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### RESEARCH ARTICLE

#### KEY THEMES AND TRENDS IN RESEARCH ON BLACK GIRL LEADERSHIP: SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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#### Abstract

This systematic review is critical as it sheds light on a neglected area of research: the experiences of Black girls in leadership positions. While there is a growing body of literature on leadership and gender, race, and ethnicity, the experiences of Black girls in leadership roles have received less attention. This study addresses this gap in the literature by conducting a comprehensive analysis of research on Black girl leadership from 2000 to 2020. The problem that this systematic review address is the longstanding neglect of the experiences of Black girls in leadership positions. Despite the growing attention to issues of diversity and inclusion in leadership, the experiences of Black girls have been consistently overlooked and understudied. A systematic search was conducted in ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), Scopus and Google Scholar for articles published from 2000 to December 2020. The reference lists of the included studies were also searched to retrieve possible additional studies. The systematic review analyzed 9 articles and found six main themes in Black girl leadership: mentoring, oppression, intersectionality, underrepresentation, support networks, and the role of race. Each theme provided valuable insights into the experiences, challenges, and potentials of Black girls in leadership roles. The findings of this systematic review have important implications for researchers, policymakers, and educators working to promote equity and inclusion in leadership. Policymakers and educators can use this information to develop targeted interventions and programs to support Black girls in leadership positions.

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#### Introduction:-

Leadership is a critical aspect of organizational success, and the ability to lead is an essential skill for individuals seeking to make an impact in their communities. However, despite the growing importance of leadership, the field has long been dominated by white men (Ely et al, 2011). Women and minorities have historically been underrepresented in leadership positions, and Black girls, in particular, face unique barriers to achieving leadership roles (Stoker et al, 2012). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion in leadership, there remains a paucity of research on the experiences of Black girls as leaders (Shih et al, 2013). Most studies on leadership have been conducted on white men, with limited research on women and even less on women of color, including Black girls (Livingston et al, 2012 and Sanchez-Hucles and Davis 2010). This gap in research is particularly troubling given the unique challenges and opportunities that Black girls face as they navigate their personal and professional lives.

Black girls' leadership experiences are shaped by their race, gender, and other intersecting identities, such as class and sexuality (Davis, 2016). They face numerous barriers to leadership, including stereotyping, marginalization, and discrimination (Cook and Glass, 2013; Emerson and Murphy, 2015; Lloyd-Jones, 2014; Johnson and Thomas, 2012; Henry and Glenn, 2009). However, despite these challenges, Black girls have demonstrated remarkable resilience and determination in their pursuit of leadership roles. They have shown the ability to lead in various domains, including education, business, politics, and social justice activism. Achieving a senior-level leadership position in higher education is a difficult task for many individuals. However, for Black women, this goal may be even more challenging. The number of White men and women in higher education holding leadership positions far surpasses the number of Black men and women in the same roles (Perna et al, 2007). The underrepresentation of Black individuals in leadership positions raises questions about why this disparity exists and what steps are being taken to address it. According to the United States Department of Education in 2012, only 9.4% of higher education administrators were Black, while 80% of college presidents were White and 26% of that percentage was women (Wolfe and Dilworth, 2015).

Many African American women today are still struggling to advance in their careers, achieve leadership roles, and attain a high-class lifestyle. These women have been instrumental in the growth of the country's economy since the 1960s and 1970s by joining the workforce (Kurtulus, 2016). However, despite their contributions, African American women are often treated as inferior workers and subjected to stereotypes, segregation, and biases, both conscious and unconscious (Koenig and Eagly, 2014). While progress has been made due to the enactment of the anti-discrimination law in the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the women's suffrage movement, African American women continue to face challenges in accessing career advancement opportunities. They are often socially categorized and limited in their access to career advancement compared to their European American male and female counterparts (Nkomo and Hoobler, 2014). Moreover, women have demonstrated their leadership abilities, often being perceived as more transformational than men. They have been successful in improving organizational performance, motivating their followers, and exhibiting exceptional communication skills as leaders (Hite, 2004; Robbins and Judge, 2011). However, despite this progress, social norms continue to place women in subordinate roles compared to men, particularly in the context of leadership. This disparity is even more pronounced for African American women, who face additional societal challenges due to racism (Hite, 2004; Lott, 2009; Peters et al, 2004). It is predicted that it will take approximately 75 years for gender disparities in business to decrease and for leadership to become more reflective of the American workforce (Bollinger, 2008). Women of color, particularly African American women, face even greater organizational and systematic challenges when pursuing, achieving, and retaining leadership positions (Hite, 2004; Lott, 2009; Peters et al, 2004).

This systematic review aims to explore the key themes and trends in research on Black girl leadership from 2000-2020 and examine how they have evolved. Additionally, the review will examine the factors contributing to the success of Black girls in leadership roles, as well as the barriers they face in achieving leadership positions. The review will synthesize existing literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of research on Black girl leadership and identify areas for future research and practice. The importance of this review lies in its potential to inform policies and interventions that support the development of Black girls as leaders. By highlighting the factors that contribute to their success and the barriers they face, this review can inform efforts to increase the representation of Black girls in leadership roles and improve their opportunities for leadership development. Moreover, the review can help address the gap in research on Black girl leadership and provide a foundation for future studies in this field.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the key themes and trends in research on Black girl leadership from 2000-2020, and how have they evolved over time?
2. What factors contribute to the success of Black girls in leadership roles, and what barriers do they face in achieving leadership positions?

### **Methods:-**

This review was conducted following PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis) 2020 guidelines (Page et al, 2021). Two databases were [ERIC (Education Resources Information Center) and Scopus] were searched for articles published in English. The articles were published from 2000 to December 2020 and had to present information on themes and trends in research on Black girl leadership. ERIC was the primary database considered to represent internationally-indexed articles from the region.

### Primary search

The search strategy for ERIC featured a combination of free keyword searches. The keyword search featured an all-text analysis to broaden the sensitivity of the search strategy. We did not use any search filter and only applied filters during the title and abstract screening. The search strategies used for Scopus was a slight modification of ERIC's strategy. Table 1 below represents the selection of primary keywords considered for the search.

Database	Term
ERIC & Scopus	("Black girls" OR "African American girls" OR "Black women" OR "African American women" OR "Black female leaders" OR "African American female leaders" OR "Black girl leadership" OR "African American girl leadership" OR "Afro-American girl" OR "girl of color") AND ("leadership" OR "leaders" OR "leadership roles" OR "leadership development" OR "leadership skills" OR "leadership programs" OR "leadership qualities") AND ("success factors" OR "barriers to success" OR "obstacles" OR "challenges" OR "achievement" OR "resilience" OR "mentoring" OR "networks" OR "facilitators" OR "enablers") AND ("2000-2020" OR "21st century" OR "contemporary" OR "recent" OR "themes" OR "evolution" OR "trends" OR "developments")

### Secondary search

In addition to the search conducted on the two databases, a direct search was done using Google Scholar database. To allow the presentation of the most relevant results in the first pages, keywords representing Black girls (African American girls, black women, African American women, Black female leaders, African American female leaders, Black girl leadership, African American girl leadership, Afro-American girl, and girl of color) were included in the search. The reference lists of the included studies were also searched for any relevant additional articles.

### Eligibility criteria

All studies had to meet the following pre-defined inclusion criteria

1. Original studies
2. Published in English
3. Studies published between 2000 and 2020 that explore Black girl leadership in various contexts
4. Studies that examine the various dimensions of Black girl leadership, including leadership styles, competencies, behaviors, and effectiveness
5. Studies that analyze the contexts in which Black girls assume leadership roles (e.g., schools and politics)
6. Studies that explore the factors that contribute to the success of Black girls as leaders, such as self-efficacy, mentorship, and community support
7. Studies that examine the barriers Black girls face in achieving leadership positions, such as racism, sexism, and intersectional discrimination

Studies that satisfied the following criteria were excluded:

1. Systematic review
2. Non-journal papers
3. Non-full-texts
4. Conference Proceedings
5. Dissertation
6. Letters to authors and comments
7. Studies that do not focus specifically on Black girls' leadership experiences
8. Studies that do not provide any empirical evidence or analysis, such as opinion pieces, editorials, or letters to the editor

### Study selection and data extraction

Potentially eligible studies were individually screened using Zotero. The selection featured a rigorous screening of titles, abstracts and full texts. After the selection of articles for inclusion, data was extracted into a predefined data

descriptor table with the following fields: author, year of publication, study design, mean age, sample size, geographical location, the objective of the study, factors contributing to success, barriers to success, key findings and limitations.

### Results:-

Our search featuring Black Girl leadership retrieved 120 results from the two databases. The search on ERIC yielded 78 results and Scopus yielded 42 results. For Google Scholar database, the results of the first forty pages only were analyzed. We found new additional articles for inclusion from Google Scholar and our search on the references of included studies. Figure 1 below represents the PRISMA flowchart summarizing the subsequent data screening procedure.

#### PRISMA flow chart

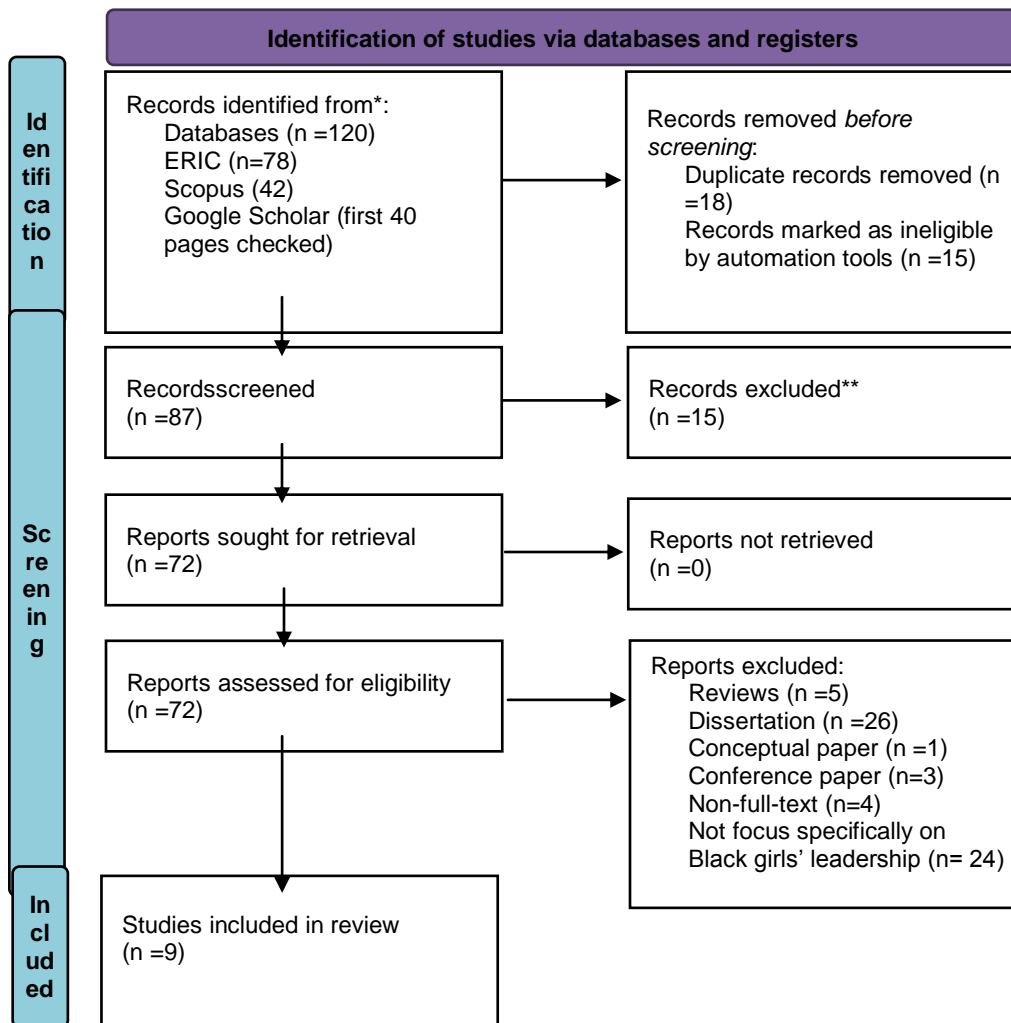


Figure 1:- PRISMA chart.

#### Characteristics of included articles

This paper analyses data extracted from 8 qualitative studies and 1 case study. 8 out of 9 studies were done in the United States. These studies reported a sample size of 104 Black women assuming different leadership roles in society i.e. schools and politics.

Study descriptor table 2

Author	Year	Study design	Size	Mean age	Geolocation	Objective	Factors contributing to the success	Barriers to success	Key findings	Limitations
(Dominique)	2015	Qualitative study	12	24	United States	To explore the experiences of contemporary black women's student leadership.	Mothering, mentorship, allyship from white peers, and the formation of social networks.	stereotype, microaggressions, racialized and gendered self-presentation expectations.	Stereotypes were often described at the foundation of other interpersonal interactions with oppression, specifically Microaggressions, Racialized and Gender Self-Presentation Expectations, and Voicing and Silencing, making it difficult for participants to interrupt these instances of oppression.	The study was conducted at one predominantly white institution. Small sample size Participant recruitment.
(Grant)	2012	Qualitative study	5	N/A	United States	Explore specific mentoring experiences of five former African-American female doctoral students in educational leadership interested in academe,	Mentorship	N/A	African American female doctoral students in educational leadership who attend a PWI have a series of unique experiences which have a direct impact on their successful entry into the professoriat	Small sample size

						and their influence on their advancement into faculty posts at separate PWIs.			e.	
(Grant & Ghee)	2015	Qualitative study	2	N/A	United States	To explore the effectiveness of traditional and non-traditional mentoring functions.	Mentorship	N/A	Both mentoring functions were helpful in the achievement	N/A
(Miles Nash & Peters)	2020	Case study	3	N/A	United States	Examine the articulation of an intersectional leadership framework.	Education and training	N/A	Black women have modeled what Black girls need because they empathize with their intersectional identities in unique ways.	N/A
(Person et al.)	2014	Qualitative case study	5	N/A	South Africa	To assess female students' perceptions regarding a joint pilot doctoral program between the University of the Western Cape (UWC) and California State	Formalized training programs, expanding research dynamics, and teaching components	Lack of access to resources	The importance of professional development and formalized training programs, expanding research dynamics, and teaching components with international collaborations are	Small sample The outcomes and implications directly referred to the specific UWC Ph.D. program with a group of unique participants, and no

						University, Fullerton's (CSUF) Higher Education program, and their experiences while in the program.			promising practices to address the challenges and obstacles black women face in preparing to become leaders in South African higher education.	validation has been conducted to verify if the successes of the pilot Ph.D. program are similar to others in South Africa. it does not address the complexities of apartheid and post-apartheid impact on leadership in higher education and black women to the fullest extent.
(Carter Andrew et al., )	2019	Qualitative study	17	N/A	United States	To explore how Black girls describe and understand their school experiences as racialized and gendered.	Support systems and mentoring	Racialized and gendered	High school-aged Black girls described toxic racialized and gendered experiences with adults and peers in their schools.	N/A
(Goodkind et al.,)	2020	Qualitative and Quantitative	36	14.97	United States	To examine traditional and	Empowerment and Resilience	Oppression	The findings demonstrate the	small sample size It is

		study				alternative models of resilience through analyses of quantitative and qualitative data from an evaluation of a year-long empowerment program.			positive effects of empowerment-based programming, challenge the utility of traditional, individually-focused models of resilience, and reframe Black girls' resistance to injustice as an alternative, collective form of resilience.	exploratory and preliminary, rather than definitive
(Holmes)	2004	Qualitative study	3	N/A	United States	To examine the experiences of selected African American presidents in higher education.	N/A	Racial discrimination and underrepresented	Experiences of African Americans in higher education are constructed largely by race, class, and gender, thus at every level and rank in the academy they are affected.	N/A
(Mims & Kaler-Jones)	2020	Qualitative study	21	12	United States	To examine 21 Black girls enrolled in a summer program in a mid-sized Southern city individually and in focus groups	Role model	N/A	Being a leader, from the girls' perspective, often meant making positive life choices that keep you on the right path—even if that path means going in a different direction	N/A



						about their knowledg e of Black women leaders and definition s of leadershi p.			than your peers.	
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### Analysis

This paper used thematic analysis to identify and analyze patterns or themes within the qualitative data.

### Results:-

#### Key Themes and Trends

These themes, oppression and resilience, intersectionality, underrepresentation, support networks, mentoring and the role of race, have been prominent in the research on Black girl leadership from 2000 to 2020. The evolving emphasis on these themes over time reflects the progressive understanding and recognition of the unique experiences, challenges, and potentials of Black girls in leadership roles. The early 2000s: Focus on Racial discrimination and underrepresentation: there was a noticeable trend of increasing emphasis on the theme of racial discrimination and underrepresentation in research on Black girl leadership. This trend suggests a growing recognition of the importance of diverse and visible Black girl leadership role models and the positive impact they can have on empowering future generations.

Mid-2000-2020s: Deepening Understanding of Intersectionality and Identity: The trend of a deepening understanding of intersectionality and identity in research on Black girl leadership was evident throughout the examined years. While earlier studies acknowledged the intersection of race and gender, more recent research increasingly explored the complex ways in which other social identities intersect with Black girls' leadership experiences. This trend signifies a broader recognition of the multifaceted nature of Black girl leadership and the need for an intersectional lens to fully comprehend their unique challenges and potentials.

The late 2020s: Shifting Focus toward Empowerment and Resilience: A clear trend observed in the systematic review was the shifting focus toward the themes of empowerment and resilience in research on Black girl leadership. While earlier studies touched upon these concepts, recent years saw a significant surge in research that specifically examined and celebrated the agency, strength, and resilience demonstrated by Black girls in leadership roles. This trend indicates a growing acknowledgment of their inherent strengths and the need to support and nurture their empowerment and resilience.

### Themes

#### Oppression

The theme of oppression emerged as a significant factor in understanding the challenges faced by Black girls in leadership roles. Many studies highlighted the structural barriers and discrimination that Black girls face in society, such as limited access to resources and opportunities, lower rates of academic achievement, and higher rates of disciplinary action. A study by Domingue (2015), examined how participants navigated interpersonal interactions with oppressive forces and identified the sources of support that enabled these women to continue exercising their leadership despite these challenges. The author reported that stereotypes formed the basis of many other interpersonal interactions with oppressive forces, such as microaggressions, racialized and gendered expectations related to self-presentation, and both voicing and silencing. These factors made it challenging for participants to interrupt instances of oppression. A qualitative study by Goodkind et al. (2020) analyzed both quantitative and qualitative data from an evaluation of a year-long empowerment program to explore conventional and alternative models of resilience. The authors reported that there was no observed change over time in traditional indicators of individual resilience based on quantitative analyses. However, qualitative analyses revealed that participants

engaged in critical reflection on their encounters with oppression fostered mutual support, developed a positive sense of gendered racial identity, and actively participated in collective action.

### **Support Network**

Person et al. (2014) investigated how Black women in South Africa possess the eagerness to advance professionally and progress to higher levels in their roles as educational leaders. The authors concluded that adopting promising practices such as professional development, formal training programs, expanding research dynamics, and incorporating teaching components with international collaborations can help overcome the challenges and obstacles faced by Black women who aspire to become leaders in South African higher education. Also, a study by Goodkind et al. (2020) observed beneficial outcomes resulting from empowerment-based programs. They questioned the effectiveness of conventional resilience models that primarily focus on individuals and instead advocated for a reframing of Black girls' resistance to injustice as an alternative form of resilience that is collective. A study (Mims & Kaler-Jones, 2020) provided important insight into which leaders Black girls identified with and what leadership meant to them. According to the author's report, the girls' perspective on being a leader often entailed making positive decisions that guide them along a righteous path, even if it means deviating from the choices made by their peers. Moreover, the girls' definitions of leadership emphasized the importance of supporting others, particularly fellow Black girls.

### **Underrepresentation**

The theme of underrepresentation emerged as a significant factor in understanding the challenges faced by Black girls in leadership roles. A qualitative study by Holmes (2004) highlighted that the office of the president within higher education institutions serves as a prominent example of the underrepresentation of African American administrators.

### **Intersectionality**

The theme of intersectionality emerged as a crucial factor in understanding Black girl leadership. A qualitative study by Miles Nash and Peters (2020) focused on the efforts of three Black women school leaders who specifically work for the benefit of Black girls. By analyzing their asset-based strategies, the study proposes an intersectional leadership framework to conceptualize their work. The author reported that Black women educators possess distinctive capabilities to provide support for Black girls within educational institutions.

### **Mentoring**

The theme of mentoring emerged as a key factor in understanding the development of Black girls as leaders. Many studies emphasized the importance of mentorship in fostering leadership skills and confidence among Black girls. Mentors were found to provide guidance, support, and encouragement, as well as important networking and career opportunities. A qualitative study by Grant (2012) explored the unique mentoring experiences of five African-American women who had completed doctoral studies in educational leadership and were interested in pursuing academic careers. It examined how these experiences influenced their ability to secure faculty positions at predominantly white institutions. The author concluded that certain components of mentoring were closely tied to the success of these women in advancing their careers. Another study by Grant and Ghee (2015), explored the idea of mentoring as a nuanced strategy to support the upward mobility of African-American women in predominantly white institutions (PWIs).

The author concluded that mentoring strategies aid African American women and minorities' succession at PWIs. A study by Carter Andrews et al. (2019) delved into the way Black girls articulate and interpret their school encounters within the context of race and gender. Additionally, it examined how creating a conversational environment enables Black girls to construct personal and collective narratives regarding their educational experiences, facilitating a critical examination of these experiences. The authors reported that even though the Black girls in the study encountered negative attitudes and mistreatment from their peers, as well as negative perceptions and reduced expectations from adults; they expressed having positive relationships with supportive adults within their schools. These adults encouraged them to embrace their true potential and validated their racial and gender identities. The adults played a mentoring role and motivated nurturing and caring practices often referred to as "othermothering".

### **Role of race**

Holmes (2004) investigated the experiences of African American presidents in their administrative positions. The authors noted that while African American presidents encountered issues related to race in their roles, these issues

were not their primary concern in managing their administrative responsibilities. However, the authors suggested that considerations of race may have been a primary factor in the selection of these individuals for their positions by institutional hiring officials. Carter Andrews et al. (2019) reported that Black girls at the high school level expressed encountering harmful racial and gender-related experiences involving both adults and peers within their school environments.

### **Discussion:-**

This systematic review aimed to examine the key themes and trends in research on Black girl leadership from 2000-2020, with a focus on understanding the factors that contribute to their success and the barriers they face in achieving leadership positions. Through the review, six key themes emerged from the literature: mentoring, intersectionality, underrepresentation, support network, and the role of race and oppression.

Mentoring was identified as a critical factor that contributes to the success of Black girls in leadership roles. Studies consistently found that having access to mentors and role models who share similar experiences and backgrounds can have a positive impact on Black girls' leadership development. Intersectionality, or the intersection of race, gender, and other identities, was also found to play a significant role in shaping Black girls' experiences in leadership positions. The literature suggests that Black girls who face intersecting forms of oppression, such as racism, sexism, and classism, may encounter unique challenges in accessing and succeeding in leadership roles. Underrepresentation was identified as a key barrier to Black girls' leadership development, with studies consistently finding that Black girls are underrepresented in leadership positions across various sectors. This underrepresentation is linked to broader societal and structural factors, such as discrimination and lack of access to resources and opportunities. The support network was another key theme that emerged from our review, with studies highlighting the importance of having access to supportive networks of peers, family, and community members in fostering Black girls' leadership development. Oppression was identified as a critical barrier to Black girls' leadership development, with studies highlighting the impact of systemic and structural forms of oppression on their experiences in leadership roles. These forms of oppression include but are not limited to racism, sexism, and classism. The theme of the role of race emerged as a significant finding in the reviewed studies on Black girl leadership. This theme highlighted the importance of understanding how race intersects with the experiences and opportunities for Black girls in leadership roles.

Our findings align with several other studies that have investigated the experiences of Black girls in leadership roles. For example, Lim et al. (2017) found that mentoring and role models were critical factors in fostering the leadership development of Black girls. Similarly, Peter and Miles (2021) highlighted the importance of intersectionality in shaping Black girls' experiences in leadership roles and the need for interventions that address systemic forms of oppression. However, our review also identified some differences in the findings of other studies. For instance, while some studies have emphasized the importance of individual-level factors such as self-efficacy and confidence in Black girls' leadership development (Jackson, 2012), our review found that systemic and structural barriers, such as discrimination and lack of access to resources and opportunities, also play a critical role. Additionally, studies by Curtis (2007) and Edwards (2020) have highlighted the importance of addressing underrepresentation and intersectionality in understanding Black girls' experiences in leadership roles.

Another area of agreement between our review and other studies is the importance of supportive networks in Black girls' leadership development. Several studies have highlighted the significance of supportive relationships with peers, family members, and community members in fostering Black girls' leadership skills and confidence (Bruce-Golding, 2019). Our review supports these findings and underscores the importance of cultivating supportive networks that are culturally relevant and responsive to the needs of Black girls. Furthermore, our review contributes to the existing literature on Black girl leadership by highlighting the impact of systemic and structural forms of oppression on their leadership development. While some studies have examined the impact of racism and other forms of oppression on Black girls' academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Richardson, 2021), few have specifically examined the impact of oppression on their leadership development. Our review underscores the need for more research in this area, as well as the need for interventions and policies that address systemic and structural barriers to Black girls' leadership development.

The review also highlighted the need for further research that examines the intersectionality of race, gender, and other identities in shaping Black girls' experiences in leadership roles. While some studies have examined the experiences of Black girls in leadership roles, few have specifically focused on the experiences of Black girls who

are marginalized by intersecting forms of oppression. This gap in the literature underscores the need for more research that addresses the unique challenges and opportunities faced by Black girls with intersecting identities in leadership roles. Overall, our review contributes to the growing body of literature on Black girl leadership and underscores the need for interventions and policies that support their leadership development. While the findings align with several other studies, there is still much to be learned about the experiences of Black girls in leadership roles, particularly those who are marginalized by intersecting forms of oppression. Future research can build on these findings by examining the effectiveness of interventions and policies designed to address the barriers faced by Black girls in leadership roles.

### Conclusion:-

This systematic review of research on Black girl leadership from 2000-2020 identified six key themes that have emerged in the literature: mentoring, intersectionality, underrepresentation, support networks, and the role of race and oppression. This review also identified several factors that contribute to the success of Black girls in leadership roles, as well as the barriers they face in achieving these roles. Overall, the findings highlight the critical need for interventions and policies that support the leadership development of Black girls. Mentoring, in particular, emerged as a critical factor in fostering Black girls' leadership skills and confidence. Interventions that provide opportunities for Black girls to connect with mentors and role models who share their racial and gender identities are particularly effective in supporting their leadership development. Moreover, the review highlights the need to address systemic and structural forms of oppression that hinder Black girls' leadership development. Interventions and policies that address discrimination, lack of access to resources and opportunities, and other forms of oppression may be necessary to create a more equitable playing field for Black girls in leadership roles. Finally, the review contributes to a growing body of literature on Black girl leadership by identifying key themes and trends in research from 2000-2020. By highlighting factors that contribute to the success of Black girls in leadership roles, as well as the barriers they face, this review can inform the development of interventions and policies that support their leadership development.

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