where she is hanging on and still climbing it, is the perseverance of the intersectionality. And so, I thought this was perfect in that, we are balancing on this balance beam but still climbing. It's like, we're not gonna let go of this. An earthquake can come and I'm going to hang on for dear life.

Celeste went on to reflect on the pride that she and her daughter exhibited when seeing her successfully complete his difficult task. The deep connection is highlighted in her initial statement when her use of pronouns shifts from "she is me" to "Black women" to "we". This interchanging language used when describing the photo implies an understanding that Black children are not only extensions of us, but often serve as mirrors replaying experiences we ourselves have had. Dani reiterated this sentiment stating,

> I know a lot of times, we always told the girls that they need to go to college and get out of <city>. [But] I'm an example of what it's like to be from <city> and still be successful. And so, I have now embraced that and let them see, I'm here. I'm from here just like you all. I also attended an all-girls school. I went through public education and so, it's okay to still be from here and you can still be somebody from here.

Figure 5

Celeste's Illustration of Leading and Mothering Black Children

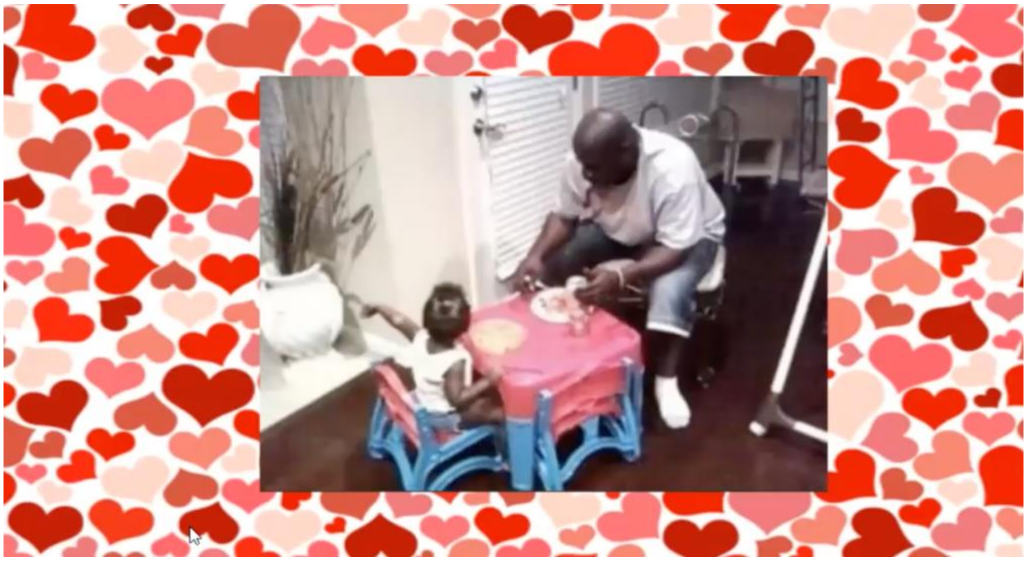


Love (2019) describes the concept of "spirit murdering" as acts of trauma that leave personal, psychological, and spiritual injuries on children (p. 38). By seeing themselves in the children, the participants are intentionally uplifting the spirits of Black children to ensure that they are feeling supported. VitaButtafly echoed this experience using her chosen photograph in Figure 6. In the photograph, her toddler daughter is sitting at a child's table eating dinner as her dad sits across from her and eats his dinner. Vita explained that this daddy-daughter time was something that her husband held sacred for their daughter. When asked to share why this picture made her "boo hoo cry" when she took it, she said,

> It was important for me because I never got that, what she is getting right here in this picture. I cannot ever remember a time sitting down and eating with my dad. Ever. And having a conversation. My dad and I would, if he had to pick me up and take me somewhere, it would be really quick car conversations. But not, "let me hear you out". And I know she's young here, only two, but the fact that he would listen. It didn't matter to him if he understood what she was saying. And I wish I had that but never did. So, I think it's important.

Figure 6

VitaButtafly's Illustration of Leading and Mothering Black Children



Ms. Brooklyn discussed this connection from the standpoint of relating to the parents in her school. She discussed an upcoming parent meeting that she has with two parents whose children have been getting into small scuffles. Though the two girls were not in trouble, she called the meeting with the parents to discuss the situation with them in the hopes of preventing a larger scale incident. She discussed her planned approach as to how she would conduct the meeting and said,

> I’m going to start with the anecdote of when a teacher called me and let me know that my son had been hit in the face with a towel. I was ready for war. Just know, I know that feeling. I know and I need them to know that every mother at this table feels the same way about their baby. And I think, starting off with an anecdote like that will help to get them in a space to listen to each other and find out what’s going on.

This sort of proactive and understanding approach that Ms. Brooklyn implements with parents illustrates the way she would want for her interactions at schools. Throughout my interviews my understanding of this theme deepened to include the idea that the participants not only see themselves in Black children and parents, but also develop a deeper connection with them.

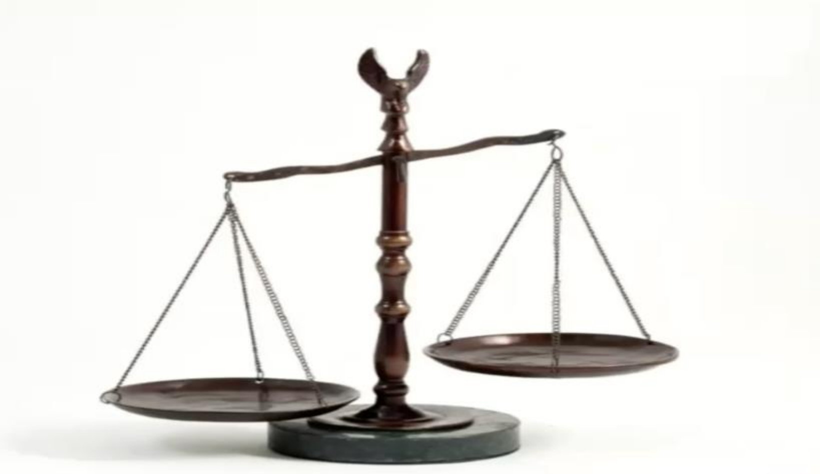
Theme 5: Finding Balance

Between advocating and supporting others as othermothers, exemplifying professional authenticity and developing deep connections with students and families, all four women discussed the tension they feel as they try to balance their roles as mothers and school leaders to Black children. They all mentioned the difficulty of caring for and leading Black children as a Black woman. Ms. Brooklyn summed it up as “hard as hell” and utilized her photograph (Figure 7) to illustrate the role this juggling act plays in her day-to-day, sharing,

> It is a constant juggling of the scales tipping. If I had to put a name on it, I’d say often if my family life is down, then my work life is up. When my work life is up, my family is down. You know? They oscillate. I’ve never had it at an equilibrium where I feel successful in both spaces [at the same time].

Figure 7

Ms. Brooklyn's Illustration of Leading and Mothering Black Children



Dani, a high school principal, echoed this sentiment explaining the strain she has felt recently from her oldest daughter who is currently a senior in high school. Her daughter has expressed her frustration about her perceived lack of her mother's time. Dani disclosed her feelings sharing,

> It's just a lot. I'm getting a lot of, "You care about them more than you care about me" and it hurts. It hurts really bad. Because I'm trying to convince her, that's not what it is. You are my priority. You are who I'm going to show up for in so many ways.

Celeste reiterated this message when discussing her daughter. "She's my priority. I have to give her what I expect educators to give all children. And I think that sometimes we pour so much into others that we don't have the energy to pour into our own children".

This imbalance also appears to take a toll on the other participants as well. VitaButtafly expressed that she constantly feels like she's "not doing enough" and tells herself that she has to do "more" to support children and families. Ms. Brooklyn shared that she has been feeling "unsuccessful as a mom" because her son is behind on his reading level while she is "putting so much into other people's kids". In those moments of self-reflection as a leader and mother to

Black children, she shared, “I gotta stop and really be more into my own child. Both my children.” And Celeste explained,

> Even when I’m not feeling well, my mind is on my kids. I was up two nights this week thinking about staff and students. Just because of all of the things that are going on in the schools. And so, I have to balance that with being on for my own child. I can’t put so much into it that when I get home, I’m checked out. I’ve done that … if I’m leaving this house and giving 110%, then there are times when I need to give her 110%.

Three of the women shared that they achieve balance through keeping work and home separate as much as possible. For Ms. Brooklyn, she implemented this rule when she began to have children.

> I’m very disciplined about when I am at work, versus when I am not at work. I don’t mix the two. When I go home, I’m home. When I’m at work, I’m at work. My phone might be on when I’m at work, but I have a work phone and a personal phone. No one at work has my personal number. So, it’s easy to turn off their access to me. I’ve been disciplined about that since day one. Once I had kids, I stopped bringing work home. Because I can’t do it at home. And it’s not fair. I don’t want to be that parent that’s like, at work all day, and then gotta come home and work, too. It’s not fair. And it’s too much. Once I get home, putting them kids to bed, feeding them and stuff, I’m tired. I am tired. Especially since I’ve had kids, I rarely bring this laptop home”.

Love (2019) identified the fight for abolitionist teaching as welcoming a “struggle”. This idea was reiterated in this emerging theme of finding balance as the leaders have embraced the battle to create school experiences for Black children that align with their desires for their own children.

5 DISCUSSION

The phenomenon of interest in this study was the lived experiences of Black women who identify as mothers and school leaders to Black children. This chapter will present: 1) a brief review of the study, 2) a discussion of the relevance and implications of this work on the field of educational leadership, including recommendations for future research, and 3) personal reflections, including how I have changed as I gathered, filtered, bracketed and crystalized the data. This study was motivated by my experiences of feeling silenced and unimportant as both a mother and school leader, while simultaneously knowing that my understanding of being a Black child in America has given me vital insight into the needs of Black children.

This study applied the hermeneutic circle to semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation from four Black women who currently serve as school leaders and mothers to Black children. This involved gaining new insights about the phenomenon by “moving from the whole to the details and back to the whole, with input of experience and contextual interpretations along the way” (Målqvist, 2015, p. 2). By reading the individual sections of participant’s interviews, filtering their descriptions of the phenomenon through my own knowledge and experience, I gained a new interpretation that I then compared to the meaning of the participant’s whole experience. Understanding is more than “merely re-creating someone else’s meaning” (Laverty, 2003), thus, I similarly compared the individual participant’s experiences to the whole group’s experiences of the phenomenon. The five themes that emerged to illustrate this phenomenon included, Othermothering, Advocating, Professional Authenticity, Deep Connection to the Students and Families and Finding Balance.

Discussion of Findings

The Black women in this study indicated a strong commitment to caring for and leading their students in the way that they would have wanted for themselves and their own children. Khalifa (2018) contends that school leaders can only lead anti-oppressive education “if they recognize the oppression in its current iteration” (p. 52). I argue that one of the current iterations of educational oppression is in the ways we discount the care needed by Black children to be successful; care that is provided by Black women as school leaders and as mothers. Noddings (1984) states, “Caring involves stepping out of one’s own personal frame of reference into the other’s. When we care, we consider the other’s point of view, his objective needs, and what he expects of us. Our attention, our mental engrossment is on the cared-for, not on ourselves. (p. 24). Not acknowledging the ways that Black women support and boost their children’s educational experiences reinforces rather than challenges the marginalization of Black children. As a counternarrative to the idea that Black women do not care or have little to offer to Black children in terms of success in school, the women in this study showed an intense level of care that honored the Black children, their families, and the community.

As Black women who have faced their own experiences of feeling ignored or uncared for due to intersectional racist and sexist beliefs, they are more aware of and intentionally provide Black children with a protective and supportive stance which serves as a stark contrast to the anti-Blackness found intentionally and inadvertently in a White, male dominated society. While this does not mean that only Black women can provide the support and protection called upon to lead anti-oppressive education, it does suggest that it comes as intentional practices from some Black women perhaps due to having similar experiences in society. For example, VitaButtafly’s experiences in the bank preventing her grandmother from allowing White people to skip them in line left a lasting impression of her advocating for herself and her grandmother. Highlighting the practices and experiences of Black women who are mothers and leaders does not negate the positive impact held by many other groups but centering this work through the lens of Black women who serve as leaders and mothers to Black children, could produce remarkably different ideas around what it takes to successfully lead and mother Black children.

Initially entering this work, my presumptions about the lived experience of Black women who identify as school leaders and mothers to Black children would center around ways to bridge families and staff together. Though this idea did come up, the toll that this lived experience takes on the women became more evident the more I deepened my understanding. While this could have been more evident because of stress related to the COVID pandemic, Griffin (2013) found that Black faculty members indicated that working with Black students involves extra time and energy, including additional academic development, engagement in students’ personal lives and providing psychosocial support for students. Findings in this study were congruent with Griffin’s study, in that participants all mentioned the constraints placed on them as they tried to balance mothering and leading Black children and expressed being mentally and or emotionally tired. The intersectionality of being Black women, mothers, and school leaders weighs heavy on the participants leaving them feeling “tired”, “unsuccessful” as moms, and like they are not doing enough to help Black children. By continuing to ignore the knowledge and expertise that these women bring to successfully leading and caring for Black children, we are depriving the field of their expertise. Furthermore, we are magnifying the fatigue these women experience thereby losing out on the mothering, advocating and support they offer to the students, their families, and the staff.

At the same time as recent attacks by Conservatives on the concept of Critical Race Theory have led to bans on any disagreeable racial concepts such as White privilege, or bias or systemic inequities. Black students like Izzy Tichenor and their families continue to experience schools that are unsafe for them. This 10-year-old child with Autism, attended a Utah elementary school where she encountered racist bullying by students and teachers and an administration unwilling to address those concerns (Joseph, 2021). This child took her own life and as a Black school leader my heart broke for both the racial trauma that Izzy lived through, and the helplessness felt by her mother who relied on the school to care for her child *in loco parentis*.

In loco parentis, Latin meaning “in place of a parent”, refers to the legal responsibility that an individual or organizations, such as schools, assume when entrusted with minor children. Stuart (2010) argues that while the responsibilities *in loco parentis* should be understood to include supporting, protecting, and disciplining children, our public schools and courts have focused almost solely on the disciplinary aspect of parenting and is “no longer appropriate to the modern needs of public education” (p. 970). However, the participants in this study as Black mothers and school leaders embodied all aspects of *in loco parentis,* including the expectations that Black parents have of supporting and protecting Black children from internalizing negative biases meant to either explicitly or implicitly imply an anti-Black sentiment.

The participants illustrated *in loco parentis* in several ways. By serving as othermothers and advocating for the children and families, these Black women created deep connections built on trust and a sense of care that counteracts the dominant discourse of the Black community. Additionally, the participants’ willingness to show up with professional authenticity supported the connections built, as they felt confident and were aware of when to shift their communication with Black students and families to be heard. Ms. Brooklyn described this as talking “regular” and “familial”. However, taking on the role of *in loco parentis* appears to also take its toll on the participants as both leaders and mothers to Black children. The women not only discussed the physical challenges of balancing motherhood and school leadership, but also spoke of the emotional and mental toll as they discussed feeling “unsuccessful”, “tired”, like they should be doing “more” and generally unaware of the support they provide to others. By not acknowledging and uplifting these contributions, schools are ignoring valuable discussion on ways that school leaders can create more equitable, safe, and successful school buildings for Black children around the country. Black scholar and author Lerone Bennett, Jr. is quoted as saying, “An educator in a system of oppression is either a revolutionary or an oppressor” and Collins (2016) asserts that women of color engage in motherwork because they realize that “individual survival, empowerment, and identity require group survival, empowerment, and identity” (p. 47). Findings of this study suggest that an essential aspect of leading and caring for Black children is empowering and supporting them and their caregivers to challenge the dominant discourse, but recognition of the price that burden has on Black mothers and school leaders introduces larger implications.

Implications

Benson & Fiarman (2019) argue that school leaders are better equipped to address racial inequalities when they understand their history and how racial bias continues to influence student outcomes (p. 8). I contend that the intersectional identities of the participants as Black women, mothers, and school leaders to Black children, have better equipped them not only because they understand the history, but because they have lived that history since childhood. They have a unique perspective and provide invaluable insight about a sector of Black mothers who also have developmental and pedagogical knowledge from their years as educators and school leaders.

Research has shown the critical role that principals and school leaders play in creating communities that are nurturing, safe and challenge students to engage in academically rigorous instruction (Hammond, 2015; Khalifa, 2018). A part of creating this environment in schools with Black children involves actively addressing the anti-Black sentiment they encounter throughout their schooling experience.

According to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015), effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being (Standard 3). Furthermore, Standard 5 highlights the expectation that educational leaders also cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, 2015). To adequately prepare leaders to "move the needle on student learning and achieve more equitable outcomes in schools" (p. 1), leadership preparation programs need to intentionally expose leaders to the perspectives, experiences, and strategies implemented by women like the participants in this study to connect deeply and authentically with children and families in marginalized communities.

As concepts such as Critical Race Theory attempt to emphasize the impact that racism, bias, and anti-Black attitudes have on the Black community, schools and school leaders have a responsibility to familiarize themselves with these experiences, their impact on families and children, and concrete strategies to support and empower them to advocate for themselves.

Van Manen (2016) argues that one of the goals of phenomenological research is to help people to "become more fully who we are" (p. 12). While Black women are not a monolithic entity, the experience of internalizing racialized understandings of power, support and identity became more evident throughout the study. These understandings fueled the participants to provide specific support and advocacy that deserves further examination and implementation into the educational leadership literature.

Suggestions for Further Research

During my search, I found few studies focused on Black women as school leaders or mothers and fewer still focused on the intersectionality that they navigate as they care for and lead Black children. This study explicates a deeper understanding of their lived experience as caregivers and leaders, and future research should incorporate an opportunity for a focus group with these participants. Davis (1981) reveals the significance Black women placed on gathering in the 19th century to "come together to decide upon a strategy of resistance to the current propagandistic assaults on Black women" (p. 133). A focus group would potentially provide participants a space to receive support, encouragement, and reinforcement to continue addressing the historical and current context of marginalized children and families. At a minimum, the addition of a focus group would offer more data that would be used to further uncover their lived experience.

Moreover, though the participants shared their experiences, future research into this topic should include observations to the data collection process. Capturing observations of the participants with their child(ren) and at schools where they serve as administrators could generate additional strategies that other school leaders could implement as they lead Black children. Though the link between student achievement and educational leadership has been researched (Witziers et. al., 2003), more quantitative studies are needed to further solidify and understand the connection between the two, regardless of the social construct of the leader or the children. However, a quantitative method of assessing the impact of these Black female leaders on the student achievement of Black students would potentially increase support for the notion that these leaders have valuable expertise that should be further developed.

Personal Reflections

Conducting this study during the twin COVID and racial discrimination pandemics involved a level of difficulty that I did not expect to experience. Research has shown the significant impact of discrimination on the health and well-being of people of color (Addo, 2020). During this time, my own mental health and well-being were challenged as I learned of and endured my own experiences of Black children in schools across the country. Learning of incidents such as Anthony Thompson, Jr., a 17-year-old Black child killed in the restroom of his Knoxville, TN school (Smith, 2021) or Isaiah Elliot, a 12-year-old, Black child suspended by a Colorado district and visited by police for playing with a bright blue and orange toy Nerf gun in his bedroom during virtual art class (Helmore, 2020), undoubtedly influenced the way I interpreted the data for this study.

Van Manen (2016) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a critical philosophy of action, because engaging in the level of reflection required “deepens thought and therefore radicalizes thinking and the acting that flows from it” (p. 154). This conclusion aligns with my experience as I not only deepened my understanding of the phenomenon of leading and mothering Black children as a Black woman, but the process also evolved my understanding of the phenomenon and the importance. My fore-sight about Black mothers and school leaders prior to investigating this phenomenon lay primarily in the idea of using their voices to address the needs of the Black children and parents who may be unaware and unable to fight oppressive and inequitable tactics for themselves. My initial voice memo and much of the original ideas for why

I wanted to study this topic centered on Black women and school leaders connecting families with schools by increasing parent engagement and involvement in schools with Black children.

Connecting schools and homes was still a large part of the phenomenon as evidenced by the themes of othermothering and advocating. However, another essential aspect of the essence that emerged was the parallel concern about the toll this intersectionality has on Black women. Though the women all articulated feelings of being “tired”, feeling like they are “always on”, and feeling “unsuccessful” at being a mom, the conversations did not dwell on COVID as being the impetus for this exhaustion. This surprised me as stress from the pandemic has placed unprecedented pressure on people around the world, including myself. However, listening to them share how unsuccessful they felt as mothers and school leaders helped me to discern the extent to which the essence of caring for and leading Black children has extracted a heavy demand on them.

This idea led me to my illustration for the essence of leading and caring for Black children as a Black mother and school leader. I selected a picture (see Figure 8) of my three children taken two years ago. In the picture, my son is draped by his younger sisters on either side of him. They are grinning, genuinely happy, looking adorable with a huge bow, purple braids, and without a care in the world. It is revolutionary in a world of anti-Black rhetoric to raise happy Black children. In her book, *We Want to Do More than Survive,* Bettina Love (2019) highlights how crucial joy is when fighting for social change stating, “Finding joy in the midst of pain and trauma is the fight to be fully human” (p. 119). Navigating my identities as a Black mother, and school leader to Black children has not been an easy journey, but our children deserve to smile, and I will continue to fight.

Figure 8

My Illustration of Leading and Mothering Black Children

SAY IT LIKE YOU MEME IT
Just Chill
GLITTER ON

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent

Georgia State University
Informed Consent

Title: Intersections: Black female school leaders' lived experiences of leading and mothering Black children
Principal Investigator: Dr. Sheryl Cowart Moss
Student Principal Investigator: Rolandria Justice-Emenuga

Introduction and Key Information

You are invited to take part in a research study. It is up to you to decide if you would like to take part in the study.

The purpose of this study is to unpack the lived experiences of Black mothers and school leaders and highlight the ways that they care for and lead Black children.

Your role in the study will last five hours over eight (8) weeks.

You will be asked to do the following: participate in three, 45 – 60-minute, semi-structured individual interviews with the Student Principal Investigator, one, 60-90-minute focus group meeting with the other participants and provide at least one photograph illustrating what it means to mother and lead Black children. Participating in this study may cause you to experience some negative feelings as you share your lived experiences as a Black mother and leader.

This study is not designed to benefit you. Overall, we hope to gain information about ways to better support Black children through highlighting the experiences of Black mothers and school leaders.

Purpose

The purpose of the study is to better understand what it means to lead and care for Black children by centering the experiences of Black mothers and school leaders. You are invited to take part in this research study because you identify as a Black mother and school leader to Black children. A total of eight people will be invited to take part in this study.

Procedures

If you decide to take part, you will participate in three, semi-structured individual interviews with the Student Principal Investigator. These interviews can be held via a secure online platform at a time of your choosing and will last 60 - 75 minutes. You will also participate in a focus group meeting with other participants in the study. This meeting will also be held over a secure online platform and will last 60 – 90 minutes. During this focus group, you will be asked to share at least one photograph illustrating what it means to you to lead and mother Black children as a Black mother and school leader. Study participation will span two months.

- SI will contact participant to schedule interview(s). Interviews will be held using a secure online platform and will be video recorded and secured on a password-protected computer, locked in a cabinet that only the SI has access to.
- Participant will be individually interviewed three separate times. Each of those interviews will take 60 -75 minutes.
- Participant will also engage in a focus group meeting with the other participants in the study. This meeting will be held via a secure online platform and will be video recorded

and secured on a password-protected computer, locked in a cabinet that only the SI has access to.

- This focus group meeting would happen one time and last 60 to 90 minutes of time. During this focus group meeting, the participant will be asked to share at least one photograph that best illustrates what it means to care for and lead Black children as a Black mother and school leader.
- In total, the interviews will take no more than five hours of the participant's time and last no more than two months.

Activity	**Time Involved**	**When**
Individual Interview #1	60 - 75 minutes	Week 1
Individual Interview #2	60 - 75 minutes	Week 3
Individual Interview #3	60 - 75 minutes	Week 5
Focus group participation	90 minutes	Week 8

Future Research

Researchers will remove information that may identify you and may use your data for future research. If we do this, we will not ask for any additional consent from you.

Risks

There is the possibility that participation in this study may cause you to experience negative feelings as you share your lived experiences. To prevent this, we will take breaks in the interview when needed and will stop any line of questioning that is raising traumatic memories. If you experience overwhelmingly negative feelings, I will provide contact information to local professionals who can offer support. No injury is expected from this study, but if you believe you have been harmed, contact the research team as soon as possible. Georgia State University and the research team have not set aside funds to compensate for any injury.

Benefits

This study is not designed to benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to better understand the experiences of Black mothers and school leaders as they lead and care for Black children. Better understanding this phenomenon may provide ways to better support Black children in schools.

Alternatives

The alternative to taking part in this study is to not take part in this study.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. You may refuse to take part in the study or stop at any time. This will not cause you to lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Confidentiality

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. The following people and entities will have access to the information you provide:

- Rolandria Justice-Emenuga, (Student PI) and research team

- GSU Institutional Review Board
- Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)

We will use your self-selected emergent theme name rather than your name on study records. The information you provide will be stored on a password-and firewall-protected computer and locked in a cabinet that only the Student PI will have a key to access. The emergent theme sheet with the self-selected emergent theme names will be stored separately from the data to ensure privacy. When we present or publish the results of this study, we will not use your name or other information that may identify you.

- The emergent theme sheet to identify the research participants will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study.
- Video recordings of the interviews will be stored on a password-and firewall-protected computer and locked in a cabinet that only the Student PI will have a key to access. The data collected in this repository will be destroyed three years after completion of the study.
- Participants will be asked not to reveal what was discussed in the group, but the researchers do not have complete control of the confidentiality of the data.
- Be aware that any communication sent over the Internet may not be secure. Procedures such as password-protected meeting links and firewall-protected computers will be implemented to address security. The researcher is not collecting IP addresses.

Contact Information

Contact Dr. Sheryl C. Moss or Rolandria Justice-Emenuga at rjusticeemenuga1@student.gsu.edu, (201) 463-2XXX or (404) 413-8XXX

- If you have questions about the study or your part in it
- If you have questions, concerns, or complaints about the study

The IRB at Georgia State University reviews all research that involves human participants. You can contact the IRB if you would like to speak to someone who is not involved directly with the study. You can contact the IRB for questions, concerns, problems, information, input, or questions about your rights as a research participant. Contact the IRB at 404-413-3500 or irb@gsu.edu.

Consent

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep.

If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

____
Printed Name of Participant

_____________________________________ ______________
Signature of Participant Date

_____________________________________ ______________
Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent Date

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Interview	Questions
Interview #1: Focused Life History	● Demographic information ○ Education ○ Current position ○ # of years in education ○ Ages of child(ren) ● Tell me about your journey to become a school leader. How did you get into school leadership? ● Talk to me about your journey to become a mother.
Interview # 2: Details of the lived experience	● Describe what it is like to lead Black children as a Black school leader. ● Describe what it is like to lead Black children as a Black mother. ● Discuss a time when being a school leader helped you to better mother your children. ● Describe what it is like to care for Black children as a Black mother. ● Describe what it is like to care for Black children as a Black school leader. ● Discuss a time when being a mother helped you to lead your school better.
Interview # 3: Reflection on the meaning	● Thinking back to what you shared about your life history in interview one and your experiences as a mother and school leader to Black children in interview two, what does it mean to lead and mother Black children as a Black woman? ● How has being a Black woman shaped how you lead and mother Black children? ● What challenges or barriers have you encountered as you’ve mothered and led Black children as a Black woman? ● What has made you successful at leading and caring for Black children? ● What do you want people to know about leading and mothering Black children?
Photo elicitation	● Share at least one photo that best describes what it is like to lead and mother Black children as a Black woman. Describe the picture and why that picture best illustrates your feelings.

LEADING AND MOTHERING BLACK CHILDREN IN 2021

If you lead and mother Black children, your VOICE matters!

Black Mothers & School Leaders

This qualitative study is interested in examining the lived experience of Black women who identify as school leaders and mothers to Black children. We're looking for co-researchers to tell their stories. You have an expertise when it comes to caring for Black children that we would like to acknowledge and learn from.

Eligibility? Answer yes to three questions.

- Do you identify as a Black woman?
- Have you been a school leader to Black children for at least 3 years?
- Are you a mother to Black children?

Co-researchers will be asked to:

- Participate in three, semi-structured interviews (virtual option available)
- Participate in one focus group meeting with other participants
- Share at least one photo that best illustrates what leading and caring for Black children means to you

If you would like to be a part of the study, please call or email a member of the study team:

Rolandria Justice-Emenuga
Study Coordinator
Rjusticeemenuga1@student.gsu.edu
201-463-2XXX

Appendix D: First Interview Protocol

First Interview Protocol

Introduce myself & why I’m studying this subject
Explain the process
3 individual interviews
Focus group interview
Reconstruction is based partially on memory and partially on what the participant now senses is important about the past event.
Explain this first interview
Opportunity to provide contextual background from your life story
Put your mothering and leading in the context of your life history
I will ask follow up questions to get more details
I won’t speak much but it’s not because I’m trying to be rude, I want to make sure that I’m giving you space to share your story
Reminder of privacy
Emergent theme name for the study
Confidentiality

● age ● Current position: ● Years in leadership: ● # of years in education ● Ages of child(ren): ● Relationship status	
Tell me about your journey to become a school leader. How did you get into school leadership? You can start from wherever you would like.	
Talk to me about your journey to become a mother. You can start from wherever you would like.	
Probing questions to get more details ● You mentioned earlier that you _____. Could you describe in detail what happened? ● You mentioned ______ tell me what that was like for you. You mentioned ______ describe that in more detail for me ● Can you clarify what you meant when you said…? ● Are there any stories that would illustrate that? ● What was that like for you?”	

Appendix E: Participant Repository Example

Sample Repository

1st interview	2nd interview	3rd interview	Photo elicitation
Leadership as expected trajectory (p. 2)	Serving community (p. 1, p. 9, p. 9, p. 13)	Students have families (p. 2)	Balancing work and personal life (p. 10)
Started leadership as a coach (p. 2)	“always on” (p. 1, p. 9, p. 12)	Strategies she uses to connect with parents (p. 2, p. 3, p. 3)	Lack of feeling successful at both identities at the same time (p. 10)
Good in the classroom = leadership (p. 2)	Work is difficult (p. 1, p. 12)	Work/co-workers and personal life not mixing (p. 2)	
Person that people go to (p. 3)	Importance of my Blackness as a leader (p. 1, p. 2, p. 3, p. 3, p. 3, p.9, p. 13)	“my babies” (p. 2)	
Holds people accountable (p. 3)	Intentionality of actions (p. 1, p. 2, p. 2)	Intentionality (p. 2, p. 6, p. 7)	
Doing what you have to do (p. 3)	Being a role model (p. 1, p. 2)	Connecting w/ parents (p. 2, p. 2, p. 3)	
Burdens of relationships (p. 4)	Passionate (p. 1)	Going towards the problem (p. 3, p. 3, p. 10) Sharing personal stories w/ parents (p. 3)	
Benefits of relationships (p. 4)	Advocacy (p. 2, p. 3., p. 13)	Warm/strict (p. 3)	
Supporting students (p. 4)	Black pride (p. 1, p. 2, p. 2, p. 2, p. 3, p. 7, p. 11)	Pushing back/advocating (p. 3)	
“my babies” (p. 4, p. 4, p. 6)	Visual images of Blackness (p. 2, p. 2)	Fairness (p. 3)	

Interacting with students (p. 4)	What is success? (p. 2, p. 13)	Acknowledging to parents that we’re all parents (p. 3)	
Joy of designing pd (p. 4)		Balancing between work and home (p. 4, p. 9)	
Pride in Blackness (p. 7)	Encouragement/thanks from a student (p. 2)	Feeling inadequate as a mom/spending too much time on other’s children (p. 4, p. 7)	
Black & happy; Black boy joy (p. 7)	Hair (p. 2, p. 7)	White educators talking to students the way you talk to them (p. 4, p. 5)	
Power in titles (p. 5)	“Black Excellence”, “Queen”, “King” (p. 3)	Community deserves the best (p. 4)	
Passionate (p. 4, p. 5)	Othermothering/warm strict (p. 4, p. 4, p. 6, p. 6, p. 7)	Passionate (p. 2)	
Building critical thinking in our children (p. 7)	Impact of Black leader mothering Black children (p. 4)		
Intentionality of decisions for children (p. 7)	Microaggressions/biases (p. 5, p. 5)		
Overprotective of our children (p. 7)	Perspective that being a parent helps (p. 5, p. 5, p. 6, p. 8, p. 9)	History/ Black history (p. 5, p. 6, p. 6)	
Kids having fun/joy (p. 5)	Importance of school leader perspective (p. 6, p. 6, p. 8, p. 11, p. 12)	Protecting Black children (p. 5, p.10)	
No working at home (p. 11, p. 12)	Parents having passion for their baby (p. 6)	Managing up (p. 5)	
Importance of partner (p. 10, p. 11)		Leading people (p. 6, p. 9)	
Excitement for a daughter (p. 9)		Perseverance/make a way attitude (p. 6)	
Covid (p. 9, p. 12)	White counterparts (p. 5, p. 5, p. 9)		

Decompressing from the day (p. 11)	Mistrust from parents (p. 5)	Wanting her child to have the same mothering she gives to others (p. 7)	
Working late (p. 11)	“my children” (p. 6)	Tension between letting your child be independent but knowing that they have to meet certain expectations (p. 7, p. 7)	
Tired (p. 11, p. 12)	Leader helping her children advocate/be successful in school (p. 6)	Othermothering (p. 7)	
	Protecting Black children from neighborhood (p. 7)	What does unsuccessful look like? (p. 10)	
	Advocating against policies that don’t serve Black children (p. 7)	Protective of reputation (p. 10)	
	Code switching/real talk (p. 9)	More concern for Black boys than Black girls (p. 8, p. 9)	
	Subtle differences between “babying” Black children and looking at them as “my babies” (p. 9, p. 13)	This phenomenon is hard (p. 9) White mothers differences in experiences (p. 8) Feeling like your parenting is judged (p. 8)	
	Black leaders trust in Black students/lack of fear in them (p. 10)	Feeling inadequate as a leader (p. 9)	
	Connecting your children with the school community (p. 10)	Feeling responsible/pride doing stuff even if it’s not your responsibility (p. 10)	
	Black communities deserve the best (p. 13)		

	Having to “mother” the adults (p. 13)		
Themes: Other mothering Trying to find balance Pride in Blackness/Importance of Blackness Fairness/Advocacy/No excuses Intentionality in decision-making Everyday racism Passion/passionate Importance of sharing your perspective with others			

Appendix F: Themes across Participants

Themes across Participants

Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3	Participant 4
Supporting others/Othermothering/ Bridge leadership	Other mothering:	Connecting with others/Bridging/Loving on students/my babies/othermothering	Othermothering
Finding balance/Supporting yourself/Receiving support from others	Trying to find balance	Finding balance between work and home	Finding balance
	Pride in Blackness/Importance of Blackness		Seeing yourself in the children
Advocating (for parents, students, own children)	Fairness/Advocacy/No excuses	Advocating/Going towards the problem	Advocating
	Intentionality in decision-making	Intentionality	
Racism/Implicit/Explicit Bias/Inequities/Fear	Everyday racism	Dealing w/racism/ people making assumptions/fear	Making assumptions
	Passion/passionate		

	Importance of sharing your perspective with others	Importance of our experiences/learning from others	Importance of sharing our experiences and learning from others
			Spirituality
			Importance of SEL/Therapy
Making an impact/focus on results			Focus on results/impact

Appendix G: Third Level Coding

Third Level Coding

Themes	Celeste	Ms. Brooklyn	Dani	VitaButtafly
Othermothering/Bridging	I can't imagine being a parent in a meeting and nobody looking like me. And feeling like I'm the underdog or that I'm being spoken down to. I've heard that by parents. So, they call me all the time. Parents will call me and complain and be very escalated. And I just listen and absorb and then talk them through hand say, Hey, let's come back to the table. I hear you. I want you to be able to express that to the committee. So, let's do what's best for your child. I want your child to be successful. And they're so appreciative and they say, thank you. It's just, that's kind of the everyday. But for the most part, I get that sense of relief that I'm there and I think it's because I've taught Black children and am raising a Black child in America, I feel like I can share that lens with a	: I love it. They're my babies. I'm the momma bear for 12th grade. I don't have any data points to say this, I just know how it feels. It's so much better. I've been with them since 9th grade. The families know me, they know who to call which is sometimes burdensome too because sometimes they need to call the main office, but they keep calling me. But yeah, it's been like the close knit-ness of the relationship that I have with the 12th grade is one that is precious to me. I'm almost everybody momma. They treat me like I'm they momma. So, yeah, it's like,…. What is it. It means they regard me, they are accountable to me, they don't want to disappoint me. A lot. They often don't want to disappointment me. they definitely regard me. When they have good grades, they immediately want to show it to me. When they, they know that	So, many things are going through my mind because I absolutely love <school>. I love my kids. My babies need to go out. They need to intermingle. And they were impressed with how I was able to teach them. Because they were used to… Because the standards were high. I become mother. I'm not principal when I'm at work. So, that's how I draw to them. And when I see certain them or being a certain way with them, those motherly instincts kick in. It's a gift and a curse. Because I get, I don't like to take it personally, but I take it personally. Like, don't ever get in a little girl's face, yell and scream. Like, don't do that because I	He'll knock on the door and say, hey. But something about him will occasionally will be off. And I think me being a mom allows me to recognize that. So when I see a kid walking down the hallway and they just don't look the same, or they don't speak to me the way they normally do… And I mean, I'm going to be a mommy to my little one, well she's in middle school, but until she's self-sufficient, she'll always come first. But I'm always going to be mommy to those kids in the building too. And I think that's what I mean to love on them, and I am not a hugger. I am not a hugger.

	parent to come to a consensus for doing what's best for the child. It's powerful and meaningful for me because we are marginalized, especially our young Black boys. Loving on them when they were with me, even when there's snot coming down there their face and they've torn up my room, at the end of the day, I would always come home and reflect and have a glass of wine and say, what can I do tomorrow? I have noticed that, and this is not me tooting my own horn, but the staff gravitates towards me when they need that reassurance. When they need a moment to be able to get themselves together. When they need guidance. I know I'm supposed to be calling this person, but I really just want to talk to you about it because you seem so levelheaded.	something is going to get back to me, they come to me first. They come to me not only do they see me as a mother figure, but I also see them as my children. I definitely care about them just as much. I think, and not in the sense, because I really hate when people say that, They're my children. No, they're not. They have whole families, but I think, I want for them what I want for my son. I want, I want them to have great lessons. I want them to have great teachers in front of them. I want them to be on time to their classes. I don't treat them in a way that I wouldn't treat my own children. I'm also protective of them. There's a, with motherhood and being a leader in this building, in a very, we're in <neighborhood>. <Neighborhood>. I'm very protective of them. I am cognizant. Y'all need to be off of this corner in a matter of 10 minutes. We're not standing around. When we go to trips, I make sure that I know where we're going because this neighborhood don't get along with that neighborhood. I am a mom, a nurturer to all students that I encounter in this	see that as my child. And I want you to understand that you wouldn't want anyone to talk to your child like that. I take it extremely personal with like, certain things that you're allowing different things. Because I'm looking at that like, that's my daughter. And I wouldn't want anybody talking to my daughter that way. I wouldn't want nobody not to care. Oh she's just sitting over there crying, I don't care. Like, let me get to my class. No. I'm going to stop what I'm doing to show up for these girls. So, yes, that's how that kicks in, every day. when we think about history, Black women are the mothers of history. We took care of their kids, as well as taking care of ours. We are this earth. Without Black women, the world would not exist. It could not go on. It could not move on. Because we take on so much. We just have a strength.	

		job. And it's not, and not in the same vein. Because I do give way to an understanding that they have parents, they have families. But I think that when they're here, I am very passionate about the relationship that I have with them such that there's ownership there. These are my babies. The history of our people. The history of who your ancestors were to me. It doesn't sit well with me. And I don't think that you love them like I love them. So, don't scream at them. Definitely why I chose for him to go to an all-Black Montessori because I need for him to have the same nurturing, Black mothering that I have at his school. I wanted to feel confident in that and I wanted him to be confident in his Blackness.	: I just always put it in the sense, that I want to be the type of principal that I want, or that I would want for my children to have. Or that I would want anybody in my family. So, showing up as that person that I want to be in life. Like, why don't you have a lesson plan? Would you want your child's teacher to not have a lesson plan? Then it gets like, Oh. You know, you're right. Or even if you don't have children, I'm sure there's somebody, a child, that you hold special to your heart that I'm sure you would be fighting tooth and nail. I just want us to do what's best for children. Picture illustrated how she treats the students (p. 12) And she came over and gave me the biggest hug. And the photographer that we had captured that moment. And I just thought that was so impactful. Everyone when they saw, I had posted this	

			picture many years ago. They were like, that is so you. This is how you are with students in <city>. You treat them all like this. It just warmed my heart. She was just so excited. She was like, I've always wanted a Barbie dreamhouse all my life. You see this little, she's about 6 or 7 and she said, all my life. This made her Christmas	
Finding Balance	And I divorced and had to take on all of that responsibility with no buffer. And so, there would be days that I would come home tired and she'd be tired. And we'd both be near tears. And I would say, come here. Let's just love on each other. So, she had very high expectations of me. And, initially I didn't tell her that I was going through a divorce because as Black women, we just deal with what we've got going on. And we put on our big girl panties and we put on our boots and our lipstick. And nobody really knows what we're going through.	Once I had kids. Once I had kids I stopped bringing work home. Because I can't do it at home. And it's not fair. I don't want to be that parent that's like, at work all day, and then gotta come home and work, too. It's not fair. And it's too much. Once I get home, putting them kids to bed, feeding them and stuff, I'm tired. I am tired. Especially since I've had kids, I rarely bring this laptop home. When the pandemic hit it was like, it was not my favorite. I found a way to come into the building so that I could separate work and home. It is fulfilling. It is fulfilling. It is hard. It's definitely hard work and you are, I am always cognizant to be on.	She asked me, and it was a like a lightbulb went on, have you ever shared your story with your daughter? And I was like, you know what, I haven't. And so, that changed the dynamics as well. And I struggled because I just don't ever want her to look at my mom any different because my mom and I have a great relationship. So, I shared that with my daughter and she had a better understanding and it did bring us a little closer. And give her some more understanding and context as to why I was struggling. Because I just didn't know.	I've always wanted to do something. And even today, I feel like I'm not doing enough. So, I tell myself that, girl you need to do more.

	And she's my priority. I have to give to her what I expect educators to give all children. And I think that sometimes that we pour so much that we don't have the energy to pour into our own children. But just back to what is it like, it's just always on. We're always on. We're always going. We're always having to, for me, I feel like I'm always having to prove myself. And it's not a thought that happens everyday, its really just nagging behind me. Like, I struggled with just taking today for myself. there's a lot of boundaries. I don't really blur the lines with my professional life and my personal life. They're very, very separate. They're separate and I'm authentic in both of those settings, . But, even when I'm not feeling well, my mind is on my kids. I was up two nights this week thinking about staff and students. Just because of all of the things that are going on in the schools. And so, I have to balance that with being on for my own child. I can't put so much into it that when I get	It denotes to location. I'm very disciplined about when I am at work, versus when I am not at work. I don't mix the two. When I go home, I'm home. When I'm at work, I'm at work. My phone might be on when I'm at work, but I have a work phone and a personal phone. No one at work has my personal number. So, it's easy to turn off because their access to me, I've been disciplined about that since day one. It's hard as hell. It is hard as hell. I think, it's just a really hard job. And I think that the, it's important work and I want to continue to lead in education, but I'm constantly battling, not at the sacrifice of my own. And I think when asked what picture describes motherhood and leadership, it is a constant juggling of the scales tipping. If I had to put a name on one, I'd say often time my family life is at the down and my work life is in the up. My work life is up, my family. You know? They oscillate. I've never had it at an equilibrium where I feel successful in both spaces.	Oh, you want to go to dance? I'm going to put you in dance. And I would notice sometimes that my daughter would cling to her friend's moms and I was like why are you… and it was different. Because they were doing that nurturing piece that I That's how i've shown up in the position and I set the precedence for that. After certain point, work is cut off. I have to be mommy. I'll pick up on those things when i get back. It's nothing is a dire emergency. Nothing. So, I try to do as much as I can within the work hours. Because what I'm finding is I give so much at work, sometimes it lacks for my family. Especially when I'm, right now, just in total transparency. So, it's just a lot. I'm getting, it's a lot of, you care about them more than you care about me. It hurts. It hurts really bad. Because I'm trying to convince her,	

	home, I'm checked out. I've done that. … if I'm leaving this house and giving 110%, then there are times when I need to give her 110%.	lately I've been feeling unsuccessful as a mom. And it's been in the vein of education because my thought processes that I've been saying to myself is, I'm putting so much into other people kids and my son is behind in his reading level. My son, what else I might be exaggerating it, but it bothers me. I'm missing going to his tutoring because I'm here at work. Or he, it took me this long to get him into extra-curriculars because I'm always at work. So, there's moments of my self-reflection where I'm feel like, I gotta stop and really be more into my own child. Both my children.	that's not what it is. You are my priority. You are who I'm going to show up for in so many ways.	
Advocating	And I didn't realize that I would be going to battle for young Black boys in particular, in this school system. Because of the thick undertones and undercurrents, and sometimes not implicit bias. Just bias. Just, just, very marginalized. And their parents weren't knowledgeable and didn't know how to come to the table with the same fight that I had seen in my previous district. And I would say to my colleagues, we can't take advantage of this parent just because she doesn't know the law. We have to do what's right. Well, I battled that for several years.	I've put a big onus on do it right or don't do it. Do it right or don't do it. This community deserves your best. If you can do it, do it well. Don't half-ass it. Exactly. And I had to show my colleagues, I know we don't want them to have mace in school, but the reality is that they're traveling back and forth in this neighborhood isn't the greatest, and there are creeps outside, they might need their mace. Things like that. So, that had to change. I think we changed our head tie rule because	And that's why I told them, everything we do, we're doing as a school community. It's not a teacher thing. It's not a student thing. . I've had a student who is struggling with grief, had never been to a therapist. Had lost her grandmother. I don't know the story behind the mom but she's with the dad. Lost her grandmother and at times, she suffers from that. So, immediately when she talked with me, I connected	Advocated for her daughter - So it made me feel good because I knew that she knew that daddy was there anyway, he's always taking her to dances… So dad plays a huge role and thank God for him. - Took boxing for six years, is vocal, - This is my ex-husband and this is my youngest daughter. It doesn't matter how old she gets, or how many pictures we take.

	: I can't imagine being a parent in a meeting and nobody looking like me. And feeling like I'm the underdog or that I'm being spoken down to. I've heard that by parents. So, they call me all the time. Parents will call me and complain and be very escalated and I just listen and absorb and then talk them through hand say, Hey, let's come back to the table. I hear you. I want you to be able to express that to the committee. So, let's do what's best for your child. I want your child to be successful. And they're so appreciative and they say, thank you. I think that it's interesting because our Black families know less about how to advocate for their children properly that strong arms the district into getting whatever they want and need and our families are sitting at the table with no knowledge, no backing, no advocate to be able to speak to. They're just kind of like, ok. I know I used to take a lot of time in meetings to say, mom, let me hear from you. Do you understand? There's a lot of information that we're sharing with you right now. Do	they should be able to wear headwraps. We're going to show you the difference between a bedroom headscarf and a matter of regalia and headwrap, show you how to wrap it. We ordered head wraps because of that.	her, and this is a senior. I connected her with our social worker. Gave her the resources and we had another conversation about 2 weeks after. And I said, how did it go? Did you set up everything? And she said, well when I took it to my dad, my dad was like, nothing is wrong with you. We don't need that. You know that whole… I was like, they're undoing what we're trying to do. She was like, he didn't even want to look at the papers. He was like, we don't need no counseling. You fine, girl. So, when I had the conversation with the dad, he ended up breaking down to me. Like, full blown breaking down. He like, this is hard. It's just me. And I'm like, dad, it's okay. I know this. This is why I'm saying that you need this. So, was able to connect them to family therapy. That felt good. And I had to assure him that, Nothing is wrong with you. Nothing is wrong with her. So, the thing that he thinks, that he has tied it to, I assured him.	This is my favorite one. And I boohoo cried when I took the picture. And my ex-husband said why are you crying? She's just over there talking, no one is understanding what she's saying. Even though my dad was present in my life, he was not. And if it meant like quality time, I never got that. And for him to always sit down, he would never sit at, what we called the adult table. He always sat with her. - So, the fact that <daughter's name> gets this all of the time and I never did, it's powerful to me. For son Touching your hair and asking you why your hair looks that way. When someone is rubbing your skin. When people are doing that, it's not okay. When someone calls you the n word, and says I'm just joking. That's not okay.

	you have any questions? And very often they wouldn't, but I would stop and give them an opportunity to know that you can, you are part of this. You have a voice. I want you to use your voice. And if my child, didn't get that, I'd be advocated that she got that too. I would be one fierce mama bear. I've had to speak to the teachers a time or two, just about making sure that things are in place for her success. But a lot of kids don't have that same advocacy. Or that same level of advocacy coming from inside the home. Therefore, they need someone in the building to have that for them.		And I'm vulnerable. I said, I'm in therapy every two weeks. I wouldn't be telling you to do something that I'm not doing.	- like my daughter, it would happen one time and one time only.
Dealing with racism	And people have commented on the way that I present and some people have said, I was intimidated by you and your knowledge. And that's probably been the biggest challenge or barrier is breaking through that so that people can see the authentic me. But, when implicit bias is carried, it impacts in a way that it can change the trajectory of another human being. I think we have to be more conscious about that.	I had another interaction with a student where he came to me and he had said something and he used the wrong verb. There was like a lack of subject-verb agreement and the teacher had addressed him saying, How do you sound saying that? Or whatever. And he'd felt… he did not like it. And he wanted to be able to say to her, that he did not like it and how it made him feel. And we discussed, and I was like, one point that you should share with her is that her ancestors brought your ancestors here out of their will and then refused to teach		I could understand how she feels. I understand that she's experienced racism herself, she's in the military, she's experienced it. I've been there, done that not in the military, but I have experienced it myself. I've experienced my children, where I perceived my children to be treated differently. So, I know what that feels like. And I told her that I'm talking to you right now as a mom, I'm not

	And I've, in my classroom experience as well as my leadership experience, have talked to students who say, I don't know why she was getting on me, when so-and-so was doing the same thing. I don't know why I have to take my earbuds out but so-and-so can leave their earbuds in. I mean something so trivial, but it's the equity piece. And kids get that justice peace. They understand good intentions. And they understand implicit bias. They may not know what to call it…	them the language so initially this was not our tongue. So, if we're not using subject-verb agreement, it's because we taught ourselves this language… and you know I had to break that kind of message down with him. But I live for moments like that. I live for those teachable moments about Blackness That and because I'm Black. There's mistrust. And there's also like, some presumptions. Like, I often have to check my teammates about presumptions about the Black family. And, their overzealousness when taking on things that's not their responsibility. I have to say things like, they have a whole mother. Ask her. Or him. Or their father. Or this is a married couple, raising their son.		talking to you as an administrator. even if I don't need you to solve anything. Just hear what I'm feeling and hear what I'm saying. I felt that and I heard that through that telephone conversation. I actually had a teacher ask me to call a parent regarding a student about a student being out often. And I asked her, Well why don't you call her? And she said I sent her a Class Dojo. And I said, No, you should call her. But at any rate, I feel like maybe there's some fear, hesitation, misunderstanding, I don't know what I'm going to get if I call the parent, it could be a combination of all that. But I don't want our White teachers to feel afraid to contact us. Because that's the problem. That's the breakdown. I don't want anyone, even my own child, because I'm a Black parent, don't not call me because you feel like I'm going to But I've never heard some of the ugliness that I hear now. I

				like the fact that the teachers are open with me, I really do. But I also hear some of the stuff, whether they mean it or not, I hear some of their honesty. And their honesty comes across as, that child is that way because of x, y, z. So, I see more of that and hear more of that.
Sharing our experiences	. She doesn't display all of the deficits, but enough to where I can say, ok and can relate to parents o, I've had heart to heart conversations with parents off-topic, off record just about, hey listen, I'm advocating for you. I'm advocating for your child. I understand the hardships…	Everybody loves this office. They don't necessarily say why, but it's a vibe. They say, it's a vibe. They don't pinpoint, what. But I'm betting on and counting on the subconscious permeation of the space. You saw Blackness, you saw someone that was proud of Blackness. I'm intentional about the music that I play in the morning. Sometimes we get to gospel, and sometimes it's Mary J. Blige. I'm just very intentional about everything I love about being Black, being permeated in the space and exuding from my rooms. And they being able to see, I'm proud of my culture and I'm also the boss. , I got a call that a little boy had slapped his face or something. I remember in that moment, I was livid. What? Somebody slapped my baby's face. And I took the time in	I also attended an all-girls school. I went through public education and so, it's okay to still be from here and you can still be somebody from here. So, a lot of what I get just from getting in the school community and just being who I am, they see themselves in me. So, I learned from my girls is that when listening to them talk about their home life, what they express different things with their parents, they don't feel like their parents are showing up for them. I start thinking, well maybe that's how my child is feeling. I know that I can come down on her… a lot.	I'm not saying that other races don't know our children or whatever because I would never want to say that but, I just know what it's like to be in elementary school as a Black girl. I was able to give them a lot of knowledge. I do try to expose them a lot, whether that be traveling, whether that be going to museums, civil rights events. We do protests. I've grown up doing protests. That's a thing I wanted to do, not necessarily something that my mom and dad imparted on me. So, in turn my kids, more so my younger one, anytime there's a protest going on, she's right there in it

		that natural, organic feeling to call my colleague and say, Yo, I know we deal with parents all the time, but let me tell you, this feeling that I feel right now about my son being slapped, I don't want to hear shit. I'm going over there and it's going to be a problem. The only thing I need to hear is solutions and what's been done because I'm not trying to hear it. But I shared that with him to share that was my natural feelings… So, when we're dealing with these parents and they're coming and they've heard about their baby having a fight, or their baby… you have to understand. It's real. It's a real passionate feeling that you have about your baby that you just can't. You can't contain it. And if you're not talking right, I don't want to talk to you. So… I share moments like that with them. ust know, I know that feeling. I know what it's feeling like… and I need them to know that every mother at this table feels the same way about their baby. And I think, starting off with an anecdote like that will help to get them in a space to listen to each other and find out what's going on.	So, immediately, and even when I think back on it, if I had had a therapist, or my dad had the family therapy, it would have made us better. Instantly, that was a natural. Now, that you say it, and I never even thought about it until you just said that.	Maybe the temperature is better read at the risk than the forehead. I'm not feeding much into it. Come to find out, the child was Black. Shared this with my ex and he said, I want you to know and I've never shared this with you, but when I have to go somewhere and they have to check my temperature, it is unnerving to have a thermometer gun pointing at my head. I've always been a Black female, I'm not a Black male. And he said, I need you to understand. Get a visual. And he is jokester of all jokesters, so for him in that moment to be that serious,… And he said, get a visual. And I said to him, so when your temperature is taken, does it remind you of having a gun pointed to your head? And he said, absolutely..
Professional Authenticity	So, just really embracing who I am and being confident as a Black woman. We have to have	Because I serve, it's my passion. I serve my community. I want to see MY community do great. I want to	I'm into a lot of the things that they are. Like, my style of dress. Different things	But give me the opportunity to be who I am.

	that confidence. We have to lead consciously knowing that there is both explicit and implicit bias in America today and that it exists. And if we don’t lead with that in the back of our minds, and know that the teacher sitting at the table, or the other executive at the table, or that another leader may not understand, what this young, Black child is dealing with. That it’s something that we have to do consciously. It’s not something that you can do by happenstance. It is being very conscious, bringing awareness to others about what it means to be Black. What African Americans have to deal with in America. And not being afraid of Blackness. My daughter, I got her a water bottle one year that said, Black girls are smart, I can’t remember what it said, buy she came home and said, is my water bottle racist? I said, no ma’am, no ma’am. Your water bottle means that you are proud. That’s what that means. I think also, you talk about that, but I don’t think that it has anything to do with leadership.	help, like turnaround this state of the underdog for the Black community. Yeah… I’m passionate about teaching as well, but I think that when it comes to leadership and what I exemplify as a leader, it is my Blackness matters a lot. I’m intentional about my appearance. I’m intentional about how they see me. I’m intentional about the styles in my hair. I’m intentional about how I speak to them. I’m intentional about when it’s time to teach them moments of advocacy or moments of history. There’s a note sitting in front of me, so I can read a note that’s a part of my why. Because why matters. Thank you Ms. Sanders for the incredibly long hours you spend trying to make sure that each and every one of us has an amazing senior year. You are the perfect split image of a successful Black woman, taking initiative and power every time you walk through the door. So beautiful and full of life. If no one else told you, I will. Thank you. It’s important for my children to be sure in their confidence of self, and their Blackness before I send them off into these other schools where they may have to be questioned.	like that where you can still carry yourself like a professional and still be you. So, that’s the main thing that i”m trying to get across to them. You can’t let anyone dictate to you who and what you’re supposed to be because I feel like I’ve gotten where I’ve gotten because I’m me. My speech may not always be as articlulate but I’m still the principal of this school.. So, yes. I’m passionate. I love it. I love that I can be me. This is what you all get. I’m not going to talk different. I’m not going to change my appearance. I’m not going to change who I am because that does not take away from the job that I can get done.	

		You know, I just want them to know, we Black. We Black and we happy Black. You know, we celebrate our Blackness. And that's the foundation that I wanted to have for him. My fellas refer to me as "Queen". And they also refer to each other as "Kings". Like I have interactions with a student, and whenever he sees me he goes, Good morning, Black Excellence. And I say, Good morning, Black Excellence, too.		
Making an impact/focus on results		Ms. Brooklyn shared a story of a situation with a parent that deteriorated into the parent yelling outside of the school at some children and the police being called on multiple occasions. This situation did not occur with students that Ms. Brooklyn was leading, she felt responsible sharing, "…because of who I am and the ownership and pride in the things I'm involved with, it still was a reflection of me. I just had a meeting with his, I'm trying to have a meeting with his mother, but his mother is very oppositional. Saying that we're not letting her son be a child, he's been at home. I have to keep… Ok, so which part of being a child… so when he's playfights in class we	And I happened to be in a school that had a school counselor for each grade level. So, I would tell them the things… I made them be a part of the EP meetings because they would be like "oh I'm not coming. I don't need to attend. No, you do need to attend and this is the part that you need to discuss. The same way that you would attend if it was just a regular meeting for a general ed student.	

		should just, No, that's not what I mean. Ok, mom, I need to know what you mean. I have to name those things that… pull her in and be like mom, I'm asking your permission to be real with you. Yeah, I push back. I push back when I hear things that are not accurate or that I don't agree with. I push back and the finessing it, is making sure that they're in a space to hear a pushback. I identify it as, Ms. <parent name>, I want to push you a little bit. Or I identify it as, I disagree, can we talk about… Like, I name exactly where I stand on something and I don't dilly dally with them.		
	Look, I'm going through a divorce. I'm really just doing the best that I can to get out of bed. But when I come, I'm 100% and giving you everything I have. And she was like, I didn't know. I would've never known. And people to this day are like, I never knew that you were going through a divorce. You used to just come and do your job and just do it so well. We never knew that you were going through such adversity. And I think as Black women, we do that often. We just carry that	But you know when you think about it, those things come out of our experience as being Black in America. White people don't have to have mantras like that because they're not going to have such an unfavorable existence in America. We, it's a part of me. I appreciate that question because it makes me notice that it is a distinction to me because of my experience as being Black in America.	So, one of my students, one of my seniors was having a rough time. I could tell because she is usually jolly, jolly, jolly. So I seen her twice in the hallway, and I was like, ok, this is the second time that I'm seeing you and you're not yourself. Come into my office. We have to talk. And she immediately broke down. And she told me, this is just a lot. Senior year is a lot. I'm applying for colleges, I'm trying to work, I'm	Yes, because believe it or not, I don't know if anyone else has told you, but this is like my therapy.

	load and that's centuries. That we go through trauma, hard times and expected to keep it moving. And people have commented on the way that I present and some people have said, I was intimidated by you and your knowledge. And that's probably been the biggest challenge or barrier is breaking through that so that people can see the authentic me.		trying and she was just like, I don't feel like my mother is being supportive of me. I don't feel like my mother is there for me, listening to me. I want to have a social life. She's always fussing at me. And I'm just like, Oh my gosh is this me? And she was just like, she doesn't want to hear me out. I just want her to listen to me and talk to me and support me. Instead of giving me all of these tasks to do, and saying that I'm not doing this or saying that I'm not doing that. But just like, understand and know that I'm struggling right now and this is a lot. And I'm just like, and that was like a come to Jesus moment for me	

Appendix H: Photography Release 1

Photography Release

I hereby authorize Rolandria Justice-Emenug, hereafter referred to as “Company,” to publish photographs taken of me and my name and likeness, for use in the Rolandria's dissertation, titled, “Intersections: Black female school leaders’ lived experiences of caring for and leading Black children”, online and video-based marketing materials, as well as other publications that draw from this work.

I hereby release and hold harmless Rolandria Justice-Emenuga from any reasonable expectation of privacy or confidentiality associated with the images specified above.

I further acknowledge that my participation is voluntary and that I will not receive financial compensation of any type associated with the taking or publication of these photographs or participation in company marketing materials or other Company publications. I acknowledge and agree that publication of said photos confers no rights of ownership or royalties whatsoever.

I hereby release Rolandria Justice-Emenuga, any contractors, employees, and third parties involved in the creation or publication of marketing materials, from liability for any claims by me or any third party in connection with my participation.

AUTHORIZATION

Printed Name: Davita Williams

Signature: Davita Willia______________________ Date: 04/06/2022

Street Address:

City: Villa Rica State: GA

Appendix H: Photography Release 2

Photography Release

I hereby authorize Rolandria Justice-Emenug, hereafter referred to as “Company,” to publish photographs taken of me on (December 20, 2018), and my name and likeness, for use in the Rolandria's dissertation, titled, “Intersections: Black female school leaders’ lived experiences of caring for and leading Black children”, online and video-based marketing materials, as well as other publications that draw from this work.

I hereby release and hold harmless Rolandria Justice-Emenuga from any reasonable expectation of privacy or confidentiality associated with the images specified above.

I further acknowledge that my participation is voluntary and that I will not receive financial compensation of any type associated with the taking or publication of these photographs or participation in company marketing materials or other Company publications. I acknowledge and agree that publication of said photos confers no rights of ownership or royalties whatsoever.

I hereby release Rolandria Justice-Emenuga, any contractors, employees, and third parties involved in the creation or publication of marketing materials, from liability for any claims by me or any third party in connection with my participation.

AUTHORIZATION

Printed Name: Tiffany Williams

DocuSigned by:
Signature: Tiffany Williams ________________________________
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Date: April 7, 2022

Street Address:

City: Owings Mills State: MD