African American Women Serving as K-12 Superintendents:

An Examination of the Experiences That Impact Their Career Trajectory

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
(Educational Leadership)
at the University of Michigan-Dearborn
2022

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Dedication

To my family, I give thanks. Family, you believed in me and gave me space and encouragement to undertake the journey. Your pride in me is only superseded by my pride in you.

To my parents for all of the love throughout my lifetime and within their afterlife given to me, I give thanks. Mama and Papa, until we meet again, rest in peace. I accomplished the ultimate achievement within education for you.

Acknowledgments

My sincere gratitude is expressed to my Doctoral Committee. To my Chair, Dr. Christopher Burke, I thank you for your belief in me combined with your willingness to journey with me from start to finish. My gratitude can only be expressed through a delicious honey crisp apple for the teacher. Dr. John Artis (Posthumous), one of my favorite professors, you kept it real with me, always willing to share words of advice from your bag of experience. I will miss our lively conversations and your staunch loving ways of reproof when I was thoughtless. May you forever rest in peace. Dr. Ann Lampkin Williams, the day you sat beside me sight unseen you told me it was possible. That chance meeting was a God-given gift. I cannot thank you enough for all of your support and intervention. My final committee member, Dr. Albert Hodge, you came aboard at the passing of Dr. John Artis not knowing me but willing to help me to succeed. Your guidance, kindness, and superb expertise were invaluable.

I must also give thanks to professors Dr. Susan Everett and Dr. Mesut Duran. You pushed me, prodded me, and helped me to stand, refusing to allow me to fall. I appreciate you recognizing my potential to achieve the end goal more than words can say. Your efforts brought me to this day.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge Dr. LaShonda Fuller, my counseling intern, and Darryl Bingham, my work son. Together you dared me to take on this journey and your respect and love for me is only matched by my love and respect for you.

To the love of my life, Darrel F. Johnson, thank you for applauding me and sharing your know-how with me. Your loving regard re-energized my efforts to prod forward.

Without each of you this would not have been possible. I sincerely appreciate and give thanks for each and every one of you.

Finally, to my Lord and Savior I give homage for the Grace and Mercy bestowed upon me that provided the strength and courage to accomplish this task. Throughout the trials and tribulations, it was only through prayer and spiritual sustenance that I arrived successfully to attain this honor. I thank you, Lord, for this achievement.

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Abstract

While women comprise the majority of those employed in K-12 school districts, educational administrators who are women, especially African American women, are underrepresented in the superintendency position. Broadly, the position of superintendent is one of the most gender stratified occupations in K-12 school systems, and African American women who seek career advancement in these systems face challenges that are unique when compared to African American men and White men and women. In particular, African American women face social stigmas related to the challenges of sexism, racism, and classism in career advancement. The reality of intersectionality further complicates these barriers and can be experiential deterrents that impact African American women during their advancement to the position of K-12 public school superintendent. This study explored the lived experiences of seven African American women who have ascended to the position of K-12 public school superintendent. Findings obtained through this qualitative research revealed five themes: (1) spirituality, (2) dual bias status, (3) supportive relationships, (4) preparation, and (5) self-care. In sum, insights gained through these themes fills a gap in the literature by offering greater understanding on how to mitigate the underrepresentation of African American women in this position.

Chapter One: Introduction

Historically, a very small percentage of African American women educators have been promoted to the superintendency, the highest administrative position within K-12 public school districts (Brown, 2018; Chacon, 2018; Colbert, 2009; Cox, 2017; Davis-Jones, 2013; Handy, 2008; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Taylor, 2016; Williams, 2016). The position of a K-12 public school district superintendent is similar to a corporation's Chief Executive Officer. Accordingly, the most powerful and influential person within K-12 public education, aside from the school principal, is the school district superintendent (Colbert, 2009; Henderson, 2015).

The K-12 public school district superintendent leads the organization to academic success or failure. Upper administrative and executive positions have customarily been dominated by White men (Colbert, 2009; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Reynolds-Dobbs, et al., 2008). Notwithstanding the underrepresentation of African American women as school superintendents, there also is a lack of top ranking African American women administrators in public and private sector Fortune 500 companies (Beall-Davis, 2017; Brooks, 2010; Cadet, 2018; Colbert, 2009; Joshi et al., 2015; Taylor, 2016). Additionally, there are inequitable gaps in the numbers of African American women who serve in executive and senior positions within post-secondary institutions of higher learning, both community colleges and universities (Braxton, 2018; Carter-Frye, 2015; Clayton, 2009; DeConcilio, 2016; Tanner, 2019; Townsend, 2019). From these statistics, it is clear that it's difficult for women to enter and be successful in most fields, including the K-12 public school superintendency, as it's understood to be the domain of men.

This qualitative research explores the leadership experiences of African American women prior to becoming K-12 public school superintendents with an aim to identify factors that might increase the number of African American women serving as K-12 public school superintendents. This chapter provides relevant background information and describes the purpose of the study and its research questions. The chapter ends with a discussion of the theoretical framework used to guide the study.

Gender Inequity

The leadership position of superintendent in K-12 public education has traditionally reflected a White patriarchal system (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Colbert, 2009; Daye, 2007; Gillett, 2012; Henderson, 2015; Jenkins, 2019; Jones, 2013; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015) despite the fact that women constitute the majority of professionals in K-12 public education (Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). It is noteworthy that only 16 percent of elementary school teachers are men; yet, men comprise 80 percent of principalships (Wallace, 2020). School systems' structure of masculine dominant group control influences the exclusion of women seeking upper management positions of power within the organization (Patterson, 2006). The fact that men receive more administrative promotions than women gives credence to the assumption that men are more intellectually competent leaders (Bailey-Walker, 2018) and sustains societal beliefs of women's inferiority (Williams, 2016). Stereotypic perceptions of women as emotionally weaker and less intellectually competent than men are often used as a rationale to explain the scarcity of women in leadership positions (Patterson, 2006). Consequently, the culture of the patriarchal K-12 public school system supports the status quo and provides few opportunities for African American women to be promoted (Wallace, 2020).

The contrasting gender role expectations for men and women are learned behaviors derived through environmental cultural socialization (Driver, 2014). Given that leadership and professional positions in organizations have historically been held by White men, White male behavior is unconsciously accepted as the norm that all employees, especially leaders, should aspire to (Jones, 2013; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Accordingly, professional advancement is often aligned to assimilation of White middle-class values, which differentially affects persons of color (Carter-Frye, 2015). Moreover, another general perception is that if women do not assume the dominant male leadership style, they too lack the courage and confidence necessary to lead a K-12 school district (Henderson, 2015). Somewhat contradictorily, in challenging situations in which African American women superintendents must exert strong leadership typically characteristic of men, negative perceptions of their leadership surface. African American female leaders are frequently misunderstood as angry (Kingsberry, 2015). Confronted with the same challenges as White female and male superintendents, African American female superintendents authoritative power is labeled as aggressive (Pruitt, 2015; Rowan, 2006). When African American women make decisions that are comparable to their White counterparts, they are not considered as assertive and confident but are instead viewed as controlling (Caldera, 2016) and difficult to get along with (Cox, 2017).

Society's patriarchal system of White male leadership dominance has prevailed (Jones, 2013; Lee, 2000) as a role model for top administrative executive career aspirants, coercing African American women contenders to conform to what could be construed as a masculine demeanor (Jenkins, 2019). Women aspiring to school leadership often accept the inevitable realization that the adoption of a masculine orientation may possibly be a necessity to succeed, although assimilation promotes the stereotypical ideology pertinent to male versus female

leadership styles (Patterson, 2006). In contrast, the literature suggests that the most successful women in leadership positions rely on their knowledge and are not influenced by the perceptions of others. Some women in leadership have courageously dared the step outside of traditional gender roles to attain a power status that is commonly held by men. Aspiring women are capable of leadership. Nevertheless, essentialism and gender stereotypical beliefs continue to dictate a personality adjustment as a prerequisite for African American female executive leadership. The question becomes why? Accomplished African American women are knowledgeable leaders and are capable to demonstrate leadership without coerced acquiesces to male behavioral demeanors (Patterson, 2006).

Numerous people have beliefs about the capabilities of African American women in leadership positions (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). African American women are expected to acquiesce to the role perceived best suitable for a woman; that is, the role of a mother, housemaker, or professionally, a classroom teacher (Pruitt, 2015). Distorted cultural stereotypes portray women as the nicer, kinder sex, while men in leadership are perceived as the assertive, directive gender that makes decisions (Henderson, 2015). This perspective, however, is a form of gender discrimination.

Preconceived ideas of gender leadership behaviors have a direct discriminatory impact on the effectiveness of African American women (Henderson, 2015). The profile of an African American woman leader is not one distinct identity, rather the leadership styles of African American women are multifaceted and individualistic (Doss, 2011). Frequently misconstrued, African American women are often viewed as threatening, lacking soft skills, and having attitude problems (Carter-Frye, 2015). Rather than perceived as assertive or confident in their authority when questioning cultural norms, women leaders of African American descent are often

misunderstood as angry (Cox, 2017). Forceful Afrocentric characteristics can be considered as threatening or confrontational. Aggressiveness is conceived as a negativity trait in women (Colbert, 2009). Consequently, this perception becomes a disadvantage for African American women and how their leadership is seen by others (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Intersectionality: Black Women and Discrimination

Educational institutions have unfairly devalued African American women and idealized their White counterparts (Haynes, 2016). Social inequalities embedded within American culture reinforce symbolic boundaries of discrimination that separate African American women from White women (Colbert, 2009). Sociocultural theories considerate of intersectionality highlight the complicated lives of African American when compared to White women (Beall-Davis, 2017). The struggle of African American women is much more intense. Researcher Kimberle Crenshaw (1991) coined the term *intersectionality* to articulate how overlapping systems of race and gender subordination impact women of color. The intersectionality analytical framework explores relationships among feminism, racism, and patriarchy, and their implications for issues of power, social justice, and oppression (1991). In other words, intersectionality creates awareness about identity and its relationship to power (Crenshaw, 2015). As a whole, African American women have experienced gender and racial marginalization. Intersectionality critically discerns the impact of membership in multiple categories of oppression (i.e., race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, ability, and age) to deconstruct phenomena that affect African American women (Collins, 2015). While Crenshaw originally introduced intersectionality to address the marginalization of African American women within feminist antiracist theories, politics, and antidiscrimination laws (Carbado et al., 2013), the term has evolved to frame the invisibility of groups not exclusive to African American women that face

intersectional vulnerabilities of racism, sexism, classism, ableism, and heterosexism (Crenshaw, 2015).

Traditionally, society has repeatedly disenfranchised African American women in favor of men and Whiteness (Caldera, 2016). As a group, African American women share similar experiences in the workplace, but are different and unique (Collins, 1996; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). African American women possess individual sets of knowledge, skills, and career experiences (Colbert, 2009). Yet, one significant factor that is often overlooked in their development is the different support they are provided. Formal and informal networking capacity is a critical component of success (Cox, 2017; Henderson, 2015; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Williams, 2016). An example of formal networking is mentors and collegial support (Henderson, 2015; Taylor, 2016). Informal networking is exemplified through faith, family, and friends (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Colbert, 2009; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Taylor, 2016). African American women experience a combination of additional obstacles on their career journey that White women and African American men do not experience (Carter-Frye, 2015). African American women and White women share the same barrier of gender/sexism in their advancement to the K-12 public school superintendency, but their experiences are different (Colbert, 2009). White women may experience rejection of administrative advancement founded upon gender biases; however, the intersectional bias of racism and sexism cause African American women to wonder if rejection is because of race, gender, or both (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). African American women face greater challenges en route to the executive leadership position of the superintendency because of intersectionality, the duality of being both African American and female (Colbert, 2009).

Race and gender roadblocks exclude African American women from networking opportunities for upward mobility (Williams, 2016). Additionally, an obstacle to African American women recruitment opportunities are the gatekeepers of superintendent searches. Contingent upon stereotypical biases of not being qualified, nonminority male gatekeepers deprive African American women of leadership opportunities (Kingsberry, 2015). Unfortunately, roadblocks and obstacles of historical racist and sexist oppression are inextricably linked to African American women's quest for power and authority (Haynes, 2016). The upward mobility of African American women is below African American men and even farther behind White women (Henderson, 2015). African American women who seek career advancement face challenges in competition against White men, White women, and their African American male counterparts (Pruitt, 2015). The experiences, training, credentials, and personal and professional connections of White men and women provide an advantage that African American women are not often privy to (Jenkins, 2019). The social capital of networks afforded to men supports the differential treatment of men and women (Patterson, 2006). Training and mentorship opportunities provided to men are oftentimes not the same for African American women who are not members of the "good old boys network" (Kingsberry, 2015).

African American women need exposure to different duties and responsibilities via association and observation of professionals with the authority and influence of the superintendency (Colbert, 2009). Lacking the social interaction of colleagues who can shape leadership experiences hampers the formation of a leadership identity (Cox, 2017). Essentially, experience and skill training deficiencies impact opportunities for promotion (Patterson, 2006). African American women upon entry into male dominated administrative occupations become acutely aware of the impactful experiences of gender segregation and racial discrimination. The

discriminatory practices inherent in intersectionality is most evident when the qualifications, experience, and job performance of African American women, are equivalent if not superior to males, yet notably absent of rewards or equivalent authority (Wallace, 2020). Although the number of qualified and prepared women for the position of superintendent has increased, the number of African American women that acquire the position continues to lag behind the number of men who achieve the position (Pruitt, 2015). Despite their credentials or level of experience, hidden obstacles keep African American women from obtaining the superintendency (Jenkins, 2019). Sexism and racism significantly impact the professional advancement of African American women, leading to stagnation in their professional growth and career advancement.

Society's perception of the African American woman for an inordinate length of time has not been a positive image (Cox, 2011). Contributing to school boards' and search committees' rationale not to hire, promote, and retain qualified African American women in higher leadership positions despite qualifications, skill sets, and education achievement is belief in the social stigmas associated with African American women (Carter-Frye, 2015). African American women continuously contend with many negative racial stereotypes in their professional lives that impede workplace relationships (Patterson, 2006). The African American woman has been categorized in several gender stereotypical groupings that affect their ability to act authentically and effectively with others within the workplace. Stereotypical groupings based on gender, ethnicity, and colorism (i.e., skin tone) are biases that challenge African American women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008) seeking the K-12 superintendency.

In conclusion, Rowan (2006) posited that the complex ideologies of race, class, and gender in the images, representations, and symbols of African American women construct

meanings that take the form of accepted truths. African American women have to combat historical stereotypical images, such as the Mammy, Jezebel, and Sapphire, which may affect people's perceptions and treatment of Black women in the workplace (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). African American women must prepare themselves to align the reality of their inner selves with what their outer image means to others. This is the duality of racism and sexism that preoccupies an African American woman's definition of self, which emerged post slavery (Collins, 2009). Cultural depictions often are influential in the establishment of marginalized identities to African American women and affect career ascension (Carter-Frye, 2015; Doss, 2011). Negative stereotypical beliefs perpetuated throughout a school district impact how leadership by women is viewed, serve to promote male leadership within a dominant masculine organizational culture (Patterson, 2006), and continue to subjugate African American women (Collins, 2009). The effect of the stereotypes is that they appear to be a natural fact (Collins, 2009), help maintain White dominance in the workplace, and can be mentally, physically, and emotionally damaging for African American women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Statement of the Problem

Predominant literature on the role of school superintendents historically has taken the perspective of a White male-controlled position (Bailey-Walker, 2018). Early studies on the leadership roles of women have limited data on African American women as K-12 public school superintendents (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Williams, 2016). Research studies of women educational leaders have tended to have middle- to upper-class White female participants. Such studies imply that White women are the accepted behavioral norm of female leadership and the subsequent representative model of womanhood (Doss, 2011). Williams' (2016) research supports the work of Crenshaw (1989), whose findings on intersectionality established that

African American women do not fit into the category of woman except when their experiences were common with the experiences of White women. There is a lack of research that examines the way that gender and race impact women's professional experiences differently, creating an illusion that African American women and White women are alike (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). White women retain a Whiteness privilege that African American women do not have, making African American women different from the White female norm (Cox, 2017; Kingsberry, 2015; Remedios & Snyder, 2015; Williams, 2016). The body of knowledge relevant to the experiences and leadership resilience of African American women superintendents should be expanded. Additional studies are needed to encourage other aspirants.

The absence of African American women leaders is discouraging and a challenge (Bailey-Walker, 2018). With men in the majority of authority positions, pipeline preparation for women is flawed (Henderson, 2015). Gatekeepers' systematic exclusion develops internal beliefs within African American women that the superintendency is not obtainable (Colbert, 2009). These beliefs stymy African American women's pursuit of superintendent positions. A highly qualified woman excluded from advancement is both unfair and unfortunate, as women have much to offer in the leadership role (Buechel Haack, 2010). Moreover, without the uniqueness of alternative role models, African American girls capable of authority positions are subjugated to society's stereotypical career choices relegated to women of color (Colbert, 2009).

Also of concern is the fact that the underrepresentation of women in power positions limits mentorship opportunities, which encumbers socialization. African American women leaders are more liable to provide the nurturance other women, particularly in terms of their need to address struggles in a patriarchal profession (Henderson, 2015). Throughout history, African American women's ability to overcome gender discrimination have not been celebrated

(Brittingham-Stevens, 2016), nor have their resilient abilities to overcome leadership challenges been researched (Kingsberry, 2015). The lack of representation of African American female role models in the superintendency identifies a void in studies of the challenges African American women face in the quest for executive leadership (Pruitt, 2015). Relationships within a network of African American women are essential to establish a sense of inclusion and comfortability (Bailey-Walker, 2018) and can be considered critical to successful leadership accomplishments (Henderson, 2015).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Throughout the country, there is a limited number of African American women superintendents (Bailey-Walker, 2018); yet few studies have been conducted to explore the intersection of race, gender, and leadership in this problem (Campbell, 2010). The purpose of this qualitative study, therefore, was to: (a) explore why the position of K-12 public school superintendent continues to elude educated, talented, and qualified African American women, (b) understand through the narratives of African American women the ways institutionalized gender and racial discrimination affect the pursuit of educational leadership, and (c) identify factors that might change the perception of African American women in leadership. Given this purpose, the following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the leadership experiences of African American women prior to becoming K-12 public school superintendents?
2. What events experienced within the K-12 public school systems do African American women find impactful during the process of becoming superintendents?

3. What leadership factors might change perceptions of African American women in terms of their leadership abilities and lead to an increased number of African American women in K-12 public school superintendent positions?

Significance of the Study

The minimal numbers of studies undertaken on this topic reveal the sense of isolation and struggle African American women educational leaders experience (Campbell, 2010). Deprived of a network of collegial support, this sense of isolation due to the limited number African American female superintendents is difficult to eliminate (Doss, 2011). Equitable recognition and acknowledgment of African American women in leadership could empower and give a voice to women leaders (Haynes, 2016). Therefore, opportunities for engaged African American women who chose to be school district leaders to tell the stories of their lived experiences in the framework of underrepresented school leaders are needed.

The stories of African American women K-12 public school superintendents matter. Gillett (2012) found that students' attitudes were positively impacted in terms of the desire to achieve academic success by superintendents' counternarratives. African American women in leadership positions have unique experiences shaped by historical and sociocultural factors (Haynes, 2016). Critical narratives are vital to the body of scholarship heretofore underreported. A theoretical lens through the oppositional voice of African American women K-12 public school superintendents permits a counternarrative to the presumptive dominant master narrative. Moreover, a contrasting view to dominant ideologies that concentrates on strengths not deficits is needed to display the tenacious self-efficacy of African American women leaders (Kingsberry 2015; Rowan, 2006).

Social prejudice and racial and gender stereotypes limit opportunities and are impediments to African American women in educational leadership (Kingsberry, 2015). Unsubstantiated stereotypical beliefs keep African American women at the bottom rung of the career ladder. Adverse perceptions contribute to the alleged wide expertise and skill gap between women and men in the school system (Patterson, 2006). Gender discrimination also makes it difficult for African American women leaders to reap the benefits of their achievements due to gatekeepers' perceptions of incompetence (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Valian, 2004). African American women are often negatively labeled as dominant, aggressive, sexually promiscuous, rebellious, rude, and loud (Rowan, 2006). Accordingly, additional research should be conducted on the stigmatization of African American women to dispel the negative societal images and perceptions of inept minority leadership that disproportionately disadvantage women of color (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). With limited empirical studies, Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) recommend that continued research focus on understanding how stereotypes impact African American women's advancement opportunities in the workplace. Through oral interviews, study participants can expound upon the barriers and challenges.

Driver (2014) posited that analyzed narratives of African American women as an independent group would provide valuable insight into the experiential knowledge commonalities of past K-12 public school superintendents. Henderson's (2015) research suggests that organizational structures not gender differences are responsible for the significant underrepresentation of African American women in the superintendency. The superintendency paradigm is derived from White, heterosexual, mostly economically advantaged men who have social, economic, and political power in education (Rowan, 2006). Generally, leadership is a social phenomenon favorably biased for men (Beall-Davis, 2017). In education, older White

men often lead the search for a superintendent. Among these men, professional networks of key male decisionmakers provide advancement benefits that focus on mutual social and political networks rather than essential leadership characteristics needed by the school districts (Pruitt, 2015). White men customarily establish mentors that facilitate their career advancement (Wallace, 2020). Therefore, the importance of a network of mentors and sponsors becomes eminent for African American women (Cox, 2017). African American women, as well as White women, tend to be excluded from the male political networks responsible for the superintendent candidate selections (Rowan, 2006). Essentially, biased good old boy gatekeeping practices are one of many hindrances to African American women's access to the superintendency (Kingsberry, 2015). This research offers insight into ways African American women can overcome these challenges in their ascension to the superintendency.

Beyond this, African American women remain subjected to the "double whammy" (Kingsberry, 2015); that is, a double bind syndrome of overt and covert marginalization due to intersectional racism and sexism (Haynes, 2016). Realization of the reality of intersectional discrimination and oppression is an outgrowth of critical race theory. Studies based on critical race theory acknowledge that racism is endemic and thoroughly engrained throughout American society (Driver, 2014; Haynes, 2016). For African American women, race and gender-based stereotypes in the workplace are problems that influence job promotion and advancement (Kingsberry, 2015). According to Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008), these negative stereotypes are especially damaging to aspiring African American women as the perceptions that occur as a result of these stereotypes often do so with limited or no direct contact with the women the stereotypes are about, leaving little opportunity for these women to challenge the stereotypes. This study adds significance to the current literature based by also using a critical race feminism

lens to understand the intersection of race and gender on the experiences of African American women who have served as superintendents.

Examination of the impact of stereotypes on a woman's sense of self and identity is a foundational aspect of the feminist philosophy (Rowan, 2006). However, African American women are often excluded from feminist theory because their experiences are predicated on the intersection of race and gender (Williams, 2016). The African American woman situated within the social context of gender, race, and class does not neatly fit into the traditional feminist theory paradigm (Bailey-Walker, 2018). Some White women in the feminist movement have even believed that African American women lack feminist consciousness (Collins, 1996). It may be argued on the contrary, however, that African American women have been more aware of sexist oppression than any other female group in the United States (hooks, 2015). The problem has been that traditional feminist theories were derived from data of privileged women who were understood to represent all women (Beall-Davis, 2017). Feminist organizations controlled by White women give sanction to what appear to be feminist activities for Whites only, which traditionally has barred the participation of African American women (Collins, 1996; hooks, 2015).

In spite of the challenges described above, African American women have historically been successful in overcoming struggles (Lee, 2000), and it's clear that African American women should be viewed as a group unique unto themselves (Rowan, 2006). The uniqueness of African American women due to their intersectionality initiated a movement that required a different lens than what is provided through the view of traditional feminism (Colbert, 2009). Feminism historically has operated within the realm of White American women. Black feminism evolved in response to White feminists' political agenda, which excluded African

American women (Collins, 2009; Cox, 2017) and negated the importance of resistance to traditional dominant ideologies and images (Rowan, 2006). In particular, Black feminism resisted and disavowed the inherent racist ideology characteristic of White feminist political movements (Collins, 1996). This resistance of the Whiteness underlying feminism made clear the idea that White women were not the norm or the only status for women (Collins, 1996). As a result of the resistance African American women took towards the White privileged feminist theory, a debate ensued. The debate was whether African American should take on what was known as a womanist identity, leaving feminism to and White women (Collins, 1996). The result of this debate became the evolution of the Black feminist. To focus on the categorization of African American women as being a womanist and/or a Black feminist, however, serves only to obscure the challenges that customarily confront African American women as a group (Collins, 1996, 2009). Again, this study attempts to address this issue through the lens of critical race feminism.

Finally, the gender role socialization of women creates shared challenges and barriers (Pruitt, 2015). Yet, the concerns of African American women extend beyond issues due to their status as women (Collins, 1996; Williams, 2016). White women describe the blockage to their career advancement as the glass ceiling; however, for African American women, this ceiling is more like concrete (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The glass ceiling may be defined as the prejudicial cultural practices of a company that impede the power and growth of women employees (Patterson, 2006). It is the mode of behavior established and accepted by masculine organizational leaders. Because of race, the glass ceiling blockage is more challenging and difficult for African American women to overcome. The legacy of slavery defies African American women to shatter the glass ceilings, to move from the "outsider within" status and then

up the "crystal stairs" (Rowan, 2006). Despite the favor shown to other candidates, African American women candidates continue to attempt to break through the glass ceiling. This research is significant in that it honors this tradition.

Theoretical Framework

Without acknowledgement of the intersectionality of sexism, classism, racism, and even ableism, the difficulties African American women withstand in American society cannot be completely comprehended (Wing, 2003). Conceptualized as an ordinary phenomenon, racism pervades American society (Driver, 2014; Haynes, 2016; Wing, 2003) and through education, is reproduced in the next generation of children (Zamudio et al., 2011). Indeed, America's schools are not exempt from the social phenomena of hegemony embedded within the country's societal values (Colbert, 2009). Lacking visibility African American teachers, for example, contributes to the struggle to eliminate illiteracy in segregated education (Brooks, 1993), as African American women are often at the forefront of educational leaders who demonstrate ethics of care and are concerned about unjust situations to the point of taking corrective actions (Cox, 2017).

The central discourse within the literature suggests the leadership abilities of racial minorities are minimized due to the beliefs held by the dominant culture. Norms are established according to the perceptions of White American men and the perceptions of African American women are undervalued (Williams, 2016; Wing & Willis, 1999). Moreover, African American women have a dual concern of gender and race, whereas African American men's issues are addressed only by racial makeup (Crenshaw, 1991). A theoretical framework that addresses gender and racial oppression is the legal scholarship of critical race feminism (Caldera, 2016; Collins, 2009; hooks, 2015). Critical race feminism mirrors the attributes of Black feminist theory, as it is concerned with the disproportionately affected rights of women of color in society

(Caldera, 2016; Collins, 2009). Critical race feminism is an emergent effort in legal academic circles to emphasize the concerns of disproportionately poor and racial minority women (Wing, 2003). Accordingly, critical race feminism seeks to take action through a multidisciplinary approach to formulate solutions to gendered injustices (Wing & Willis, 1999). This includes critical examination of the experience of discrimination among women of color from a multitude of factors not common to White or African American men (Willig, 2006). A critical analysis made using critical race feminism, therefore, dispels the narrative that men of color and women of color have the same experiences (Wing & Willis, 1999).

For African American women, the strength of critical race feminism grew from the affirmative action framework as a way to address the denigration and vilification of women of color (Collins, 2009; Wing, 2003). According to scholars, critical race feminist theory combined with the practical application of critical legal studies allows for the unjust suffering women of color experiences be exposed, validated, and deconstructed (Wing & Willis, 1999). Critical race feminism extends beyond traditional feminist thought, which is founded upon the experiences of White middle and upper-class women, to include at its core scholarship the multiplicity of intersectionality factors women of color endure (Wing & Willis, 1999).

The foundational premise of critical race feminism is a counter discourse to the social realities of gendered racism. Development of Black feminism challenged the assumed Whiteness of feminism in terms of its universal view of White and African American women (Collins, 1996). The rationale of critical race feminism is similar to Black feminist theory in that the experiences of African American women are viewed differentially from the experiences of White women and African American men. Accordingly, emphasis is placed on the intersectionality of gender, race, and class via a marginalized system instituted by White

patriarchy and racist oppression (Caldera, 2016). Use of these tenets to guide this study allows for the challenging of gendered racial oppression and helps to give African American women superintendents a voice.

Dominant ideologies rationalize and support the hierarchical interests of those in power (Rowan, 2006). Critical race feminism deconstructs power structures, including those held by Whites who only support the rights of others when it is beneficial to their own personal interests. Caldera (2016), for example, illustrates these interests in his discussion of society's normalization of overt and covert racial colorblindness. Through the theoretical lens of critical race feminism, a counter narrative to colorblind racial ideology and other dominant discourses may be heard. The critical race feminism framework allows the truth and the experiences of the African American woman to be exposed (Haynes, 2016). Critical race feminism's components of storytelling and counter-storytelling can reveal the impact intersectionality has had upon African American women. The counter narrative matters. It gives voice to the African American female superintendent. Women have been excluded from the dominant discourse on the experience of becoming a superintendent and the tools within critical race feminism can challenge dominant discourses allowing for a better understanding of the interrelations of the multiple oppressive variables (Willig, 2006).

Finally, it is important not to speak for those who have suffered injury, but to provide spaces that allow each injured individual to speak for themselves. With critical race feminism, the goal is to analyze, understand, and legitimize the narratives as voiced by African American women superintendents concerning their experience of oppression (Caldera, 2016). The purpose is to challenge the hegemonic dominant statutes that have turned a colorblind eye and to look for new approaches to bring about change (Wing & Willis, 1999). The experiential narratives of

past African American female K-12 public school superintendents within the state of Michigan would be a key addition to the meager scholarship data available.

Summary

Even though the majority of positions in education are held by women, African American women are significantly underrepresented as K-12 public school superintendents (Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Notwithstanding the decades' increase in the number of women superintendents, the superintendency remains a White male-dominated position and few African American women have ascended to the position of school superintendent (Cox, 2017; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Competition is strong to achieve the position of a public school district superintendent. The preponderance of White male K-12 public school superintendents is an obstacle for women, especially African American women, aspiring to the position of the superintendency (Henderson, 2015; Jenkins, 2019). To serve in a male dominated administrative role, African American women must consider the choice of conforming to the dominant male standards (Henderson, 2015; Jenkins, 2019; Patterson, 2006). In the best interests of advancement in the male dominated world of educational leadership, some African American women assimilate authoritative male leadership traits, believing that doing so eventually leads to leadership opportunities (Pruitt, 2015).

The male-dominated gatekeepers to the superintendency are decision makers that systematically disadvantage women, consciously or unconsciously, via the practice of gender bias (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Pruitt, 2015). Gender advancement based on some degree of White women career progressions continues to impede African American women's ascension to the school superintendency (Carter-Frye, 2015). Women may possess the qualifications to receive the promotion but are unable to penetrate the male-dominated glass ceiling barrier (Bailey-

Walker, 2018; Patterson, 2006). Gendered racial bias further reinforces the glass ceiling effect, making it difficult for African American women to attain positions as superintendents. African American women have to overcome many obstacles including race, gender, negative stereotypes, and limited opportunities en route to become a K-12 public school superintendent (Kingsberry, 2015).

Racial and gender stereotypes are impediments to African American women in educational leadership (Kingsberry, 2015). Despite efforts to eliminate the underrepresentation of African American women in K-12 public school leadership, systematic, endemic, and historic disparities in equity remain prevalent due to the intersectionality of sexism and racism (Carter-Frye, 2015). Gender and racial subjugation enable the marginalization of the African American woman (Crenshaw, 1989), accentuating the need for examination of intersectional discriminatory practices. Williams (2016) suggests that intersectionality means African American women cannot be characterized according to the lifestyles of other women. Preconceived biases distort ideas, thoughts, and opinions about African American women and can have a direct impact in regard to perceptions of effectiveness in positions of leadership (Henderson, 2015). The history of negative racial stereotypes in this country is a cause of unique barriers to the professional advancement of African American women in the workplace (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). The legacy of slavery is etched unto America's story. Nonetheless, theorists of critical race feminism note that it does not have to be our mantra in the future (Wing & Willis, 1999). A research study of common experiences of African American female superintendents in a Midwestern state through the theoretical framework lens of critical race feminism offers a counternarrative to the dominant discourse concerning African American women in the K-12 public school superintendent position. The voices of those silenced and downtrodden by society matter.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

Comparable to a corporation's chief executive officer (Gillett, 2012), the challenging and most powerful influential authority position responsible for the success or failure of a K-12 public educational organization is the school superintendent (Colbert, 2009; Henderson, 2015). K-12 school superintendents are responsible for organizational management of all educational services inclusive of the students, staff, and building structures within the school district. The awesome power base of the K-12 public school superintendency has been White male dominated with an underrepresentation of African American women in executive administrations (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Cadet, 2018; Colbert, 2009; Daye, 2007; Edwards, 2016; Gillett, 2012; Henderson, 2015; Jenkins, 2019; Jones, 2013; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Shelton, 2009), incongruent to the nation's rising diverse student populations and projected minority majority (Taylor, 2016). The number of African American women teachers is increasing; yet the number of African American women superintendents remains disproportionate to the number of African American educators (Dawkins, 2004). As women represent the majority in the field of education, it is a logical assumption that women should hold more positions of leadership (Carter-Frye, 2015; Gillett, 2012; Taylor, 2016; Williams, 2016).

The Superintendency in Retrospect

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) reported a lower number of women to men school superintendents (Williams, 2016). Studies prior to 1998 reported 90

percent of all superintendent positions were held by men (Colbert, 2009). At the beginning of the century in 1910, women held 9 percent of the superintendent positions in the nation (Henderson, 2015). Reportedly nearly 2.8 percent of county superintendents and 11 percent of all superintendents nationwide in 1930 were women (Colbert, 2009). In 1971, AASA reported without stipulating racial ethnicity, that the percentage of women superintendents in the United States was 1.3 percent (Dawkins, 2004). The 1992, AASA study reported that 6.6 percent of the superintendents in the United States were women, a tremendous increase from the 1982 study of 1.2 percent (Dawkins, 2004). Studies in 2000 publicized 13.2 percent of the nation's superintendents were women. The highest number ever reported of women superintendents in the nation was in 2010. An AASA study revealed that 24.1 percent of the nation's superintendents were women (Henderson, 2015). The percentage of women superintendents had almost doubled; however, race/ethnicity was not differentiated.

An anonymous state-level Association of African American Superintendents (AAAS) report in 2007 revealed 523 public school districts had as superintendents 126 women and 22 African Americans, 10 of which were women (Colbert, 2009). The Council of the Great City Schools (as cited in Williams, 2016) reported in 2010 that 27 percent of the nation's larger urban school districts' superintendents were women. Nationwide statistical studies in 1998 and 2000 showed most minority women superintendents served minority student populations that exceeded 25,000 in low performing urban school districts (Gillett, 2012; Williams, 2016). African American women superintendents, past and present, have served disproportionately in urban school districts with limited solutions for serious problems (Colbert, 2009) and often were the first minority to lead the school district (Williams, 2016).

Despite an increase in African American women candidates who seek the position of the K-12 school district superintendency, White men still prevail in securing and retaining the position at a significant rate over women (Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). White men are four times more likely to attain the superintendency at an earlier age than women (Kingsberry, 2015). The profile average of a school superintendent is that of a middle-aged Protestant married White man from a small town (Lee, 2000). Fifty-three percent of men contrasted to 21 percent of women were appointed to an administrative position before age 30 (Henderson, 2015). Sixty percent of male superintendents entered the superintendency through the high school principalship compared to 25 percent or fewer female superintendents. Women generally have slower career advancement, progressing through the ranks as a classroom teacher, assistant principal, principal, coordinator, central office position, and assistant superintendent to attain the superintendency (Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Women superintendents are commonly older than their male counterparts and generally have had 20 years of teaching experience when appointed to an administrative position (Kingsberry, 2015). Men are retiring at 55, whereas experienced women educators at age 55 or 60 are seeking to obtain a first superintendency (Henderson, 2015).

Henderson's (2015) profile study of 15 of Mississippi's sitting women superintendents revealed all had 25 years of experience in education, with few or no school aged children. Composed of an even racial distribution of White and African American, 60 percent were older than 50. The women had served as assistant/deputy superintendents or been in central office positions before the superintendency. Selection for the superintendency was based upon personal characteristics, instructional leadership ability, and potential to be a change agent (Henderson, 2015). In fact, a majority of women superintendents believed the rationale for

selection was to be instructional leaders and/or change agents (Colbert, 2009; Henderson, 2015; Kingsberry, 2015). Eight percent of African American women superintendents believed stipulations of selection carried an additional expectation to be community leaders and accomplish anticipated school districts reforms compared to 3 percent of White women (Colbert 2009; Kingsberry, 2015).

Williams (2016) proposes that African American women believe advanced degrees, professional development, and practical experience are essential to be distinguished as qualified applicants for the superintendency. Subsequently, the percentage of women enrolled in school administration preparation programs has increased to outnumber the men (Pruitt, 2015; Williams, 2016). Although more women than men are enrolled in educational programs, only 10 percent pursue credentials for the superintendency (Henderson, 2015). Over half of all master's degrees are awarded to women; yet an overwhelming majority of senior level administrative positions are held by White men (Colbert, 2009). In the 2003-2004 school year, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) recorded 3.9 percent of all doctoral degrees were earned by African American women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Education doctoral degrees conferred to African American women increased by 92 percent from 1995 to 2005 (Clayton, 2009). Henderson (2015) noted 52.1 percent of female superintendents had doctoral degrees compared to 42.1 percent of male superintendents. It is noteworthy that no state required a doctorate as a qualifying prerequisite for the superintendency position (Williams, 2016). Nonetheless, it would appear equal leadership representation should be commensurate with the preparedness of the women candidates who possess more advanced degrees than men (Carter-Frye, 2015).

Dawkins' (2004) study of 19 major cities within Michigan revealed the majority of school districts were in financial deficits prior to the hiring of African American superintendents to lead the districts. The minority superintendents typically served in small school district communities with school and community populations that are over 50 percent African American. Sixty-nine percent of the minority school leaders had a school board composition of majority non-White individuals, with a majority minority student enrollment. The Michigan communities were receptive to the alternative cultural change in leadership of the African American superintendents. Yet, African American superintendents continue to be a small ratio of Michigan's total population of school superintendents (Dawkins, 2004).

Women Education and Leadership

To understand the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, one must know the historical context of African Americans and women in education (Williams, 2016). America's educational foundation was built for White men. Affluent families sent their boys to boarding schools or abroad to become educated. Male teachers taught boys literacy, arithmetic, and an array of subjects pertaining to family, church, and community (Henderson, 2015). As men had roles within business and politics, extensive reading and writing skills were believed to be required. The role of the woman was that of a mother and housekeeper (Pruitt, 2015). It was not until the mid-1870s did the education of girls and women become relevant. Training for girls was limited to domestic education. Formal instruction for girls focused on homemaking skills, household expenditures, and Bible reading (Henderson, 2015). Women did not require writing skills, as their primary duties were dedicated to home and church tasks. Slaves and freedmen were prohibited by law to learn to read and write. It was not until 1862 that the first act for the

establishment of primary schools for African Americans was passed by Congress (Brooks, 1993).

Education was male dominated. During the early 1800s, men controlled the teaching profession, finances, and school committees (Henderson, 2015). School committees burdened with the responsibilities of day-to-day operations transitioned authority to a superintendent. Twenty-seven eastern and mid-western cities established the superintendent position for school management (Henderson, 2015). In 1870, the National Education Association formed the Department of Superintendents. The first order of business was to solidify the executive power of the superintendents within the education organization, which emphasized male dominance (Bailey-Walker, 2018). By the turn of the century, school boards had been reformed to policymaking and the executive superintendent controlled the business management and supervision of instruction (Henderson, 2015).

The Civil War initiated a change in education for America. With America's growth in business and industry, men left the less paid teacher positions for private sector jobs, which created a shortage of classroom teachers (Henderson, 2015). The shortage of male classroom teachers brought a reluctant acceptance of women at the elementary level into the educational profession (Pruitt, 2015). Women had begun to enter the classroom as teachers; however, the men remained the figure heads of authority in education. World War II's G.I. Bill provided the costs of schooling that opened the pathway for men to enter into the field of education and subsequently into administration, an opportunity not afforded to women (Henderson, 2015).

Changes in Education

Despite the roots of historic and systemic disparities in the United States, Blacks made substantial strides to overcome inequities and attain education (Carter-Frye, 2015). White

opposition limited educational institutions for African Americans. However, discrimination did not stop the desire to be educated. By 1860, 28 African Americans had received college degrees (Brooks, 1993). By 1876, after the abolishment of slavery, there were 1,075 public schools and 121 Black private schools (1993). Former slaves demanded education equality with the support of the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, the Fourteenth Amendment, which conferred citizenship, and the Fifteenth Amendment, which gave the right to vote. The push for access to education led to more equal educational opportunities.

African American women marched for the Suffrage Movement in spite of Elizabeth Stanton's and other feminists' attempt to deny their participation (Giddings, 1988) and efforts to improve schools and protect their inalienable rights (Cox, 2017). The political activism of the Suffrage Movement propelled ambitious women into school leadership positions through the right to vote (Colbert, 2009; Cox, 2017). Traditionally, the county school superintendent was an elected position voted on by men for men. When women became voters, they were more likely to elect women as county superintendents. The challenge for women leaders in education became systems that relied on appointment rather than voting and stopped the progression of women in school leadership. For African American women, the process of leadership had to be negotiated through a predominantly White organizational culture (Haynes, 2016). Leadership opportunities for African American women were shut down by the traditional vanguard leadership (Doss, 2011). The network of patriarchal decision makers did not select women for school leadership positions (Cox, 2017).

The consequences of discrimination, prejudice, low expectations, and insufficient schooling in America's history have sanctioned inequities that seem insurmountable in public education. The turbulent civil unrest in the 1950s and 1960s greatly affected the

superintendency. Ironically, the enactment of the 1954 Brown vs. the Board of Education Civil Rights victory had an adverse effect upon schools in some respects. A deliberate endeavor to avoid obeisance to the United States Supreme Court order for integration and equality in education for all was instituted throughout the south (Kingsberry, 2015). Moreover, desegregation shut down colored schools. Access to education for African Americans was once again hindered. African Americans could no longer go to African American schools or attend White schools. A direct result of the school closures was that many African Americans were displaced from their jobs as teachers and administrators (Colbert, 2009; Kingsberry, 2015). The displacement of African American educational leaders due to the closure of African American schools has historical ramifications that affect promotion and pursuit of educational leadership positions today (Williams, 2016).

The 1954 decision created an extensive struggle for equity and excellence in public schools, as well as for the emergence of African American superintendents (Colbert, 2009). African Americans were hired as superintendents in school communities with a majority non-White student population controlled by predominantly African American education boards (Kingsberry, 2015). Discrimination and racial tensions increased the political role of the superintendent (Gillett, 2012). Superintendents shifted focus beyond instructional management onto community and political support (Henderson, 2015). The 1960s and 1970s saw an increase of political demands for equal treatment and opportunities under the law in the United States. The civil unrest propelled politicians to improve school systems. Federal legislation and law enforcement coerced organizational systems to comply with the changes of the times (Henderson, 2015). Laws are essential but not necessarily the answer (Wing, 2003). Legislation

did not completely stop segregation. Discrimination continued in social venues for African Americans (Colbert, 2009).

African American Women Superintendents

Inadequate data is available relevant to African American women's ascension to the K-12 public school superintendency and the paucity of research has been duly noted (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Clemmons, 2012; Colbert, 2009; Cox, 2017; Daye, 2007; Doss, 2011, Edwards, 2016; Gillett, 2012; Jones, 2013; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Shelton, 2009; Taylor, 2016; Williams, 2016). The available literature has focused minimally on the emergence of African American women leaders, with limited research on factors that cultivate the leadership development of these women (Clemmons, 2012; Colbert, 2009; Doss, 2011; Haynes, 2016; Williams, 2016). Insufficient data exists to identify the reasons for the low numbers of African American women who become school superintendents (Daye, 2007). Because so few African American women hold the superintendent position, studies on the characteristics and leadership styles of individuals who become superintendents have almost exclusively focused on men (Pruitt, 2015) and White women (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Doss, 2011; Williams, 2016).

Notwithstanding laws and legislative intent to eliminate inequities, the underrepresentation of women and minorities persists in the power authority position of education (Carter-Frye, 2015; Henderson, 2015). White men maintain control of administrative roles in education including the superintendency and high school principalships (Colbert, 2009; Henderson, 2015), with the exception of the elementary school principalship (Kingsberry, 2015). It is usually African American and White women who serve in the leadership of elementary schools (Colbert, 2009; Haynes, 2016; Kingsberry, 2015). Elementary principalship, deemed a

woman's position (Henderson, 2015), was a common pathway for African American women to attain the superintendency position (Kingsberry, 2015).

Anna T. Jeanes, a Philadelphia Quaker in the 1930s, trained African American women educators to supervise African American schools (Brooks, 1993). The selected African American women known as the "Jeanes supervisors" were on the forefront of education administration in a role similar to superintendents of today. The women leaders conducted in-service training to improve curriculum instruction and introduced new techniques until the desegregation of the nation's schools. Reduced in numbers via the 1954 desegregation of the nation's schools, Jeanes supervisors remained in educational leadership positions until 1968 (Bailey-Walker, 2018). A testament to the leadership abilities of African American women, Jeanes supervisors possessed the ability to motivate the efforts of others with a self-effacing character.

Women's Leadership Foundation

Over the course of history, African American women have fought for educational rights and demonstrated creative, fearless, and innovative leadership. Yet, systematic disparities in education have led to a failure to acknowledge African American women's achievements (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). Between 1895 and 1925 there was an increase of African American women who completed college. Then and now, these women have used the intellectual and political space of their time to contest racism and sexism (Collins, 2015). African American newspapers throughout the 1920s and 1930s reported on the African American education movement. In these newspapers but excluded from the mainstream dominant discourse, were the achievements of Mary June Patterson, the first African American woman to graduate from Ohio's Oberlin College in 1862, as well as the first African American

women to earn doctoral degrees including Era B. Dyes, Sadie T. M. Alexander, and Georgiana Simpson (Brooks, 1993; Gillett, 2012).

Other exemplary models of transformational educational leadership include Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, Ida Wells- Barnett, and Mary McLeod Bethune. Dr. Anna Julia Cooper, born a slave, earned her doctoral degree after the age of 60 from Paris' Sorbonne University (Keyes & Blakely, 2002). Dr. Cooper established a school for African Americans that boasted a college prep curriculum. It was the only school for African Americans in history to be considered a "White" school in the segregated District of Columbia school system (Brooks, 1993; Keyes & Blakely, 2002). Ida Wells-Barnett, born a slave, fought against racism, lynching, eugenics, and women's subordination as an editor, journalist, and teacher (Collins, 2015; Keyes & Blakely, 2002). Mary McLeod Bethune, founder of Bethune-Cookman College and a recipient of the Spingarn Medal, was acknowledged by Presidents Coolidge, Hoover, Roosevelt, and Truman as an outstanding educator. Bethune was the first African American woman to lead a federal agency. She was appointed to leadership of the Advisory Board of the National Youth Administration minority affairs office (Brooks, 1993). African American women educators, influential heroines in the battle for equity in education who were uncelebrated in history from 1866 through 2010, overcame gender and racial obstacles during Reconstruction, Segregation, and the Civil rights era (Brooks, 1993; Clemmons, 2012). These African American women have demonstrated tenacious leadership, tremendous courage, innovation, and perseverance to impact educational systems (Clemmons, 2012). The women were examples of human adaptability, resilience, and strength (Daye, 2007). Today's African American women educational leaders dare to defy the odds to overcome the history of slavery and segregation for education as their

fore sisters did (Rowan, 2006). African American women have been an asset to education leadership in the past and present and assuredly will be in the future.

Leadership Styles

A school administrator's leadership style controls the success or failure of the school organization (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). Most leadership theory frameworks have been developed contingent upon traits of the White men (Haynes, 2016). With a significantly different cultural approach, African Americans' leadership styles lean towards a family or community orientation (Campbell, 2010) that motivates the participation of others to impact educational change (Pruitt, 2015). Doss' (2011) study of six African American women executives found emergent similarities to White female executives. Cultural competencies, however, differentiated the African American women executive behaviors from other executives. African American women share leadership commonalities with other education administrators both by gender and racial identities, but they do not demonstrate only one leadership profile. The administrative styles of the participants were individualistic and multifaceted, not homogeneous (Doss, 2011). Leadership studies ascertain few administrative differences between genders. A noted exception is that men seem to be more task-oriented and females relate more on an interpersonal basis in management behaviors (Campbell, 2010; Kark, 2004).

The authoritative leadership characteristics of men are unconsciously considered the acceptable behavioral norm (Pruitt, 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008) to define successful school leaders (Henderson, 2015). Effective women school leaders balance typical male characteristics of assertiveness, authoritativeness, and skill competence with typical female leadership characteristics of nurturing, compassion, and knowledge (Henderson, 2015). Male managers' exhibit more autocratic leadership style behaviors that focus on employees' mistakes

as opposed to female leaders' more democratic or participatory style (Jogulu, 2006; Kark, 2004). It is not conclusive that women possess only certain characteristics and men others; however, society has socially constructed impressions of male and female behavior (Henderson, 2015). Rather than develop a non-traditional leadership style unique to their individuality, women are expected to aspire to the behavioral leadership norms of White men (Pruitt, 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Yet, notwithstanding gender and race, the majority of educational leaders including African Americans and women are keeping pace with current leadership trends, modifying management behaviors to become transformational leaders (Campbell, 2010; Jogulu, 2006; Kark, 2004).

Transformational and Transactional Leadership

Transformational leadership is characterized as a feminine model of leadership (Campbell, 2010; Jogulu, 2006; Kark, 2004). Campbell (2010) identifies transformational leadership as motivational, intellectually stimulating, charismatic, visionary, challenging, and developmentally focused. Kark (2004) noted the motivational style of transformational leaders empowers staff to work on collective goals. Similarly, Jogulu (2006) speculated transformational leadership traits of cooperation, collaboration, collective problem solving, and decision-making are empowering qualities women possess. This characterization of transformational leadership is linked to the belief that women's social interactions compared to men's can be more sensitive, social, and expressive. Socially, women are considered more friendly, pleasant, nurturing, and demonstrate an interest in other people (Jogulu, 2006). Women are perceived as emotional, passive, and lacking aggression, whereas men are perceived as authoritative, aggressive, and sometimes sexist. Pruitt (2015) posited that men are regarded as efficient and organized, while women are viewed as relatable and easy going. According to

Buechel Haack (2010), women administrators implement a more participatory democratic style of leadership. Campbell (2010) theorized transformational leaders are highly effective leaders possessing behaviors that inspire subordinates without incentive or corrective actions.

African American women leaders often combine transformational leadership and transactional leadership approaches to lower bureaucratic structure and empower staff support. Transactional methodologies employ collaborative strategies that encourage participatory behaviors, inspire effectiveness, and augment subordinates' satisfaction (Campbell, 2010). Transactional leadership through controlled instructional supervision strategies establishes coordination of school wide goals (Campbell, 2010). Transactional leadership theory emphasizes effective leader goal setting skills to motivate, improve, and reward subordinate performance (Pruitt, 2015), whereas transformational leadership's central focus is the formation of relational bonds between leaders and followers to enable participation (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Kark, 2004). The combined perspectives of transformational leadership and transactional leadership blend intuitive thinking and interpersonal skills and are qualities considered more consistent with female leadership styles (Kark, 2004). While transformational leadership has many positive characteristics to effectively achieve support from followers, it can be problematic for women to implement, as the characteristics of being African American and female can be considered weak and ineffective leadership (Henderson, 2015).

Reinforcing the historical benefits of White privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005), school organizational structures were designed to benefit White male leaders (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008) who opposed women in authority positions to maintain their monopoly of social resources (Colbert, 2009). Male dominance in school organizations has historically solidified the belief that African American women must conform to fit into the superintendent position.

Expectations utilizing White male behaviors as measurement of the appropriate leadership and professional conduct can be a disadvantage for women in quest of leadership advancement and professional opportunities (Carter-Frye, 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Women administrators struggle against adaptation of behaviors aligned to the socially constructed norms of leadership to maintain or obtain positions of authority (Haynes, 2016). Colbert (2009) asserted that African American women superintendents struggle against assimilation and the historical perceptions of White privileges. It has been surmised that resistance to assimilation may be one of the variables that exclude African American women from the position of school superintendent (Colbert, 2009). Historical knowledge is essential to understand why this inequity of men versus African American women seeking leadership advancement in education persists (Henderson, 2015) in a professional field dominated by women (Cadet, 2018; Carter-Frye, 2015; Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Williams, 2016).

African American Women and White Women Assimilation

Focal points of past women leadership studies have surveyed middle- to upper-class White women as the feminine norm (Doss, 2011). Accordingly, there is insufficient analysis of African American women superintendents (Bailey-Walker, 2018). The unique challenges faced by African American women were often left out of the conversation or literature (Haynes, 2016). Inadequate comparison data on gender and racial differences imply that African American women are highly similar to White women and African American men (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). However, previous studies primarily on White women's experiences as the normative group have eliminated the perspectives of African American women's experiences, inferring only White women's issues are important and demonstrating an indifference to the important concerns all women face (Colbert, 2009; Remedios & Snyder, 2015).

While the gender experiences for African American women are comparable to those of White women, historically there are important differences (Caldera, 2016; Kingsberry, 2015). Using the experiences of White women as the norm fails to address the racist experiences of African American women (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). White women retain the historical benefits of White privilege (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005), whereas African American women do not hold a beneficial color privilege (Kingsberry, 2015) or entitlement as a consequence of White social hegemony. Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) reiterated the unique oppressive history in America as the cause for the different and often oppressive workplace experiences and professional profiles of African American women. The tumultuous history of African American women in the United States stems from hegemonic White male-controlled societal practices of oppression, sexual abuse, and most of all, slavery (Steele, 2017). Slavery created a sense of survival in African American women who had received similar workloads and violent punishments as enslaved men (Brown et al., 2017). Examined naked on the auction block, African American women were mishandled during slavery to determine reproductive capability and subsequently ordered, seduced, and violently coerced to have sexual relations with White men (Cox, 2017). Patriarchal hegemonic denigration continued towards African American women even after slavery ended with the terrorist riding attacks of the Ku Klux Klan who violently raped the women and lynched the men (2017). Marginalized, African American women's identity in regard to gender has been repetitively challenged and contradicted by oppressive societal conditions (Doss, 2011). Yet, the resilience of African American women is displayed through their forward movement through slavery, the Suffrage Movement, segregation, the Civil Rights Movement, desegregation, and now re-segregation. Despite the many conflicts, African American women continue to advance, to transform themselves, and to

help develop others (Cox, 2017). Empowered by achievement, historical cultural influences, and an enthusiasm for life, Doss (2011) postulated that African American women continually triumph over adversity.

African American women experience ambiguous situations of intersectional bias (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). Racial and gender stereotypes obstruct African American women's advancement in educational leadership (Kingsberry, 2015). The American culture seemingly supports social discrimination that reflects White entitlement and male privilege within the superintendency (Caldera, 2016; Colbert, 2009). Power and authority of the school superintendency are eluded from African American women because of social discrimination. In pursuit of the superintendency, African American women face what critical race theory surmises as the insurmountable challenges of racism in America (Beachum et al., 2008; Darder & Torres, 2009; DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Essex, 2016; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009).

Civil Rights Legislation

Legal changes have reduced, but not eliminated, overt patterns of discrimination. Racism is deeply ingrained into the structure of America (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). Creating anti-discrimination laws does not necessitate the attitudes and behaviors of individuals will change. Profoundly rooted in American society are biases of social separation combined with educational segregation of African Americans and Whites, which remains widespread after legislative and judicial decisions (Colbert, 2009). An illusion of change exists to mask institutional policies that suppress and exclude African Americans from executive advancement in education (Collins, 1996). Exclusion remains constant in disregard of legislation. The struggle for legitimacy and equality to increase opportunities for women has failed to eliminate the disparity of African American women in the role of the public school K-12 superintendency. Much of the disparity

has historic and systematic roots and to eradicate the inequity additional legislation was needed. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 prohibited employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, and attempted to ensure equal rights to all (Colbert, 2009). Nevertheless, in spite of highly qualified women that could effectively lead a school organization, less qualified men are hired as superintendents (Buechel Haack, 2010; Colbert, 2009; Jogulu, 2006). Promotion rates of women compared to men remain unequal (Pruitt, 2015).

Systemic racism and the fight for equal rights in education have been an ongoing battle in the courts of America since the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision of separate but equal legalized segregation (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998). The Brown vs. the Board of Education Supreme Court decision challenged the Plessy vs. Ferguson decision, ruling separate but equal was a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007). The Brown vs. Board desegregation ruling by the United States Supreme Court brought into the forefront issues of prejudice and discrimination displayed in America's segregated schools (Gillett, 2012). The process of school desegregation was tumultuous and highlighted inequities overwhelming public education. Yet, the turbulence of the Civil Rights Movement became the impetus for the federal government to tie funding to compliance (Gillett, 2012).

The Title IX Educational Amendment of 1972, another Civil Rights legislative reform, was passed to reduce gender inequity and promote the equal rights of women (Carter-Frye, 2015; Henderson, 2015). Perceptions driven by the dominating male culture opined women were not qualified to serve as K-12 superintendents. The traditional view communicated men were best suited as administrators and women for teaching (Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Rowan, 2006). Title IX laws required equity for men and women in every educational program that received federal funding (Carter-Frye, 2015). Yet, Title IX did not increase the prevalence of women in

administrative positions (Henderson, 2015). Enactment of civil rights laws eliminated obvious discriminatory practices and gave women and minorities equal rights under the law but resulted in very little increase of women to the superintendency (Colbert, 2009; Henderson, 2015). Civil rights legislation has benefited the dominant society who promotes social justice when reforms are aligned to their personal interests (Gillett, 2012), as noted by men continuing to hold most of the leadership positions in school districts. Women serving as superintendents continue to be rare and there are even fewer examples of African American women serving in the role of superintendent (Kingsberry, 2015).

Critical Race Theory

Critical race theory reflects a moral judicial revolution in response to America's social and racial unrest (Delgado & Stefancic, 2005). Critical race theory "is a way of understanding and transforming how people of color experience the political, economic, social, and educational aspects of life" (Ware, 2015, p. 68). Critical race theory (CRT), which was born out of legal literature to address racism and explore the racial narrative of marginalized minorities, emphasizes the experiences the dominant narrative of racism inbred into American society (Gillett, 2012). Racialized experiences traditionally discredited by the dominant White culture can be legitimized (Haynes, 2016) through the counter discourse and study of the broader perspective of race, racism, and power provided by CRT (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017). Laws, customs, and the history of segregation in the United States have a documented effect upon African Americans' opportunities for administrative authority and power (Colbert, 2009) and accentuate privileges to the dominant culture of Whiteness while marginalizing other cultures (Delgado & Stefancic, 1998; Ware, 2015). Inherent in American history is a social reality of the dominant group's self-perception as superior that forms racial inequalities hidden behind a

system of political and socioeconomic power (Darder & Torres, 2009; Flessa & Ketelle, 2007). These inequities have systematically denied African Americans rightful benefits of public education (DeCuir & Dixon, 2004; Ware, 2015) via laws supportive of White privilege (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2009).

CRT, an outgrowth of civil rights legislation, has an essential purpose to bring to the forefront the evils of systemic racism. The lens of CRT sanctions a marginalized population's ability to tell truthfully the story of the discriminatory challenges and oppressive experiences faced by African Americans (Haynes, 2016). Gillett's (2012) study of five California minority superintendents corroborates four tenets of CRT: (1) the preeminent existence of racism, (2) counter-storytelling refocuses the dominant narrative, (3) Whiteness has a property value that subjugates minority groups, and (4) interest convergence; that is, the assumption that social justice or racial reform will be promoted when aligned with the dominant society interests. Gillett (2012), commenting on the CRT research of Bell (1980), contended that CRT has benefited Whites. Similarly, Delgado and Stefancic (1998) postulate the progress of civil rights in the struggle against systemic racism occurs only to meet the self-interest of Whites in power.

Intersectionality

Emergent from CRT, the term *intersectionality* was coined to denote the multiple forms of discrimination African American women experience (Collins, 2015; Cox, 2017). Intersectionality looks at experiences of identity oppression (Nakhid et al., 2015; Nash, 2008). Liu (2017) posited that intersectionality as a critical analytical tool interprets identity according to politically relational combinations of gender, class, race, and sexuality. In addition to the aforementioned categorical variables of race, class, gender, and sexuality, Collins (2015) postulated that age, ability, nationality, and ethnicity also influence intersecting systems of

power. Race or gender should not be addressed separately when seeking clarity of the oppressive identity experiences of African American women, as the lived experiences are interconnected. Taylor's (2016) research findings conveyed the commonality African American women experience as it relates to racism, sexism, and marginalization and its effect on their careers and attainment of executive positions in education. A multiplicity of oppression, intersectional discrimination of African American women indeed is a combined relationship of racism and sexism simultaneously experienced (Cox, 2017; Haynes, 2016; Williams, 2016).

It is difficult to understand the unique social spaces in which gender oppression interconnects with racism. A goal of intersectionality research is the transformation of society through analyzing the relationship of knowledge and power. Collins and Bilge (2016) proposed intersectionality as an analytical tool to interpret global complexities and critical inquiry into the formation of traditional social inequalities relations to politics. Intersectional scholarship reconsiders how core constructs of human rights, work, family, and identity reinforce complex social inequalities. According to Collins (2015), "the term intersectionality references the critical insight that race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities" (p. 2). A common consensus pertaining intersectional bias is the critical delineation of how race, gender, and class, reciprocally construct complex social inequalities (Collins, 2015).

African American women contend with the dual effect of intersectionality in the challenging quest for school leadership. African American women are a double minority exposed to racism as African Americans and sexism as women (Colbert, 2009; Haynes, 2016; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). African American women's "double whammy" of race and

gender (Clayton, 2009; Colbert, 2009; Cox, 2017; Doss, 2011; Kingsberry, 2015) leads to adversity in the workplace, evident in the lowered managerial promotion rate of African American women (Clayton, 2009; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Carter-Frye (2015) hypothesized that the factors of being African American and a woman work in tandem to create barriers that affect career progression and generate disparities in career visibility for Black women leaders. The obstacles of race and gender make the attainment of school superintendent leadership difficult for African American women to accomplish (Pruitt, 2015).

African American women experience multiple forms of oppression. Linked to lower socioeconomic status, African American women experience the triple subjugation of racism, sexism, and classism (Caldera, 2016; Cox, 2017). Brittingham-Stevens (2016) noted the common experiences of struggle interlocked through a legacy of race, gender, and class oppression. Although White women and African American men have experienced oppression by the dominant gender (McCrary, 2001), African American women's experiences historically are similar and yet different from those experienced by their counterparts (Collins, 2015; Kingsberry, 2015). White women deal with gender/sexist issues and African American men deal with racial/ethnic issues (Colbert, 2009). Women as a homogenous group share concerns relative to sexism but not the double bind of gender and race. African American men share only the concern of racial discrimination. The problems, concerns, and subsequent needs of African American women, therefore, are uniquely different from White women and African American men (Caldera, 2016).

Collins (2015) identified intersectional theory as a means to expose the relationship between race and gender and resulting inequality. Intersectionality describes the ways in which oppressive traditions are interconnected and reinforce the need for antiracism and feminism

(Nakhid et al., 2015). Feminist and antiracist theoreticians' exposure to intersectional assumptions seem to aggregate race and gender identity oppression and strengthen concepts to dismantle essentialism and the doctrine of White privilege (Collins, 2015; Nash, 2008). Intersectionality considers the interconnection of racism and sexist/gender oppression and ways that interlock in the unique social spaces Black women occupy (Nakhid et al., 2015). Visible and invisible forms of intersectionality's double whammy play a significant role in the self-perception of African American women and experiences that determine the journey of professional development to career advancement (Haynes, 2016). Inextricably linked to social justice, knowledge of the intersectional race and gender bias is necessary to understand how social inequalities influence individual experiences.

African American women are innately resilient to their marginalized status within a patriarchal White dominated society. Black feminism and intersectionality use the binary experiences of African American women to strategically change societal views (Nash, 2008). This is accomplished through an examination of social, political, and cultural realities and the linking of civil rights and feminism to examine how intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality impact marginalized groups (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality research examines the multiple and complex dimensions of intertwined oppression to bridge the gap between antiracism and feminism (Nakhid et al., 2015). Intersectional theory's intent, however, is not to negate the variations of privilege, autonomy, and freedom among the experiences of African American women. Yet, multiple oppressive identities dictate all African American women, poor or privileged, will experience a degree of marginalization (Collins, 2015). African American women's leadership experiences are race and gender impacted and should be examined simultaneously to note the intersection among both (Williams, 2016). Limited studies have been

undertaken into the intersection of race, gender, and leadership among African American women educational leaders. The high visibility aligned with questions of competence and overall performance in the few studies conducted indicates a sense of isolation (Campbell, 2010).

From Feminism to Black Feminism

Feminism's claim to speak for all women has been unfounded. The feminist perspective is to support equal opportunities for women comparable to their male counterparts (Ogletree et al., 2019). Collins (1996) postulated that a feminist ideology confronts the educational opportunities, employment, political rights, and poverty status of women to ensure political rights and economic development through collective social action for women. The global agenda encompasses the human rights of women, laws governing marriage and divorce, sexual assault, and health and reproductive rights—all concerns of women that men exercise authority over. Feminism's ideology as a global political movement is the confrontation of sexism in which men control over social relationships (Collins, 1996).

The original theory established by feminist scholars had not accounted for how the experiences of women of color were affected through intersectionality (Collins, 2015). For centuries, African American women were aware of the ways hegemonic White male patriarchal society's interrelated acts of racism, sexism, and classism had devalued and debased them (McCrary, 2001). The African American woman's struggle for liberation and gender equality underscored the premise of Black feminism (Caldera, 2016). Black feminism and womanism enabled African American women to focus on the role White feminist and African American male liberation movements held in the subjugation of the Black female. Black feminism and womanism provided a critique of resistance to the belief that White women and African American men, consciously or unconsciously, were on the side of Black women (Caldera, 2016).

Black feminist theory is grounded in intersectionality's conception of the interlocking issues of race, gender, class, identity, and sexual oppression to empower African American women (Collins, 2015). A primary goal of Black feminism is to unilaterally influence political and social power by combining intellectual inquiry and political activism with narration of the legacy of the racial and gender struggle (Cox, 2017). Essentially, Black feminism accentuates the need to be heard and not silenced.

The establishment of Black feminism contradicted the assumed premise that a White woman was the female norm (Collins, 1996). White feminism suggested women of color were affected by White women's beauty (Ogletree et al., 2019) without regard to the beauty within the many hues of Black women. Lighter complexion African Americans were deemed more acceptable because they resembled Whites lighter-complexioned hue (Taylor, 2005). Images that denigrated African American womanhood, race, gender, and class were common experiences that grounded core themes in Black feminism (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). These experiences created a need to repackage feminist ideologies from a White foundation (Collins, 1996) to embrace the realities of Black women (McCrary, 2001). Juxtaposed between Black Nationalism and North American White feminism, a valid concern for the effectiveness of Black feminism was to maintain its emphasis on the concerns of African American women and not recast into the interests of White feminism (Collins, 1996).

Womanism

Womanism and Black feminism are alternatives to mainstream feminism and African American male hegemonies in the construction of African American women's identity (McCrary, 2001). African American women challenged the exclusionary, Whites-only feminist controlled organizations to separately identify with womanism (Boisnier, 2003; Collins, 1996).

Boisnier (2003) postulated that one's identity as a feminist and/or womanist is relative to a woman's self-concept and life experiences. Mutually, the frameworks of womanism and Black feminism centralize the importance of Black women's voices in the analysis of multiple socially constructed gender identities issues (Caldera, 2016) and the challenging of racially segregated terrain that characterized American social institutions (Collins, 1996). Interchangeable in purpose, womanism and Black feminism espouse a platform concerned with the racist and sexist struggles of African American women and the efforts to achieve equality (Collins, 1996).

Collins (1996) posited that to debate whether one is a Black feminist or a Womanist camouflages the real issues of intersectionality. Theoretical usage of the terms womanism and Black feminism to identify the viewpoints of African American women obscures the realities African American women have endured (Collins, 1996). The womanist theoretical basis is a gender related identity model that crosses all racial and ethnic groups (Moradi et al., 2004). The womanist perspective can be broadened to include oppression outside of gender identity into sexual orientation (Ogletree et al., 2019). Comparable in the quest of equity and liberty, the frameworks of Black feminism and womanism critiqued White feminist and African American male liberation movements in terms of interrelated acts of racism, sexism, and classism in subjugation of the Black female (McCrary, 2001).

Feminism has been viewed as a movement to attack men. Womanism addresses gender oppression without eliminating African American male relationships (Collins, 1996). Womanism strengthens African American relationships through sanctioning of the unwritten African American community rule that African American women will support African American men no matter what (Brown et al., 2017; Collins, 1996). African American women are not interested in attacking African American men but are rather looking for unification. Womanism

provides coexistence. In support of racial membership, womanism allows African American women to address gender oppression without attacking African American men (Collins, 1996).

Interconnected within Black feminism and womanism is the ethic of care. Built into this framework is the issue of caring for groups that have been marginalized due to slavery, segregation, classism, and sexism (Cox, 2017; Hughes, 2019). The African American woman's legacy of struggle dictated they stand together through caring activism to re-define self-images (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Rowan, 2006). The ethics of care extended African American women into the larger community as "other mothers;" that is, the position of caring, sharing responsibilities, and looking out for all Black children (Cox, 2017; Hughes, 2019). Accordingly, African American women teachers' role was expanded to include surrogate mothering and caring responsively for students away from home (Ramsey, 2000).

Womanism is constantly evolving in its commitment to social justice and the eradication of all forms of oppression (Collins, 1996). Limited research has been conducted to determine the relationship of womanist identity attitudes with racial identity attitudes (Moradi et al., 2004). Although demographics portray African American women as a homogeneous group, the women are heterogeneous (Caldera, 2016) and uniquely shaped in correlation to personal beliefs, values, and norms (Pruitt, 2015). Collins (1996) postulated that womanist and Black feminist ideas are primarily considered among Black women of privilege but would be a benefit for all African American women. Womanism's emphasis on self allows African American women to understand ways in which gender identity is aligned to sociocultural experiences (Brown et al., 2017). However, another important theory, critical race feminism, has also permeated perceptions of the man hating theory associated to feminism to focus on gender equity. Collins

(1996) postulated that an emphasis upon gender as a structure of collective power would help in clarification of how institutionalized gender oppression is aligned to racial oppression.

Critical Race Feminism

Critical race feminism is an analytical tool to assess the intersectional dilemma of women of color mired at the bottom of society (Wing, 2003). The theoretical framework of critical race feminism, an outgrowth of CRT, challenges the multiple perspectives of segregated gender oppression (Caldera, 2016) to amend societal views of Black women (Nash, 2008). The multidisciplinary scope of critical race feminism theorizes comprehensive practices to combat gender and racial oppression (Caldera, 2016) for sustainable solutions to all causal factors (Wing & Willis. 2009). Whether poverty stricken or privileged, women of color must grapple with how internalized intersectional oppression has affected their perception of themselves (Collins, 1996).

African American women have unique social challenges that necessitate resilience in times of adversity (Brown et al., 2017). Mirroring Black feminist theory, critical race feminism focuses on the different lives and experiences of women of color due to the intersections of race, class, and gender within a White male patriarchal system (Caldera, 2016). Similar to CRT, the attributes of critical race feminism attributes include storytelling and counter-storytelling. Tenets of critical race feminism, as within CRT, give minorities a liberal voice to radically challenge the realities of racism within education (Gillett, 2012) through the tenets of intersectionality, the convergence of White interest, society's permanent normalization of racism, and the overt/covert social construct of racial colorblindness (Caldera, 2016).

The conceptual ideologies of critical race feminism and intersectionality collided in the 1991 case of Clarence Thomas' nomination to the Supreme Court of the United States as an Associate Justice (Senate Hearing, J-102-40). Clarence Thomas, an African American man, was

alleged of sexual harassment by his subordinate Anita Hill, an African American woman, at the EEOC government office. The judiciary committee who sat in adjudication of the charges was composed of 14 White male senators. Judge Thomas denied all allegations and stated his reputation had been irrevocably damaged by the charges and slanderous testimony. Professor Hill's reputation was ruined as she was portrayed as a sexually promiscuous Jezebel. Professor Hill had shared her experiences with others who publicly made known the allegations years after they had occurred during the vetting process of Judge Thomas. Professor Hill had not complained of the sexual harassment charges or sought justice prior to this time. She was an unwilling complaintive. Jordan (2003) identified that silence is a common practice in sexual harassment cases out of concerns of retribution, career losses, community censure, personal embarrassment, and humiliation. Exposed Anita Hill, under pressure, braved the taunting, accusations, admonitions, reproach, humiliation, and character demoralization before the entire nation. To attest the truthful reality of her experiences, a polygraph test from Professor Hill was requested. A request was not asked of Judge Thomas. His sexual preferences were not in question, only Professor Hill's.

The results of the disposition disregarded gender over race, as Professor Hill was labeled a "White feminist" although she was clearly African American (Jordan, 2003). The dynamics of the African American community made the idea of sexual harassment implausible and difficult to battle due to the existing sexual stereotypes of African American women as Jezebels. The African American woman has been repeatedly portrayed as a woman that is immoral and sexually insatiable. The cultural question of Thomas' pornographic vernacular was viewed as an awkward attempt at courting and assumed as acceptable harmless banter between African American men and women. Sexual abuse of African American women in American has not

been viewed seriously despite struggles of resistance to sexual predation (Jordan, 2003). Anita Hill's credibility was no match for Judge Thomas' authoritative senator supporters. The power of the dominant patriarchal system was strong, as the 14 White senator adjudicators sanctioned the political confirmation of Judge Thomas to become an Associate Justice to the Supreme Court of the United States. Sexual politics under patriarchy is pervasive in the lives of African American women (Caldera, 2016). Anita Hill was disempowered in the quagmire of the dominant interpretations of feminism (Crenshaw, 1991).

In the court of public opinion, critical race feminism faced a formidable challenge of racism, sexism, and classism in the hearings. Significant in feminist philosophy is the focus on a woman's sense of self, person, and identity. The broad-spectrum theory of feminism is to eradicate the inequities, injustices, and sexist oppression of women of all races, settings, and social classes experience (Haynes, 2016). In customary practice, societal images and cultural stereotypes of African American women identity have been systematically subordinated, diminished, and belittled (Rowan, 2006). Anita Hill achieved visibility for the ideas, experiences, and struggles of African American women against the dominant discourse (Collins, 1996). Analysis of the inter-relationality of class, race, and gender within power domains help comprehension of global social inequalities for resolutions (Liu, 2017). Wing (2003) postulates that race is a social construct in which the legal system privileges some over others. Critical race feminism's theoretical approach strengthened through the jurisprudence of affirmative action endeavors to emphasize the legal concerns of women to formulate sustainable resolutions to end the denigration and vilification of disproportionately poor and racial minorities (Wing, 2003).

Barriers Challenges Strategies

Henderson (2015) posits there are multiple barriers and challenges women face to attain educational leadership positions. The journey for African American women to gain the power of the superintendency has been filled with obstacles inseparably linked to institutionalized racist and sexist oppression that devalues African American women and idealizes White men and White women (Haynes, 2016). Believed more problematic for African American women, than for White women or African American men are barriers of race and gender because of intersectionality (Pruitt, 2015). Research substantiates obstacles of race and gender as preventive barriers for African American women (Carter-Frye, 2015; Doss, 2011; Henderson, 2015; Jenkins, 2019; Pruitt, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

In the United States, gender roles are constructed through a Eurocentric lens (Brown et al., 2017). Carter-Frye (2015) posited that these Eurocentric constructions of gender affect African American women who do not have the leadership look of being White or a man. The gender biases inherent within the theory of homosocial reproduction become apparent when women applicants are required to have higher qualifications, more academic degrees, and experience to be considered a candidate for the position of superintendency (Bailey-Walker, 2018). Valian (2004) hypothesized that decision-makers don't seriously value women in leadership. Pruitt's (2015) study of women superintendents, however, noted that gender barriers are not insurmountable in the attainment of the superintendency but do require a more conspicuous effort in the implementation of leadership duties.

Literature suggests cultural depictions and extreme media representations impact perceptions of character and capability, which affect the career ascension of African American women (Carter-Frye, 2015). Social stigmas and perceptions are contributing factors to the

professional growth of African American women (Carter-Frye, 2015; Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). The profile of African American women has damaging undertones. Opinions are shaped by stereotypical images when people have limited or no direct contact with African American women in male gender-typed leadership domains. The portrayal as mammies, welfare recipients, and Jezebels are stereotypical ideologies utilized to continue the political oppression of African American women (Haynes, 2016; Rowan, 2006). Often, rejection of African American women's leadership is contingent on beliefs that women are irrational and lack the intellectual competence to attain a power status equal to or over men (Pruitt, 2015). Many assume African American women are aggressive, loud, and exhibit rude behaviors (Rowan, 2006). The negative viewpoints overshadow the talents and competence of African American women (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008) to perpetuate ideologies of incompetence (Carter-Frye, 2015). Evidence of gender bias is prevalent in African American women not receiving equitable job opportunities, income, and political rights (Colbert, 2009). The personal biases of school boards and consulting firms have a significant impact upon the selection of superintendent candidates (Henderson, 2015). Moreover, the discriminatory practices of Boards of Education make the right to negotiate a deserved promotion resources of time, space, and salary difficult for women.

African American women across the United States are aware of the barriers against women seeking school superintendent positions (Williams, 2016). A barrier in the hiring and recruitment process is the proverbial glass ceiling (Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Taylor, 2016). The glass ceiling and behaviors established by organizational powers impact retention and block the advancement of minorities and women leaders (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Patterson, 2006). Essentially, gender and racial biases limit the progression of persons outside the dominant demographic group to top school leadership positions (Colbert, 2009). Influenced by cultural

factors and media, organizations built on oppressive social structures disregard the accomplishments or merits of marginalized individuals such as African American women (Chacon, 2018).

While the glass ceiling effects diversity in education leadership broadly, unwritten rules and gatekeeping practices in the search and hiring of superintendents hinder African American women more specifically. The gates are open widest to applicants who have high school principalships and central office level experiences, which benefits White men over women of color who typically hold elementary principalships or other administrative roles that are viewed less demanding (Kingsberry, 2015). Search firms led by 50 to 80-year-old White men who look for social and political colleagues and discount the characteristics and experience of aspirants of color (Pruitt, 2015). Bailey-Walker (2018) identified search firms as a networking system for the "good-old-boy network." Male political networks responsible for superintendent candidate selection effectively remove women from school leadership opportunities (Rowan, 2006).

Another problematic issue for African American women is the need for mentors. Cox (2017) explained that mentors provide counsel and moral support for an aspiring superintendent, whereas sponsors facilitate doors of opportunity to hire aspirants. Isolated from male networks, African American women are rarely chosen by men as protégés (Wallace, 2020). Taylor (2016) posits African American women were overwhelmingly overlooked for executive leadership positions. The overlooked women possess the job qualifications and interview well, yet the positions are given to less qualified candidates. The exceptions are positions within tough minority school districts (Taylor, 2016). To overcome networking obstacles, women must create their own environments of success. Henderson (2015) suggests women should visibly network

in professional arenas to increase the probabilities of breaking the good-old-boy network and the glass ceiling.

The power base of African American women in leadership is limited, as biased perceptions challenge management abilities. Pruitt (2015) identified issues African American women experience which include disrespect, inadequate responsiveness to directives, and non-acceptance of the authority position by district stakeholders, members of the school board, community, parents, and subordinates. Women in leadership encounter resistance that limits access to power and puts them at risk of job termination according to the will of the community and school board (Pruitt, 2015). When selected and installed as superintendents, women are continually challenged to overcome preconceived notions of male leadership styles to prove professional leadership ability (Henderson, 2015). African American women superintendents report a continuance of the glass ceiling (Taylor, 2016) and sexist barriers that impact their ability to lead (Haynes, 2016). The trajectory to shatter the glass ceiling is cumbersome and requires overcoming barriers through perseverance and resilience (Carter-Frye, 2015; Henderson, 2015).

Without available access to sponsored network of role models, African American women must develop alternative strategies to increase professional visibility for career development (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). Women must encourage and support other women. Same race and gender representation is important (Carter-Frye, 2015). It would be beneficial as a source of strength and inspiration for female aspirants to find and connect with other women superintendents (Pruitt, 2015). Studies support the importance of networks and the shared knowledge, insights, and experiences of sponsored mentors for aspiring African American women in the job of superintendent (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Pruitt, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

Mentors, role models, family and friends support groups have all been acknowledged as positive contributions that helped African American female aspirants to the executive level position in education (Pruitt, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

Henderson (2015) postulates internal and external barriers prevent women access to positions of educational leadership. Negative perceptions influence leaders and impact ability to attain leadership positions (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Exiguous research exposes a lack of appreciation for African American women's leadership style in terms of characteristics, expertise, and experience (Carter-Frye, 2015). Lack of collegial network or political support skills, gender discrimination, and unfounded beliefs concerning women's abilities lead to women not pursuing the superintendency (Pruitt, 2015). Societal beliefs of African American women as inferior leaders and hostile in the workplace further obstruct the willingness of African American women to pursue the superintendent position (Williams, 2016). Subsequently, many professional African American women won't take themselves seriously and don't pursue the superintendency. Doss (2011) postulates isolation is also an ominous challenge to morale, as limited women exist in the superintendency for collegial engagement and support. Guidance from mentors can be critical in pursuit of sustained employment (Williams, 2016). Mentors of similar cultural values help mitigate cyclical issues to cultivate leadership frameworks and build work ethic (Doss, 2011).

The intense duties and responsibilities inherent in the superintendency have made numerous African American women shy away from pursuit of the position or even step down from the position after attainment (Colbert, 2009). When faced with what appears to be impossible obstacles to conquer, fears and insecurities give way to doubts of capabilities. Henderson's (2015) research hypothesized that African American women's worst enemy is

themselves in terms of the internal barriers of low self-image, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation or aspiration to attain the superintendency. Kingsberry's (2015) research suggests fear of failure is an important inhibitor that thwarts minority women pursuit of the superintendency and justifies the belief men are more competent because the most competent are promoted (Bailey-Walker, 2018).

White superiority and privilege permeate African American history. African American women enroute to leadership positions will encounter the social phenomena of both racism and sexism within school districts. Colbert (2009) contends African American women in top positions have to embrace the authority to overcome issues of racism and sexism to establish legitimacy in the superintendent leadership position. Bias is not always recognizable, and opinions of others are often distorted by personal beliefs. Nevertheless, minorities and women are relegated to subservient working roles by society (Colbert, 2009). Subjected to traditional gender roles of marriage and family (Bailey-Walker, 2018), the obligatory self-imposed intrinsic barriers make the rigorous responsibilities of superintendent positions difficult (Colbert, 2009). Women in top educational administrative roles must choose conformity to male standards while forsaking their families at home or endeavor to become superwomen at home and on the job (Jenkins, 2019).

Motherhood and family responsibilities affect the career advancement of Black women (Carter-Frye, 2015). In the acceptance of the superintendency, women must often make a choice between relationships and careers (Williams, 2016). Married or single women with children who are generally responsible for the home, weigh career responsibilities to family responsibilities (Patterson, 2006). Family obligations are constant battles for career women. Many women are the primary caregiver for an elderly parent, which also requires a significant amount of time,

mental energy, and financial resources and limits advancement into school administration (Henderson, 2015). Lee's (2000) study found career progression was adversely affected by time constraints due to personal responsibilities as caretakers. The conflict in role responsibilities made the women less encouraged to aspire to the superintendency (Henderson, 2015). The demands of the superintendent position dictate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week that leaders are to be mentally, physically, and emotionally able to work. The hours associated with the position are considered an obstacle (Colbert, 2009). An extreme amount of time away from home is a contentious belief that African American women fail to fulfill traditional womanly duties to provide children proper supervision (Rowan, 2006). It is critical to have family support as the shift in role responsibilities can create stress among members of the family as women navigate a balance between home and career (Henderson, 2015).

Another major barrier to African American women's pursuit of the superintendency is geographic immobility. Opportunity to advance to school district leadership becomes available frequently throughout the nation, just not readily in the area in which one lives. To obtain an available superintendent position, women must be willing to relocate (Colbert, 2009; Henderson, 2015). To relocate involves leaving extended family members, friends, or communities. Women are less willing to move, as the conflict in role responsibilities can be difficult. Given the various barriers that include the attitude of board members, exclusion from male networks, the absence of female mentors, limited opportunities, and negative stereotypes, Kingsberry (2015) questions how African American women overcome challenges and hardships.

Despite constraints to their authority, many African American women superintendents possess a strong self-image to successfully transcend through professional climates of negativity (Williams, 2016). Kingsberry (2015) speculated the superintendent position inclusive of

politically complex demands leads to emotional stress, anxiety, and professional burnout. Colbert (2009) queried African American women superintendents on how in spite of the doubt of others they were able to continue to perform the leadership duties. All responded confidence and strength was provided through formal doctoral degree preparation, network involvement, mentors, and belief in God. Bailey-Walker's (2018) research of African American women superintendents' lived experiences expounded on the success strategy of preparedness in overcoming barriers and challenges. Regardless of the underrepresentation in literature and executive leadership seats, preparedness in African American women superintendents leads to resilience (Kingsberry, 2015). Notwithstanding daily challenging disruptive events, the African American female superintendents' ability to withstand hardship, remain mentally intact, and adapt successfully to stressful circumstances was proven (Kingsberry, 2015).

The professional ability to cope with obstacles or adversities is resilience (Cox, 2017; Driver, 2014; Kingsberry, 2015). Brittingham-Stevens (2016) defines resilience as an ability to function with an inner strength that emphasizes capabilities and positive attributes rather than weaknesses. Educational resiliency, a research validated coping strategy, is made stronger through multifaceted protective factors with experiences of adversity (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Colbert, 2009; Cox, 2017; Doss, 2011; Driver, 2014; Kingsberry, 2015; Williams, 2016). Leaders who have been greatly challenged through negative stereotypes employ internal and external factors to overcome obstacles (Kingsberry, 2015). Spirituality and support systems were strategically focused on rather than deficits when confronted with daily barriers of bias, obstacles, or adversity (Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Driver (2014) theorizes the multifaceted connection of protective factors and resilient actions, safeguard individuals during adversity, enable recovery, and build resilience for future adversities via new learning and understanding.

Women leaders strengthened by personal and educational resilience effectively rebound from adversity to retain positive attitudes (Kingsberry, 2015). Research participants believe spiritual practice is not necessarily religious practice but is a liberating mechanism and a force to cope with isolation, mistrust, and bias (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Pruitt, 2015). In fact, spirituality is considered an important steadfast psychological ally (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). Kingsberry (2015) reiterated the idea of faith and spirituality as the crux to the productivity for African American women superintendents. Possessing faith and spirituality in hard times provides the motivational balance to keep the positive outlook needed to forge forward with set goals. Personal spiritual belief systems are grounded by many from a foundation in the church of their youth and the power of prayer. Morning devotion or prayer is a daily applied spiritual discipline (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Colbert, 2009; Cox, 2017). Cox (2017) referenced two vital effects individuals experience in spiritual practice. First, spiritual practice renews energy and purpose. Secondly, spiritual practice provides educational leaders greater access to innermost dimensions needed to succeed.

Finally, Reynolds-Dobbs et al.'s (2008) research exposed the damage negative stereotypes pose to the overall well-being of professional African American women. Low expectations for African American women's intellect and high values for their physical appearance (Remedios, Snyder, 2015) affirm the inherent resilience of African American women in spite of oppression and marginalization (Collins, 2015). For some women of color, such challenges are seen as opportunities to remove barriers through perseverance and hard work (Taylor, 2016). African American women superintendents are confronted with the same challenges as other superintendents (Pruitt, 2015). The role of the superintendent is not an easy job for a man or woman. In the authority role men are perceived as great leaders whereas

women in the role of authority are perceived as aggressive (Colbert, 2009). African American women just want to be seen as effective superintendents (Cox, 2017). Simply being the boss does not garner the respect of others. To attain authority as the superintendent, one must lead by example and provide a vision for the organization (Colbert, 2009). No matter what gender is in the authority seat, the duties, expectations, and responsibilities of the position do not change.

Summary

The underrepresentation of African American women in the superintendency is reason to investigate why more African American women are not superintendents (Colbert, 2009). The journey for African American women to gain the power of the superintendency has been filled with obstacles that are inseparably linked to institutionalized racism and sexism. The struggle for legitimacy and equality has moved women forward yet hasn't significantly increased the number of African American women in the superintendency. In spite of historical dynamics, African American women persevere against the tough competition of White women and male counterparts to seek the public school district superintendent position (Pruitt, 2015). It appears any momentum gained in increasing the numbers of African American women superintendents may be reversed by the frequent resignations and dismissals of African American women superintendents across the country (Daye, 2007).

The barriers and obstacles for an African American woman are predicated upon gender and race (Bailey-Walker, 2018). Gender is a common barrier that leads to a glass ceiling and limits women's ability to obtain the superintendent position. African American female school leaders don't escape this reality and must address the hidden barriers, racial biases, and prejudicial challenges evident in lack of support and mistrust afforded to them in their quest for

administrative positions. Resilience, spirituality, visibility, networking, and mentoring are crucial management strategies for African American women school leaders.

America's dominant society does not embrace the African American woman (Kingsberry, 2015), whom mainstream White America tends to have less interaction with due to prejudicial stereotypes (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Research studies on race ignore the role of gender and the feminist analysis of society ignores race. Feminist theory and antiracist discourse do not accurately reflect African American women's experiences of intersectionality (Williams, 2016) or analyze how intersectionality influences the identity and experiences of African American women (Cox, 2017). African American women endured unique experiences controlled by cultural, social, and historical dynamics (Haynes, 2016). Oppression and subjugation are historical realities of Black life but do not define the lives of African American people. Critical race feminism theory restructures the tenets of critical race theory to challenge racist realities within education to give women of color liberty to tell a counterstory. Narratives from the voices of African American women superintendents are needed for an analysis of leadership experiences. Chronicles on ways to balance family and career from educational leaders would be an insightful resource. The stories would provide African American women aspirants the knowledge essential to overcome gender and racial bias to attain and retain K-12 public school superintendent positions.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study (van Manen, 1990) is to expand upon existing research on the lived experiences of African American women K-12 public school superintendents in an industrial Midwestern state. The intent is to give voice to the lived experiences and obstacles in African American women superintendents' career trajectory. Despite an increased number of qualified African American women for the position of school superintendent, a very small percentage of prepared African American women have ascended to the superintendency (Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Moreover, the underrepresentation of African American women role models in the superintendency identifies a void in studies of the challenges African American women face in the quest for executive leadership (Pruitt, 2015). More studies are needed to share the narratives of lived experiences to enable understanding and perseverance in social milieus of today (Degand, 2015).

Expansion of prior research is essential to gaining a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of African American women superintendent (Kingsberry, 2015). The continued underrepresentation of African American women in the position of superintendent dictates their experiences and perceptions be shared. Data added to the existing body of research would be useful to understand the challenges African American women face in attaining and maintaining the superintendency. The findings would provide strategies to future African American women aspirants how to resiliently overcome barriers and challenges. Additionally, educational leadership programs would have an awareness of the support African American women doctoral

students need. Most importantly, research findings would benefit school board search consultants on selection and screening practices (Kingsberry, 2015).

Shared leadership experiences, whether similar or different, provide a model in the preparation for the position of public school district superintendent. This study focuses on the descriptive career paths lived by African American women superintendents. This study seeks to ascertain strategies and coping mechanisms used to overcome barriers these women have encountered within their superintendency. This study undertakes how others, formal and informal, influence the professional careers African American women superintendents. The next generation of female aspirants to the superintendency may find the results of this study beneficial. This study is to explore the mutual gender and racial issues that impact African American women's career trajectory in the male dominated school superintendency.

This chapter entails: (a) an introduction, (b) discussion of qualitative design, (c) identification of phenomenology as the appropriate methodology, (d) description of the sample population size, (e) explanation of the site and participant selection, (f) role of the researcher in data collection, (g) description of the data collection process, (h) description of the data analysis process, (i) discussion of measures for ethical protection of participants, and (j) means for establishing the study's rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness. The research questions used to guide this study were as follows:

1. What are the leadership experiences of African American women prior to becoming K-12 public school superintendents?
2. What events experienced within the K-12 public school systems do African American women find impactful during the process of becoming superintendents?

3. What leadership factors might change perceptions of African American women in terms of their leadership abilities and lead to an increased number of African American women in K-12 public school superintendent positions?

Discussion of Qualitative Design

To identify the disproportionate underrepresentation of African American women school superintendents, an effective qualitative research design was implemented for this study. Cselenszky (2012) argues that the goal of qualitative research is not to describe or test a theory but rather to generate a theory. Qualitative research interpretively focuses on exploration, discovery, and inductive logic (Cselenszky, 2012). It is through the identification of a phenomenon experienced that a richer comprehension of how the meaningful contributions of people and experiences influence the career trajectory of women. An in depth understanding of lived experiences can be enabled through a qualitative study that shares narratives concerning the pressures of professional work upon the personal lives of women school superintendent aspirants (Armijo, 2016). Value exists in the narratives of individuals actively engaged in the studied area (Kingsberry, 2015). Valuable insights are gained through a qualitative narrative inquiry.

Narrative inquiry within qualitative research was the best methodological approach for this study. Pruitt (2015) contends that the goal of a narrative inquiry methodology design is to assess an interpretation or the meaning of a sampled research problem. In this type of qualitative research, open-ended questions support meaningful conversation to engage the narratives of lived experiences (Armijo, 2016). Narrative inquiry approaches provide insight into the lived world from the viewpoint of individual lived experiences. This type of qualitative research inquiry is an unstructured inductive holistic approach that attempts to interpret meanings of

phenomena individuals' experience. It is void of prior assumptions relative to the interrelationships of the generated data (Cselenszky, 2012).

There are contrasting differences between quantitative and qualitative research. Johnson and Christensen (2012) identify qualitative research as exploratory, socially unpredictable, and reliant upon non-numerical data such as words or verbalization of experience by individuals. Contrastingly, quantitative research relies on numerical data to test a theory or depends upon numeric analysis in search of confirmation of an empirical hypothesis that is predictable. The lens of quantitative research is narrowly focused on minimal causal factors, whereas qualitative research uses a widened lens to explore human behaviors, choices, and significant experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Contrarily, quantitative research strategy is rigidly designed to seek a scientific answer to a research problem (Pruitt, 2015). Different from quantitative research, qualitative research approach is typically not statistical, rather it is interpretative and reflective (Cselenszky, 2012). To describe moments that provide meaning into the lives of individuals, a variety of empirical resources such as personal experiences, introspection, life stories, cultural texts, and observational interviews are used in qualitative research (Armijo, 2016)

Identification of Phenomenology as the Appropriate Methodology

To investigate how lived experiences shaped and/or impacted the professional career trajectory of African American women education leaders, the appropriate methodology was phenomenology. The essence of phenomenon, pre-reflective experiences, is a key focus of phenomenology (Cselenszky, 2012). Phenomenology questions the nature or meaning of an experience. It is not an empirical or theoretical observation but instead is an account of an experienced time or relationship as lived (van Manen, 1990). An overall purpose of

phenomenological research is to provide a description of how an individual attributes meaning to their lived experience to construct their world (Armijo, 2016). Lived experience describes how aspects of a person's experiences are meaningful as experienced (van Manen 1990). A phenomenological research approach would potentially fill the literature gap to empower an understanding of the lifeworld experiences that impact the career trajectory of women education leaders. A fundamental finding of qualitative phenomenological methodology is discovery. It is not a predisposed speculative hypothesis but rather an endeavor to discern meanings to conscious recalled lived experiences (Giorgi, 2008).

Cselenszky (2012) contended that phenomenology is concerned with how experiences define lives. Husserl, the father of phenomenology, formulated the lifeworld notion, which describes the daily experiences of lives (van Manen, 1990). Johnson and Christensen (2012) explain lifeworld as the immediate inner world of consciousness and experience of individuals. The meanings ascribed to individual lifeworld descriptors are phenomenological perspectives that precede theoretically chosen scientific perspectives (Giorgi, 2008). The focus is how people make sense of their lives and experiences. It is the goal of phenomenology to understand the reality of the lived experience that gives meaning to each individual's perception to what is true or real in life (Giorgi, 2008). A phenomenological analysis aim is to clarify meanings of phenomena prior to conscious reflection of lived experiences, uninfluenced by internal or external interpretation (Armijo, 2016). A qualitative phenomenological inquiry strategy enables the ability to document and make meaning of the lived experience of the study participants. Phenomenology explores phenomena through interviews, documents, literature, philosophy, experience, or whatever opportunities exist to access information (2016). As such, lived experiences produce valuable perspectives pertaining to human lived experiences.

Johnson and Christensen (2012) highlighted the utility of phenomenological research in understanding an individual's experience and how the experience forms the individual's perspectives. The emphasis of phenomenology is not isolated introspection, but learning an individual's perspective within the context of their reality (Gallagher & Francesconi, 2012). Therefore, phenomenology extends beyond the recalling of facts to reflection on a specific past experience (Armijo, 2016; Curran & Kearney, 2012). This characterization indicates phenomenology's premise that feeling and sensing is historical.

It is important to differentiate accounts of unacceptable theory, opinion, or hearsay as evidence of lived experiences. Phenomenology's foundational question is to discover "the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of ... phenomenon by an individual or by many individuals" (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 383). In phenomenological research, what an individual thinks about something is not the same as their experience in the phenomenon (Gallagher & Francesconi, 2012). Therefore, discovery is not focused on a definition of the phenomenon but rather a description of the situational structure of the lived experience of the phenomenon (Giorgi, 2008).

To discover the consciousness of an experience, phenomenological narrative inquiry should center on the description of the experience. It is most important to access the details of the experience and not ascertain the thoughts about the experience. Open-ended interview questions in phenomenological research focus on participants' memories and reflections to revisit experiences (Cselenszky, 2012). The formation of the questions is essential to gain a descriptive essence of the lived experiences. Open-ended questions do not have preconceived answers such as no or yes, but rather seek answers that assist detailed identification of the experience. Examples of narrative inquiry descriptors include who, what, when, where, why,

and how, and examine responsive feelings to the lived experience, its pervasiveness in the participant's lifestyle, and its perceived effects (Gallagher & Francesconi, 2012). An emphasis is on reexamining a phenomenon for the emergence of new meaning to enlist a richer understanding of the phenomenon as experienced (Lauterbach, 2018).

Description of the Sample

Purposeful sampling was used with a criterion strategy to identify subject participants. Johnson and Christensen (2012) and Mayer et al. (2018) define purposive sampling as a nonrandom, non-probability sampling technique. A primary aspect of purposive sampling is the criterion-based selection process, in which specific selection criteria are identified (Johnston & Christensen, 2012). The goal is to select individuals who are representative of the unique population to enable an in-depth understanding pertaining to the investigated research questions (Cselenszky, 2012). The participants in this study were purposively selected to facilitate understanding of underlying phenomena focused on participants' career pathways encounters.

A large sample size is not necessary with a semi-standardized interview narrative inquiry methodology. Armijo (2016) advocates purposive sampling as an appropriate method for a phenomenological descriptive study. A sample size of six or more willing participants who have experienced the phenomenon and are able to share descriptive perspectives of the phenomenon is adequate (Armijo, 2016). Similarly, Kingsberry (2015) recommended a minimum of four or five participants be interviewed. Giorgi (2008) recommended a variance of at least three participants for a quality examination of the phenomenological perspective findings. It is more prudent to have a small number interview session rather than a larger sample size (Pruitt, 2015). However, a larger sample size would provide different viewpoints and experiences that could be triangulated for verification of information.

During this research, snowball sampling was additionally utilized. Snowball sampling is a technique to increase the sample size. Participants are asked to recommend additional persons who meet the study criterion and were willing to participate in the research interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The researcher was unable to obtain an updated list of superintendents by race and gender. Subsequently, referrals were needed to secure participants.

Explanation of the Site and Participant Selection

At the judgement of the researcher, individuals that met the inclusionary characteristics were invited to participate in the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The criteria for inclusion in this research were:

1. African American racial background
2. Female gender
3. Reside in a Midwestern industrial state
4. Former/non sitting K-12 public school superintendent
5. Current/sitting K-12 public school superintendent

The selection process initially was limited to only former/non sitting superintendents. This was to elicit the true conscious responses without fear of reprisal from school boards, subordinates or community members. Limitations of qualified individuals mandated modification of criterion to include current sitting/former superintendents, associate superintendents and assistant superintendents.

African American women superintendents were to be identified through the directories of State Boards of Education, collegial networking, and the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). NABSE, a professional and leadership development organization for African Americans, keeps an updated comprehensive database, which helps with access to

African American women superintendents. The researcher contacted each candidate by email or telephone. The potential participants were informed of the study's purpose and asked about willingness to participate. Consenting participants were emailed an informed consent form, biographical survey, and interview protocol guide to be returned via email. Interviews were scheduled following verbal consent and return of the biographical survey. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and respect for anonymity, a group conference was not feasible. A face-to-face interview was videotaped utilizing Zoom technology with a secondary audio-taped recording. In deference to availability, follow-up conferences were held by a second Zoom interview, email, and/or telephone conference.

Role of the Researcher in Data Collection

Armijo (2016) notes that it is the phenomenologist role to understand human behavior through the lens and lived experience of the study's participants. In the role of researcher, it is important to interpret received data correctly. I endeavored to observe my thoughts carefully to remove personal biases. As I constructed meaning from the lifeworld of others, I needed to also reflect upon my own lifeworld. My perspective as an African American female K-12 public school educator is vital, as my career goal of becoming a school superintendent had been deferred. Through my lived experiences, I reflected on meaning by reviewing past experiences, looking at current experiences, and thinking about the hopes I had for my future. In the reflection of my career, I revisit moments in which I was held back by men in positions of power—men who wanted to use my skills but would not give me true authority and power. Such denials led me to acquiesce and give up my aspirations to ascend to an executive position. This gave credence to a realization. I do not want the women who come behind me to give up on a fight that is ours, as women, to win. These types of self-reflections are important (van Manen,

1990) and I followed Cselenszky (2012) guide to keep a reflective journal to maintain a more truthful interpretation.

Johnson and Christensen (2012) posited that as the researcher, I must set aside my personal beliefs to experience the lived phenomenon experiences of the study subjects. To suspend preconceived concepts about a lived experiences phenomenon is to bracket. Knowledgeable of my personal background, gender, and lifeworld history, bracketing was important to reduce embedded biases that would shape interpretations formed during the study. Bracketing is a mathematical term Husserl coined to "describe the act of suspending one's various beliefs in the reality of the natural world in order to study the essential structures of the world" (van Manen, 1990, p 176). Johnson and Christensen (2012) defined bracketing as "to suspend your preconceptions or learned feelings about a phenomenon" (p. 384). Bracketing means freedom from suppositions, as the researcher must set aside all prejudgments as the subject's lifeworld is unfolded (Cselenszky, 2012). To understand the essence of the experience according to the participant's perception, I had to bracket my preconceptions to enable accurate interpretation of the participants' described lived experiences.

In discussing the role of bracketing further, Giorgi (2008) suggested that in the interest of learning how the phenomenon is lived, it is important the researcher brackets personal understanding of the phenomenon. Armijo (2016) identified cognitive and motivational mechanisms within an individual social context that generate subjective principles and produce objective patterns of social life. I have a professional counseling license and as a public school administrator and guidance counselor, I am knowledgeable in behavioral based interviewing and observation. Moreover, my background as an African American female public school educator, researcher, and educational consultant predisposes my social interactions. I endeavored to put

aside my personal philosophies to obtain a concrete description from the lifeworld of research participants who had experienced the phenomenon. To gain a truer understanding of the phenomenon, I remained open to each participant's dialogue, being careful not to interject my lived experiences. As an African American woman and guidance and counseling administrator, I understood some of the challenges faced by the superintendents. I had some anticipated thoughts about my understanding of the researched phenomena but chose not to define it and diligently worked to set aside personal beliefs. I followed the advice of Johnson and Christensen (2012), and consciously refrained from ethnocentrism or the judgment of people. Self-awareness of my preconceptions enabled me to set aside my beliefs to experience the individuals' life-world phenomena as described. At those moments, my consciousness would gain access to enjoin with the subjects' lifeworlds as told.

Description of the Data Collection Process

Multiple data collection methods were utilized. Research approval from University of Michigan—Dearborn Institutional Review Board (IRB) committee had to be obtained before data collection could begin. Ethical consideration compliance included informed consent of human subjects and participant confidentiality. Data was collected through a biographical questionnaire, curriculum vita, and semi-standardized interviews. The collected data methods encompassed demographic profiles, Zoom interviews, iterative probing questions, observation, document examination, and reflective commentary. A semi-standardized interview protocol data collection method permitted flexibility of questioning to probe participant responses (Pruitt, 2015). The foremost source of data collection was the individual semi-standardized Zoom interviews and audio tape-recordings. Options for follow-up clarification to revisit with participants were used as needed.

Prior to the Zoom face-to-face interview, an interview protocol was emailed to all consenting participants. The semi-standardized interviewing protocol guide was broad and allowed opportunity for potential response reflection. To gain an understanding of the participants' personal and professional background, a biographical questionnaire was emailed prior to the Zoom interview as well.

Five of the participants partook in the formal recorded Zoom interview with a backup audio recording. Two participants experienced technical difficulties and the audio-recording was completed via a telephone conference. The purpose of the Zoom semi-standardized interview was to gain qualitative insight into how the participants interpreted their lifeworld experiences and behaviors, as well as the meaning of their life experiences. Utilization of Zoom recorders, audio recordings, and telephone conferences was to accurately capture all articulated responses. Semi-standardized Zoom interviews were scheduled on a one-on-one conference initially not to exceed 90 minutes. However, the initial conducted semi-standardized interviews varied in length from 1 to 1.5 hours. The follow up clarification interviews varied in time from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours. Time spent was contingent upon the narratives told by the superintendents.

The narrative inquiries relative to the focal points of the research required participants to share personal histories and lived experiences. To ensure and safeguard confidentiality, pseudonyms replaced names or any references that might result in exposure of participant identity. The semi-structured questions probed participants to reflect upon gender, identity, professional preparation, and the challenges or barriers faced in their career trajectory. The question format encouraged the participants to candidly express personal views and perceptions. The unstructured open-ended and closed-ended questions were designed to discover patterns and factors unknown prior to the outset of the study. Semi-structured questions elicited shared

subjective information about the underrepresentation of African American women K-12 public school superintendents that may coincide with or add to the knowledge reflected in the review of literature.

The Zoom interviews recorded visual gestures and verbal responses of subjects. To gain a richer understanding of the research problem, observation of participants' facial gestures and hand and body movements were also included in the data collection process. Visual observation helped to identify emerging themes regarding participants' reality and shared experiences. The two telephone conferences did not have visual observation of behaviors; however, voice intonations were noted. The researcher's observations were recorded and transcribed in field notes. To accurately capture the essence of the recorded Zoom interviews, all interviews were transcribed within 24 hours to avoid memory lapses. Reflections of what was observed, experienced, and perceived during and after the interviews were recorded as field notes as well. Memoing, that is, recording reflective notes about what was learned from the data was another important data source in this qualitative research (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). To aid in data analysis, relevant observation of facial gestures, body movements, and voice intonations memoing became supplemental notes to the recorded interviews. The researcher triangulated submitted data documents, interview responses, memoing, and field notes for analysis.

Description of the Data Analysis Process

Significant in qualitative research is the ability to interpret and understand the perceptions and contextual complexity of human behaviors. Kingsberry (2015) posited that to determine a study's internal validity, the research findings must be congruent with the reality of the participants' understandings of the presented phenomenon as interpreted by the researcher. A most important component of the data collection method was behavioral observation notations,

which were essential to the expansion of the field notes. Data obtained from behavioral observations was analyzed to determine whether body language corresponded with what participants verbalized and was written in the field notes. Behavioral observation of voice intonations aided subjective reporting of what participants believed and did.

An interpretation of interview data was analyzed through a six-step process. Step one was the organization of the interview data. Repetitive review of Zoom interviews aligned with reading and rereading, initiates familiarization of interviewee narratives and transcript documents. Step two entailed using inductive logic of recurrent lived experiences to generate theme categories. Cross reference patterns of beliefs, perceptions, and recurring ideas were identified and gathered into specific contextual theme categories. Significant statements, quotes, or accounts that demonstrated how the participant experienced the phenomenon were highlighted as recurrent themes. Step three was to encode the data. Johnson and Christenson (2012) stated that to code is to mark data segments with category descriptive symbols, i.e., phrases, colors, numbers, letters, or names. Assigned coding classifications generated a graphic chart to easily facilitate retrieval of categorized assessed data themes. This priori process was a preferred coding analysis strategy to use. Priori coding allowed for pre-established codes based on my inductive conceptual belief from prior research documented in the literature (Johnson & Christenson, 2012).

After data were coded, step four involved expansion of emergent understandings. The data interpretation was tested to determine if the obtained information addressed the research. To test the interpretation accuracy as expressed by the participants, a query to determine if the meaning, structure, and essence of the phenomenon lived experience is fundamental (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The data was subjected to continual review, question, and investigation to

improve comprehensive knowledge of the information attained. Step five required checking interpretations for clarification of information. Comparative analysis of the narrative data was searched for alternative explanations to pull out new meanings or answer predominant questions. The encapsulated narrative data was coded to identify, compare, and understand repetitive patterns. A master themes list was developed to discover commonalities and differences in the challenges faced, barriers encountered, and strategies of resiliency utilized. Kingsberry (2015) acknowledged that the coding process is iterative and recommended theme files to contain descriptions, corresponding data, and supporting evidence for additional analysis. Step six began the writing process for a report presenting the study's findings.

Data obtained for this study were triangulated using a combination of the Zoom semi-standardized interviews, observations, field notes, and document analysis. Kingsberry's (2015) technique of inductive logic to make sense of the data was utilized. An inductive presentation of the interview data explores themes, issues, and relationships to uncover emergent theories. The recorded Zoom interviews were cross referenced for data analysis. The process of data analysis entails interpretation through consolidation and reduction of what had been seen and read. Observations were to be intuitive to elicit specific types of information. Participants were prompted to ask questions at the conclusion of each interview. Additionally, inquiring as to whether participants had questions was also used as a form of member checking. Cselenszky (2012) noted that member checking is a means to certify the credibility of findings. Starting with an analysis of specific observations, patterns emerged from open-ended observations toward building an understanding of the investigated phenomenon. Collectively, interview transcripts were reviewed to discover similarities and differences among the descriptions of lived

experiences. This process was repeated until the interpretation of interconnected themes emerged.

Discussion of Measures for Ethical Protection of Participants

Foremost, respect and dignity of each subject was emphasized as I conducted my research. The underrepresentation of African American women among K-12 public school superintendents' dictated protection of all identifying information associated with the participants. Measures to guard the personal names and school districts were essential. The identity of study participants would not be linked to any written or oral report. In lieu of a written signature informed consent form, informed participatory consent was recorded verbally by all participants at the onset of the Zoom interview or telephone conference. Additionally, the personal nature of the research required all participants to acknowledge volunteer participation in the study without monetary compensation.

Individual rights were also protected during data collection. All participants received an informed consent disclosure via email detailing the purpose of the study, procedures for individual confidentiality, and ethical rights protections as outlined by IRB guidelines for researchers. Each participant was informed of the involved study obligations and the right to participate, decline, and/or withdraw from the study at any time without explanation. All study participants were informed of the sensitive nature of the study and the methods used throughout the data collection process to assure confidentiality. To protect the identity of each participant, pseudonyms were utilized, and the data was de-identified. Each participant received a transcription of the Zoom recording for approval and/or revisions via email.

All collected data is to be kept confidential, securely locked in a digital password-protected storage or by a lock and key for 3 years. The encrypted protected password shall be

known only to the researcher. All recorded data and field notes are to be securely locked in the home of the researcher. Only the researcher shall have access to the lock and key. To ensure capture of all oral narratives in the event of technical difficulties with the Zoom interview recording, a second auditory recording device was simultaneously utilized. After all tapes are transcribed and a master tape made all other original recordings are to be destroyed. The master tape shall be kept in the secured possession of the researcher.

Means for Establishing the Study's Rigor, Credibility, and Trustworthiness

To establish rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness, the researcher had to bracket knowledge of her past experiences. This bracketing increased the reliability of the data. Moreover, the shared lived experiences were to be considered as phenomena presented and not judged as to whether they were similar to the researcher's experiences or beliefs.

Credibility and trustworthiness in the study were also established through the use Zoom and audiotaped interviews. Data triangulation verified that what was observed and reported had the same meaning as what was presented, further providing credibility to the research findings. Kingsberry (2015) advised the data should be subjected to repetitious coding to look for consistency and recurrent patterns and this recommendation was also heeded throughout this study. Methods of iterative rephrased probing questions were used to uncover, clarify, or discard data that emerged as testimonial falsehoods. Additionally, in-depth interview gestural observations would expose the attitudes, behaviors, and verification of details shared by the participants. Iterative questioning was a precautionary strategy to prevent deliberate lies. Triangulation of various methods of data collection, audio recording, member checking, document examination, open- and closed-ended narrative inquiry enhanced the study's rigor.

About credibility more specifically, Cselenszky (2012) noted that credibility is reliant upon the confidence others have in the ability of the researcher to make appropriate decisions relative to data sensitivity. The connection built with the individual participants was contingent on the cultural elements experienced by most African American women. As an African American female educator, I endeavored to build a positive relationship through compassionate respect, focusing on the research problem, demonstrating patience, and maintaining flexibility. Informal conversation held prior to the Zoom interviews stressed the importance of studying African American women in executive K-12 public school leadership positions. The participatory voices of individuals would provide a counternarrative to the current literature. In advance of interviews and collected data, all participants were reassured of compliance to IRB procedures. Strict ethical observance of confidentiality encouraged participants to candidly share detailed perceptions of their lived experiences.

Concerning trustworthiness, purposeful sampling aided in enhancing this aspect of the study, as the center of exploration was to be the participants' lifeworld experiences and daily struggles. Verbatim responses and direct quotes from the participants reassured the study's internal reliability. Additionally, individuals were asked to emphasize experiences deemed important, interesting, and meaningful to their career trajectory. To certify validity of collected data, participants were provided an opportunity to ask questions, review their Zoom interviews, and review written transcripts of their interviews. Member checking was important to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of collected data (Cselenszky 2012; Kingsberry, 2015). Each study member was given emergent data findings for review to ensure accuracy of the information as written. Individuals were encouraged to provide the researcher feedback to minimize the chance that the meaning of their lived experiences would be misconstrued. This technique of

member checking allowed for accuracy and consistency to ascertain what was said in writing coincided with the intended meaning.

Summary of the Methodology

This overview of the research methodology included an introduction to the research purpose, identification of qualitative phenomenology design as the appropriate methodology, a description of the sample, discussion of the role of the researcher; review of data management processes inclusive of methods of collection and analysis, measures for ethical protection of participants, and a discussion of how rigor, credibility, and trustworthiness were established within the study findings. Delimitations to this study are availability of subject participants, necessity of confidentiality, and time inconvenience. The underrepresentation of African American women superintendents makes confidentiality most important. Pseudonyms replace names of the participants to safeguard exposure of identities. The need to protect identities permitted not more than one participant to an interview session. The participants' busy schedules prohibit face-to-face Zoom interviews in some instances. Additionally, opportunities to conduct follow-up interviews were also constrained in some instances due to limited availability.

Qualitative methodology narrative inquiry was an appropriate strategy to encourage reflective conversation. Phenomenological research focuses on the meaning of lived experience. The interpretation of the participants' disclosed lived experiences gives insight and meaning into human behaviors to make sense of the world. The triangulation of data collection, the semi-structured questions within the narrative inquiry, and participant verification established reliability in this qualitative phenomenological study. Member checking and dissemination of findings to the research participants for confirmation of accuracy is crucial to the validity of the

study. Prioritizing participants' feedback provides valuable insights. This study's findings may be an invaluable addition to the existent body of knowledge for future African American female aspirants. The shared leadership experiences, whether similar or different, have implications for practice to empower implementation of effective strategies to reduce if not to eliminate the underrepresentation of African American women K-12 public school superintendents.

In the preparation for this study, I reflected on my personal career pursuit in public school education. I decided in early childhood to become a teacher and set my adolescent eyes upon becoming the first African American female superintendent of a school district. In my pursuit to attain leadership, I repeatedly applied for administrative positions and was continually denied. I reviewed the criterion and experiences to carefully access my viability. I really didn't understand why I was constantly overlooked until a principal told me "I wanted a man, but I'll take a strong woman instead." Despite my leadership, improvement innovations, and skill sets, I was repeatedly denied administrative positions. A man was chosen over me, a demonstratively qualified woman. In time, I realized it wasn't me, it was a gender insecurity that would not allow a man to employ a woman. The struggle was emotionally too much, and I gave up. Yet, I could not leave the children who I strongly felt needed educators of my character. The pride I feel is immense for the study's African American female superintendent participants. The story of their career trajectories to executive leadership can be an inspiration for young aspirants to follow and not let go of the dream. My dream, my youthful career goal, lives vicariously

Chapter Four: Presentation of Findings

This chapter presents findings from the collected and analyzed data of seven African American women superintendent study participants. To obtain the data, individual Zoom audiotaped interviews were conducted that lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The rationale of this qualitative methodology study was to give voice to the lived experiences of African American women as it relates to their trajectory to a superintendency position. The objective was to discover the experiential commonalities of African American women who attained the executive leadership position of a K-12 school superintendent. Their voiced narratives about gender and race provided an opportunity to gain insight into the continued underrepresentation of African American women as K-12 school superintendents. Clarity of barriers to diverse female leadership is necessary to eradicate societal gender inequities. It is imperative the experiences of African American women in leadership are documented to influence other aspirants to pursue the superintendency. The narratives of their career trajectories to executive leadership can be an inspiration for young African American female aspirants to follow and not let go of the dream.

Participant Pseudonyms

To protect their anonymity, each African American female superintendent study participant was given a pseudonym of an ancestral African American woman who challenged societal disparities towards women, minorities, and education. Fearless ancestral African American women that were advocates for equal rights, feminism, and education paved the way

for female education leaders of today. History identifies African American female leaders who courageously stepped forward to defy conventional customs that were unsupportive of the common good for all persons. Adamant in their beliefs of the fundamental guiding principles of the American Constitution, these women assumed leadership when many others cowered in fear to right an injustice. Boldly confronting societal inequities, these women of old laid a solid foundation for education's modern day African American female leaders to stand upon, who bravely followed in the footsteps of their ancestral leadership.

Table 1

Superintendent Demographics

Pseudonym	Employment Status	Years in Education	Educational Credentials	District Type	Age*	Marital Status
Margaret T.G. Burroughs	Active	22	Doctorate	Suburban	42	Married
Shirley Chisholm	Retired	43	Doctorate	Urban	34	Married
Dorothy Height	Active	23	Doctorate	Suburban	45	Married
Ella Josephine Baker	Active	28	Doctorate	Suburban	37	Single
Maya Angelou	Retired	32	Doctorate	Urban	40	Married
Mary Church Terrell	Active	27	Doctorate	Urban	46	Married
Daisy Bates	Retired	35	Masters	Urban	53	Married

*Age at first appointment to the position of superintendent

There were a total of seven African American women who participated in this study, as shown in Table 1. Four were K-12 public school superintendents, one was an interim superintendent, and two were associate/assistant superintendents. Each female superintendent demonstrated fearless tenacity in the pursuit of educational excellence and opportunities, similar

to the tenaciousness of the noteworthy female forerunners of leadership in African American history. The profiled African American female superintendents of today share a phenomenal connective spirit that seems conjoined spiritually with the basic foundations of humanity revealed in the characteristics of historical African American female leaders. The seven African American female superintendents deserve recognition similar to "she-roes" from a time in which women were to be complacently silent, seen but not heard. These modern day heroines are outstanding in each of their own right, deserving of a place in contemporary history. The pseudonym character analogues are as follows.

Superintendent A: Ancestor Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs

Superintendent A will be referred to by the pseudonym of Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs. Margaret Taylor Goss Burroughs (1915 – 2010) was a community activist, a visual artist, and a prolific writer. As an art teacher for over two decades in a Chicago southside high school, her life was dedicated to promoting student appreciation of cultural identity, exploration of African American art, and preservation of Black history through increased awareness. A renowned artist, she associated with individuals with opposite political views. Her art of black/white faces, which demonstrated sameness, was seen as a catalyst to bring people together through mutual respect and understanding. As a member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) Youth Council, she rallied for the release of the Scottsboro Boys. Burroughs argued that society was both racist and capitalistic, and consequently in need of change. For her outspoken beliefs, Burroughs was profiled by the FBI as a communist, which she fervently denied and courageously continued her advocacy for Black artistry. Conscious of the limited opportunities for Black artists she established the South Side Community Art Center with the assistance of Eleanor Roosevelt and President Roosevelt's New

Deal Federal Arts Project. To preserve and display Black history, Burroughs co-founded with her husband the DuSable Museum of African American History in Chicago (Dolinar, 2011; Keyes & Blakely, 2002). It was her greatest contribution.

Superintendent A, a non-traditionalist, shares the artist spirit. She believes in outside the box exploration of different learning style modalities to encourage student mastery and voice. Her focus is diversity, equity, and inclusion with the collaboration of as many stakeholders as possible in decision making. A courageous and productive team leader, Superintendent A in consultation with stakeholders on school policy and decisions attentively listens with compassion to all voices to hear the varied perspectives. As an executive visionary leader, her objective is to build upon the individual strengths of students to attain mastery aligned to each individual's personal perception of success.

Superintendent B: Ancestor Shirley Chisholm

Superintendent B will be referred to by the pseudonym of Shirley Chisholm. Progressive thinking Shirley Chisolm (1924 – 2005) was a Black feminist educator and politician. Taunting a campaign motto of being "un-bought and un-bossed," she successfully broke through racial and gender barriers to become the first duly elected national Black congresswoman. Serving seven elected terms, Chisholm struggled through contentious relationships as she strove to transform the Democratic Party and Capitol Hill politics. She endured complicated relationships with the Civil Rights struggle and the Feminist movement. Her campaign platform as the first Black woman to pursue the Democratic Party nomination for president addressed the interlocking political issues of racism, sexism, and poverty. Although she did not win a primary, Chisholm's avant-garde campaign platform was a catalyst for change that motivated other candidates to address real issues. Chisolm experienced more discrimination as a woman than being Black. At

the historical evolution of Black feminism, she was the lone Black feminist in a male dominated environment where men were men. Chisolm's heroic composure to life's encounters had a profound influence within electoral and party politics (Barron, 2005; Curwood, 2015; Dolinar, 2011; Keyes & Blakely, 2002).

With challenges similar to that of Shirley Chisolm, Superintendent B's experiences within the political arena of school administration were fraught with racial and sexual discrimination. She endured twice the challenges of her male counterparts. The general impression was that women were unable to handle the pressures of leadership. Superintendent B noted that her upbringing as a child prepared her for the challenges of life she would endure. Acknowledgment of different challenges gave her the strength to keep her eyes on the prize. The progressive movement of the school district and its students was the prize she sought. Usually the lone Black female at a meeting like Chisolm, Superintendent B as a catalyst for change brazenly did not back down from the challenges she encountered. Rather than succumb to criticism and opposition, she has valiantly improved school conditions for students over her years of tenure.

Superintendent C: Ancestor Dorothy Height

Superintendent C will be referred to by the pseudonym of Dorothy Height, a social activist. Dr. Height (1912 – 2010) dedicated her life to education, and civil and women's rights. Alongside Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., A. Phillip Randolph, Whitney Young, Bayard Rustin, and other prominent leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, Dr. Height fought tirelessly to prevent lynching, reform the criminal justice system, desegregate schools, and integrate the armed forces. Although women were not equally accepted as Civil Rights leaders, she became known by some as the godmother of the Civil Rights Movement. She assisted in the planning of

the March on Washington in 1963. Yet, despite repeated requests and being a great orator, because of her gender Dr. Height was not allowed to speak, relegated only to sit on the dais. The prevalent biases of sexism inspired Dr. Height to include women issues of housing, childcare, education, and employment in her discourses throughout the nation. Mentored by Mary McLeod Bethune and a friend of Eleanor Roosevelt, she remained a calming influence in the volatile time of lynching, cross burnings, and bombings amidst the racial tensions of police brutality. She received multiple awards for her leadership roles in the National Council of Negro Women, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), which were organizations that challenged politicians and presidents to establish legislation that benefited women, people of color, and the poor. Notably, Dr. Height life's quest was to improve the nation's gender and racial gap to ensure equity for all (Edney & Barnes, 2010; Harwell, 2010; Keyes & Blakely, 2002).

Comparable to the experiences of Dorothy Height, Superintendent C was also met with opposition by people who were not thrilled with a Black woman in the leadership position. The concept that male aggression makes men stronger leaders rendered her transition into leadership tumultuous. As an African American woman, her ability to handle the leadership role was scrutinized, questioned, and discounted. Throughout the difficulties she experienced, her focus remained on the students of the school district. With the influential support of mentors and the development of political savvy, Superintendent C persevered to develop innovative summer programs that gained the support for her leadership from the teachers, staff, parents, and the broader educational community.

Superintendent D: Ancestor Ella Josephine Baker

Superintendent D will be referred to by the pseudonym of Ella Josephine Baker, a Civil Rights activist who inspired and guided emerging leaders in the freedom movement. Ella Josephine Baker's (1903 – 1986) strategic leadership skills were noted as a field organizer within the NAACP, as a convener and advisor for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as the first director of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and as an instrumental planner of the Freedom Riders. Baker believed in the grassroots approach to educate African Americans to create political leaders from the bottom up. She preferred to work with the impoverished or working class over the Civil Rights Movement elites. Spiritually reared to lift up the less fortunate, she learned to listen to people. Through its radical rhetoric, Baker's grassroots organizing embodied political opposition. Speaking up for women caused her political work to go unrecognized, as she often challenged the biases that privileged men and the leaders within the Civil Rights Movement. Though marginalized, Baker remained committed to economic justice and gallantly continued to advocate as an investigative journalist for civil rights and equality for all until her life's end (James, 1994; Keyes & Blakely, 2002; Njoku, 2020).

Equivalent to Ella Baker's democratic intellectual vision, Superintendent D possesses organizational vision and strategic planning skills. She recognizes the struggle of gender and race as a civil crisis. Superintendent D understands that to impact equity, diversity, and inclusion changes, educational leaders must be willing to take risks. Throughout her career of building- and district-level administrative positions, she has fostered trusting relationships through her active listening skills. To continually accomplish personal and district educational goals, Superintendent D a confident proficient team leader, aligns professionalism with spiritual values to present her authentic best self.

Superintendent E: Ancestor Maya Angelou

Superintendent E will be referred to by the pseudonym of Maya Angelou (1928 – 2014). Born as Marguerite Johnson, she changed her name to Maya Angelou as an adult when she began to assume prominence as a poetess, civil rights activist, actress, director, composer, and a college professor. As one of the first Black women successful in most artistic genres, Maya Angelou held respect as a Black intellectual in academia. She could speak and interact in the native languages of Spanish, French, Italian, Arabic, and the West African language of Fanti. The social and political significance of Angelou's remarkable life is distinguished through global stage performances, presidential poetry recitals, and friendships with Malcolm X, Nelson Mandela, and Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.

Outstanding within Angelou's autobiographical poems is a profound moral stance and resistance to racism, sexism, and poverty. Through the vivid imagery of her language, she shed light on the economic consequences of patriarchal family structures. She argued that via racial, gender, and class discrimination, the concept of patriarchy was a cause for the marginalization of women. A practicing Christian, Angelou through the poetry of the sermon heard in Black churches, believed truth-telling was wise. Accordingly, her autobiographical writings depicted historical factors of the United States' failure to acknowledge capitalism's impact upon the African American community. Maya Angelou's writings of personal emotions of anger and rage propositions readers to discover the paradoxical traditional view of America's failure to achieve its historical ideologies. Maya Angelou, strengthened by her personal attributes in the duality of being an African American and a woman, uniquely recognized the important power of association and social networks to promote learning to identify contemporary social problems

(Abdelmotagally, 2015; Essick, 1994; Keyes & Blakely, 2002; Rodriguez, 2014, May 29; Roscan, 2019; Swanagon, 1997; Weaver, 2002).

Superintendent E demonstrates the same stamina and perseverance as Maya Angelou. Her journey to attain the executive position of school superintendent was littered with obstacles latent to the effects of intersectionality and analogous to the many occupational roles Maya Angelou held throughout her life. Challenged as a single mother in pursuit of attaining the doctorate, she had to invest affordability of time and money to complete the doctoral process. Although like Maya Angelou Superintendent E had gained acknowledgement of her abilities through administrative service in a number of educational venues, the superintendency remained male dominated. As a data-driven African American woman, most people appeared intimidated by her many skill sets. Progressing upward, she had five different interviews before receiving an administrative position in a district that was void of Black administrators and educators. The cultural diversity in that district was a culture shock for some staff and parents who came into the office. Undeterred, she courageously stepped forward to confront the conventional inequities of the cultural customs she experienced. Through it all, without essential district support and expectations of failure, just as the works of Maya Angelou, Superintendent E remained unwavering to help instruct children and be a staff benefactor to make an educational difference.

Superintendent F: Ancestor Mary Church Terrell

Superintendent F will be referred to by the pseudonym of a university professor named Mary Church Terrell. Mary Church Terrell (1863 – 1954) was a suffragette and an advocate for civil rights. As the daughter of former slaves, her life was filled with a number of firsts to eliminate racial and gender disparities. She was a founding charter member of the NAACP, the first Black woman appointed to the Washington D.C. school board, the first president of the

National Association of Colored Women (NACW), founder of the Colored Women's League of Washington (CWLW), leader of the Coordinating Committee for the Enforcement of the District of Columbia Anti-Discrimination Laws (CCEDCADL), an organizing founder of Delta Sigma Theta sorority at Howard University, and a successful source for the integration of the National Association of University Women. A lifelong political activist, Terrell believed that standards of achievement, respectability, and upright moral lives, not imitation of Whites, would break down the racial discriminatory practices of public facilities within Washington, D.C. At age 86, Terrell supported by a cane, led a Civil Rights protest to integrate restaurants, which specifically targeted Kresge, the Hecht Company, C.G. Murphy, and department stores. After an arduous 3-year campaign of endless meetings, picketing, boycotting, and litigation, Mary Church Terrell's lifelong battle against long standing segregation practices and racial injustice in Washington's public facilities, restaurants, and theaters was victoriously culminated (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2003; Keyes & Blakely, 2002; McCluskey, 1999).

Superintendent F, an offspring of educators, understands that the journey to leadership for African American women looks different than that of their White counterparts. A noted similarity to Mary Church Terrell's laborious quest for racial equality, Superintendent F identifies the importance of professional technical training, the interview process, an exposure to the political aspects of the superintendency, and budget and media management. Due to a desire to learn and grow in her career, Superintendent F attended state level and regional meetings to develop her leadership acumen. Throughout the years of preparation, she worked assiduously in roles of building level supervision and district level leadership. When the district under her leadership experienced a crisis, a new strategic plan had to be adapted. Transition to a new plan necessitated research to understand the important issues. It was critical to devise methods of

transparent communication for all stakeholders. Just like Mary Church Terrell, Superintendent F in the core challenge of the crisis, revised predetermined plans to contribute strategies that culminated in the provision of essential support and resources for her school district.

Superintendent G: Ancestor Daisy Bates

Superintendent G will be presented with the pseudonym of Daisy Bates, a Civil Rights crusader and social activist. Daisy Bates (1914 – 1999) became internationally known for her crucial role in the fight against segregation in Arkansas schools. As the president of Arkansas' NAACP chapter, an intense local and national struggle for equality in education prompted Bates to organize the Little Rock Nine. Nine African American students were selected to implement the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that declared school segregation unconstitutional, to become the first to integrate the all-White Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas. Bates worked tirelessly to protect the students known as the Little Rock Nine. The defiant Governor of Arkansas dispensed the Arkansas National Guard to prevent the students from entering the school. However, the President ordered federal troops to uphold the law and protect the Little Rock Nine and overruled the Arkansas National Guard. From the headquarters of her home, Bates provided continuous support and advice. She regularly drove the students to school to embolden the students' responses to the vicious displays of animosity. Although Bates was considered a natural beauty, she was thought of as a deeply flawed woman. As a child, her mother was murdered by three White men. The horrifying realities of White supremacy in her mother's death had an emotional and mental effect upon her that energized her life's dedication to ending racial injustice. Bates was the president of the Arkansas state NAACP conference of branches. Reared by foster parents, she did not have a college degree or sorority ties, and therefore, at the helm of leadership, she endured contempt from professional African American

men who aspired to have the leadership position. Daisy's tenacity, moral courage, bravery, and self-respect were the essential attributes of her commitment to the cause of desegregation. Her image as an incredibly respectable Black lady who stood for the rule of law was brilliantly displayed through her social activism. Her activism extended under the Johnson administration to work for the Democratic National Committee on anti-poverty projects and via co-ownership with her husband. Daisy Bates was the recipient of several awards and an honorary degree from the University of Arkansas for her influential role as the mentor of the Little Rock Nine in the nation's biggest battle for school integration. Daisy Bates, fortified by her spiritual upbringing, embodied the tenets of respectable Black womanhood through her commitment to social activism, social justice, and the Civil Rights Movement. She is known for her tireless efforts to transform public school education opportunities for all students (Anderson, 2009; Harper, 2019; Jones-Branch, 2007; Kirk, 2007a, 2007b; Norwood, 2017).

Related to Daisy Bates struggles as a woman, Superintendent G demonstrates impeccable strength in the struggle against sexism. Not considered an ugly woman, Superintendent G was victimized by sexism and colorism. When entering a conference room, she often received snarky comments and visceral reactions steeped in colorism or some notion about what she thought of herself. In spite of pushbacks, Superintendent G endeavored with integrity to ease the discomfort of others to encourage collaboration and corroboration to improve student achievement. As a team leader, her approach was always with compassion, empathy, and fairness. She was once confronted by an authoritarian man who refused to negotiate her contract as she was a woman, contradictory to the common process taken with men. Superintendent G recognized her dilemma and chose a more political avenue to take advantage of the career opportunity. Working assiduously on behalf of the best interest of children, she did an

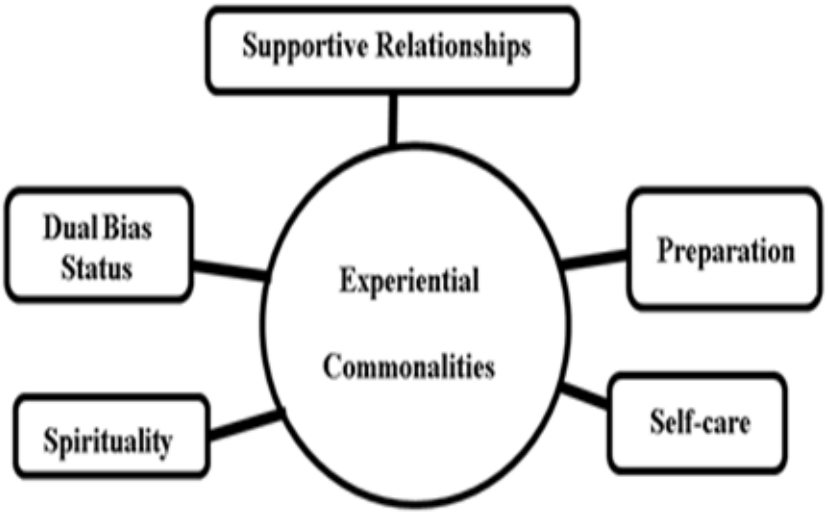
exemplary job in pursuit of curriculum resources despite pushbacks about the costs to her methods. With courageous diligence, she moved forward with the mission despite the opposition. A woman of action, Superintendent G inspired people to acquiesce to her leadership and not feign cooperation to her title.

Findings

The exploration to understand the challenges of African American women superintendents' career trajectories was guided through the three research questions identified for this study and led to a clearer perception of how African American women school superintendents experience dual identities as African American women in leadership. Their resilience is evident through a philosophical regard for the education of all children and their diligence in job performance. The Zoom interviews provided insight into the individual personalities, characteristics, and the pathways taken to attain the powerful executive position of school leadership. From the data findings, five themes emerged: (1) spirituality, (2) dual bias status, (3) supportive relationships, (4) preparation, and (5) self-care (Figure 1).

Figure 1

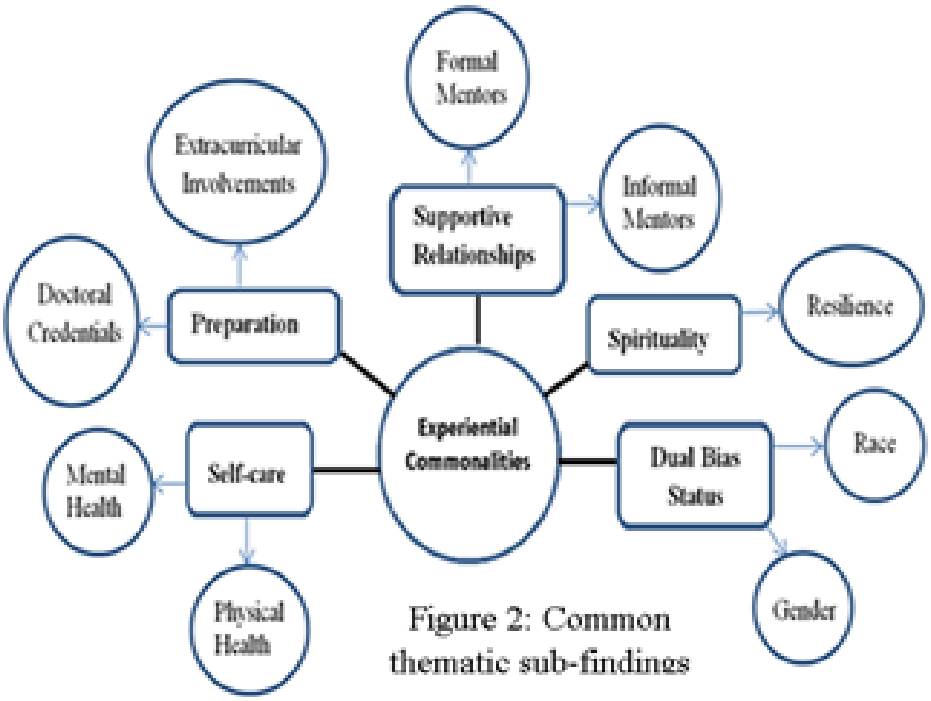
Thematic Findings



The collective themes revealed sub-themes for further exploration of (a) resilience, (b) duality of identity based upon gender and race, (c) informal and formal mentorships, (d) doctoral credentials and extracurricular involvements, and (e) mental and physical health.

Figure 2

Subthemes



Preparation for Selection Consideration

Gender discrimination among superintendents is most noticeable in the educational preparation of African American women. The expectation of women having superior credentials is rooted in the belief that administration is a male occupation. The fact that female aspirants were expected to possess superior qualifications for superintendency consideration was an undetected barrier of gender discrimination. Notwithstanding, the participating women superintendents within the study group, were highly qualified with academic degrees, professional experiences, and affiliations. All but one, Superintendent Bates, possessed

advanced credentials of a doctoral degree. Superintendent Baker mentioned the importance of attaining a doctorate:

> Make sure that when it comes to checking boxes you can check every box. Job posting say looking for a master's degree or that's the qualification, but then the next slide says, doctorate preferred. I tell individuals who say do I really have to get a doctorate. What I've learned is that my degree is a calling card. When I need it I use it. When the final decision is made the doctorate becomes a determining factor. You would have been selected but unfortunately you don't have a doctorate.

Superintendent Terrell shared it was the influence of others that initiated her pursuit of a doctoral degree:

> A professor said you are extremely talented. You have to get your doctorate if you want to be a superintendent. For a Black woman you're going to have to have that terminal degree. If you want to advance your career it doesn't mean that you can't, but it just makes it that much more challenging.

Superintendent Height remembered how her experiences at the university were the essential preparation for a superintendent position:

> I actually had a couple of superintendent courses to get my license and certification. When I was an assistant superintendent, I went through the Aspiring Superintendents Academy with about 20 other district level leaders from across the state. That was a yearlong program. We had exposure to the politics of the superintendency how to manage the media, budget, how to go through an interview process, and we each had a sitting superintendent who was a mentor who worked very closely with us.

Superintendent Angelou, after being recruited into a collegiate recruitment program as the lone teacher in the midst of a cadre of African American administrators, spoke of the difficulties and sacrifices experienced in pursuit of the doctoral degree:

> I wanted to get that doctorate because I had promised my grandmother, and I had already become the first member of my family to graduate. So I had to do it. It was hard because the kids were younger. They were with me in class, sitting at the background table while the rest of us did group work. It was just hard.

A few of the participants acknowledged the discrepancy in hiring practices increased the necessity of an advanced degree. Speaking on the career trajectory of African American women, Superintendent Terrell stated:

> A superintendent search, they're always public. I noticed that right away African Americans all had doctorate degrees. What makes the trajectory journey so different for African American women is because you got to navigate different spaces. We all in a professional environment wear different hats and have to show up very differently.

Addressing the issue of gender bias in leadership selection, Superintendent Height stated:

> It was just kind of having to have every single qualification and more to get a position. Where your White male counterparts may have 60% 70% of the qualifications and still be given the benefit of the doubt to be able to be in the position.

Understanding that the superintendent's position is male dominated, it is essential for African American women seeking advancement recognize the importance of being distinguished from the competition. In some instances, men may not have a background in curriculum and lack principal or instructional experience. It is important that women of color recognize the dilemma in which they are placed and consider that when positions applied for are not offered,

another door will open. Additionally, it appears that for women of color to advance, they must immerse themselves in strategies of intellectual stimulation through university doctoral programs, obtaining an advanced degree, and engagement in activities outside of the daily generic educational tasks.

Career Pathway Preparation/Positions

Women tend to have more career moves, degrees, and certifications than men. The typical pathway to superintendency with some differences includes holding the positions of teacher, building administrator, and then central office or district administrator. Each of the African American women in this study began their career trajectory as classroom teachers, leading to building administrative positions, and then to district level administrative positions. The superintendents diligently worked to accomplish each administrative tier in progression to executive leadership. At each level, it was a common belief that they concentrated on the tasks of the positions held at hand before moving forward. Superintendents Bates, Angelou, Burroughs, and Chisolm were special education teachers and leaders on the building level. Superintendents Angelou, Burroughs, and Chisolm served as special education directors at the district level. Superintendent Bates was the only participant that did not have a principalship prior to attaining district level executive administration. She disclosed the building level administrative experiences that impacted her career trajectory: "I was acting special education department head. I was actually part of the cabinet for the principal at the time. I sat in with the cabinet. I was given those responsibilities as delegated by the principal." On the district level, Superintendent Bates served as an executive director in the central office prior to becoming an assistant superintendent. She possessed special skill sets and held specific knowledge that was coveted by the school district, which led her to the central office position offer.

Superintendent Terrell spoke of her trajectory of learning at each capacity in preparation for the next administrative position. She recalled:

> I'm continuing to grow. I have been throughout my career the athletic director. I've been the special education coordinator. I've been the summer school coordinator. I've done things that are not necessarily in my wheelhouse especially athletics, that was a stretch. There is a component around athletics and as a superintendent you better well know. It has helped me understand athletic programs. I understand about scheduling, I understand lots of things, and in a community district you got to know how to do some of this work.

Superintendent Baker highlighted the pathway undertaken that led to accomplishment of a leadership career trajectory: "I've had an experience in every single position on the way to the superintendency. I've been a teacher, athletic director, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. I will leave a footprint that you will remember."

The Administrators Association of School Administrators (AASA) identifies significant differences among men and women in preparation for the superintendent's position. Women superintendents report more professional development activities in the curriculum and instruction area. AASA noted a participation difference of 73 % of women to 39% of men in Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development sponsored activities (Brunner & Grogan, 2005). Additionally, Superintendent Terrell discussed the association, training, and preparation exposure gained from working different school districts:

> I've had small and rural broad city district experiences. Most of my career about half of my career has been almost evenly divided. The more experience you get with certain things, you feel more capable and competent to do that level of work. I had aspirations to be a superintendent one day. My superintendent was very good about having me attend

> state level and regional superintendent meetings with her. She tapped me to be an associate assistant superintendent while I was still building principal. I was doing district level work due to the fact that in this particular small district you don't have as many people to do the lift. I had lots of exposure around doing district level work in Midwestern states.

In education, the gender disparity in the roles of building principal, central office administrator, and district superintendent retains the concrete ceiling for African American women. This tends to limit exposure to formal and informal networking opportunities that assist with attaining and sustaining superintendent positions. To counteract the barrier effects of gender bias, experience is a recognized necessity for career advancement. Ironically, strong women who become central office administrators or superintendents often begin as teachers. Yet, gender role models on the executive level remain limited. Women spend more years as a classroom teacher than men before becoming administrators. Several years spent in the classroom on the elementary level rather than the secondary level is a barrier for women to access the superintendency. Therefore, women tend to be older than men when entering into the superintendency. Men are more likely become a superintendent at an average age of 43. Reportedly the median age for White women was 55 years and for women of color, the average and median age is 52 (McCord & Finnan, 2019). The mean age upon becoming superintendents among participants of the current study was 42.4 years of age. In comparison, the career trajectory of the women in this study is similar to that of White men in terms of age. The majority of the participants were the first African American women in their positions. They understood that one must check every box to be considered for promotional ascension. In a dialogue with a Caucasian male superintendent, Superintendent Baker remarked:

> I know a superintendent, Caucasian male, has been a superintendent since he was 25 years old. This person jumped over every other box and was already there at 25. I said how does that happen? I said, what was your trajectory? What were you, the teacher of the year? He said, "It was set up for me. My father was a superintendent 20 plus years ago, so it was kind of like a natural trajectory that they would select me when I entered." What are we talking about?

Preparation is important. Superintendent Chisolm shared:

> Remember that it is not always going to be easy. What I'm saying is nobody is going to give you anything. I'm sorry it's just not going to happen. You got to fight for it you got to be prepared for it. You need to have the preparation so you can deal with the other stuff. I always geared myself up the night before. I prepared for what I knew I was going into. You never know what you're dealing with, with human beings things can change. It wasn't a lot of female Black female superintendents so whatever meetings I would go to I was the only one. I could interact because eventually you're either going to be ignored or called on. You can have little surprises. You know that's life, but you also know that the sun comes out tomorrow as well. I decided to use the energy to outshine them or to prove them wrong instead of crying. I thought it was difficult it was challenging.

Historically, the superintendent's position has been patriarchal. This can be daunting for some African American women aspirants who see the challenge as insurmountable and choose not to undertake what is believed impossible. Women should not allow societal biases to fill them with doubt relative to their intellectual proficiencies when in competition with male candidates. The trajectory to the superintendency is through preparation and belief in oneself.

To become prepared for executive leadership, one must continually push themselves out of the role they are currently in to see themselves in the leadership role. The image of possessing leadership ability must also be seen by others. Exposure to the experiences of leadership skill building leads to a cultivation of self-esteem in one's ability. This should be encompassed within the career goals of the aspirant. To achieve the position of executive leadership, will not come without challenges.

Supportive Relationships

Discriminatory barriers of race and gender limit selection opportunities for women of color due to a lack of network political support, visibility, and role models. Opportunities provided to men are oftentimes not the same for African American women. The male-dominated good-old-boys network maintains disadvantages that isolate women from the possibilities of promotion. Not including women in professional networks gives an advantage to men, as the good-old-boys network can be a link to key school districts decision makers. This study's participants advocated building networks that support administrative aspirants. Recognizing the importance of a networking group for women aspiring superintendents Superintendent Angelou suggested:

> Women have to stick together and help each other. And until that happens, 100% versus 52% versus 74%, then women will not take the lead. There has to be, like, a group of women. That will study together and that will see each other through and get them over the hump. Men have done it for years. Women have to do it now.

Within education, there are significant statistical gender differences. Women are the dominant gender in professional education. Evident in the paucity of women executive leaders,

is the low percentage of African American women superintendents. Superintendent Height acknowledged the disproportionate percentage of female teachers to male superintendents:

> Education is mostly a woman dominated field. Overall, the teaching demographics are mostly women. There's still this very archaic belief that men should be the natural leaders over women.

It is unproven that women are discouraged from preparing for the superintendency. Men, considered the family breadwinners, are socialized for leadership to provide better resources and status for their families. Representation of women superintendents, especially a gross underrepresentation of African American women as superintendents, remains historically disproportionate to White men. Superintendent Terrell commented on the discrepancy of African American women versus men in the executive position:

> I can't give you the statistics but I would imagine that it's probably less than 1% Black women in the state, maybe 2%. Across our nation there are only 3% of Black women who are superintendents. There are 22 districts in the County. Of the 22 districts two of them are led by women and two are led by Black people. I'm the double minority in the sense of I'm the only Black woman. Out of 22 districts 19 of them are led by White men.

All of the superintendents recognized the disadvantage in the limited number of African American female superintendents in the establishment of a network. The participants recognized their race and gender as an anomaly and accepted the shortage of women role models for mentors. On the underrepresentation of African American women in executive positions for role models, Superintendent Angelou professed: “Of course there were more males than women. There were some female colleagues that were superintendents right along with me. But we were

just exchanging ideas they weren't necessarily like mentoring me." Superintendent Baker confirmed White male dominance of the K-12 school superintendency:

> They're definitely Caucasian men. The reality is when you look at executive leadership as a whole that has been the individual that has held the seat. I believe there's some historical perspective there. Those individuals have sought after the position, but I also believe that there's been a tendency to be comfortable to keep doing what we do. Sometimes almost not willing to take the risks to impact that kind of change.

The lack of representation of African American women administrators results in insufficient female role models in the superintendency. Subsequently, many recognized their choice of mentors were to be males. A former superintendent recognized Superintendent Height's leadership abilities and encouraged her to pursue the goal of becoming a school superintendent. As a Caucasian man, he reached out to assist her and provided wise guidance as she embarked upon the trek of executive leadership:

> A former retired superintendent, a White male, connected me with an African American woman who runs an aspiring superintendents institute. He said to me your experience when you become a superintendent is not going to be like my experience as a White man. You need to talk to other Black women to talk about what their experiences are like. I still keep in touch with him.

The superintendents recognized the disadvantage in the limited number of African American women superintendents, as well as African American men in the establishment of a supportive network for mentoring. With fewer African American women superintendents in positions, a cohesive bond was formed with male superintendents. At the underrepresentation of women Superintendent Angelou professed:

> I communicated more with men. I had male mentors that helped out most of my career that was Black. Role models were more White men. Had only one woman that was a school district superintendent who shared concerns that provided some insight.

The participants spoke of role models that were Black men; yet most all had White male predecessors as mentors. On the supportive nature of established African American male superintendents, Superintendent Chisolm commented:

> The older African American male superintendents, who were there, were always supportive and positive and that's why we had the African American superintendents group. In that group were only a few of course Black women. You know the history there weren't a lot of us. The guys that were there were amazing, were supportive of quote their little sisters.

Representation of the same race and gender is important and can impact the decisions school leaders make. Superintendent Baker identified having male and female mentors:

> The majority of my mentors, of course are males but I strongly lean on one African American female that is a trusted mentor that I will say anything to. I have found over the years that she has proven to be just that. I don't have the same discussion with males that I have with the female. I don't see them understanding.

Commenting on the few women of color in executive positions, Superintendent Bates stated:

> The most positive communication I had probably was with other department heads in a cabinet who were facing some of the same kind of challenges. There were six other Black women who sat at the head of department system offices. We would regularly meet to have dinner and adult beverages, to discuss how we're going to approach some of the challenges we were facing, and some of them were the same.

Generally underrepresented, outnumbered, and excluded, the female superintendents revealed the importance of having mentors for guidance and spoke of the support of predecessors. Superintendent Burroughs' predecessors were men. She commented on their leadership styles:

> The last Superintendent, a Hispanic male, was hands off. The superintendent before him, also a man, did get into the schools when I was a building principal. I don't know that I feel like that is a male versus female trait. I think that there is the expectation for women to be more nurturing. That expectation might look like accountability and accountability is different. People may expect more for a woman.

Superintendent Chisolm identified the characteristics of her predecessors and acknowledged a tumultuous relationship that was void of support:

> At that time they've all been males. It was an extremely political arena. My predecessor was not supportive. The person, who was in a position for six or seven years a white male, had a doctorate, had not been a principal and did not have any background in curriculum. He was of European descent. He was supporting another candidate, himself. He was also supporting his political arena, the bank.

Superintendent Bates divulged the characteristics of her predecessor, an African American woman, were not necessarily the best thing to happen for the district or for her as she assumed the reins. Alone in a large conference room with her predecessor, she recalled her thoughts about the conversation*:*

> That person has some ideas about education that in my mind did not serve the wellbeing of children but it was in service of self, and for the benefit of those in her inner circle. I found that to be highly, highly unusual. That person had been a superintendent in several

> large and small school districts across the country. She proceeded to give me dirt on everyone and what to watch out for. She did not consider the fact that I've been part of that district and my interactions with those people were directly in conflict with what she was telling me. She was trying to manipulate me to feed my perception of them. I recognized that was happening. I understood what it was and filed it away with temerity.

The district that employed Superintendent Terrell was unique and had experience working with Black women in leadership. Superintendent Terrell's predecessor, a Black woman was supportive. Superintendent Terrell had never worked with an African American woman superintendent and disclosed the relationship need for Black female mentorships:

> My predecessor, a former African American woman superintendent, had various positions in that particular organization, and had matriculated through the system. I've connected with her as a nice sounding board. She has been a really great mentor for me. I usually lean on Black women just because I think our experiences as leaders in education kind of make us unicorns. It's a very different experience. We certainly have to go through the professional kind of technical training, as everybody else, but our journey often to leadership looks a little different than what our White counterparts will and work has looked like.

Unicorns are colorful mythical animals that embody the characteristics of a horse with a wavy tail and a single straight horn projecting from its forehead. A unicorn is considered unique or unusual. Like the unicorn, the superintendent's position is a highly desirable dream but difficult to obtain. Described just like the mythological creature unicorn, African American female superintendents are extraordinary, amazingly remarkable, hard to come by, and a very rare find.

Political Unicorns

Time and again, African American women superintendents are the first African American women in executive leadership positions. All of the participants identified an awareness of the political paradigms in which they functioned. The superintendents spoke of isolation as the lone African American female in the position, a unicorn. In some cases, other women were in district positions of executive leadership. Corresponding with the experiences expressed by other study participants, Superintendent Terrell discussed the concept of a unicorn she stated: "I'm the only Black woman, only one of two women in my county." On the feelings of ethnic remoteness from others, Superintendent Baker commented on the inward feelings of isolation:

> I will say that as I walk into rooms, in many cases, I can't find anyone else that looks like me. There are only one or two others in the room that look like me. When I say that I'm talking about, a Black female superintendent, not women. Sometimes I'm speaking specifically about African Americans.

Superintendent Baker spoke of the impact of social media impact interactions:

> If you haven't had any experiences to break bread with an individual or to be in contact with a person to get to know a person, some individuals become fearful. They let social media or media dictate their belief system.

She continued to discuss her encounters of covert biases from colleagues at professional meetings:

> I'm a superintendent, you're a superintendent, you act like you don't see me. You speak to everybody else at the table, and act like you don't see me. Still you verbalize to them not to me, you said nothing to me, but you're demonstrating that you see everyone except for me. In a couple of weeks I'm going to a conference, I can literally look around the

> whole room and I can count on one hand, how many African Americans are in the room. I will have on my armor to go into those meetings, you model, you reiterate, you teach with a thick skin. They make us who we are.

The message of invisibility towards successful African American women superintendents by others is a brutal display of political power. The dominant cultural group chooses not to acknowledge the relevance and importance of the accomplishments of women of color. African American women leaders need a supportive group. The representation of African American women superintendents is severely limited; therefore, women must be resilient to counteract the attempts to immolate their uniqueness. The intrinsic concept of survival is an inherent value within that intensifies the will of the women to withstand the political torture. The denial of recognition builds endurance and strength to reject the dismissal by others of equal status. The failure to acknowledge the women served only to reconstitute their sense of purpose and commitment to leadership. The subtle, harsh refusals to recognize them serve only to help build resilience and trust in one's own voice.

Experiential Development Dynamics

The study participants agreed that childhood experiences had a powerful influential affect upon their career decisions. Childhood influences from family and community provided the superintendents with the fortitude to develop competent leadership ethics that encouraged leadership behaviors that make a difference in the lives of children. Family dynamics were especially influential in establishing Superintendent Chisolm's approach to life challenges. She candidly said:

> The specific challenges I had as a superintendent, my preparation, my strength came from strong African American women and my southern background. My brother who's 7

> years 9 months older than me made sure that I was strong. My brother let me know that I was great and I could do whatever I wanted to do. I had support and I could do.

A professional woman of color can leave an indelible impression in the formative years of learning that could significantly impact the life direction of a person. In elementary school, Superintendent Chisolm had such an encounter. She, with pride, fondly reminisced:

> I remember our teachers taking us outside. We sat on the grass waiting for this special visitor to show up. I can remember this big black car driving around to the playground. This stately Black lady got out of this big black car and she was talking to us. I remember her putting her hand on my head and said, "Oh, you're going to be one of my teachers or one of my doctors or someone my sweetie poo aren't you?" I remember that to this day. Do you know who it was? It was Mary McLeod Bethune.

Superintendents Terrell and Height were raised in families with professional women as the norm. A generational descendent of educators and administrators, with pride, Superintendent Terrell shared:

> I come from a family of educators, both my mother and her immediate sister just above her are retired principals from public schools. I've been under their wing for years as I was a brand new teacher and first starting to seek administrative roles, they were great mentors.

Superintendent Height recants the community people in her school district were not aware of her upbringing in a family of professionals. She chose not to inform them of her family ties but rather thought:

> They're talking to me like they're getting to know me. Where do you live? These houses must be impressive to you. I came from two college educated parents. There was an

> assumption that because I was Black I came up poor. All of that covert language, that I'm just enamored. I was not enamored. These were all the assumptions that people made about me, which I can't figure out why they would make an assumption, other than my race.

A person's perspective of life is formed by life's experiences. Assumptive beliefs are often drawn according to culture and what is historically known. Without experiential interactions with African American women superintendents, the perceptions of many are based upon internalized societal biases of inability based upon gender and race. The ability of others to respect the power of the position becomes essential for the women of color in leadership. The participants developed a demeanor to disregard the gender and racial attacks, which was powerful and opened avenues to bond with stakeholders. In leadership, it is essential to use one's platform and voice to create safe spaces for open conversation related to differences. To gain collaborative relationship transformation, African American women leaders should exercise their voice for naysayers to see a reflection of self. Through interpersonal discussions, connections of respect and recognition of the right to be in the position held may be forged.

Building Communication and Transparent Relationships

All of the women participants were educators and were unified in the position of superintendents being more political than academic. The nature of the superintendent's position entails numerous challenges. Leadership is a complex social process in which the leader influences others to collectively accomplish shared objectives. Recognizing people skills are essential to accomplish district objectives. Superintendent Baker spoke of the need to build savvy political skills:

> The political aspect is huge. You are the face of the organization. You must have contacts and reach your legislators, your lobbyists, and those individuals who also hold key political capital throughout your community, throughout the county and throughout the state. The savviness to navigate it, because it's not just to agree or disagree we must navigate. We see in our current political world. You have to be able to bring people together. It's not a one side versus the other side we all have to live in this place together. So there has to be some savvy to coalesce the two.

Specifically addressing her role, Superintendent Terrell identified:

> This particular role is definitely much more political. Had the components in our curriculum and instruction, but I don't necessarily lead it. I just have to be able to talk about it, and to make sure that people understand what the vision of our district is. I'm the face of the organization.

When questioned on the belief of the political role expectations of the superintendency Superintendent Burroughs answered: "The superintendency it's politics. Being a superintendent feels like being a politician, a public relations person. It feels like the dog and pony show. I've never felt less like an educator in my whole entire life." Congruent to the feelings expressed by Dr. Baker and Dr. Terrell's assessment of the position, in continuance, Superintendent Burroughs identified the role expectations that limit direct oversight of curriculum matters:

> I'm more of a hands on, do the work, solve the problems. It's just a lot of managerial type things rather than instructional leadership. It's just like there's not enough time in the day for me to be. I used to try to go to all of the instructional leader meetings and the principal meetings. They have so many other meetings that I have to go to Chamber of

> Commerce meetings, you know, all of these different PTA groups and community groups that I have to go to that I miss a lot of the school instructional pieces.

Conscious of the power within the job tasks, Superintendent Baker disclosed:

> We go in knowing that we have to be the best at it. You can't come in half-cocked you just have to be the best at what you're doing you can't slouch, you must lead you can't just assume the role. I'm the end all be all now you all do the work. I'm going to sit over here and put my feet up. You really have to be in the trenches and be about the work to really elevate the organization to where you need to, for them to be.

The interactions of others in the day-to-day empirical occurrences of a K-12 public school system play a significant role in an individual African American woman's perception of school leadership. Regarding the powerful position of a K-12 Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent Bates remarked on the behaviors of stakeholders:

> The title superintendent made people kowtow and it bothered me the whole time. I try my best to make everyone comfortable around me. Being a woman of my word willing to roll up my sleeves and get in the trenches with the people who were working alongside me willing to volunteer for what no one else wanted. I needed people's support because this was a big job and I needed allies. I respected you as a thought partner. They knew I was no nonsense. Basically, I knew what I was doing. I studied. I worked. I asked questions. I attended professional development. I didn't shy away from hard conversations, and I gave people credit.

A communicative relationship with all stakeholders was important to the African American women superintendents for the successful achievement of district objectives.

Established positive relationships can be central to a superintendent's success. Superintendent Baker identified the necessity of positive team relationships:

> There's no I in team and you can't do anything alone. You can lead all day, nobody's following you, you're not getting anything done. You definitely need to foster trust and relationships. Active listening, you have to be a great listener. You have to listen, find out the history, know the players, so that you can know and understand what needs to be done. You have to listen so that you can know the pulse. You have to listen to find out what motivates the workforce and what motivates the team members. Recognizing talent and expertise have sustained me. It's just as simple as saying kudos for a great job.

A trait of African American leadership is that of transformation. In many ways, it is reasoned that the position of superintendent is individual in a political realm. Although it is a political position, the personal cannot be exempted. To be transformative in leadership, one must be respectful of the value of individual team members and the worth of stakeholders. The tasks afforded to the success of educational institutions dictate that the objectives, requirements, and ideas of others are recognized. The leader cannot be self-righteous, consumed with power, but must rather display a caring recognition to the concerns of stakeholders. Generally, when frustrated, stakeholders present a concern in anger but there is nevertheless a need for reconciliation of the problem. The person is anticipating leadership to take action. Listening carefully provides an opportunity to see the concern through the lens of another. Active listening, inclusive of queries, permits chances of a clearer comprehension of the concern presented to be gained. The answer to the problem presented may not be the outcome desired, but active listening and being heard is validation of individual worth.

Superintendent vs. School Board Power

Doubly marginalized in society as women and African Americans, the study participants noted that they served at the selection of school boards and a large part of the superintendency can be focused on satisfying the needs of board members. It is a general consensus that school boards are reluctant to hire women superintendents. Public school boards hire the superintendent and serve in direct supervision with authority over the superintendent. School boards develop a profile of the type of candidate they are looking to hire and tend to employ what is believed to be the most effective leader. In recognition of the school board power of candidate selection, Superintendent Baker stated:

> I want to believe that the Board of Education will make the best decision based on the quality of the candidates that entered the race. I want to believe they will adhere to not using race, gender, political status, disability, religion and or any other such thing to make their selection. I'm hoping that they will allow this to be a fair process of what I bring to the organization which is visioning strategic planning, and the likes.

Superintendent Terrell also spoke of the school boards approach on leadership selection:

> When a board decides that they want a particular candidate it does not matter it's who they see themselves working with. They've got to be able to see themselves, working with a woman and a Black woman, and be okay with it. Boards as well as any organization talk around equity and talk they believe in leadership diversity. You can do all the right things and have all the right words. It's almost like when actors go to casting calls. They've got to be able to see you in this role. If they can't see you in the role you can show up in your pajamas and have a better chance of getting a job.

The study participants supported building a healthy and strong relationship between a superintendent and the school board. Many superintendents face priorities of developing harmonious relationships amidst chaotic politics and personal agendas of multiple board members. The superintendents recognized the need to focus on the concerns of the district and not personalize situational occurrences. On transition to a new school district as principal, Superintendent Height recalled the support she had received:

> When I first started in the district it was a different board. Now boards change so much. My superintendent was so supportive of me that he didn't even allow anything to get to the board. He made it very clear don't even come see him unless I actually did wrong. I was his first African American hire. I wasn't his last. He made it very clear that he valued diversity. He was proud of me and he supported me. I don't know how the board would have taken anything because he didn't let anything get to the board.

To move forward, the women needed to develop transparent skills that encouraged trust and open communication. It can be difficult for African American women superintendents to achieve the autonomy essential to implementing change when school board members advocate personal agendas. Superintendent Bates on the mindset of boards, realistically stated:

> If they don't have a growth mindset and are open to having female leadership we live in a patriarchal society. Breaking through that is going to mean women have to keep hitting their head against that ceiling, and hitting their head against that ceiling until it cracked. It's not until it cracks and shatters. Come on and practice, it hasn't yet shattered, it really hasn't. But we have got to keep working and stay true to our philosophy of education and leadership.

On the importance of transparency through communication, Superintendent Terrell's approach to leadership was awareness of not being an expert at everything. Strategically, she shared how to address stakeholders within the broader community:

> I think it's important that people understand the why behind things. I've never been the kind of leader who has been like, "Because I said so." I don't think that's particularly effective. I think it has to be transparent and so I'm being honest. If I don't know the answer to something, I will say, "You know what, I'm not sure about that. Let me get the information for you. I need to do more research on it," and I think people appreciate that. I'm not just going to be saying something. I do weekly YouTube videos of current events and on our website various topics related to stuff that's going on with the pandemic, vaccinations, and school choice. I've done meetings with my board members, small groups and one on one, to keep them abreast of different things. I don't want them to be caught off guard.

A school board member's misuse of power is subject to bring discord between the superintendent and the board, largely affecting the success of district objectives. Inappropriate behaviors of some school board members dictate appropriate behavioral responses. Superintendent Angelou commented on members of the board who coercively promote the acceptance of personal ideas:

> We're all individuals with intellect, all of us, board members and superintendents, but when you get board members that think they know more than the superintendent that can't be because they didn't study the superintendency. When they try to tell you how to do your job, or when they try to cover up stuff that's not right that's not good. My demeanor said don't you try that because that's not why I came. I came to enhance life

> for children. I'm the professional in this capacity. Take my recommendation and either vote it up or vote it down but let me be the one to do my job.

Commenting on the significance of being true to the reality of their person and understanding the value of a team, Superintendent Terrell acknowledged the importance of communication in gaining the support for her outlined platform to be successful. She identified how input from stakeholders in the loop can make a difference:

> We have conversation. What am I being measured by? How will you know these are things that I want to do? I have to own the stuff that I want to do in this role. It can't be a secret, just to me. I liken it to when you're on a diet. When you have a piece of cake, everybody like, "Girl, I thought you said you wanted to get into that swimsuit." If you're the only one knowing that you're on a diet, you got to say it, so that you can be held accountable to it. I have to put it out there publicly so that the support that's within my organization, board members, community members, cabinet members, can hold me accountable. I need that level of accountability.

Failure to express occupational dilemmas can potentially have an adverse effect on those experiencing discrimination. Superintendent Burroughs identified the need to include stakeholders by creating an environment for people to provide feedback:

> I ask for feedback and I take it very seriously. I have created safe environments where people aren't worried that I'm going to be vindictive against them later for something that they said to me. People who I work with know that I'm honestly dedicated to doing the best job that I can. I do get honest feedback that allows me to change because I listen. I'm also very willing to give honest feedback to people. They're happy to return the favor

> when you allow people to have open conversations with you and they don't get repercussions.

Race and sex discrimination experienced by African American women educational leaders is often subtle despite a common belief that discriminatory acts are blatant or overt. The actions of others are not linked to the women's leadership abilities but rather often stem from limited exposure to African American women in positions of authority and power. The superintendents believed trust, transparency, and maintaining a sense of confidence in the ability to competently complete the tasks of the position would supersede difficulties linked to their gender and race. Superintendent Baker, aware of the misconceptions of African American woman leadership, stated:

> They think you're overwhelmed, overworked, underpaid, and angry and they think what we're going to do. But when you come out strong, courageous, and you come out supportive you move forward and things will ultimately work themselves out. First of all, we can't be afraid, but we have to be ready, confident, but not overconfident. We have to be prepared, well studied, well versed, and able to compete. In all areas that mean being knowledgeable, showing your best work, means giving your best effort. That means being able to demonstrate you have the maturity level, the emotional balance, to navigate. All of that is preparation from many leadership trainings and opportunities to have mentors, also to work in various settings with various individuals.

Superintendent Chisolm emphasized the consistent need for transparency in her competency to make decisions acknowledged:

> I did what I had to do. Once I said I was going to do something I did it. I was open and transparent. I believe in getting directly to the situation and to that person. I didn't

believe in going around the bend sneaking around talking around people. I believe in dealing with the problem, putting it on the table and how we're probably going to stop it.

Superintendent Burroughs placed a similar emphasis upon communication stated:

> I'm very much into a shared distributed leadership. Our cabinet works very closely together as decisions are being made. I consult and collaborate. Authentic collaboration is to me the cornerstone of an effective superintendent. Everyone's not always going to agree but you can form some sort of consensus. You have to be able to pull people together. You have to listen and you have to you have to back your team and make sure you can't make a decision and then not provide people with what they need in order to implement whatever decision. Having great follow up evaluating your decisions on a regular basis to make sure there's no adaptations needed but adapting as necessary.

Understanding the challenges innate to cultural differences, the superintendents revealed biases of the duality of race and gender. The superintendents shared a commonality in how voice assertion and stature often influenced how the African American women leaders were perceived. Superintendent Terrell commented:

> It's assumed that if an African American woman has passion in her speech she is perceived as being angry or hostile. I have a platform, and I have a role. Some of that goes into the work you got to use your voice and you got to figure out how to use your voice. I would be stupid if I did not challenge people who sometimes have exhibited privilege. I'm respectful. We can engage in a dialogue. We don't have to agree, but you certainly won't silence me. I still got to be me. I can't pretend I'm anyone else. If I try to be someone else that's not going to ring true for me, and I'm not going to be happy.

> As much as I wanted this position and I really wanted to be here, I couldn't show up as anyone other than myself.

Superintendent Baker understood the perceptions others portrayed of her and the effect she held over others. She said:

> I probably could say the angry Black woman because of my height, my size, and my diction. The way that I talk, I'm very clear, I'm very direct. I also know when to sit back in my chair. Because if I stand up, that might be viewed as abrasive, or if my tone gets higher, it could potentially be perceived as being angry. The word bully has been used and I have even been called that.

Stereotypical views of decisive actions by African American women in the implementation of their duties are frequently misconstrued as being founded in emotions. Superintendent Angelou unveiled the societal image of an African American woman stereotypical belief as being an emotional woman of color. She voiced: “If you are an African American female most people are intimidated with you. These are my own perceptions. They look at you differently. African American women are especially seen as angry Black women.”

A common societal belief is that women are fragile and emotional. Aware of the stereotypical beliefs on the views of women as emotional by society, Superintendent Baker stated: “I also tell women, don't you think that men don't cry.” Superintendent Terrell said: “I have empathy for people, and I do listen to what people say that they need. But again, I've watched male colleagues become more emotional about things than what I do.” Superintendent Height exposed a contrast of women and men emotions contradictory to popular beliefs highlighted her personality as an even keeled person not easily ruffled:

> I mean we're all different as women all are emotional some more some are less. Some men are more emotional than women. I think that there's an assumption of how women are going to behave or act. Not as much as the angry Black woman. I'm not going to be as ruffled because even being in this space, I can't be. I don't have time to wallow in anything. Something happens you make a mistake, you reflect, you move forward and it's assumed that you are more stoic or strong. Your experiences just make you who you are. I think the other piece when you're an African American, or minority in White spaces, you have to be strong, thick skin in general. To this day I have never seen a woman in leadership more emotional than men in leadership. Quite honestly, I feel like if a woman has made it to this level they have to be in some ways hard. Not that they don't have a soft spot, not that they don't get emotional. I've seen men cry not boohoo but shed a tear. I see men in leadership and their egos and their feelings get hurt so easily. I don't think we could do it without being judged. The fragile egos and everything else that I see of some men, I just don't understand it. I think part of it is because as women in leadership many of us are mothers and wives and so here we are in leadership. We run a company or run a school district. Then we take care of the house.

Superintendent Burroughs also commented on the historical stereotypical beliefs pertaining to women:

> Society's norm of Black women being unsuitable isn't going to ever change. Yes, it's changing because we're talking about it more exposing it but we still have a long way to go. All you have to do is look at the storming of the capitol. That should tell everybody, it tells everybody I mean we have a long way to go.

All stereotypes do not impact the successful trajectory of every African American woman superintendent, but many suffer from the implications of the stereotypical images that have sustained through White male dominance in executive positions. The view of African American women who pursue upward movement of leadership is different according to Superintendent Height from others:

> In getting this position, someone said, "You really moved up fast." I've been an educator for quite a while. I don't see this as super-fast. I don't know if that's to do with my race or if it has to do with my gender. When I look at some of the trajectory of men administrators, they can move up the administrative ranks much faster, and nobody questions when you've been in a district for 12 years. But when you do it as a woman or as an African American it's you just really trying to climb the ladder. I just don't hear that kind of rhetoric with men. Men are aggressors, and it is okay, that's leadership that's strong. When women are aggressive knowing what they want and moving up the ladder in leadership it's sometimes seen as negative, almost like you have a masculine spirit. This is who I am as a woman and you know I have aspirations and I can do the job and so I want to move.

In a conversation held with a board member during the selection process, Superintendent Chisolm remained steadfast in her abilities and her belief of self. She recalled her stance taken:

> I think the president of the board at that time was an African American female asked me, "Are you sure about applying for this, what is your husband going to say?" I'll never forget that. I was shocked. I looked at her for a while and I said I guess he's going to say what he always said all these years; when dating, when we marched across the undergraduate stage and received degrees together, that we were going to stand like two

> strong willow trees. We wanted to stand side by side but have enough space so that one would not overshadow the other. He would say, "You go get it wife," because that's what he always told me. I know it was coming from her perspective but I guess she just didn't think that women could handle the job.

Superintendents that are not members of the community and serve in districts that are diverse need the support of the district stakeholders to achieve expected objectives. Socio-political aspects of an African American woman superintendent's relationship with her school board may be difficult for a superintendent not from the community to nurture a shared objective. It can be even more so cumbersome based upon the election cycle changes of board members that impact the consistency of the superintendent's task objectives. The superintendent participants addressed the commonality of experiences held with the election changes of school board members. Superintendents Angelou and Chisolm spoke concerning how the superintendency was affected with the election cycle altering the composition of the school boards. Superintendent Chisolm said:

> Every year was an election, and we'd get one, two, or three people, new people, on the board. Every year there was an election the composition of the board changes. The challenges were different in terms of the composition of the boards given any year. Under pressure and unfortunately I think the general impression was that a female can't handle pressure, are not as smart or strong and should not be in that leadership position. But females are.

A school board change of support was the cause for Superintendent Angelou to leave that school district. She stated:

> The seven and zero board members that elected me to come switched to a four and three and only three were left. When I went up there it was like a five to two African American board, and maybe two others. When I left there the dynamics had changed. I wasn't going to be in the driver's seat and I wasn't going to be there sad every day.

In concurrence Superintendent Baker stated:

> The demands on the job sometimes it's still the glass ceiling. I probably have always faced one barrier. I believe that, it's just natural for people to assume will we be able to do the job. Will you be able to fill the shoe? Will you be able to walk in the same footprint or footsteps that were before you? I'll have to share with you, that is one question that when asked I think my teeth grind. I'm not in any shape to follow anyone's trajectory or footstep or pathway, that's just not who I am. But unfortunately, it appears the organization was not ready to hire you.

On the suspicion of African American women being negatively affected in the selection of administrative leadership, Superintendent Baker commented:

> There's really a crisis going on in terms of race, in terms of gender, in terms of access, in terms of opportunity, in terms of education. Some are struggling to make the right decision. Some are struggling to even own that they've been a part of the problem and not a part of the solution. I also believe that there's been a tendency to be comfortable to keep doing what we do and sometimes not willing to take the risk to impact change. There's some historical perspective. Just look at the political landscape.

Superintendent Height believed:

> I just think that there's the difference between getting the benefit of the doubt, which I feel, many White males and White women get the benefit of doubt, where we have to

> prove ourselves. There's an assumption that they probably can do the job and felt like for us you need to prove that you can do that.

As a whole, the women superintendent participants shared a commonality in the fundamental belief of preparation, mentorship, and reciprocity as the framework for collaborative decision-making leadership. A communal thread expressed by the superintendents, regardless of the school district location or district economic stability, was to attain legal assistance in the establishment of their employment contract. Essentially, through the advice of others, Superintendent Angelou who identified herself as the "queen of diversity," realized personally the importance of legal contract negotiations. She recalled a turbulent experience:

> Folks looked me over and they thought I was rebellious. I didn't shy away from being African American versus being quiet and subdued and not say much that's not that wasn't my style. I was exposing all kinds of financial horrific issues. They wanted me to leave. I hadn't done anything wrong. Another superintendent had shared his contract with me. He told me to make sure that you have an attorney that gets you an iron clad contract this must go in your contract. I mirrored his contract. If it hadn't been for my mirroring his contract, they probably would have demoted me and paid me teacher contract but they couldn't. You can send me home but you must pay me. When they don't want you to no longer work in their district, you have to go. You go with everything you got in your contract.

Superintendents are the face and leading spokespersons for the school system and bear local, state and federal responsibility to shape the future of schools and the education of students. The position is highly political. School board members maintain oversight on the selection and performance of a superintendent. It is conceived by many that school boards are reluctant to hire

women. Gender and race impact career pathway trajectory. More African American women lead elementary principalships in contrast to men who dominate high school principalships, the unofficial route to the superintendency. This lack of visibility for women is indicative of another barrier to the superintendency. Superintendent search firms have become more aggressive in identifying women candidates. The school board determines the needs of the school district and outlines the leadership characteristics believed desired to accomplish the educational objectives. Many African American females identified they were hired as curriculum change agents. Superintendents often visualize the political aspects of power, is exacerbated by the actions of the school board that ultimately impedes performance. To offset the inherent struggles of power superintendents need to develop a strong working relationship of mutual communication with board members, staff, and community.

Marriage in the Superintendency

A key factor in the women superintendents' ability to establish successful stable career paths was having supportive spouses, family, and friends. Even though some of the superintendents had married twice, each of the women acknowledged within their current marriages longevity that exceeded 20 years or more. Within the cultural institution of marriage, the participants were unified in equality and diversity, fueled through the belief of marriage being a partnership. Marriage formed a lifelong union for the superintendents that enjoined a bond of a man and woman into two equally important and diverse halves. Only one of the participating superintendents remained unmarried.

African American women superintendents realistically understand consequences to family, career, and choices that must be made. Women must be strategic in their plans for advancement to leadership positions of public school district superintendents. An

insurmountable reality for some women is a lack of family or spouse support. Superintendent Bates stressed the necessity of having an informal networking system:

> I think you would need to have your family support in place. That is so very important because you need to have some place where you can be yourself. You have to have an opportunity to be who you are and to say what you want without feeling that someone is going to go back and say something. When you walk into that superintendency you put on your mask. It made a difference to know who's pulling for you out there it's like you never know whose gunning for you never know who is pulling for you. No matter what was going on I knew somebody was out there in my corner and that made all the difference.

Superintendent Terrell recognized the decision to relocate to an out of state school district for career advancement required her family's adaptation to a different environment. The decision was jointly conceived as she recounted her spousal support:

> My husband and I, are definitely a team. I'm in a different place right now just because we're empty nesters. My husband and I made this decision together. Our role, very much is a partnership, and we didn't look at it as it's like we want stuff. We both kind of expected that we have to work hard for it. And we need to work together. And so we didn't look at it as oh, he earns the money and I do the cooking and cleaning and quite honestly our roles are reversed in a lot of ways. We're in good communication about what it is that we want to do.

The average superintendent spends more than 50 hours a week at work, including night meetings and sporting events. Time management on the job is an obstacle juxtaposing the balance between work, home, and parenting. There exists a variety of decisions women have to

make in seeking advancement. In making the difficult decisions of job versus home, Superintendent Height identified the pressures of being a wife and homemaker:

> I can tell you that it does take a toll on your personal life, especially if you don't have a mate that understands. Like if you have a mate that's kind of old fashioned and thinks that you, even though you just put in an 11, 12 hour day, need to cook dinner, and you know do everything else, makes it very hard. The reality is the woman is taking care of the house. You got to take care of the men, because most men still need to be taken care of. Men in leadership positions they're not juggling all of the things that we have to juggle as women. You know, make sure the groceries are bought, kids get the homework done, make sure they get the clothes cleaned, that they can go to football practice. I think it also makes it hard when you're so driven. Again kind of an ego thing is who's going to overshadow who.

African American women who plan for professional job advancement have tough choices relative to career, marriage, and parenting. The prime time for career advancement is also the prime time for career building and the bearing of children. Society has placed upon women expectations to bear a greater share of the home and child rearing responsibilities. Spouses accordingly adapt a flexible attitude pertaining to the demands of family responsibilities and professional obligations. Many husbands had the ability to work from home and to adjust their schedules to accommodate the family needs. For some, there was the cultural belief that a woman's place was in the home. Furthermore, it is a belief that women working outside of the home posed potential negative outcomes on the growth and development of children. When queried about her career aspirations affecting the family and marriage, Superintendent Chisolm responded: "I had an outstanding husband who was right there an outstanding partner that

assisted with the kids. And they came out fine." As the dominant gender in education, qualified women are actively defying the beliefs of marriage and family is a deterrent for their selection.

Parenting in the Superintendency

All but two of the participants had children that they reared during their preparation and advancement to become a superintendent. Superintendent Angelou, as a single parent rearing her children, discussed the necessity to enroll her children within all the White institutions that she served. She commented on how her decision affected the children's development: "My kids learned about racism and how you make friends with culturally diverse people. They did even probably a better job of that than I did."

The superintendents also shared their decisions on motherhood. The decisions for Superintendents Bates and Baker were aligned with the analogy of a glass being viewed as half full or half empty. Superintendent Bates said:

> I decided in my early 20s that I was going to be childless. I understood that about myself. The reason why was after about a year or two of teaching I realized, when I came home I had nothing to give including sometimes myself. I committed to being childless, because I knew that my career was that important to me. It gave me joy to be a teacher, to be a coordinator. I was focused on making sure I was doing, being the best whatever they decided me to do I could be. I don't regret it. I just know that my life would have been richer had I had children.

In the following statement, Superintendent Baker recognized her sacrifice of motherhood:

> I don't have any children, so my sacrifice was a little greater than it probably had to be. When I realized I made that sacrifice, I was like wait I missed the mark. I'm not sleeping

> at the wheel I know what happened. I kept my foot on the gas pedal and didn't get off. I just somehow passed every exit by accident in this moment and missed my opportunity.

In making the difficult decisions of job versus home, Superintendent Height talked of how the pressures as a parent, aligned to the role of superintendent:

> I had to prioritize and some things I just didn't do. I was not the PTA mom helping raise money. I didn't have the capacity to do certain things. I prioritized parent teacher conferences watching my child in a game. I had to really know what things I'm going to let go and not feel bad about and what things am I going to be there for because it's really important to me. Sometimes I say no to my job. Maybe I can't do this extra program or maybe I'm going to go to this event but I'm only going to stay for half an hour because I need to be there for my child.

Evaluating herself as a parent, Superintendent Height confessed:

> I can't say I was always perfect. I'm sure, my daughter, I know my daughter would say I was not. I do think she knew she was a priority. I was going to do anything that I could to make sure she was also successful to get what she needed. So, it's just really prioritizing, letting go, and not feeling bad that you have to say no. There are probably a lot more things I would have done in my job. Nope, this is going to be enough because I've put in my time and I know I got to spend some time with my family.

Superintendent Baker recognized the many factors that women consider when making the choice of motherhood. She spoke on the restraints of motherhood that inhibit African American women from pursuing advancement:

> The time that goes into natural motherhood, childbearing and child rearing when you have a young child and leading or holding executive leadership positions, is astronomical.

> The demands on the job, sometimes they believe that they have to make decisions between family and work environment.

Time restraints of the superintendent's position can be difficult for a person with younger children who seek a balance between work and family life. Working longer hours each week and attending night meetings and sporting events, for some women, is rationale not to seek leadership positions. Pressures of leadership time restraints affect parenting expectations of family time contrasted to the demands of time spent with school board members, staff, and community. For women, time away from her family role is conflictual to the traditional gender socialization of the family. Contrarily, men are socialized to be the family breadwinner and are encouraged to enter leadership positions. Without spousal support, many women find the nature of the superintendency unattractive, as the work pressures and time demands are discouraging.

Informal and Formal Mentoring Relationships

Research has shown the importance of forming informal and formal mentoring relationships. All of the study members expressed a supportive system was important. Formal mentorships are usually scheduled meetings to consider a selected topic for discussion. An informal mentorship is a relationship with an individual who has the knowledge and experience to help strengthen the career. Generally, the discussions involve a spouse, family member, or close friend, and the conversation topics are generally considered a priority. Family and friends can be a major source of informal support and are important to the success of African American women superintendents. Superintendent Terrell identified her key supporters:

> My personal support system is my husband, my extended family, my relationship with God, also my team at the district office. I consider those my personal board, my

> committee and they're brutally honest with stuff. My husband will tell me have you thought about this. I need that.

The scarcity of Black female school superintendents dictates the importance of supportive mentorship in preparation for position consideration. The development of authentic engagements is pertinent to the development and preparation of leadership, but is also necessary for effective maintenance of leadership. The task of balancing work, family, and a personal life outside of the superintendency can be a stressful challenge. Superintendent Angelou shared the difficulties of family dynamics as an aspirant and how informal supportive relationships helped her managed through:

> I was a single parent going in the midst of a divorce from my first hubby and I needed some assistance. I needed people to push me and hold on to me to make it happen. I remember giving up a lot of Sunday evenings, to work as a team of leaders, with people that were already principals, already assistant principals, already curriculum administrators. They were very supportive.

The support of established administrators as mentors would benefit aspirants to develop the leadership potential possessed. Being a part of an influential network of chosen administrator mentors would potentially increase the attraction of the superintendency. Relationships with reputable administrator mentors would be an incentive for more women to realize the exceptional role of a superintendent and seek internships in preparation for education leadership.

Formal Mentorship in the Superintendency

Without formal mentors, Black women may be at a disadvantage in regard to high-visibility assignments that showcase they are qualified, credible, and competent leaders. To gain

opportunities for formal mentorships, Superintendents Angelou, Chisolm, and Terrell encouraged networking with national and local superintendent organizations. During her principalship Superintendent Angelou noted the mentorship impact of being groomed by her African American male superintendent upon her career trajectory:

> He had me out learning data, how you use data. He would bring me along for the ride to the superintendent's meetings. I was just fascinated to be in the same room with them. What I didn't know then is he was showing me off and trying to groom me. I learned even more about the central office, the principalship, a curriculum, you name it. In this interim time I am actively involved with the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) and the local affiliate chapter.

Actively involved with NABSE, Superintendent Chisolm confirmed the difference in her leadership was gained through association, training, and preparation. Exposure to national and international training provided her a unique viewpoint:

> All the way up from being a teacher I went to various seminars and workshops, state as well as national leadership conferences. I had two summers abroad with other superintendents and other new administrative leaders from around the country. I had further training, and experiences in Oxford England, Glasgow, Scotland, and South Africa.

Superintendent Terrell shared her perspective on choosing organizations to network with:

> A lot of the organizations I've been a board member for I've tried to in particular, align myself with stuff that I believe in personally. I had been associated with NABSE. I've been associated with African American Leadership Forum, Urban League, more loosely affiliated with them like on special projects and things of that nature.

An overwhelming number of superintendents of color and both genders work with associations such as the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) to prepare for the superintendency. The professional involvement in civic and academic based organizations assists in the ability to assess the current status in the field of education. Most importantly, active involvement within associations builds leadership skill sets. Being a part of a network increases decision makers' visual awareness of the aspirant and enhances potential for selection.

Dual Bias Status of Gender Discrimination

Oppositional experiences in a patriarchal, White-dominated system of identity and oppression can stifle African American women's pursuit of administrative positions. The associated responsibilities of the role of school superintendent can be challenging for women. Many experience a lack of organizational support. The climb to leadership ranks is tougher for women of color due to the concrete ceiling's density. Black women superintendents face the intersectional challenges of race and gender. These specific barriers present unique challenges that make it difficult to thrive in the position of leadership without appropriate support. The concrete ceiling that excludes women from attaining top school leadership positions are often repeatedly reinforced by race and gender biases. African American women in leadership have experienced discriminatory acts of sexism and racism within an organization. Racism, however, was not viewed a problem for Superintendent Bates, she revealed:

> I was in a predominantly African American district. What did make a difference was my gender. I get there was no opportunity for racism to rear its ugly head because I was surrounded by African Americans. But the colorism aspect reared its ugly head, and the sexism reared its ugly head. The level of sexism however gave me a jolt.

African American women educational leaders' decisions of authority are often challenged, resented, undermined, or even ignored by stakeholders. All participants spoke of encounters related to gender discrimination. Gender discrimination, or sexism, is when women are victimized due to being female. The majority of the African American women superintendents considered gender to be more of a barrier than race. Although many of the participants reported experiencing some discriminatory biases, they did not allow the incidences to become a job performance barrier or alter attempts to access the superintendency. Appreciative of her heritage and femininity, Superintendent Bates disclosed her inability to be anything other than herself. She commented:

> It's uncomfortable for me as a woman because I'm not a patriarch, I'm a matriarch. That role is not how I live my life. It's not how I succeeded in any position I've ever had. Putting on a suit and tie and acting in the way of the man is not something that is comfortable for me. I've rarely seen women in positions do that. However, when you are assertive, you're called aggressive.

Understanding the importance of the role expectation, Superintendent Baker emphasized a philosophy for acceptance of the superintendency:

> To take on an executive level position that does not align with your values is not going to make that opportunity the one that you want it to be. We don't go to work to work a job. That's a career, it's a lifestyle, it's a passion. We're driven well especially in these roles. The money doesn't match the dedication that really needs to go into it. So with that being said, you have to love what you do, and again, it has to align with your values.

The view of African American women can be skewed, making women of color endeavor to fulfill unrealistic expectations in contrast to their White counterparts to gain a sense of

competency. The expectations for African American women superintendents are generally believed to be higher, with little room for mistakes. The duality of African American women in leadership positions portrays the women as being an exceptional member of the Black race. A common conviction was African American women leaders had to do a better job. It was thought a woman's actions were being continually observed and closely evaluated. Superintendent Height recognized the difference in expectations of African American female superintendents. She spoke of the pressures of others upon her not to make errors:

> I think it's the difference between getting the benefit of the doubt, which I feel, many White males and White women get the benefit of doubt, where we have to prove ourselves. I think that's the difference. There's an assumption that "Oh, they probably can do the job" and for us, you need to prove that you can do that. Not able to be afforded to really make a mistake, you will make them. You need to quickly address it. You have to own it, and move forward being cognizant that sometimes you may not be able to get past that mistake, because you only get one. It's just kind of that whole idea of it being harder to move up, having to constantly prove yourself to everyone.

Superintendent Terrell also commented on the expectations:

> This goes where that sexism piece goes. You could have a male superintendent. Alpha male superintendent after male, they can succeed one another. You might have one that's crappy, one that's good, one that does illegal stuff. There's nothing, but when you are a woman, you're carrying kind of the weight of the future. So, if you mess up, then you may be closing the door for a future woman to follow you, a future Black woman.

Scrutinized to prove their knowledge, skills, and competence in the execution of their position responsibilities, African American women superintendents discount race and gender

prejudices to excessively overachieve. To be an overachiever is not automatically a negative attribute. However, it can have adverse effects when leaders develop unrealistic expectations. Superintendent Baker admitted:

> My lessons learned that you can give it 150% all the time. But after so many years it is going to come back and bite you, and you're going to have to sit down and you won't be able to work at your best, because now you need to heal or recover, you know, or take a rest. I preach the balance but if there's one thing that I struggled to do it has been to find the balance.

The position dictates resilience and self-care. African American women superintendents in times of strife should be reminded as to why they chose to accept the position. The work performance of American women superintendents is affected by the paucity of numbers in comparison to White men, White women, and Black men. It is a tendency of African American women superintendents to believe they shoulder the burden of having to continually prove themselves capable of the position. Yet, they face some of the same problems of power as other leaders of different gender and racial makeups. Consequently, it is important for African American women superintendents not to adapt a masculine leadership style but rather lead according to their developed management style.

Dual Bias Status of Racial Discrimination

Each superintendent expressed awareness of the intersectional barriers of race and gender; however, many chose not to address the race factor and rather focused on the impact of gender. African American women are aware that they are overlooked for positions solely on the bases of their race and gender; however, once in a position of leadership, they make it a point to not make race an issue out of fear that they will be accused of playing the “race card.” It is not

feasible to disregard the effect of race, as it is impossible to separate the duality of membership in historically oppressed groups. Within the educational profession, African American women have continuously been confronted with the intersectional natures of sexism, racism, and colorism. In reflection of the duality of race and gender, Superintendent Terrell pointed out:

> I think it's a combination, I don't know if it is. I think a lot probably has to do more with race than anything. Because, especially in this era where people don't want to believe that, or they kind of roll their eyes when you start talking about inequities. It's like you know that this really exists. We have examples of where it exists. When you have inherent practices that are biased, you bring it out.

On the duality barriers that African American female superintendents encounter in the selection process Dr. Baker stated: "I believe that possibly gender and or race could impact it in any way." Superintendent Chisolm also acknowledged the intersectionality of her position. She identified the discrepancy of race and gender experiences. She resiliently without fear of reprisal retorted:

> I had it as a female. It was compounded by being a female and a minority as well. The challenges I think were twice as much as my male counterparts. I filed an EEOC (Equal Employment Opportunity Commission) claim to receive the advancement. The lawsuit and the actual promotion was an increment period of 3 years where I continued on as assistant superintendent. I'll never forget when I got this promotion. A Black male principal told me I shouldn't have filed the EEOC complaint.

Aware of the conflictual societal treatment of the African American woman, Superintendent Chisolm further proclaimed:

> Let's be clear: the same kinds of attitudes, drawbacks, rules, perceived rules, written rules and in terms of a Black woman achieving the top in education, it's the same as going into General Motors Ford or the hospitals or any job. It isn't because you wanted to be a superintendent. Those variants were there for many different jobs. I mean we just had national basketball games and look at the Black people. This is just women. Look at the difference in the training facilities for the men and the women. This was 2020 or is it 2021. The young ladies were exposed to a difference to the men. First of all, it's always been the White man at the top.

Institutionalized practices of gender discrimination are often covertly embedded in the lifestyle practices of established education leaders. Women are often stereotyped and are treated according to those personal beliefs. The social barriers of intersectionality affect African American women's career progression, reflected in disparity of leadership representation. Superintendent Angelou discussed the culturally specific inequalities of the expected looks of women of color in her pursuit of executive leadership. She stated:

> Well I think at first they look at what you look like. Burgundy brownish hair was the perceived acceptable hair color for Black women trying to move upward. We've made some progress, because you'll see some leaders in locks and braids and everything, but back in the day, you wouldn't see that. They might be an assistant principal or junior or whatever but they wouldn't necessarily be the superintendent in charge.

Superintendent Terrell commented on the dress of some superintendents who represent education leadership dress for the general public. She contrasted the expectation of professional dress for African American women who have to show up differently in the leadership role of a superintendent:

> I've watched at professional conferences with superintendents how they show up. I noticed that Black women I don't know if it's an unwritten rule, or if they've been told you have to look a certain way that I don't know, but we're always dressed. We are in suits, or blazers and skirts and always looking like we could step into a board meeting. Our colleagues may be a little bit more casual at professional conferences. I've seen people in flip flops, in shorts, like I'm ready to wash my car shorts. We're at the helm, the top of an organization and you're at a professional conference with other colleagues. There's a certain kind of expectation. The role of a superintendent is a public leader and you always have to be prepared. It may be self-imposed, I will acknowledge that, but that's an example of ways that you have to show up differently.

Superintendent Height also noted the contrast as to the scrutiny of a woman. She stated:

> As a woman I think that you're always balancing. What you wear, what you should look like. The men wear the same suit, he just changes his shirt and tie. I wish I had that freedom. There are so many more rules for us. I wonder if there are extra rules, or are you putting rules on yourself, or are you playing into their mentality? Why can't you just be yourself? I know that I live in the real world and it does make a difference.

Frequently, women administrators and aspirants fail to realize issues that are discriminatory in nature. The status quo intersecting power systems form culturally specific social inequalities that are historically unjust. Superintendent Terrell recalls with angst the rationale given to her as a finalist for non-selection:

> It came down to me a Black woman and a White man. We both were assistant superintendents of different districts. I have a doctorate's degree and he was working on his. I remember listening to them to say that because he had adopted a Black son that he

> would understand the needs of the community better and the limitations that sometimes we put on students of color. The reason you're giving him this position, because you think he understands the inequities in educational systems better than I do. I thought, he's a White man who's adopted a Black son and I've given birth to two Black sons, married to a Black man, really fascinating.

Superintendent Burroughs in an acknowledgement of gender discrimination believed:

> As women when you don't back away from conflict and you stand your ground, then you're all kinds of other things, they call me something else. They'll say you're aggressive. You have to know and believe. Be your best self, go in and be authentic, lead like you know how.

Superintendent Bates spoke upon the gender discrimination that impacted her trajectory to the assistant superintendent's position. She recalled a discriminatory conversation held with the district's CEO when offered the position of assistant superintendent:

> I thought I would be treated as any other superintendent, having the ability to negotiate. I never thought that someone would form their words to say to me, "I don't negotiate with women." That was something I'd never experienced and took me a day or two to process that.

Struggles from others of hostility, insubordination, and isolation often influence educational leaders' professional objectives negatively and hinder the ability to establish authority. Not in denial of intersectionality's impact of race and gender, Superintendent Bates shared:

> For the most part, society views women as not being strong leaders. It is a societal thing that is going to take a while to eliminate. It's just like racism, it's still here. We've been

> fighting against it in this country for 400 plus years, sexism, is like that. Being an African American woman, you got two strikes against you already and don't be halfway good looking you get a third. It's going to be difficult. We get opportunities now and then, but the road for us is not paved the same as the road would be for even a Black man.

In an endeavor to overcome the historical "double whammy" of two marginalized identities, some succumb to the portrayed negative image expectation of having to be hard and tough. Collectively, the participating superintendents cited being educational leaders that held a strong commitment to improved student outcomes. The high expectations for all stakeholders can burden women superintendents to believe they must continually prove themselves. Thus, for many, the development of a tough and callous veneer is deemed essential to gain respect and acceptance. Being a taskmaster, however, can be damaging upon relationships with stakeholders. Superintendent Angelou recognized how she was perceived:

> As an African American female educator my reputation was if you were going to work for Dr. Angelou then you need to make sure you're going to work. You're not going to go and be with her, and just sit quietly and watch people destroy more children. I was a data driven leader in a superintendency that's not politically correct. He said you might be too tough. That was emotional for me because all I had wanted to do was be a superintendent and help students.

Acutely aware of the intersectional impact of the double whammy, the African American women participants were reluctant to acknowledge one bias was greater over another bias. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that it is difficult to separate the color of one's skin from one's gender. It appeared that some participants to demonstrate professionalism wanted to separate ethnicity and gender in terms of performance of expected job tasks. Still, suspicions leaned to

gender being the most discriminated factor. The uncertainty of gender is linked to beliefs that compromise confidence and potential. Superintendent Burroughs stated:

> As a woman there have been times where people try to bully you. I do think that sometimes people do say things to women in places of authority that they would never say to a man. You have to know and believe that you're not trying to go in and be somebody else. You're not trying to go in and be the person that was before you or you're not in competition with anyone. Go in and be your best self, go in and be authentic. Go in and lead, like you know how.

To overcome the barriers of an inseparable double whammy of race and gender the superintendents must find and define a method of survival resilience. A strategy to be able to formulate a plan of action and adhere to the plan of action to achieve career goals was needed.

Spirituality

Without the camaraderie of those that are similar, that is, like you in experiences, comparable incidences, and looks, a need to build resilience becomes evident. Spirituality emerged as a prominent theme of resilience that was common to all the women participants. A shared commonality was the exposure to religion and prayer throughout their lives. Unanimously, the superintendents reported reliance upon their spirituality as sustenance to fulfil the job roles. To assist in the development of a resilient attitude for successful job performance, Superintendent Angelou proclaimed the necessity of being spiritual: "You need God in your life to strengthen you and give you the desires of your heart. I was a real church girl." Also a church girl, the daughter of a pastor, Superintendent Bates, understood the support of a higher power to endure the daily challenges. With conviction she announced reliance on her faith for direction via daily prayer: "I leaned on my faith often every day comfort, for guidance, for positioning my

thoughts. Helping me to understand that sometimes hurt people, hurt people. I don't have to take that, I can avoid that, but I understand the motive."

Prayer was a universal essential staple for the participating superintendents. Every morning on the way to work, Superintendent Chisolm stated she prayed:

> Every single day I drove coming into that district I did my silent prayer. I asked the Supreme Being to send angels ahead of me and make sure that I did what was right and what I was supposed to do for those kids. I said that every single day. The years passed by, I did the best that I could every day. I don't think I wouldn't have been there if I was not doing what God wanted me to do.

The women participants in entirety acknowledged spiritual belief in a higher power served as a mental helper to liberate them from stress, isolation, and bias to build resiliency. Superintendent Baker expressed her spirituality and gratefulness:

> I thank God every day, His Grace and Mercy. I'm thankful but it also is being well prepared. Not overconfident but confident. Being very strong within presentation and passion, yet yielding a maturity level that comes with passion to contain your emotion. I know where my joy is for sure and I just thank God for keeping me and covering me through the journey when I wasn't putting my time in like I should have to take care of my mental, physical.

Unwavering in their beliefs, the superintendents believed their career positions as school superintendents were predetermined by God. Each woman believed it was the Grace of God that guided and protected their efforts as educational leaders throughout the tumultuous times of leadership. Without hesitation, Superintendent Terrell shares her belief: "It was a blessing. I

will say this: I am a person of faith. I don't believe that this job was for anybody but me. It's something that I had prayed for."

Superintendent Height prayed for a clear fit for the district to supervise when offered the administrative position of a school district that was ethnically diverse. She recounted:

> I prayed about it. I'll go for it and if I get it, it will be meant for me to have it you know and if you don't if it's not your will I'll stay where I am and I would be fine. I always pictured myself working with students that look like me. Why would I want to go out there that building was 95% White population and 5% other? I prayed about it and I ended up getting the job. I have a strong spiritual foundation that gets me through everything. I really do pray that wherever God places me, you know, I want you to place me where I need to be. And so with that, I know that wherever I'm placed I'm going to be a success.

Being spiritual generated a calming resilience among participants, enabling them with the ability to persevere through the daily challenges they faced within their chosen career capacity. Superintendent Angelou believed it was a spiritual choice for her career paths to move from district to district. She said:

> I'm going to go wherever God leads me. Take the job, get it done. So that's what I did. I was a praying woman too. God saw me out of that. He even sent me home early, with paid status.

The challenges of leadership for African American women superintendents can be burdensome, as the women often feel compelled to prove themselves. The scrutiny from others to constantly demonstrate their qualifications can be an additional hardship. Superintendent Height remarked:

> I'm an assistant superintendent and not a superintendent; they have greater challenges. The buck stops with them. But I can relate too. It is the same kind of scrutiny you've got to be twice as good to get half of the recognition, you know, same type of dynamics.

The higher expectations placed upon African American women superintendents leave little room for error. To overcome challenges, successful African American women superintendents need to display preparedness and exhibit resiliency. In response to the scrutiny of others, Superintendent Burroughs answered: "As long as you are in the role, you know, assert the need for respect. Demonstrate the end model respect as well and set boundaries." Superintendent Terrell recognized the reputation of her position as an educational leader. She noted:

> What I say has actions that people can point to. Some things I may not necessarily have control over. I'm giving them a strong foundation so when they launch from the school district, they are ready to go. I want to make sure that my behaviors and the behaviors of this organization match the stuff that we put in brochure print that looks nice. You can see it with, increased number of students in advanced placement classes, our beating the state graduation rates, and with our kids really having true post-secondary opportunities that lead to college success.

Spiritual faith that things would conclude successfully is a beacon of hope during difficult transitional times. Having the foundation of faith served as overtones of comfort in the conviction of a Supreme Being's protection. Having a strong spiritual belief provided a sense of reassurance that all would work out right.

Self-Care

With their leadership frequently questioned, the participants stressed the importance of self-care. The variance of life experiences and the acknowledgement of individual responses were shared by the women leaders. With her faith intact, Superintendent Baker acknowledged the importance of self-care:

> I will say practice what you preach when it comes to self-care. I preached to find joy and I said that my joy was getting it done. Okay you got it done and now where is your joy. I was overdoing it. I needed to tweak my own sleeping habits. I had to get myself together giving 20 hours out of a 24 hour day you only get four hours of sleep. I've cut back to probably 16 out of 24. Now I'm getting close to 10 to be considered somewhat normal. That's tough for me. I think that I ignored how I really felt. I was sluggish. I was drained. I realized that I needed to take care of my mental physical and financial self. We need to be smart, eat clean, and make sure that we find at least an hour of exercise, even if it's just walking a mile. Through the pandemic there were some lessons learned. People don't hire unhealthy people. Why would I hire someone that does not look fit for the job?

On the effect of the job pressures, Superintendent Baker pointed out:

> When you have to cry you better take a few minutes, close your door, go into the bathroom and do what you need to do to get yourself together. Remember, they're looking at you, you're the leader they need you, they know that you're human. They're counting on you to lead through crisis and at that time, you're not in the water or able to handle it, that's not what they need. I also tell women, don't you think that men don't cry.

Of the women in particular, Superintendent Bates recalled her actions at her mother's death:

> I could not stop to heal from that. I jumped right into a very high pressured job. That was a 24 hour seven day a week commitment, and I worked it to the detriment of my health, and to the detriment of me not having enough time with my family. After I left the superintendency, I was in healing mode. I had to because that experience was emotionally draining, physically draining, and psychologically fraught because of all the slings and arrows that came my way. I was tired and I needed to heal from that experience. You have to take care of yourself. Meditate self-care is crucial. Make time for yourself. You got to have a place where you can download that's important. I had to take a couple self-days and I did.

Superintendent Height referred back to her spirituality and conceded her strategy to job pressures:

> Prayer, remembering why I am here, why am I doing what I'm doing with this situation. Why am I in this situation, is there something that I need to reflect on that I should have done differently? And if so, how do you rectify that? And if not, then keep moving forward, and let it go.

Superintendent Burroughs' reaction to the pressures of leadership:

> For stress management I have to limit the amount of times that I've looked at my email. I'm one of those people who does not like to have unread emails at all. If I wake up in the middle of the night, I'm going to check my email just to, you know, so I don't see it in the morning and find out that something happened in the middle of the night.

To avoid the pitfalls of the job pressures and maintain stability of self-care, Superintendent Terrell said:

> People are going to do all sorts of research and try to figure out who you are and who your friends are. You got to know who you are and what's important to you and be okay with declaring what's important to you and what you will, and will not stand for. So speak unapologetically. Put yourself in spaces that give you new opportunities to kind of push your growth.

The participants advocated establishing their own personal work standards, maintaining a healthy balance between work and family life, valuing social support, and interconnectedness with others to overcome the negatives. Superintendent Burroughs shared the following sentiment:

> You have to control the job, you can't let the job control you. Many of the problems I'm dealing with are adult problems and not student-centered problems. I've made sure people know they can't schedule things when I'm interfacing with the students. I've made sure to keep non-negotiable planning and programming during those times with my student roundtables.

Most importantly, Superintendent Baker advised:

> We need to make sure that we really are intentional about self-care. We are intentional about taking time, meaning when you are supposed to be on vacation and you need to really be on vacation. But that means we have to have the right systems in place to really be on vacation. It’s easier said than done. But all of those things keep that happy life.

The intricacies of the position of executive leadership and the contemporary social problems such as poverty, violence, drug abuse, child abuse, and homelessness can be wearing. For many African American women superintendents are trail blazers, the first of their gender and race to assume that position. The limitation of others like them encumbers the conversation of

techniques and strategies to overcome the obstacles they face. To find solutions for societal problems they face within the education institutions they lead, the superintendents recognize the need to step away from the daily pressures to be revitalized.

Superintendent Bates' Story

Superintendent Bates recalled the treatment she received from the chief executive officer (CEO) when offered the superintendent's position:

> I was provided a contract. Traditionally, all superintendents in a negotiation have their contract reviewed by their attorney. I submitted my contract to my attorney for review and he did a markup of the contract. I submitted it to the general counsel of the district, to take to the chief executive officer. The message came back to me. I don't negotiate with women. And since you dared to try to negotiate with me the 3 years, I've put in the contract I'm backing off to make it two. Take it or leave it. I was very hurt that someone that looked like me, who had went up the corporate ladder that knew the struggle for people who looked like us, would turn around and say to someone who was his sister in a way that because you're female, I will not negotiate. I do believe had I been a man there would have been no problem.

Despite the CEO of the district's opposition to negotiating a contract, Superintendent Bates overcame the difficulties of gender discrimination accepted the position, set personal goals to prove her skill sets, and practiced decisive behaviors that potentially led into becoming task oriented over achiever:

> I took no sick days. I took very little vacation time. When they needed information from me it would be accurate, timely, and in a way they could consume. I worked to complete all tasks the day before to be submitted. If you sent me an email, three to four seconds

> later you were getting a response. I didn't let people wait on me. If I told you I was going to do something and have it to you tomorrow, it was there before I left work that night. I would not leave the office before reports were completed. I would actually do something above and beyond their expectations. I knew what they were expecting and I gave them more. I would schedule a meeting with them to walk through the document or project to make sure that they were comfortable with it. I made myself a trusted voice at their table. I was able to continue to do the right thing because they didn't know what was right and every time I had a success I built more trust in each of these men. You have to make people above you look good. I made it my point to give him every opportunity to shine and to take it at all, because he was then playing by my rules.

Superintendent Bates shouldered a burden in a situation that compromised her authority. The memory elicited was unsettling as she was reminded of sexism in the workplace. She recalled:

> I was once told by a CEO, I brought to him a scenario where I had to reprimand another woman. He told me, and excuse my language but I got to tell you what he told me, that's some _____ women ____. That's what he told me. I'm telling you about a situation where someone has put a child in danger and this is how you respond to me. I soon realized I was dealing with someone who held women as someone to be seen and not heard. My reaction was, "Okay I'm going to take this to the Inspector General." When the male inspector general brought it back to the CEO, the reprimand was important. So it's not been racism, it's been sexism, my own brothers against me.

In her administrative roles, Superintendent Bates had other disturbing situations of reverse sexism to occur from Black women about her image and how she looks. She recanted the following:

> I am a Black woman with light brown skin. I am not an ugly woman. People look at me as if I must think I am superior because I'm not as dark as some Black women. I find that to be offensive. I don't find the color to be offensive. I can't do anything about that but to work with it. Understand that the color of my skin has been with me all of my life. I learned coping skills around that. It's something that I dealt with as a child and I'm very good at navigating. It was not an impediment, it was just part of the existence that I experienced. I would walk into a conference and I would get a little snarky comment that I couldn't say for sure was steep in colorism. Sometimes I got pushback from the sisters in the group who had more melanin than I. You know the color rhythm thing. We must view ourselves as superior. That she thinks she's this and she thinks she's that because she's high yellow, that type thing. It put me in a position where I had to deal with people perceiving me as something I was not. I don't appreciate it. I didn't carry myself as a beauty queen. I didn't carry myself as someone who was above anyone else. As a matter of fact, when I walk into a room, I would take a seat in the back. It's a bit of humility. I did things like that on purpose, so people would not feel they had to be armed around me. I think it's the perception of Black women period that clouds our ability as candidates sometimes. We're looked at as being angry. If we are a certain color we're looked at as how we must perceive ourselves in the world.

Superintendent Bates worked as an assistant to four CEOs. She felt at times the treatment she received was because she was a woman. When the fourth CEO arrived, he let it be known in

a staff meeting that he was going to look for a superintendent to replace her. In tenacious pursuit of her dignity, Superintendent Bates decided to retire:

> I've always been one not to take abuse. At that point I was eligible for retirement. I was tired and I needed to heal from that experience. I submitted my retirement papers and was going to leave at the end of February. He told the people at the State level, that I was leaving. They told him, don't let her go. She must stay until the end of the school year. He asked what it would take for me to stay until the end of the school year. I needed an incentive to do that. At that time the district wasn't paying once you retired any approved vacation time. Remember I told you I work 24 hours, seven days a week. Don't get me wrong, I wasn't self-serving, I was self-preserving. I wasn't going to take anything I wasn't entitled to. I left all of the files in order, documentation for how to open summer school, what to do in the case of an emergency, all of the kinds of procedural things you would want to have you walk into that kind of position was left in order for the person who came behind me. I basically continued my work as if I was going to be there for the foreseeable future. I didn't start taking sick days I didn't start taking vacation time. I worked till the last moment, I was there. I made sure they knew where the pitfalls were. I didn't make him fall off a cliff.

Regardless of the obstacles, Superintendent Burroughs indicated the ability to lead should not be impeded by the biased thoughts of others. She advocated:

> You really do have to make it into what you want and not let it control you. It's very easy to have everybody else give you your priorities. Anybody in this position has just been managing crisis after crisis after crisis. It's difficult in those times to then do

> strategic planning and set clear priorities and stay on them because we've had to pivot so frequently.

Superintendent Baker's Story

African American women superintendents are aware of the low expectations placed on poor and minority students by educators. Many have overcome these challenges in their personal experience in education and see themselves as role models responsible to inspire student achievement. Superintendent Baker shared the importance of positive modeling from experiences she endured as the first Black principal in a dominantly White school district that had only one Black student in her building: "It was unheard of for them in 2002 to have hired their first African American. That African American was me and I don't pass for anything but Black because I'm dark. It was a wonderful experience." Although Superintendent Baker served the school district for 6 years, during which time she said they treated her royally, she detailed that it was not without encounters:

> I've seen many challenges in my day, but yet those challenges have always become opportunities for me to do something great. Our biases make us who we are. If you haven't had any experiences where you've been in contact with or to break bread with an individual that does not look like you, in some cases individuals become fearful. They let social media dictate their belief system. I remember as the principal I had students say to me you're not like others, you are so different. Different from whom they had no idea. I was able to glean the students had never been around African Americans. It wasn't that they had an issue with African Americans they were repeating what they heard. They didn't have a clue. They were going on what they had learned from their grandparents, and what their parents had said. They started calling me Ma. None of those students

> look like me. I said don't call me that you know I'm not your mother. I'm your principal and I love you. When they walked across the stage I hugged every single student. Those grandparents who really had those thoughts fell in love with me. They knew that I loved their grandchild just like they did. That became that respect factor.

The experience as the only African American principal was not without encounters of racial overtones or tension. Superintendent Baker discussed an encounter she had with a parent:

> One of the parents came in and actually told the secretary I'm here to see the Black principal. I know she wasn't looking for the Black principal prior to me coming and she wasn't calling the other principal the White principal. I said to her you know there's only one principal. It's me, no matter if you say principal they're still going to come and get me. She said I didn't mean that like that. People bring to the table what they have. Knowledge is power and education is key.

Superintendent Baker's humility and regard for others helped her to stabilize the educational process to facilitate learning. Members of the community acknowledged the difference her leadership had made. She commented on the statements made to her:

> I heard a couple years before I arrived they'd have an African American referee. They called the referees out of their name; made negative comments like N word, monkey, and things of that nature. Those African Americans, who refereed the games, literally walk up to me as the principal and say, that's a whole different community, they used to be really disrespectful. Now they are all sitting around you. You're in the middle of the huddle, you're in the circle. I said yeah, we've come a long way.

To make a difference in the community Superintendent Baker identified her strategy:

> I didn't become rattled. I just had to learn how to protect myself make sure I had my whole armor on, but then also recognize that these were young people 14, 15, 16 years old. I didn't fall apart, I didn't come unhinged, and it worked well for me. I worked in environments where students would say the B word so why would I get rattled when they say the N word or get rattled when they have a swastika. It's the same thing so I use those same strategies. Let's talk it through, tell me what this is about. You lean in to learn, you try to understand, and then you educate, because clearly there's some gap there. From there you continue to model. They were really starting to grow from the experience. I knew the difference was being made. I know that I had a great impact there.

Superintendent Height's Story

Negative stereotypes of Black women can disadvantage the leadership of African American women. Images of professional Black women as angry and aggressive are not qualities that are deemed essential to that of a professional education leader. To diminish that image and to avoid encounters of prejudicial actions, the behaviors of African American women superintendents may appear defeminized, soft-spoken, or silent on issues of racial adversity. Superintendent Height spoke of the gender perceptions held based upon the demographics of her school district:

> It's an affluent school district, mostly White. I do think that some of it has to do with the school district itself being different as to how women relate, based on race. I think that some of it is the stereotype that men can be very direct, firm, and matter of fact. That's quote unquote expected of strong leadership. When a woman is direct, firm, and matter of fact about things, then she's seen as cold. It's not always attributed to leadership or

> strength. I've been called ice princess or ice queen. Just by nature I'm not an emotional person. Unfortunately, sometimes people characterize it as feminine or not feminine because you have those types of characteristics. Matter of fact, that you're being masculine, when it's just who you are not. I'm not a crier. It's just not part of my personality. But there are times when you feel like crying. I've seen men cry not boohoo but shed a tear. I don't think we could do it without being judged. I think that as a woman you're always balancing.

It was noted that pushback from the ideas of others is often thrust upon Black women in positions of authority, which initiates a reaction to conceal one's true self. In some scenarios, the treatment towards the superintendents gives the appearance of ineptitude, of the women lacking the expertise to get the job done. On the push back of others, Superintendent Height said:

> I definitely had issues with parents. I do think that the pushback that I got from that parent community was race. I was getting pushed to do things that would appease the White families, by another Black administrator. I couldn't do it because it wasn't the right thing to do. I had to get those messages out of my head.

Uncertain as to the causation of the problems she endured was racist or sexist she valiantly revisited her personal actions. In her review of herself, Superintendent Height with remorse recalled how she was viewed by members of the school district:

> I wouldn't say because of race or because gender but just more so because of the circumstances of the environment. I do think the issues that I had with staff were about me pushing them, more gender being a female. I did follow a very extroverted male and I'm an introverted female. I do think there are things that he could say to them, that I couldn't say to them. I didn't take the time to build relationships when I first came in. I

> came in looking at our data. I pushed them before I built relationships. So that was a flaw on my end, wanting to come in and prove myself. I can do this job. I can make this school better, and not really taking a step back and building those relationships first. It took me two to three years to really build the relationship trust. That was also a flaw on my end so it's hard to claim causation when there were those other pieces happening. I think both race and gender has played a role if you look at statistically men are able to move into different positions.

During a particularly stormy period of her administrative career, Superintendent Height endured a severe attack on her leadership. She disclosed the difficulties of the challenging situation:

> We had a substitute teacher. She got into an argument with a parent and hung up on the parent. I told the parent you can't yell at our employees. When I met with the substitute teacher she told me that I have no right to tell her what to do. She walked out the building in the middle of the day. She left the kids. I don't have to have you sub in this building. I spoke to my supervisor and they were fully on board. She went to the board and there were numerous meetings. She filed an EEOC complaint for racial discrimination. She was getting that community riled up, she's racist. I had kids who would bring in Confederate flags to me and say my mom told me to give this to you. That was my first administrative position experience with blatant racism. Yelling at me, you're not part of our community. Nobody wants you here. It bothered me. There were lots of tears when I got home. I wouldn't dare allow them the pleasure of seeing they were getting to me.

Throughout the ordeal and her leadership abilities questioned, Superintendent Height valiantly remained steadfast:

> I didn't feel good going in there every day I didn't. But at the same time, why am I here? I'm here for some purpose. So you got to serve that purpose, those kids. None of that has anything to do with the kids. I'm there to do a job for the kids. To give 110% every chance you get because it's a blessing for you to be able to work for them. I kept doing my job, I kept trying to focus. In smaller schools you don't have an assistant. Your closest person is your secretary. My secretary who was good friends with this lady said I only got the job because I was Black and that the Black parents were all upset because there are no Black people that works here and that's the only reason that you're here. She didn't believe that I had the qualifications to be there even though I had more experience than the person before me. I was investigated by the equal EEOC for racial discrimination for a whole year. Even though we had a 40% Black student population not one person in the school was Black other than a visiting sub social worker, not a custodian, not a cook, not a teacher, not nobody but me. That was a very difficult, difficult experience.

On her vigilance, Superintendent Height with dismay stated:

> I really was being undermined from the district level. The district tried to support me but let a lot of stuff slide that should not have. I was scrutinized. No other principal would even be questioned about not having a substitute person in their building. No one would be questioned. You don't want the person because the person is a substitute. It was really inspiring for the staff to follow me. Not because I had the true positional authority, I got them to buy in to see our school can be great. If they decided they weren't going to follow me and I pushed back on them, I'm not sure I would be supported at the district level. It was especially hard because I think that at times, there was treatment of Black

> students that was not appropriate from teachers that I had to address. Remember I'm labeled as a racist. With this label over your head 'she hates White people' she is just here for Black kids. I had to not let that stop me from doing the right thing. It probably would have some different perspectives if I was in a different school district about how I'm perceived or not perceived.

Superintendent Height expressed the resilient survival strategies she utilized to counteract challenges during difficult times. Regarding the continual endurance of antagonistic obstacles, she recalls being fortified through the tough times by encouraging conversations with other Black women in her life:

> In terms of how to deal with the situation I leaned on women who had been in the job a longer time than I. Though the teachers were supportive, you can't have some conversations with teachers it's not appropriate it's not professional. I talked to my mother, my mentors and my former principal everyone are spiritual, women of faith. They kept saying to me, hold your head up. It's has already been handled and taken care of. You might not see it, but it is already taken care of. Do your job for those kids. You don't need to keep thinking about it and worrying about it. I couldn't see it because for every three or four people supporting me one person is vitriolic. It was hard for me to not continue to rehash it in my mind. I kept focusing on those kids, the more I focused, the more that other parents, White and Black rallied around me. People said I can't be a part of this.

About vindication from the EEOC claim, Superintendent Height on her validation commented:

> The charges were dropped unfounded. That's what made the issue even more ridiculous. But they have to do all the rigmarole come in and interrogate me, interrogate people

> around me, the teachers, the secretaries and what are they going to say? It was hard. It was this nagging thing that I felt laying on my shoulders. Everything happens for a reason. I've had other situations since then that have been equally as stressful. I have not let them get to me the way I let that particular situation get to me. I learned my lesson. When I got the letter saying that the charges were dropped I heard my spirit, I didn't hear an audible voice. I got this feeling over me you were waiting on this paper and you wasted a year of your life, stressing out over nothing. Things shifted. God allowed me to go through that to prepare for this more sophisticated district where nobody's going to bring you a confederate flag.

Superintendent Angelou's Story

Having to always persevere through the negative imagery of Black women in leadership can be stressful and can lead to a tense work environment. Superintendent Angelou recognized the need to focus on the concerns of the district and to not personalize situational occurrences that were happening in her principalship. Working within a predominated White school district, Superintendent Angelou told of undesirable parental actions that appeared of racist origin:

> Parents were in culture shock. It was truly a culture shock. They had not seen an African American as a principal. It had gotten so bad with people not wanting to speak with me, but they wanted to speak with someone else and that's called racism. They would come into the office and ask the secretary, who was also in culture shock. Can you ask the principal, if she could come to the office? I need to talk to her. She said so many times that's the principal right there. They would look at me and one time, I will never forget it, one parent said, "Is there an assistant principal?" So she got the assistant principal,

which was fine with me. I was really tired of the can I speak with the principal type attitude I wanted to leave.

Mentors encouraged her to stay, as she would be more impactful if she did. With trepidation, magnanimously Superintendent Angelou with her spirituality and an educator leader's focus in tow, persevered, seeking parental approval and understanding for her intentions of student learning.

Doing the right thing for children can cause you some political disturbances. Realization of what was most important for the process of education, Superintendent Angelou took action:

> Once things present themselves, you don't want to make a big fuss about it. Then you know how to not be in the office when they come looking for you. Or you give the parents an option of speaking to the principal or the assistant principal. I had to be good with whatever they wanted. I didn't take it personal. I was surviving. I'm thankful that now in the world we live in, you got to embrace it all. I'm not in a position to judge people. I didn't live their life. I don't know what they went through to get to who they are. You just have to learn how to deal with everybody, because there is that of God in everyone. That's just kind of what I did, I mean, I accept people for who they are. Everybody has some good about them.

Superintendent Angelou, appreciated for her skill sets, was indeed impactful and rewarded for her persistence:

> The superintendent said he didn't want to lose. He offered me a central office position as assistant director of special education. I'm at the superintendency. The district had a large special needs population. I was up there and so I had to learn how to deal with it.

Microaggressions can be lived in the professional lives of African American women leaders in overt or covert forms of racist or sexist forms. The conduct can be as elusive as ostracism or as blatant as antagonistic conduct. With the lack of professional representation in the decision making process, often the African American woman superintendent is stymied via research, collegial opportunities, and the climate of the workplace itself. Many fail in diverse communities to see personal shortcomings that are prejudicial biases. Despite talks of equity among school district stakeholders many struggle with the vision and implementation.

Superintendent Terrell's Story

Superintendent Terrell remarked on two experiences of bias that occurred in the realm of her professional life. The first was an exchange with a community member who made an undue statement. Utilizing the platform voice of her superintendency, she shared:

> I was talking with a community member, one of our philanthropists about parents. He knows that parents really care when they participate in an evening event or something school related, something that he found a value in. I said, "How do you quantify care when you don't know if that parent who doesn't show up, doesn't have a second job, or maybe works second shift and cannot come to an evening event or a volunteer in a classroom? They may not have the resources to take off time for work. That doesn't mean that they don't care, you make the assumption." He said, "By law you get so much time off." I said, "That's all true. But when you are living check to check some folks can't afford to take two hours from work. They know that's their bus money to and from work or that's going to make the difference between food to last the rest of the month." I said, "Let's not get into a place of judgment until you know people's stories."

She stated further:

> In that exchange with that community member, he made a statement that he was going to use his White privilege to fight me. I responded back, "I don't have a right to challenge whatever you say to me? When you tell me that you're going to use your White privilege, I'm just supposed to accept it? Does that mean that I'm supposed to stand down as a Black woman? Is that…is that what you're saying?" He went into defense and said, "I grew up in Florida, and all my friends were Black and I'm in an interracial relationship." He said, "You're calling me a racist." No, I'm repeating what you said. I'm just getting clarity based on what you said to me. He could not get beyond that and he said I was aggressive. When you're a woman who is strong, people will assume that you're not friendly and not personable. I'm about my business, and we're about the business of the organization. People sometimes struggle with that.

As an African American woman superintendent, you have a platform and at times of adversity your voice must be heard. It becomes imperative that the superintendents assert themselves within the position when attempts at intimidation from others. Superintendent Terrell voiced:

> Some of that goes into the work. You got to figure out how to use your voice. I have a platform, and I have a role. I would be stupid if I did not challenge people who sometimes have exhibited privilege. I'm respectful, we can engage in a dialogue, we don't have to agree, but you certainly won't silence me. And that's hard for some people. That unconscious bias piece people don't really recognize they have their own biases. Let's be honest, we all have biases. Sometimes it's a little bit more subtle sometimes it's in your face. And sometimes it's, where it can't be denied. It happens daily. As a leader you pick and choose that fight or flight response from your own mental health and

> protection. I check some stuff if it's egregious or against someone who may not have positional power to do something. I'm more likely to fight if it's against a child or a staff member. I'm more likely to do it on behalf of someone else.

By nature, Superintendent Terrell described her inner person as an introvert, in which she was striving to build an extroverted personality that is transparently forthright to enhance the sociopolitical skills encompassed in her executive leadership position. Superintendent Terrell emphasized the importance of confidence and voice:

> I think as a woman, it's important to demonstrate competence. You got to be strong. You also have to demonstrate your humor and people have to be able to get to know you. I try to balance the two. If I didn't feel like my voice was really wanted it was more like they're checking the box of me being a Black woman. If my voice is not valued from my perspective it doesn't mean that I have to have my way per se, but if my voice is not going to be valued I don't need to sit in those spaces. I'm not going to sit and be the token, I refuse to do that. I will not allow people to tokenize me. I got to make sure that my voice is heard and that we are doing work that's evidenced by the things that we say are important. All those things are things that I believe in. To have those kinds of conversations with people when they say things from a place of ill will, it's a place of ignorance and you got to call it out.

Corresponding with the experiences expressed of other study participants, Superintendent Terrell discussed the concept of a unicorn's elusive reality and the need for transparent communication. She identified occurrences of the lack of collegial demeanor at superintendent meetings:

> This has happened to me a couple times where we're sitting in a meeting. We're all superintendent colleagues, again I'm the only Black woman, only one of two women in my county. We might be brainstorming ideas around a particular topic, and I may make a suggestion or my female superintendent colleague will make a statement. This has happened more than once. It won't get a response. I'm like, am I invisible. Two, 5 minutes later, a White male will say almost the exact same thing and people respond. People act like this is a huge awakening and they're just hearing it for the first time. I have called that out because that annoyed me. Something else we're sitting in a room and somebody comes in. They might assume that the male is the superintendent versus me. They'll call him superintendent and then it's like no superintendents over here. Those are two examples of more subtle things that I've experienced.

Educational Philosophy and Mission Transparency

Cognizant of the paucity of African American women role models for support and guidance in executive leadership, the superintendents leaned staunchly on their educational philosophies. Unanimously, the superintendents noted their purposeful resilience was because of the children. Enduring many challenges within the executive position, despite encountering obstacles that African American women face, Superintendent Chisolm's tenacity on behalf of the children was her rationale for being in the role of leadership. When asked what it means to be a woman in this journey, unabashedly she replied with pride:

> It just means I know I did that. For me to help kids on the way the thing that's so wonderful about the whole thing, is not the amount of money you make, it's not the title and all of that. It's when I walk through the airport or even when I've gone to cities and I

> hear my name called. I turn around and it's one of my students. You don't remember all the names. What's important is they grew and they are making a difference.

On her professional regard for children, Superintendent Bates commented:

> I had a track record of working in the best interest of children by living it walking it every day in every position I had from the time I was a substitute teacher to the time I sat in superintendency. I was consistent. My word was my bond.

Four of the seven women superintendents worked in predominantly White institutions and endured issues related to race and gender. On a problem in her predominately White affluent school district, Superintendent Height remarked:

> We have children of color here and we see opportunity gaps with our students of color. Some of our students of color are doing great, some of them don't feel emotionally accepted in the same way. I feel like my job here is for all children, but also for children of color who are in these situations as well. It is a difficult piece in this kind of environment because people want to sometimes discount the African American person. I don't know if we will be doing some of the things here if there were other people like me here. I'm not saying just me. There were definitely other people of color that were here before me, who have paved the way to have some difficult conversations needed in this society in this environment. I feel like I'm doing a job that needs to be done.

Misconstrued at times in her career, Superintendent Angelou expressed her data driven leadership approach was only a concern for the learning of all children:

> Those tendencies back then may have been more male dominated but I didn't do it on purpose. I wanted to work with children. I was just trying to get students educated. I care for children it has nothing to do with other stuff. I believe all children could learn.

> I'm saying, every child, African American, Caucasian, Mong, you name it. If you were sitting at a desk I didn't think you were really connecting with the kids. I needed you to get up and move.

In the position of executive leadership, it was an essential belief of Superintendent Terrell to focus on student success:

> This is what we need to do. I look at it again from a technical point of view. How do we support students, how do we support staff, how do we make sure that our buildings continue to run. That's how I approach it and again I look at it from a very kind of clinical technical framework.

As the educational leader, Superintendent Chisolm understood the educational needs of the students and undertook her responsibilities towards the children to build a new school with sincerity:

> My attitude is we were there for the children. That high school was so old there at the train tracks, that when the train went down the track the vibrations would make the windows go up and squirrels would come in on my babies. You'd see that Black stuff on the ceiling and on the window sills. The kids were the reason, they needed new schools. We needed the infrastructure to be strong for the technology. That was what the children needed and that was my goal. It wasn't about those folks. I was put here for a reason and my reason was to support children. I had to fight for them and leave the place better than I found it and I did that.

Six of the seven superintendents at a point in their career worked at a predominantly White institution. Superintendent Burroughs disclosed:

> I have to keep the kids at the forefront of my mind, as far as how I'm making the decisions. Knowing that I'm doing what's in the best interest of our students. I'm not bowing down to political pressure or to trying to make people happy. That is one thing that I can tell you and anybody can tell you, you will never be able to make everybody happy all the time.

Superintendent Height confessed the dilemma of a Black woman in a mostly White space to adjust her behaviors accordingly:

> I'm constantly on code switching between how I speak at home. What I would say, what I would joke about. Some of that is a work environment, you have to be professional, but some of it is because I'm going to a White space. I'm also doing it as I move up as a female in a space where I need to display strength but careful not to be too strong that I'm emasculating. I have a friend, she worked in this district with me, and became a superintendent. She went to an all Black district. She said she feels much less stress, even though she has a higher position. I wonder if you just feel much freer because you're not always switching. I've never really dug deep in terms of why. It's an interesting dynamic.

Not all African American educational leaders working in predominantly White institutions feel hindered by issues related to race and gender. Superintendent Burroughs stepped in to lead the district after incidents occurred at the central office level and within the school board. Calmly she recanted the incidences in which her interim leadership was selected to soothe the district:

> We had a couple of racial incidents in the last couple of years. We had a dean of students who ended up retiring after saying our cheerleaders looked like strippers. Most of the

> cheerleaders were Black young ladies. We had a teacher accused of calling a student, the N word. We've had a couple of issues in our district. I don't know if the selection was based on race. I think it's just at this time and the people of the available central office staff. I think it's just of the people who were available in the particular job which is working with a board that had been very fractured and had a history of difficulty. So they needed someone who was familiar with the board and could work well with the board.

Such experiences reinforce the belief that women benefit from having the opportunity to prove themselves in high visibility positions. Superintendent Terrell attributed involvement in a variety of venues outside of the superintendent tasks provided opportunities to hone her skills. She exclaimed:

> I'm going to sit on the board of the Chamber of Commerce and I'm excited. I don't know anything about business finance, but you know it'll push me to increase my network to advocate for the district. Talking to different community leaders and such that's a push for me. I could just stay and say I'm going to do all those other things which mean so much to me and my heart. I also have to push myself in some other ways, and so kind of that balance of the two.

For some superintendents, different scenarios of challenge and discriminatory bias can become an opportunity to assert their leadership. In decision making, Superintendent Terrell rationalized why certain decisions were necessary:

> People equate equity to equality. When you talk about equity, it means that one person might get seven apples and another person might get two. The reason the person who gets two apples, is because they have an apple yard, they have an apple orchard. The person with seven apples doesn't have anything. If you're talking about equity you don't

> give people the exact same thing because a person who has an apple orchard has access to apples all the time. We're trying to make sure that what we say is matched with some actions.

In another situation, Superintendent Terrell reviewed her district data and assessed incongruences in the workload within the four women and 10 men members of her cabinet. She sought to amend the incongruences:

> I recognized sexism and racism within our team. I saw that there were some inequities. I was questioning why the workloads aren't quite balanced. I have a couple of women leaders who are doing an awful lot. If we're all working, and this person has 25 things under their umbrella of oversight and leadership, and you have seven, that's out of whack. This just does not sit well with me. There are others in our organization that can do some of this lift. We are all well compensated and capable of doing jobs. I did some shuffling of duties trying to balance that within our team. So you give them more projects. That caused a little bit of a ripple. Been shifting some duties to give opportunities for people to continue to grow and develop. Want to make sure that things are equitable and aligned.

In the reorganization of cabinet duties, Superintendent Terrell acknowledged the desires of others to move upward and how the duty changes would be essential for career growth and development:

> There are a couple people in my organization cabinet, who have expressed interest in being a superintendent at some point in their career. This also gives you some opportunity to develop your skill set. You can't just say I want to be in this role, but you're not getting any experience or practice around doing some of that work.

The common thought was aspiring women needed to develop networks, establish experiences outside of their normal job capacities, and seek mentorship. Frequently, African American women educational leaders are depicted as being different. Subsequently, they are asked to go beyond the call of duty to head various special committees. Generally, the additional duties are with very little supplemental support. Superintendent Burroughs did not experience on a regular basis the common forms of gender inequities in the workplace as the other participants. She described her experiences as:

> I have had three positions this year, this school year. I began this school year as a building principal in the district. I became the assistant superintendent and then I became the interim superintendent. Our entire central office cabinet is female. I know we're the only one in the county that has an all-female cabinet. I think that's been an interesting dynamic. I'm saying though it has been interesting at times. I see it as a positive, but I also saw a little superiority of women. I think we have a lot of opportunities there. It's really some of our families who are traditionalists who have issues dealing with women. We have a lot of South Asian and East Asian families and 49.7%, White. More than racial differences are some of the cultural differences. It's the way that they interact with women. It poses a different challenge because of the way different cultures perceive women.

Conclusion

In summation, each superintendent provided advice to other women superintendents and words of wisdom to those African American women aspiring to become school superintendents. Superintendent Angelou changed over the, years through the process of educating children and

mentoring leaders. She mellowed through the strife of varied positions in different school districts. She recommended:

> You got to have people continuously networking and connecting with you. You got to be engaged with study groups. You got to read current literature. As an external candidate you need to spend two or three days in that district alone doing your own research, go into the library, go into some of the restaurants, or if it was a warm day just sit near the playground. Let the principal know that you will be on the grounds and if he had a problem with it, they will call the superintendent.

Superintendent Baker has proudly been offered every job she applied for except for one. On not being offered a position she advised:

> When a door closes on you think that the door wasn't open. That wasn't the right door. Don't worry. There are plenty of doors that are right behind that door just remain diligent. Remain steadfast in what you're trying to do, and then opportunity is going to be there for you. You know, you have to also find the right fit for you. You just don't accept executive level positions. It has to be the right fit. While they're interviewing you, you also need to be interviewing them. She strongly recommended the need to have politically savvy: I will say to anyone pursuing the superintendency, for sure leading a school district you need to know what your right and left hand should be doing. You also should have done your homework. Or you're in trouble.

Preparation is important. Pursue any and every degree, particularly a doctorate. Ask questions and accept feedback. Have a working knowledge of all aspects of the organization and don't assume. Stay informed when making decisions. Dr. Baker advocated meeting all qualifications and having all of the boxes checked. When it comes time for you to enter the race,

a tough race, a political race, a race where you may have to prove why they hired or selected you, be prepared to.

Superintendent Bates stressed the importance of human capital. Aware of the magnitude of the position and the need to have eyes and ears she remarked:

> Make sure that you understand, to some degree, every aspect as to how a district runs and put trusted and knowledgeable individuals in the right places. Know that you have the right mathematics director, the right ELA director, and if you make a mistake, correct it. Meet with them on a regular basis so you can make intelligent decisions.

Not having all the solutions, Superintendent Bates reminded:

> We all bring something different to the table. We're all different. Put it together and work together. We could make life better for the children that we serve. Those in education must understand the purpose. It isn't personal. It's to move the needle for children forward in achievement.

Superintendent Burroughs indicated that having the right mind set and understanding the realm of education was important. Those who enter teaching don't pursue conflict, rather they want to help people. Superintendent Burroughs advised:

> People who are going into education are conflict averse. Keep the kids at the forefront and what's in the best interest of students. Not bowing down to political pressure trying to make people happy in making decisions because you will never be able to be flexible and never think of any decision that you make as something that is set in stone. Because at the end of the day, once you get feedback and some things just didn't make sense, you just have to pivot.

Superintendent Chisolm noted there would be challenging days. Knowing this she recommended:

> Go right on and fight for it. Get yourself well prepared. Get you some mentors, people that you believe in that are going to give you the correct information and help you develop more. But always remember that you are as important and are great as anyone else. Understanding the position and being the person in authority does not mean that you are better than the rest of the people working. Don't forget who they are at the end of the day and don't forget why you are pursuing your goal and don't let anybody take it from you. Be a great listener. Foster cooperation and recognize the value of other people. Keep your eye on the prize. Remember what this is all about and you won't lose your way.

When times were hardest, it became important to focus on the daily tasks working diligently through the challenges. In recognition of impending challenges, prepare yourself and your thoughts. Dr. Chisolm spoke of her challenges:

> Is this life or death? Am I going to pass out? When you're going into a situation the fear isn't on a scale of 1 to 10. The night before, prepare for what you know. Dealing with human beings, things can change. You can have little surprises, you know that's life. But you also know that the sun comes out tomorrow as well.

Superintendent Height advised all: "Believe in yourself and continue to work to do what it is that you want to do." African American women superintendents remain continually under scrutiny. The barriers and challenges they face are specific to race and gender. Without the appropriate support from stakeholders, unique challenges set them apart from other leaders. To thrive, they must remain confident and focused. Superintendent Height assured aspirants:

> Generally people who have a doctorate have perseverance and inquisitiveness that whatever they don't know they're savvy enough to figure out. When you look back years down the line, did you make a difference and you did, and things change and those barriers that were put in front of you, eventually will go away will change. What you're supposed to do, you're going to do it, you're going to get it I just believe that.

Superintendent Terrell emphasized: "Got to do your research right. You got to know what are the trigger points and what are the things that are important to each board member, and you also have to be true to yourself." This learned adage came from an experience in which Superintendent Terrell was encouraged to apply for an open superintendency in a district riddled with racial strife. The dynamics of the district were not open for her to assume executive leadership. She'd be the only person of color in leadership within the entire school district. Not one person of color, in any sort of leadership role, not a teacher leader, not a building principal not at the district level, but a Black superintendent! That was not a battle Superintendent Terrell chose to engage herself in. For most that challenge would be extremely difficult for a novice superintendent. Unified, the superintendents all said, "It's okay to say no."

Chapter Five: Summary, Findings, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The leadership position of superintendent in education traditionally has been a White patriarchal system (Bailey-Walker, 2018; Daye, 2007; Gillett, 2012; Jenkins, 2019; Jones, 2013; Kingsberry, 2015); yet, the teaching staffs of education institutions are dominated by women, both White and women of color (Henderson, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). Despite the fact that a majority of K-12 public school professional teachers are women, there is an archaic belief that men should be the natural leaders over women. We live in a patriarchal society that lacks a mindset open to having women in leadership. Men are four times more likely than women to serve at the helm of an education organization as the superintendent (McCord & Finnan, 2019; Robinson, et al., 2017). A very small percentage of African American female educators have been promoted to the superintendency. A survey of superintendents by states throughout the nation conducted in 2019 by the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE) discovered of 12,855 school superintendents, 301 were African American men and only 187 were African American women (Harrison Williams Collins, S. 2019, November). African American women are significantly underrepresented as K-12 public school superintendents (Henderson, 2015; Kingsberry, 2015; Pruitt, 2015). The gender stratified position of K-12 public school district superintendent remains patriarchal in a system comprised of a female majority and has continued to elude qualified African American women.

AASA's (The School Superintendents Association) American Superintendent 2020 edition of the AASA Decennial Study identified the percentage of women superintendents

increased slightly from 2010, when it was 24.1 percent, to 26.68 percent in 2020 (Minichello, 2021). Contrasted to the vast 87 percent majority of superintendents were men in the 1990s (Glass, 2000) women have made progress, yet not enough for African American women who remain well below 3 percent of the nation's practicing superintendents (see Appendix Table 5.1). In spite of marginal advancements for women, the position of a K-12 school superintendent continues to be male dominated (Henderson, 2015; Jogulu & Wood, 2006; Pruitt, 2015; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008), with few African American women ascending to the position (Cox, 2017). Dissimilar to education's dominated female teaching staff, women make up approximately 27 percent of the superintendency, up only 2 percent from 2010 (Minichello, 2015). Despite the nearly doubled percentage of women superintendents in 2020, women remain a sizable 75 percent majority of teachers. The number of African American women teachers is increasing; yet, the number of African American female superintendents remains disproportionate to the number of African American educators (Dawkins, 2004). Structures of masculine dominant control within school systems have influenced the exclusion of women from positions of power (Patterson, 2006). The impact of history's traditions regrettably has frozen some African American women with fear unable to break through the realities of the glass ceiling. To change education's status quo of patriarchal domination, women will have to keep hitting against the glass ceiling until it cracks and shatters.

Gender Inequities

The gender experiences of African American women are dissimilar to White women, as the experiences of White women do not address the racial experiences of African American women (Caldera, 2016; Kingsberry, 2015; Remedios & Snyder, 2015). African American women experience a multiplicity of oppression with intersectionality's "double whammy"

(Clayton, 2009; Cox, 2017; Doss, 2011; Kingsberry, 2015) exposure to racism as African Americans and sexism as women (Haynes, 2016). Obstacles of racism and sexism combined make the attainment of superintendent leadership difficult for African American women (Carter-Frye, 2015; Taylor, 2016).

African American women have experienced overt and covert marginalization in multiple categories that extend beyond race or gender (i.e., class, sexuality, ethnicity, colorism, ability, or ageism) that affect women's identity (Collins, 2015) and inhibit networking opportunities for upward mobility (Williams, 2016). Past racist and sexist oppression are inextricably linked to obstacles and roadblocks to African American women's quest for power and authority (Haynes, 2016). Generally, discriminatory acts of racism and sexism towards African American female leadership are historically steeped and stem from a lack of exposure to women in positions of power and authority and have little to do with administrative capabilities (Sherrard, 2019).

Struggles in Society

Society has cultural expectations of feminine behaviors. Many African American women who aspire to the superintendency struggle in the political landscape of race and gender civil unrest. Many women struggling to make the right decisions, according to Superintendent Baker, "are not aware of having a personal role in the problem" or that they "are a part of the solution." Schools, communities and families, and social entities within society tend to favor the male gender and make women question their capabilities. The fact that men receive more administrative promotions than women, sustains societal beliefs that women are inferior and not as intellectually competent as men to be leaders (Williams, 2016). Contrarily, African American women have intellectual capacities to compete with men. It is vital for women to release

feelings of self-doubt and questions of personal capability to challenge societal preconceptions for women of color.

Competition is strong to achieve the position of a public school district superintendent and the biases are revealed when women applicants are required to have higher qualifications to be considered a candidate for the position of superintendency (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Bailey-Walker, 2018). To be distinguished as qualified applicants for the superintendency, African American women believe advanced degrees, professional development, and practical experience is required. Enrollment of women in school administration preparation programs increased to outnumber men (Williams, 2016). Despite the fact that more women are enrolled in educational programs, only 10 percent pursue credentials for the superintendency (Henderson, 2015). The glass ceiling barrier preference for men is difficult for qualified women to penetrate for superintendent selection. Qualified African American women are often overlooked in selection by decision makers in favor of less qualified men. Women superintendents generally had 20 years of teaching experience and are commonly older than their male counterparts when appointed to an administrative position. At 55 or 60 men are retiring and experienced qualified African American women of the same age are bravely seeking their first executive leadership position.

Research Question One: Summation of Findings

RQ 1: What are the leadership experiences of African American women prior to becoming K-12 public school superintendents?

Expressions of the superintendents' innermost narratives conjoined with prior research on the career experiences of African American women K-12 school superintendents segue into building a platform of preparation for the culturally diverse women leaders. Representation of

seven African American women in the top ranking position of public school superintendent in a Midwestern industrial state demonstrates positive growth. Of the seven study participants, all but one held doctoral credentials. School districts determine different educational requirements and not all districts require a doctoral degree to obtain the superintendent position (Green, 2012). No state requires a doctoral degree of philosophy or education as a qualifying prerequisite for the position of superintendent (Williams, 2016); however, African American females are advised to pursue a doctorate (Pruitt, 2015). The participants recalled receiving that advice and attained advanced degrees.

Projection of Conferred Doctoral Degrees

African American women earn 3.9 percent of confirmed doctoral degrees (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). A comparison of credentials showed 52.1 percent of women superintendents possessed doctoral degrees compared to 42.1 percent of males (Henderson, 2015). The findings in conjunction with established research indicate that African American women with doctorates were more successful in attaining the goal of superintendency. The percent of doctoral degrees awarded to men increased 32 percent between 2003–04 and 2016–17 and is projected to increase 3 percent between 2016–17 and 2028–29. Contrastingly, the number of doctoral degrees awarded to females increased 56 percent between 2003–04 and 2016–17 and is projected to increase 5 percent between 2016–17 and 2028–29 (NCES, n.d.). The increased number of African American women who are bestowed a doctorate continues to supersede the availability of superintendent positions offered to them (Clayton, 2009).

The predicted projections of the number of degrees conferred between 2016–17 and 2028–29 are developed by the Census Bureau based upon assumptions of college-age populations and data from the Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Model in 4-year

institutions according to gender. A significant factor of the future assumed fertility rate is the projected number of births and the likely number of female births. The projections are dependent on demographic assumptions consistent with the Census Bureau release of projections for each age, sex, and race/ethnicity combination that is estimated to a corresponding year (see Table 2 end note). The predictions are aligned with the assumed fertility rates of nursery school, kindergarten, and elementary grade enrollments. It is not based upon population cohorts already born. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) eighth edition of Projections of Education Statistics, classified in 2009–10, M.D., D.D.S., Ph.D., Ed.D., and J.D. all under the umbrella of doctoral degrees. This inclusion increased the increased the projected doctoral numbers higher (NCES, n.d.). Approximately 10 percent of women enrolled in advanced education degree programs pursue the superintendent credentials (Glass, 2000; Henderson, 2015).

Trajectories for Selection

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) School Superintendents Association is the largest diverse network of American superintendents. In 2021, AASA posted a job listing of 1,029 available superintendent and executive level administrator positions in the nation (AASA, 2021). A comparative availability of positions to that of the number of women in the position is evidence of the "double whammy" effect of race and gender on the career trajectory of African American women. Not deterred, passionate, and committed, the superintendents undertook professional leadership development and built relationships to increase opportunities for consideration. An Aspiring Superintendents Academy was a pathway that provided yearlong training for Superintendent Terrell. She trained with 20 independent district level leaders who were aspiring to be superintendents. She noted the intense training

encompassed “a sitting superintendent mentor who worked very closely” with individuals in the group. Having a connection to practicing educational leaders provided the aspiring leaders exposure to the political intricacies of the superintendency position. The practitioners were an informational sounding board to the many questions of protocol management, budget, and curriculum, plus more in terms of administrative leadership and preparation needed for longevity in executive leadership. Being a part of an administration and supervision class with principals and central office administrators was inspiring for Superintendent Angelou who leaned on group members for support. During the preparation stage, each study participant identified a person, a group, a professor, or an organization that provided support, which they have maintained contact with throughout their leadership.

A general belief expressed by the participating superintendents was that higher expectations are placed upon African American women than White men. As superintendent searches are public, it was noted that the African American candidates all had doctorates compared to their White male counterparts, who have historically held the seat of executive leadership with fewer qualifications. In fact, not only is it a reality that many White men do not have doctorates, they also do not have building level principalships or a curriculum background and yet are in superintendent and executive level positions. The superintendents in this study realized the necessity to check the entire box of criteria to be considered for a position. Obtaining a doctoral degree sets African American women candidates further along the trajectory pathway of being considered a finalist in a superintendent search. The challenges African American women experience in the quest for education’s top position are the same drawbacks of perceived and written rules for Black women to achieve an executive position in industry or any job.

In light of the barriers and challenges the superintendents in this study faced, they realized that appropriate preparation was essential. They were cognizant of higher performance expectations for women to be more nurturing. The superintendents as aspirants accepted that being a superintendent was more than just a job. It was a general consensus that as African American women they could not approach the position "halfcocked." It was imperative to lead as best possible. As noted, to assume the role, "You can't slouch, sit, and put your feet up. You have to be in the trenches working to elevate the organization." Highlighted in discussion of men predecessors, was how accountability is different for women. The political arena of the superintendency should not be as Superintendent Chisolm remembers her predecessor as "supporting his self" or as Superintendent Bates' predecessor was "in service for the benefit of self." The position is sacrificial, with the idea that educational leaders are to serve unselfishly for the wellbeing of the children. Superintendent Burroughs recalled her predecessor as being "hands off" and not visiting schools very often. For her, to know the pulse of the district, visitation was necessary.

A superintendent averages more than 50 hours a week attending night meetings and sporting events, which interferes with the traditionally socialized role of motherhood and family life (Glass 2000). Superintendent Baker, cognizant of the time restraint of a "24-7" job, placed personal life on the "back burner, meaning given 20 hours out of a 24-hour day, you only get 4 hours of sleep." The restraint of time is a sacrifice for most women superintendents, as it takes away from home and family. To avoid the dilemma of time away from family, Superintendent Angelou, "trying to get to the superintendency," enrolled her children into three of the school districts she worked. Reminiscing on the culturally diverse school districts, she noted, "My kids learned about racism and how you make friends with people. They did a better job of that than I

did." Nevertheless, for the participants sacrifices to family life were a choice and the position of educational leader became their lifestyle. Superintendents Baker and Bates sacrificed motherhood in pursuit of a career of executive leadership. Superintendent Bates shared, "I committed to being childless because I knew that my career was that important to me. It gave me joy." To the participants, the executive level position aligned with their personal values and was a career lifestyle of passion.

Priorities for Selection Consideration

Prior to accepting an interview or even an offer, as aspirants the superintendents believed they had to first to ascertain if the position was the right fit. A common belief was organizations talked of equity and leadership diversity but were not ready to select an African American woman as superintendent. "They've got to be able to see themselves, working with a Black woman," was a shared belief. School boards had to see a woman in the role. Just as school boards make the decision to hire, so do women candidates make the decision to accept or reject an offer.

In making the transition to another position or school district, the superintendents knew the importance of research. In moving from one state to another, Superintendent Terrell investigated what was going on in schools across the state. As a candidate to the particular school district, she attended "board meetings to see what was important to board members, what the community was talking about." She explored "the district enrollment, assessment data, graduation rates, and what the district's hot button issues were." Equipped with the knowledge of a school district's needs and expectations, aspiring superintendents are better prepared to accept offers of employment. In the instance of school districts talking equity and leadership diversity but the community and district staffing having inequities, it was the general consensus

of the superintendents to not accept the offered position. Participants spoke of being invited to apply to school districts that did not have people of the same ethnicity. It was said, "can't find anyone else that looks like me, not an African American throughout the entire district, not one on the board, not one in the central office." The question to ponder was, "Is this the right fit or opportunity for me to pursue?"

The participants identified that one should be driven and dedicated within the role of superintendent, as the money would not match the dedication needed for satisfactory job performance. Many of the interviewed African American female superintendents were forerunners, the first Black woman to hold the position similar to many other African American females throughout the country who were the first African American and woman to hold the position in a district (Williams, 2016). Comprehending the politics and biases of the superintendency, it was understood that as African American women they had to be twice as good to get half the recognition. Yet, these women skillfully navigated the negativity towards them. Under scrutiny in the charges alleged against her in the case with the EEOC, Superintendent Height identified she felt a "nagging thing laying on my shoulders, it was stressful." After a year the charges against were dropped unfounded. It was a difficult time and bothersome to be labeled a racist. Nevertheless, Superintendent Height remained steadfast in her convictions "not to continue to rehash" the upsetting racial issues or vitriolic outbursts. Instead, she diligently "kept doing my job, kept trying to focus, do your job for those kids." The more she focused on the needs of the district, the more parents, White and Black, rallied around her.

Defensive Strategies to Collegial Biases

The women spoke of painful interactions with others. Yet, mixed feelings of anger, frustration, sadness, and bitterness were offset by the joy and passion of the acceptance of their

coveted position tasks. Being spiritually minded, the women jointly shared it was the will of God to allow a successful transition amidst chaotic situations. The communal thought was, "you have to know and believe in yourself," "not try to be the person before you," rather be "your best authentic self, go in and lead." When the school board selected a White man who had adopted a Black child over Superintendent Terrell, an acrimonious feeling of "it was the dumbest crap ever" resonated within her inner being. Legally, it could not have been said, but she would have "respected the decision if they had said we want a male superintendent."

A common occurrence each participant experienced and spoke about was a blatant disregard for them at superintendent meetings. The participants described themselves as a unicorn, unique in being the solitary figure of color and gender within an educational conference or meeting room of superintendent colleagues. Generally, there was one or perhaps two other women and only one African American woman in the room. During conferences, if the woman superintendent made a statement, it was as if nothing had been said. Minutes later, a White man would repeat the comment and the general reaction was as if it was the first time the idea had been stated. One of the African American superintendents expressed annoyance at the pretense that nothing had been said. She said, "I called it out. The people were acting as if it was a huge awakening of an innovative kind of thing, and it had been said five minute ago." Frequently, the African American women superintendents felt victimized by hidden biases at superintendent meetings and shared examples. For example, the women superintendents are sitting in a room with a male staffer. Somebody enters the room, addresses the male staffer as the superintendent versus identifying the female superintendent as the superintendent. Or, a person enters the meeting room and would speak to all other persons in the room but would not address the

African American female superintendent. In the midst of the disregard, the women demonstrated professionalism, choosing not to give life to the "slings and arrows" thrown at them.

Hidden biases are flagrantly identified by some, while others choose to remain obliviously unaware of the negative biases. The superintendents desired to be treated as any other superintendent. The preference was not to be known as the "Black" superintendent or the "woman" superintendent but to be identified for their effectiveness in leading a public school district. Deliberate disregard for equal status leadership was an annoyance. In response to the unabashed behavioral attempts to aggravate the women, a superintendent called the perpetrator "out in a gentle very straightforward way, a non-emotional way." Invisible and undiscerning to most, the superintendents were acutely aware of the subtle biases displayed towards them by fellow superintendents. Clearly presented and understood, the slights sent a message of not being welcome as a professional and were believed to be intentionally designed to create feelings of inadequacies within the women. The superintendents developed a responsive strategy to counteract the adverse biases. Believing in the right to be in the position, the superintendents articulated "be the leader, be authentic, be courageous, and come out strong and supportive to move forward, those barriers will go away." It was a common belief that things would resolve positively in the end. Nevertheless, in response to adverse persons, Dr. Angelou stated, "you have to be sharp to know when something bad about them is trying to hurt you. You got to pick up on that and move away from it."

Portfolio Action Plan

To offset the forecasted challenges, a recommendation to African American women aspirants is to develop a career plan of action. An effective action plan is inclusive of a resume/vita of experience and assistance of a mentor or sponsor (Henderson, 2015). Qualified

applicants would be distinguished through education and an assortment of professional development involvements aligned with active participation in local, state, regional, and national conferences (Williams, 2016). Attending state level and regional superintendent meetings was an exposure that several of the participants had. Superintendent Angelou shared her aspirations to executive leadership with her superintendent. She remembered how fascinated she was to travel alongside her superintendent to meetings, learning about principalships, curriculum, and data management. Those experiences embellished her character and led to her being referred to as "a data driven leader." The exposure to district level work experiences created feelings of confidence to become a superintendent.

With less than 3 percent Black women superintendents in the nation (Harrison Williams Collins, 2019), the superintendents were groomed mainly by men. Seeking the goal of executive leadership, the participants were encouraged mostly by White men superintendents to forge ahead. A White male superintendent advised Superintendent Height that career advancement for her as a Black woman, required a doctoral degree. Qualifications and demonstrated skills above others would not sufficiently meet the competition challenge. The mentor encouraged Superintendent Height to talk to other Black women about their experiences and connected her to the Aspiring Superintendent Academy operated by a Black woman. It was important to understand the superintendent experiences of an African American woman would not be the same as the experiences of a White man. Reflective experiences of African American women superintendents, in truth, could only be told by an African American woman.

Achievement of executive leadership would not occur in a vacuum. Similar to the good-old-boys' networks of men, the women superintendents needed a networking group. Women have to help each other through obstacles when taking over the lead. Membership in local and

national organizations that specialize in the development and identification of superintendents such as AASA or NABSE provide a network for growth opportunities. Participation with local organizations, charities, and membership on community boards increase exposure, build community partners relationships, and augment leadership traits. To address expectations of continued development, an individual must push themselves out of their comfort zone to master new things. Admittedly, Superintendent Terrell had no knowledge of business finance, a necessary knowledge for a superintendent to possess. Not a CFO (Chief financial Officer) or ever intending upon becoming a CFO, she said, "that's a part of an organization you have to employ people to work." She nonetheless pushed to have a better grasp of organizational finance. In response to the need to learn more, Superintendent Terrell accepted a seat on the Chamber of Commerce board. Excited she declared, "I'm talking to different community leaders. It'll push me to increase my network and continue to develop as a new superintendent around finances."

The participating superintendents acknowledged the necessity of preparation through experience. The groundwork of attending local state, national, and international seminars, workshops, and conferences as teachers and administrators was not only a source of training but also provided notoriety. Affiliations with educational and community organizations provided visibility of skill sets. Seeing their potential, the women superintendents as aspirants were delegated projects of responsibility to build skills and connected with mentorship sources by their immediate supervisors. In the female dominated field of education in which males rule at the top, a demonstrated strength of the African American woman superintendent is their extensive preparation and the resulting acquired knowledge and comfort in the power of self.

Positions of Responsibility

Almost all superintendents are former assistant principals and building principals, which is the traditional trajectory from the classroom to the superintendency (Glass, 2000; Pruitt, 2015). Most women who lead elementary buildings have limited opportunities, as most elementary schools don't have assistant principals or department chairs (Glass, 2000). The common career path for men is that of teacher, high school principal, and then superintendent. It is somewhat different for women, whose trajectory is teacher, elementary principal, central office director, and then superintendent (Robinson et al., 2017; Williams, 2016). Almost 75 percent of elementary classroom teachers are women. Nearly 75 percent of superintendents did not teach at the elementary level prior to working as a central-office administrator or superintendent. A majority of male superintendents have a secondary teaching or coaching background (Glass, 2000).

The 2015 Mid-Decade Study identified school boards are more likely to hire internal women candidates rather than an external unknown male candidate (Robinson et al., 2017), as the proficiencies of the women candidates are known within the district. Opportunities are greater for applicants who have high school principalships and central office level experiences. The gates are open widest to benefit White men in secondary principalships versus African American women in elementary principalships or other administrative roles that are viewed as less demanding (Kingsberry, 2015). The study participants shared a career trajectory similar to that of White men. All began as teachers progressing through positions of building administration, advancing into district level administrative positions and subsequently into the superintendency. Four of the seven superintendents began as special education teachers, of which three became a director of special education at the district level. The participants had

experiences on all program levels within the district inclusive of elementary, secondary, and adult education. Only one of the superintendents held a coaching position. The majority of the women superintendents had served as building level high school administrators in addition to also serving as special education coordinators at the district level.

Sixty percent of male superintendents have entered the superintendency through the high school principalship. Men dominate high school principalships and as a secondary school principal are responsible for larger budgets and staff (Robinson et al., 2017). Less than 25 percent of female superintendents enter the superintendent position from being a high school administrator (Glass, 2000). The high school principalship is thought of as an unofficial path to the superintendency. Administrative experience on the secondary building level is considered good training for an aspiring superintendent. Assignments of athletic coaching and band directorships traditionally on junior high and secondary levels provide opportunity to demonstrate skills of fiscal management, leadership, and community relationships. Few elementary teachers have opportunities for head coaching assignments. A substantial majority of superintendents in the AASA study held coaching positions as a teacher or building administrator (Glass, 2000). This suggests that high school and middle school teachers have more entry points to advance into administration then elementary teachers. Many overcome the hurdle of limited positions to become special education coordinators or middle school team leaders. Despite the limitations of available opportunities, elementary teachers move from the classroom to elementary principalships to central office positions to become an assistant superintendent (Henderson, 2015).

The study participants held appointed or delegated responsibilities prior to advancement to central office positions within building level administrative positions. Superintendent Bates

was not contractually appointed by the district as a building administrator. At the secondary school, she was delegated acting special education department head by the principal. Without board appointment, she oversaw department responsibilities within the principal's cabinet to gain building level administrative experience. Similarly, as a central office director, the executive manager requested she attend superintendent meetings to present documents she had prepared on mandated state accountability data.

At the retirement of the superintendent, the school board asked Superintendent Burroughs to assume the helm for the duration of the leadership search. She accepted the responsibility. As acting superintendent she practiced a shared distributed leadership. The cabinet worked very closely together to make decisions. Her role was to "consult and collaborate" to move the district forward as the intermediary until a new leader was selected.

Similarly, at the superintendent's request, Superintendent Terrell accepted additional tasks as a building administrator to have a dual title of associate assistant superintendent and principal. A crisis occurred that affected one of the schools. Several children of that school died in a fire. The district superintendent assigned Superintendent Terrell to assist the principal through the tragedy. Working very closely with the building principal and staff, she handled the media messaging, developed a safety and security platform, coordinated grief counselors for the students, and gave emotional support to classroom teachers. It was then the light turned on and Superintendent Terrell, "understood how to do this level of work in a way that supports people to give them what they need." Exposure while still a building principal was the learning opportunity on how to do district level work. Now as a superintendent, she is giving back to people in her cabinet who have expressed interest in becoming a superintendent. Comparable to

her career development experiences, Superintendent Terrell shifted duties to give the aspiring cabinet members opportunity to grow and develop skills.

Those career experiences provided a sense of capability and competence for the women to pursue the superintendency. To enable superintendent certification and licensure, the superintendents pursued all learning opportunities. Participation in Aspiring Superintendents Academies provided individual introductions to a sitting superintendent mentor who exposed the superintendents to the politics of the superintendency, budget management, and techniques for media interactions. To gain further training and experiences, the superintendents attended local, national, and international leadership conferences, seminars, and workshops. Involvement in professional education organizations such as NABSE and AASA was important, as these were portals to networking and knowledge best practices. The superintendents learned through each experiential opportunity ways to do executive level work that supported stakeholders. University doctoral programs, superintendent academies, and mentors stressed the ability to manage media, interview skills, and development of political savvy, all of which are linked to communication.

Transparency in Communication

Communicating racial issues that affected children were often difficult conversations. Despite being labeled a racist, Superintendent Height navigated through difficult conversations. She listened past what was said to focus on what the real issue was. A personal attack that transpires in conversations or conferences is an individual's unhealthy way of communicating. Being a good listener will foster cooperation in antagonistic conversations that demonstrate to people the value of the concern presented. People come to the superintendent's office with concerns agitated, ready to fight to resolve a problem. Superintendent Baker's leadership tactic is to pause and breathe to avoid saying words that shouldn't be said. To calm and ease people to

engage solution oriented dialogue, it is best to take a seat and greet the individual with a welcoming smile. Most individuals bring a concern expecting the superintendent to resolve it. An active listener will hear the individual and probe for suggestions to remedy the problem. A shared reconciliatory approach soothes individuals and diminishes the characterization of an angry Black woman. Political savvy to arrest a situation is not about agreeing or disagreeing with one side versus the other side. It's about working for the coexistence of people. It is also important to be mindful that no decision is set in stone and flexibility to revisit a decision may be required. Superintendent Burroughs recommended "pivot when necessary." It is best to create a safe environment trustworthy of open conversations.

As a woman in authority, people try to bully you, send nasty emails, and say things they would never say to a man. When met with racial and gender biases, the superintendents depended upon transparent communication to stabilize interactions. It's important at times to stand your ground with an empathic response while not backing away from conflict. Situations of conflict must be addressed. Superintendent Terrell called out a community member who threatened to use his White privilege to fight her. She believed his comments existed from a point of ill will. Situations required the superintendents to have transparent courageous conversations. As the face of the organization, the superintendents had to lead with integrity—to say what you mean and mean what you say. Superintendent Chisolm was direct in her communications with people and earned the respect of numerous people. If she said it, she would assiduously work to maintain the commitments she made. Real communication is forthright, open, and transparent. The superintendents were honest about what was known and unknown and didn't condone making stuff up. If it is unknown, it is to be acknowledged as an uncertainty while an answer is searched for.

Recruitment and Selection Process

The double whammy of intersectionality impacts the recruitment and retention process of African American women. Contrary to White women and African American men, African American women endure compounded challenges of race, gender, and social politics. The trajectory for African American women is different and not necessarily the typical teacher/principal/central office administrator trajectory of men. The selection process for African American women is not the same and is even biased among African American men. African American women must check all the criteria boxes in the selection process to be considered a viable candidate. The African American women superintendents had academic credentials, secondary classroom experiences, and involvement in extracurricular activities qualifications above the competition. Through perseverance, acquisition of knowledge, special skill development, and experience within the community and education administrations, the superintendents attained their central office position.

Despite insufficient data to contradict this belief, school boards and search committees are composed of traditionalist men who favor men for candidate selection. Search firms led by 50 to 80 years old White men who hire social and political network colleagues discount the characteristics and experience of aspirants of color (Pruitt, 2015). The participants reported sexist experiences in the selection process by male dominated search committees. Blatant bias is not always recognizable, and the opinions of others are often distorted by personal beliefs about ability. Subsequently, many professional African American women won't take themselves seriously, and without support, don't pursue the superintendency.

Research Question Two: Summation of Findings

RQ 2: What events experienced within the K-12 public school systems do African American women find impactful during the process of becoming superintendents?

Not always knowing the pathway to achieve executive leadership, it was the insight of informal and formal mentors that propelled the women study members forward. In some cases, it was the promises made to a family elder or sitting in the shadows of nurturing family members who had achieved principalship that spurred them on. In other cases, perhaps it was a recruiter, a professor, an outsider, or a person who saw the potential and provided encouragement to pursue the struggle, as the cultural need for African American women superintendents was great. For the women in this study, awareness of the opportunity gaps with students of color also led to acceptance of the challenge of leadership with joy. The perspective of the women was that it was the will of God to be placed in a position of authority for the education of children of color. Understanding this purpose, Superintendent Chisolm reasoned that being appointed to executive leadership was "to fight for them and leave the place better, and to help kids on the way." She felt "wonderful" about the accomplishments under her tenure.

The superintendents operated from a child-centered focus instead of a philosophy focused on being teacher-centered. The superintendents were aware of historical ramifications of being a woman of color in the highest position of leadership in education and anticipated some push back. Operating an administration that did not focus on adult issues, but was instead focused on the premise of children first was not always going to be an easy road. Although they were not taught a formal curriculum of Black history in their personal schooling, the reality of different rules for African Americans women was understood. The superintendents accepted being a self-flawed human. The women knew it was critical to be realistic and not take the persona of White

male leadership. In transitioning, the superintendents couldn't show up as anyone other than their authentic self—there had to be a matchup. Thus, the superintendents stood their ground to maintain the purpose was to be there for children, but especially the children of color. Always at the forefront of the superintendents' minds were all children. The mentality was to give 110 percent for the kids. For the superintendents, it was a blessing to be able to work for children. In making decisions the superintendents questioned, "What's in the best interest of our students?"

Empirical Impactful Encounters

Within the day-to-day interactions that occur, impactful events are experienced inside the K-12 public school systems. Many of the daily events that happen are unexpected scenarios of discrimination for the women (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999) who believed they should be treated as professionals with the same regard given to other superintendents. The interviews revealed that the women superintendents were aware of the challenges and barriers before them, as they knowingly existed in a political world. African American women in educational leadership positions acknowledge that their race and gender contribute to the experiences they face daily, yet they refused to allow the intersectionality of their gender and race to be viewed as a barrier. True to research, despite incidences of racial and gender biases, the superintendent study members did not allow the duality of being Black women to influence their ability to function in the decisions of executive leadership. A commonality among African American women educational leaders was the awareness of how race and gender contribute daily to the experiences of leadership (Sherrard, 2019). At the transition of school districts, the district superintendent candidly informed Superintendent Height she was "going to have issues" being an African American woman. A group of people was identified for her support. The PTA president forewarned her of impending attacks from the community. Preparation to thwart the planned

community bombardments included being surrounded with a team of people who shared the same vision. Success depended on people continuously networking and connecting with the superintendents who were traveling in the same direction.

The superintendents knew that to stumble and make mistakes was a part of being human. The general public can be harsh when a mistake is made and be less than forgiving. In the words of a superintendent, "people want blood when you make mistakes." Further commenting on other superintendents who made harmful mistakes to people she noted, "they were easily forgiven." The expectation to not stumble or make mistakes is an assumption of perfection. To err is human. Yet, the reality of life is that being human with imperfections, mistakes are going to happen. Talented leaders acknowledge mistakes and address how to repair the mistakes and what must be done to get them fixed. It was the intention of the superintendents to make the best decisions in support students, staff, and the organization.

Mistakes are unintentional and often lead to fears of reprisal. Reflective of the attitudes of stakeholders, Superintendent Terrell's approach to minimize the error was to apologize and take ownership for the plan not working out well. There will be bumps in the road, as seen in the changes from in class learning, to virtual learning, to hybrid instruction as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It was a frightening new experience for all stakeholders, yet mistakes in decisions made by these women were deemed as unforgivable. Superintendents Terrell and Height believed that to engage in argumentative rhetoric would be nonproductive to continue down a pathway of that nature. It was stated, "Either you're going to accept the apology or you're not, but I'm moving forward on how we're going to do this better." Unplanned circumstances do come to pass. They asserted in those situations, leaders will "step back" to clearly explain to stakeholders "to step back means to take two steps forward." Unexpected

glitches in a project plan or an unfavorable decision shouldn't stop education leaders from doing what is best for the children of the district. Times of adversity can bring monumental challenges. During those times, a superintendent did not want to go into the office "feeling in a down mood." In times of adversity, Superintendent Baker recommends "when you have to cry, use the restroom and get yourself together." The superintendent is expected to lead the school district through the crisis. She reiterated, "Not being in the water at crisis time, that's not what they need." Stepping away to gain personal control is as simple as closing your door to regain focus on the task to do what you need to do to handle it.

Free thinking human beings change to manage little surprises that must be dealt with. During times of hardship, the women were counseled to remain erect and to hold their heads up high. It was a period of challenge, as others demanded the African American women prove their abilities. Those hard times were problematic for the superintendents, as personal inquiries ensued in their roles. Regardless of the concern, in agreement it was said, "you cannot let that stop you from doing the right thing." Despite the challenge, "when the situation calls for it, just stand up and be the leader, so the team would be ok and move on." The expectation was to do the work with fidelity to yield promising results. Practitioners of a collaborative and transformational leadership styles, the superintendents understood after gloomy days in school life, on tomorrow the sun comes out. These African American women refused to allow the intersection of gender and race become an unbreakable barrier or hurdle. Steadfast, the superintendents continued to not allow anyone or anything to intimidate them.

Political Effects in Relationships

The results of this study revealed that African American women superintendents understood the historical perspective that the top position of leadership in education has been

sought after and held by White men. It was a reality that the superintendents' positions were political and the ability to perform the job as women of color would potentially be stymied by the stakeholders. Like other African American women superintendents' researched and documented experiences (Sherrard, 2019), the study members too had involvements with school board members, administration, staff, and community that at times were political inhibitors to the achievement of educational goals. In stressful times of challenge, it's imperative to assert the need for respect in the role of superintendent and not be manipulated by the situations. Equally important is to set boundaries and demonstrate the end model respect as desired.

Superintendents possess a platform of knowledge to share in the day-to-day operations of the school district. Vital to the efficiency of the organization is having knowledge in technical ways to support students and staff, and how to ensure the buildings are run proficiently. Crucial is a clear understanding that superintendents provide the vision of the district, and in an overview of the district, should remain in the lane of instructional leader. An example is the pandemic. The responsibility of the superintendent is to have a working knowledge of the push for vaccinations but should require medical skilled staff to share specific information on vaccinations. It would not be the lane of the superintendent to approach the technical clinical framework of that subject and in so doing provide misinformation.

African American women endure challenges to their platform in the role of superintendent. The superintendents continually had stakeholders questioning decisions and wondering if Black women were capable to handle the operations of the school district. As women they portrayed strength and competence, and interjected humor as a balance to counteract the perception of being a bully or an angry Black woman. Important for superintendent Chisolm during stressful times of challenge, was to maintain composure to pave a pathway for others to

come behind her. A superintendent cannot buckle under the pressures as people, especially the young people, are watching. Circumstances of the position dictate a responsibility to set a good example. The behavior expectations for African American women superintendents are greater than, as Superintendent Height put it, men's ability to "wear the same suit over and over again, he just changes his shirt and tie." That is not a freedom extended to African American women leaders who are constantly under scrutiny. There are extra rules for African American women placed by society that create doubt in their leadership abilities. Ironically, it is easier for African American women in society to gain approval for the physical attributes of the roundness of their bodies than to gain endorsement of their intellectual prowess (Gallos, 1995). Do African American women superintendents play into the mentality of those rules or are there rules that African American women mentally placed upon themselves? The women are cognizant of the political world in which they exist and when met with biases of gender and race, the superintendents depend upon transparent communications to stabilize negative interactions.

Relationships with the Stakeholders

As superintendents are hired by school boards, it is important to establish a positive relationship. Successful relationships between the superintendent and the school board were contingent on a professional regard for the role each entity held. School boards have valuable resources for information to assist novice superintendents in successful acclimation to the district. The school board's primary function designated by state laws is to oversee community public educational programs. A school board has the responsibility to maintain and support the operations of a school district. Management of the overall school system operations is the specified role of the superintendent. Significant is the instructional role superintendents have to provide a quality education for the children.

Difficulties occur in the relationship between superintendents and school boards when members step aside from the designated roles. Often the challenges occurred with election changes to the make-up of the school board or in scenarios of role versus role. Conflict happens when board members are in disagreement as to whether the direction of the district should stay status quo or change instructional practices. Unresolved vitriolic differences are disruptive to the educational process and can be difficult for the superintendent to navigate through. One of the study superintendent's school board was verbally abusive and out of control. The personal conflicts of a fractured school board with a history of difficulty created issues within the school district. The district superintendent resigned and four new board members were elected. The district needed a leader who was familiar with the concerns of the district and would work well with the board. Superintendent Burroughs, a collaborative leader, was asked to take the helm. She accepted the responsibility and assumed control to lead the district. The superintendent had not allowed the disagreements or attacks to become personal. Instead, her focus remained on the children.

Paramount to a successful working relationship between superintendents and school boards is a transparent knowledge of roles. The relationship of superintendent to school board is synonymous to being in a marriage. The support of the school board is important and it is incumbent for all to nurture a trusting relationship. Superintendent Baker emphasized the spelling of team does not have a role of I or a role of U. To rearrange the M and E in team imply responsibilities rest only upon superintendents for the education of children. There is a position to be played by all on the team. Superintendents cognizant in their convictions on how a district runs honor the wishes of the school board to build allies on the board. The school board is the superintendent's boss and the school board's power determines the success of a superintendent.

If the school board does not approve of the superintendent's management style, the contract is liable not to be renewed. This was the predicament Superintendent Angelou became enthralled in. There was a displacement of the original board that selected her. Under the auspices of a newly elected board, the new overzealous members exhibited the privilege of entitled power. Superintendent Angelou had difficulties as the new board members believed her to be rebellious and challenged her decisions to expose horrific financial issues. The school board did not take the role of board members to vote for or against her recommendations, but rather tried to do the job of superintendent. The school board members did not know more than her about superintendency. It was not a good fit. As the role of superintendent versus school board was compromised, Superintendent Angelou committed to work with board members, stood firm in her authority and was terminated.

The women superintendents acknowledged interactions that were racist and sexist from school board members and district personnel in contract negotiations. It was believed the school boards did not want to hire an African American woman but did so for quality instructional purposes. Superintendent Bates experienced a devastating awareness of gender bias when she was told by an African American male executive manager that he did not negotiate contracts with women. Differential treatment from school boards for White men, White women, and Black men was common. Encountering sexism did not deter Superintendent Bates from her purpose to ensure the education of children. Throughout the process of negotiation, the superintendent exercised strategies of professionalism to offset the feelings of differential treatment. She had to make a professional decision for a flight or fight response to that egregious discussion. It was a slight which she moved beyond for the good of the children in the district.

A strategy to strengthen relationships with the school board was to build transparent communication skills, which is also a significant tactic for staff and the broader community. The superintendent is the political face of the organization and must work with all stakeholders. Possession of political capital with legislators, lobbyists, and community members requires superintendents to navigate with political savviness to bring people together. Administrators need not be a pit bull, a trailblazer, a dictator, or run over people to motivate the workforce. Superintendents that take the time to actively listen, ask probing questions, and observe staff talent and expertise foster trustful relationships. In the rush to prove her abilities to better the school, Superintendent Height created issues with the staff by pushing them before building relationships. Admittedly, it was a flaw as she moved hastily without learning the history of the school and what motivated the team members. It's important to set honest expectations and help everyone to meet those expectations. By actively listening from a place of empathy, a workable plan of action can be developed. The superintendents acknowledged the political aspect is more than just agreeing or disagreeing, it is a coalescing of ideas. The superintendents would not always agree but listened to find a consensus. Without workable relationships with stakeholders, nothing will successfully work out.

Philosophical Role Acceptance

United in the philosophy and mission as K-12 school superintendents, the African American women superintendents kept student success at the forefront of their leadership. The main focus for all of the superintendents was student achievement. The study participants conveyed a belief in all children being able to learn. As collective and individual voices, African American women superintendents in the leadership of educational institutions maintain a strong commitment to improved student outcomes (Rowan, 2006) and to focus always on the children,

while simultaneously never losing focus on the adults in the organization (Cox, 2017). The women expressed pride in having a track record of working in the best interest of children and not bowing down to political pressure in the making of decisions to make other people happy. Especially as one of the superintendents expressed, "you will never be able to make everybody happy all the time." The superintendents work within conflicted, complex, and politically sensitive environments that can lead to emotional stress and professional burnout. The problems superintendents face are often adult problems and not student-centered problems. Superintendent Burroughs encouraged aspiring women to "control the job and not let the job control you." Despite the overwhelming commitment by African American women superintendents, the question still remains as to why there are so few African American women in leadership of K-12 public school districts.

One finding through the interviews was that the women refused to be tokenized. Tokenism can be construed as a form of racism or discriminatory bias. A form of tokenism could be the hiring of an African American woman to prevent criticism or to create an illusion of fairness. Unfortunately, this often minimizes the credibility of an African American woman leader, presenting her as a token to her colleagues (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). There is a difference when school districts espouse equity and diversity as a rationale for selection. Superintendent Terrell was tokenized while competing for a superintendent position. Even though she had a doctorate and the White male competitor did not, he was selected for the position over her a Black woman because "he had adopted a Black son." As a Black woman in a mostly White space, Superintendent Height was constantly code switching in her interactions with others. She was told by a staff member that she didn't have the credentials and was "hired

to be a face for Black families." She was even "getting pushed to do things that would appease the White families" by other African Americans.

An invitation to participate in an organization is sometimes an organization's effort to check the box of having representation of a Black woman participant. It is the imagery and not the superintendent's voice that is wanted when an organization proclaims it needs the African American superintendent. Superintendent Terrell declared, "if my voice is not going to be valued, I don't need to sit in those spaces." The women did not pretend to be someone else or allow their position to be tokenized. Consent was not granted for their skills to be misused for political purposes or assumptions of equity, diversity, or inclusion to placate a segment of the community. There had to be a matchup in what was believed for the common good of the school district and the superintendent.

The women emphasized the need to say no to offers where there was evidence of inequalities, such as being the African American superintendent in a majority district that had no African American decision makers at the building or central office level. Positions under the guise of inclusion within an organization in which there was not one person of color in any sort of leadership role would be a challenge the women chose not to undertake as a first time superintendent. The women were not afraid of a challenge and embraced opportunities to make a difference in student learning. Having a voice and a platform for change is all well and good but to accept a position that reeked of racial strife just to become a superintendent was not acceptable to the participants. Without allies to help influence some of that work, the interviewees advised "when one door closes, think of it as an opportunity for another door to open." A position that is a better matchup was presumed and awaited. The dynamics of a district that consisted of 99 percent Caucasian teachers and not one person of color in a

leadership role would have monumental obstacles to overcome. It was not a plausible choice to make. The school board needed to make changes throughout the system for equity and diversity inclusion and not begin at the helm.

Living a Conundrum

A widely cited reason for the paucity of women in the superintendency is school boards will not hire them (Sherrard, 2019). Advanced degrees, professional development, and practical experience are essential for African American women to receive consideration as a viable candidate for the competitive superintendency (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Williams, 2016). School boards develop a profile of the type of candidate they seek. Studies have found that communication skills, knowledge of curriculum and instruction, and budgeting expertise are preferred; however, school boards tend to hire what is believed to be a strong leader (Sherrard, 2019). Many male superintendents believe school boards view women as incapable of managing a school district. In an AASA study, 82 percent of women superintendents surveyed indicated school board members do not see them as strong managers. Of those women surveyed, 76 percent believed they were viewed by the school boards as incapable of managing district finances. It was believed by 61 percent of those surveyed that the existence of the glass ceiling lowered the probabilities of African American women being selected in school management. A possible rationale for this finding is racist and sexist hiring policies associated with school boards and search committees that are composed of a majority of men (Glass, 2000).

Another partial reason for the underrepresentation is African American women lack the individual experiences school boards and search committees are looking for. Disregarding a school board's interest in the instructional program, research has shown that fiscal management of resources is a critical aspect of the superintendency and a key emphasis within the hiring

criteria. This, however, is beginning to change as school boards are seeking instructional leadership to raise test scores and meet state-mandated required assessments (Glass, 2000). The superintendents' strengths were instructional and they believed they were hired for their expertise in curriculum. School boards while saying that the instructional program is important do not want an inexperienced superintendent in fiscal management. The need for fiscal knowledge was noted by Superintendent Terrell who hired a CFO and expanded her knowledge of finances through joining the city's Chamber of Commerce board.

Neither American schools nor their school leaders are untouched by hegemonic practices valued within society. The social phenomenon of intersectionality places overwhelming expectations upon African American women superintendents. Some expectations were self-imposed. The superintendents spoke of having feelings of not going into the job, as the daily challenges stirred personal questions not of their ability but as to why they were a superintendent. What was the purpose in seeking the position? The superintendents sought out the few women leaders to hear how to balance the pressures of the superintendency, only to learn many were enduring the same experiences. Superintendent Bates in response to the negative treatment from the executive manager became an overachiever, leaving the office at night only after completing requested reports and not taking vacation or sick time off. It was her practice, as she knew what was expected, to go above and beyond the expectations. This was to prove her value to the organization.

All the superintendents in this study endured the struggle of having to make choices, as they believed the work was about "tough situations that need us 24 seven." It was exhausting for Superintendent Angelou who as an African American woman was pressured by the culture shocked school community. She grew weary of the many times White parents requested the

principal, only to see her and ask, “Is there an assistant principal?” It had gotten so bad with people not wanting to speak with her that she decided to resign. The superintendent of the district recognized her unique skills with students with special needs and did not accept the resignation. Instead, she was promoted to a central office position as assistant director of special education.

The educational leaders demonstrated ethics of care and always placed the children first. Education is a forward process, built upon learned prerequisites. When these prerequisites were breached the superintendents were swift to take corrective actions. To meet stakeholder criteria for leadership, the women focused on the job and worked assiduously to meet expectations. For Superintendent Burroughs, having an unread email was stressful. She’d wake up in the middle of the night to check emails to find out if something happened in the middle of the night. Task oriented, the superintendents did not want something to occur in the night that the school board learned from the five o’clock news. Communicating with stakeholders was a central task the leaders readily assumed.

Resilience via Spiritual Self-Care

The school leaders had to prepare for challenges, as many African American women shoulder a psychological and social burden in pursuit of personal and professional excellence (Collier, 2018). The education leaders had to maintain a sense of self to navigate through daily encounters of challenge. Spirituality was the calming factor the leaders leaned on for comfort and for positioning of thoughts. Resilience through spirituality was a prominent theme identified. All of the study participants were grounded in a spiritual belief and attributed faith in God for their accomplishments. Having always pictured working with students that looked like her, Superintendent Height prayed on her decision to work in a building population of 95 percent

White and 5 percent other. Strengthened through her spiritual foundation, she grasped that part of her placement was for all kids to see diversity. The transition was difficult, but her spirituality was a foundation and a comfort as she knew "He put me there to be successful."

The women professed the importance of having a spiritual foundation of daily prayer. Superintendent Chisolm daily en route to work prayed to the "Supreme Being to send angels ahead" for protection and guidance. She always wanted to do the right thing for children. Congruent with existing research, spirituality and prayer enabled trust in an individual's abilities to develop resilience to address and overcome obstacles of race and gender (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016; Sherrard, 2019). Racial and gender biases closed doors of advancement for women. The leaders were grateful, as the closed doors revealed the desires of their heart. The superintendents acknowledged a strong faith in their spirituality to provide them the ability to recognize the proper fit when offered. The women were thankful that "spiritual Grace covered them" in the journey of leadership when they failed to exercise self-care in pursuit of duty. Through a devout belief that their achievements were the will of God, the African American women sustained the adversities of leadership. The strong spiritual foundation resigned them to walk with faith to face professional and personal life challenges.

The superintendents spoke of learned lessons of the significance of self-care through long hours spent accomplishing their endeavors. Many women superintendents of color believe they are scrutinized and bear a burden of having to constantly prove their competence (Brunner & Grogan, 2005). This can be wearing upon those in leadership. Those instances can bring real tears, as the women are human. Yet, the women understood the need not to be seen as emotional. When situations dictated courageous conversations or when tough calls needed to be made, the leaders relied on the basics of respecting others, creative visioning, and diversity of

thought. The superintendents identified that resilience through their spirituality provided a collaborative leadership style useful for navigating difficult issues. Moreover, the African American women superintendents identified the importance of being able to lead the team. Care of staff was equal to care of self. Educating children required cultivating a team. To be able to do so meant the leaders needed to eat the right foods and have sufficient hours of sleep. The leaders learned to pace their activities, recognizing that the work would be there the following day along with a new batch of issues. But most important, in the words of one participant, "When on vacation, be on vacation." The superintendents had to put staff in place to act in their stead for uninterrupted time away from the office. To step away on vacation was to enable the women to revitalize in a safe place with personal loved ones and family.

The Bible provides examples of marriages linked to spirituality. Common among six of the seven women was the longevity in their marriages. Each married superintendent spoke of the unconditional support their spouses provided with relocation, the daily care of the children, and the assumption of shared domestic responsibilities within the home. Data among married women superintendents indicate 26 percent had a spouse or partner that moved in support of their career advancement to superintendent. Eighteen percent reported a spouse in support changed jobs. Twenty percent of married women superintendents reported their spouses reduced their job hours to be a support, and 10 percent left the workplace to accommodate the women's career advancement (Robinson et al., 2017). Spousal relationships serve as valued informal mentors. Supportive spouses possess the knowledge and ability to help strengthen the careers of African American women superintendents (Sherrard, 2019). Within the spousal relationships was a comfortable place for the women to download from the daily slings and arrows that were emotionally, psychologically, and physically draining.

Research Question Three: Summation of Findings

RQ 3: What leadership factors might change perceptions of African American women in terms of their leadership abilities and lead to an increased number of African American women in K-12 public school superintendent positions?

School Boards and Superintendents

The study participants acknowledged that the political aspect of interaction with the school board was huge. It was a consensus among the study participants that school boards had to envision working with an African American woman as superintendent. School boards demonstrated a willingness to take that leap of faith and hire the women, many of whom were the first to hold the position. Throughout the nation, school boards seeking equity and diversity within its districts are having difficulty attracting qualified applicants for vacant superintendency positions. The demands of the superintendency are excessive upon time, and the work pressures affiliated with the position are discouraging for many qualified applicants. Many African American women in elementary settings are poorly positioned for advancement in contrast to men in secondary schools. Secondary administration is a skill builder for executive leadership. Comprehensive understanding of leadership requirements dictate African American women attain commanding positions of visibility at the table where decisions are made.

Certain qualities of leadership are predisposed for some individuals; however, effective leaders refine their skills through experience, education, training, and professional self-development (Brittingham-Stevens, 2016). The study participants all acknowledged being a mentor to others. The women superintendents recognized that the acquisition of skills and knowledge is pertinent to executing the intricate details of executive leadership in alignment with a personal sense of empowerment. Whenever possible, the superintendents shared experiences

with other women of color. As a role model and mentor, the participants were willing to provide internship opportunities as a valuable resource for their own training was shadowing a sitting superintendent. Shadowing exposed the day-to-day interactions of the superintendency and was an experience that augmented classroom instruction. As aspirants, the superintendents were encouraged to seek formal and informal mentors. Unfortunately, the paucity of African American women superintendents in some ways limited mentorships to White men. One of Superintendent Baker mentors for many years, however, was a White man. In the relationship of mentor, she frankly stated, "He has held the role for many years and still provides great nuggets that I continue to take with me as I make my journey." The emphasis of a mentor/mentee relationship was to attain the position of superintendent. Learning to politically navigate the superintendency with another African American woman as a mentor was desired, however, women of color were few in numbers.

Role Models

The superintendents had role models and in simulation became role models for those to follow in their footsteps. It is common for superintendents to mentor others who aspire to executive administration and especially colleagues who aspire to become superintendents (Henderson, 2015). Superintendent Angelou as a principal was groomed by the superintendent to be his successor. Superintendent Terrell was given responsibility to mentor five principals and became an assistant associate superintendent in the district. Superintendents Height, Chisolm, and Bates moved through the ranks as internal candidates within their school districts to central office directorships. Superintendents Baker and Burroughs were external candidates and under 40 when assumed central office leadership positions. The women had developed

special skills and maintained reputations of sound moral character with a focus on the education of children.

Superintendent Chisolm always touted professionalism, “as the children were watching.” Consequently, the superintendents in their daily tasks were examples for aspirants to follow and learn from. The superintendents not only identified the need to provide mentorship but the importance of maintaining mentors as superintendents. It was important for the female superintendents to reach back and help somebody else to move up, as they believed a level of accountability could be sustained through continuation of personal mentoring. In matters of policy and decisions, the participants were not boastful and took ownership for their actions. The superintendents shared their pride at being the face of the organization. They were in a position to make a true difference for children. Being the face of the school district, the superintendents were careful to not allow personal choices to put the district in a negative light. Superintendent Terrell proclaimed, “I'm leaving a positive impression upon the community, the district deserves that.” Always cognizant of the role held in the community, the superintendents diligently strived to be true to their philosophy of education and style of leadership. The women carefully selected capable people for department administrators and emphasized learning areas of management. Confident in their abilities, the women were reticent to blame others for unsuccessful projects. The superintendents respected the opinions of people and collaboratively worked to improve staff productivity. Lifelong learners, the superintendents attended professional development activities to stay abreast of current trends. Remaining at the forefront of learning helped the women to stay professional in contentious interactions with the school board, staff, and community. To increase visibility and gain experiential growth and

development, the superintendents availed themselves to every opportunity to expand their knowledge.

The seven women had a high level of self-efficacy that was derived from their upbringing, experiences, and spirituality. Beyond the acquisition of personal achievements, the women believed it was incumbent upon them to lift up other African American women to ascend to the office of the superintendency. Deeply aware of the biases of gender and race women of color face, the superintendents persevered and modeled behaviors of professionalism. Not dwelling upon the negativity of others, Superintendent Bates said, "The job that I've done gives me an opportunity to share my rich background." Throughout her career she endured obstacles of intersectionality based upon colorism, sexism, and racism. At the final days of her career under an African American executive manager that displayed contempt, she worked tirelessly and with integrity to provide her successor a smooth transition with "no pit falls." Empirical knowledge of gender and racial biases in the politics of education shared with aspiring women of color would increase the potentiality of more African American women seeking to become superintendents.

Strategies of Management

Expectations of superintendent responsibilities range from administrator, manager, instructional leader, spokesperson, and politician. The enormous responsibilities of the position in combination with intersectional biases are rationales for the paucity of women in the position of superintendent. In the findings of this study, the women were able to manage stressful agendas through strong support systems. The seat of a superintendent at the helm of an organization is a seat that can be very cold and lonely. As targeted women minority leaders, everything was thrown at the superintendents. They had to have levels of readiness to fight off

the onslaughts of "slings and arrows." Development of formal and informal bonds was advocated. It was said by one superintendent, "Join organizations that support female executives, not just superintendent. You need to be able to hear the voice from all aspects."

Each study participant was engaged with organizations such as the Urban League, NABSE, AASA, Chamber of Commerce, and university programs, as well as other local and national organizations throughout their preparation for leadership and superintendency. The African American women superintendents encouraged want-to-be superintendent women to develop formal and informal mentorships to support development of personal career goals. The women advocated for interested aspirants to do as they had done and become active with professional organizations and curriculum review committees, and to join a networking group to extend awareness and knowledge of best practices and increase personal visibility. An ambitious hopeful cannot just say, "I want to be in this role" without getting any experience or practice around doing some of the work. The superintendents willingly became involved in additional developmental tasks aside from their regular tasks when opportunities were presented. The chosen mentors were trusted coaches who reviewed resumes, interpreted strategies for potential interviews, reviewed and practiced interview questions, and groomed the women in the politics of being a superintendent.

Having supportive formal and informal mentor relationships was stressed as a part of self-care. For the women superintendents, the brutal honesty of spouses, family, friends, and members of committees or staff was often appreciated, as it provided an opportunity to see a situation through the lens of someone else. For a mentee, a mentor would share tidbits and wisdom through the lens of someone who has familiarity in the role. Ability to have open discussions without fear of reprisal or offense was a source of empowerment and encouragement.

Access to a supportive role model would help to identify and correct skill gaps to expand the comprehensive perspective of the superintendent role. The seven superintendents were advocates for mentorship, and in the findings it was determined that the superintendents believed it was their responsibility to uplift young African American women to follow in their footsteps.

The superintendents also identified the impact of support received by the family. Through their marriages, the support of their husbands viewed as a partnership was phenomenal. Receiving preparatory support from close family relatives set the foundation for successful interactions as superintendents. Aligned with research data, family support that develops a strong self-concept is a top strategy in the preparation of superintendents for successful accomplishments of district level work (Williams, 2016). In preparation for the superintendency, support systems are a necessity. The superintendents believed mentoring made a definite difference in the achievement of the leadership goal of the superintendent.

Implications and Limitations

An important finding to this study was that there were few African American women who met the criteria to participate. Mindful of the fact that the K-12 school superintendent position is traditionally a White male dominated position, a limitation to the generalizability of this study was the small number of African American women K-12 school superintendent participants. The strategy of purposive sampling to identify subject participants had to be extended to include a strategy of snowball sampling due to the small number of known African American women K-12 school superintendents. The study also had to be expanded to include sitting and former superintendents and sitting or former associate/assistant superintendents. In an industrial Midwestern state that boasts over 800 public schools, only 10 African American women were identified as potential participants for the study, of which only seven participated.

The nonexistence of African American women superintendents in quantity is a barrier toward the superintendency that is reinforced by the glass ceiling effect (Bailey-Walker, 2018). It is yet to be determined the causal factors in totality for the underrepresentation of African American women in the position of K-12 superintendent and how to remedy the problem.

Without a pool of sitting African American women as superintendents, those considering executive leadership have few role models to emulate. Without a plentiful existence of role models, the choices for mentors generally involve White men. The absence of African American women superintendents was challenging. Limited women leaders to shadow often leave African American women seeking to a restricted "double in group" that has fewer members and fewer connective opportunities (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). In comparison to men, women seem to have fewer opportunities for involvement in a developed mentoring system (Glass, 2000). Men have the good-old-boys' network. For African American women, exposure to other women of color for mentorship is limited. Superintendent Height, through a White male member of her class, secured a position in an affluent school district where she was mentored by an African American woman principal. The difference in her trajectory was that during her doctoral studies, a White male superintendent introduced her to an out of state aspiring superintendent academy operated by an African American woman. The journey for African American women is different. Black women need the interactions of other Black women to share experiences. Visual exposure to one who is a representative of your group helps individuals to visualize themselves in a similar capacity (Carter-Frye, 2015). It is a law of nature to gravitate to one's own kind. Psychological studies have shown people are attracted to what is familiar. Persons who are of the same ethnicity and behave culturally in similar ways share a common familiarity. Familiarity has a comfort zone which individuals believe is safe and not likely to cause harm

(Ward, 2013). The superintendents had African American women confidants who they talked with about things never spoken about with the White male mentors. The women did not believe the men would understand the familiarity of being African American women.

Superintendents Angelou and Bates identified shared relationships with African American women. In conversations with superintendents of color, men and women, a statewide cohort group was formed. Members of the cohort would meet separately to talk about the equity issues in the various districts to bypass the barriers. For Superintendent Angelou, the network made of experienced administrators was an instrument to solve shared district problems. Superintendent Bates affiliated with a group of six Black women central office department heads. The women met regularly for dinner and adult beverages to discuss the similar challenges experienced and tactics to offset negative involvements. The association was revitalizing. It was the most positive communication Superintendent Bates stated she had as a superintendent. If women were to assume lead positions, women "had to stick together and help each other."

African American women must build relationships with other women of color to affect change. The women must be steadfast and unafraid. The adage, "a quitter never wins, and a winner never quits" often manifests in an executive leadership position. Confidence is gained through leadership training and mentorship opportunities. The door closed on Superintendent Baker, which was for the best. Another door opened that placed her in her current position, which is a better fit. Application to a superintendent position is an open process to the public. When rejected as a final candidate, someone else had seen Superintendent Baker's interview and was impressed with her talents and expertise. She was invited to apply for her current position. Another door had opened, and she never quit. Closed doors permit aspirants opportunities to continue to develop. Challenges in the words of Superintendent Terrell, "let you know your

capabilities" are character building. Time also assists in learning what your capabilities are and how to contain emotions, which is a much-needed survival quality for a superintendent.

Without the powerful gender context of a group such as the good-ole-boys' network, equity for women in administrative career development compared to that of men is not assured. Mentors can be an intermediary to provide aspiring women mobility opportunities between school boards and superintendent candidates. It is not unusual, as shared by the study members, to have a feeling of invisibility or of being like a unicorn. African Americans women in organizational leadership struggle for equitable recognition and describe disempowering incidences in which their authority is consistently questioned (Haynes, 2016).

The duality of gender and racial discrimination is considered a variable influencing the lack of African American women representation in executive leadership. The participants of this study were reluctant to confirm negative leadership experiences were related to race or gender issues. Most were aware of the duality of being an African American woman and saw it as a combination of inequities. In some areas, discrimination was conceived to be more a result of gender bias and in other areas perceived to be more racial discrimination. Some of the women superintendents regarded their gender to be more of a barrier than their race. Nevertheless, all of the study members admitted having been negatively affected at some point as superintendents with discriminatory encounters. It was the choice of the participants to remain vigilant in their qualifications to perform the tasks of the superintendency. The women bravely took ownership when things didn't work well and committed to do better. After reflecting on the issue, these women apologized and made the needed adaptations. In unison, the superintendents refused to continue down the path of rehashed conversations. To carry on a discussion would give continuous life to an issue that had been resolved. The women superintendents declared, "Either

you're going to accept the apology, or you're not but I'm moving forward about the business of the organization." A leader's platform announces the vision of the organization as to what is important and what unapologetically would not be tolerated. Role models for their students and staff, the superintendents are living examples of successful achievement for all to emulate in management.

Additionally, it was noted throughout the data the women superintendents did not identify a given leadership style, but rather elaborated on the experiences of gender leadership. A limitation to the disclosure of a given leadership paradigm style relative to gender is perhaps due to the underrepresentation of African American women superintendents. Superintendent Baker was the only participant to speak of transformational leadership as a management approach to motivate staff productivity. The consensus from all of the leaders was to approach situations that occurred under the auspices of their leadership with professionalism.

Through iterative probing, all the superintendents discussed professionalism in terms of what was considered essential in transparent communication. Superintendent Terrell spoke of not being "tokenized" and speaking out when necessary against "egregious acts against those with less power" in a professional manner. She described professional as not portraying the syndrome of the angry Black woman by "cussing someone out." Superintendent Baker disclosed the importance of protecting the "sanctity of the role of a leader" when presented with stressful stakeholder concerns. Through her experiences, she learned to give an "inviting smile, pause to listen, breathe, and then respond." In the making of decisions for the district, Superintendent Burroughs advocated "collaborative listening." A commonality was "empathetic" behaviors to elicit interactive communications with others. Not disclosed in the superintendents' narratives was a given leadership theory to explain the common thread of transparent communication as

professionalism. Is there a gender style of leadership exclusive to women? Further exploration into the theories of leadership would potentially identify the management styles of professional African American women superintendents. Expansion of the scope of leadership style could provide a foundation to a universal program training platform for African American women's executive leadership.

Conclusion

The study participants offered the following advice to aspirants regarding obtaining superintendent positions. Aspiring superintendents are encouraged to make a plan for preparation. The superintendents pursued academic credentials and advised all who desired executive leadership to earn a doctorate degree. Although not required, a doctoral degree was the ticket into executive leadership for the majority of the participants. A doctorate is an indicator of perseverance and ability, which increases viability for selection. The competition for selection of a superintendent is a tough political race so when opportunity arises to enter the race, there is marginal room for mistakes. Aspirants are admonished of not only the need for educational degrees but the importance of possessing technical knowledge of school district strategic planning and an understanding of politics. To lead, superintendents need to have political savvy, know the Civil Rights Act, Title IX, know school law, understand business finance, be knowledgeable in curriculum and development, be aligned with an ability to evaluate, and be able to assess program development. As candidates, the superintendents explored the school district's strategic plans, expanded knowledge of all working aspects of the organization, and reviewed enrollment data and state reports on the status of the school district. Clarity of the district's human capital among other tidbits such as finances and curriculum innovation was learned at attendance to school board meetings prior to the interview. Those who

seek executive leadership are encouraged to do the essential homework on the evaluation and assessment of school district programs and to remain continual learners.

It is important to grow through education and association with professional organizations. To learn what they needed to know about executive level positions, the superintendents stepped away from their comfort zones of familiar tasks. Aspiring women must also step out of the landscape of their existing roles to build skills, gain visibility, and develop a network. State appointed or in-district committees provide opportunities for aspirants to attend meetings of different work groups and to join in conversations with the superintendents they see themselves becoming. In anticipation of the opportunity to apply for a superintendent's position, one must practice diligence and remain steadfast to grow and learn in preparation for when the door opens. The door may open and the door may close. Those aspiring should remain diligent, as the superintendents learned there were plenty doors that opened right behind a door that closed. Counseled not to just accept an executive level position, the superintendents ascertained the importance of making sure the position under consideration was the right fit. If not, it was okay to say no.

Without a large cadre of African American women superintendents, involvement in academic extracurricular activities assists in the development of a networking system that is otherwise limited for women of color. However, the superintendents also recommended having a mentor or coach to shadow and for trustworthy interactions. Although the majority of the study participants desired women as mentors, it was accepted that most mentors would be White men, as these individuals dominate superintendent positions. The superintendents in this study suggested aspirants emulate their philosophy on how to make a difference for the education of children. The role of a superintendent is more than saying, "I want to be." A working

knowledge of leading a school district is necessary when in pursuit of the superintendency. A superintendent's position is 24-7 as they seek to grow the organization.

Recommendations

African American women encounter different challenges and barriers in their trajectory towards the superintendency. Seemingly unavoidable cultural differences and gender biases stifle qualified individuals from seeking the position. To offset the discouragement of African American women from preparing for the superintendency, future research study is recommended in the development of a leadership training platform that would explore the rationale for standards of higher qualifications, criteria for selection, expectations associated with women of color, and contribute to closing the intersectional biases in the superintendency gap. Six of the seven participants were superintendents in affluent school districts. As African American women, they were a minority but held the position of power. A research study to identify the characteristics the women possessed is recommended to establish a rubric for leadership.

Superintendent Search Committees

A common thread in the study was that superintendent search committees had to have a mindset to seek African American women for the position. School boards predominantly populated by men must envision themselves working with an African American woman as a superintendent. The leadership style of African American women is related to the Black experience in America. African American women lead in a manner that is contrary to the traditional male leader's task-oriented style. Generally, the style of an African American woman is inclusionary. The study participants were transactional transformational leaders that interacted with stakeholders interpersonally. Participation of the school board and members of the search committee in equity, diversity, and inclusion training, professional development workshops, and

seminars would aid in a mindset change concerning the capabilities of African American women's leadership abilities. From the training, fair and impartial criteria could be established that isn't designed to deliberately exclude African American women. School boards must refrain from indulging in Black on Black discrimination as noted by Superintendent Bates to provide qualified African American women an opportunity to serve as public school superintendents

School boards that have a 97 percent student population of color in the district with a majority White female teaching staff must reflect if the cultural needs of the student body are being met. Without a preponderance of persons who share racial familiarity with the students, it is questionable if the whole needs of the students are equitably considered. To offset the inability to identify qualified African American educators, school board members should refer to national education associations such as AASA or NABSE. The school board members may join a local NABSE affiliate chapter. NABSE affiliate chapters host workshops and seminars on critical areas of societal changes pertaining to curriculum and the impact of race and gender, in addition to more topics on the governance of education institutions. For additional direction on the responsibilities of a school board education, membership in the National School Boards Association (NSBA) is highly recommended. An advantage to involvement with non-profit school board associations is the services offered. The associations offer training school board governance, provide school board members support with legal matters and policy writing, and most importantly, help in superintendent searches. Ongoing association with organizations such as NABSE, NSBA, and AASA provides professional development opportunities that offer much needed clarity to the roles of a school board and the superintendent.

State Board of Education

The State Board of Education as an elected body has general supervision over public education. The State Board of Education serves as a general planner and coordinator for higher education, specifically as a financial advisor to the legislature requirements for state institutions' instructional programs. The State Board of Education has the power to control and direct expenditures of higher education institutions. America's institutions of higher learning are microcosms of hegemonic social phenomena that are deeply embedded within society. The powers of the State Board of Education can be an impetus for change.

For some women, awareness of the odds against selection has fostered "an unwillingness to take the risk to impact change." It is a historical pattern that has become a comfort zone. Many African American women in university doctoral programs do not seek superintendent certification out of the belief that they are not considered a viable applicant. Only 10 percent of the women in advanced degree programs follow through to attain the superintendent's credentials (Glass, 2000). Fear of the male dominated line of superintendents has gripped many African American women aspirants and frozen their efforts to pursue the position.

State Board of Education control of revenue could potentially provide incentives to African American women who have expressed interest in becoming school superintendents. In preparation for the superintendency, a scholarship or grant can be established to increase African American women's enrollment in doctoral programs. The State Board of Education in collaboration with universities can develop an enrollment incentive and establish teams to recruit building and central office administrators for doctoral programs. The State Board of Education in an advisory capacity can review curriculum courses and make recommendations to public institutions of higher learning to review required courses for degree conferment. Courses that

have a masculine overtone should be reviewed for sexism and necessity as required courses. If it is reviewed by the state board of education and the designee of the university and it is determined the course lacks viability, it should be removed from the required list. In addition, autonomy to opt out of a required graduate studies course contingent upon documentation of mastery of the required course through employment activity or a co-curricular involvement should be implemented.

University Doctoral Programs

Education has favored the male gender and disregarded the developmental learning of women. Women have been subjected to teacher behaviors and pedagogy that favors men. At the end of the formal schooling years, girls emerge with half the self-esteem of boys. Society sends mixed messages to women during learning, which makes women question their academic abilities. In schooling, men are steered to mathematics and science courses and women are steered to liberal arts courses. Women are generally conceived as transformative learners and are believed to function best in a supportive classroom (Gallos, 1995). Current classroom instruction involves discussions that negate the full range of life experiences. Topics of parenting, self-image, domestic home life, and relationships are generic discussion formats for women. The topics are presented from a traditional perspective and are not sufficiently illustrative to draw in the female learner. Learning occurs through experience and experience gives meaning to learning. To connect an understanding of the workings of the world, aspiring women have to be challenged to find meaning in their experiences.

In lecture classes where the instructor is the purveyor of knowledge, aspiring women do not have the advantage of peer learning. Superintendents in training need to form collaborative learning groups to develop team building skills. College professors of doctoral students can

devote time to assist students in building effective team skills through group work. In a hierarchical classroom, students miss the value of competitive discussions in lieu of traditional instruction. It is important for college professors to reflect on the ways the presentation of course materials have masculine overtones. Course materials and required readings should be reviewed and examined for an undertone message about gender. A candid examination would reveal how women are represented or whether text illustrations of women are generic. A review of terms used in of course materials should also be conducted to determine if terms reinforce the male gender. For example, in reference to a woman writer is the word author or authoress used? Author has a male connotation. In examination of reading material and course assignments, professors need to review what is said and what is not said about women. In rethinking the choice of course reading materials, the messages to women as second-class status to men can be reduced.

To change the classroom community to fit the learning needs of aspiring women would be a task for the traditional instructor. Universities can provide insight into the delivery of instruction that is essential to the learning styles of women through ongoing professional development for faculty. Instead of public praise to reinforce participation, generally instructors ignore good answers to focus on answers that are off target or incomplete. Training in experiential learning techniques would be beneficial to all. Experiential learning can move a learner from a silent participant into a confident participant in the learning process. The students are challenged in experiential learning to enmesh themselves within a class activity, derive meaning, and illustrate the central ideas. Discussions of experiential learning emphasize the variety of student life experiences to highlight the relevance and importance of women.

In collaboration with the state board of education, universities can develop a graduate curriculum program for African American women aspiring to become superintendents. An advanced degree will be conferred supported by mentorships, internships, and completion of learning academies. Co-curricular and secular experience may be used to waive required courses that can be documented through life experiences. A course such as statistics can be removed from the required list for completion, as technology apps will calculate data.

Future Studies

A majority of African American women superintendents are married with children. Research is recommended to investigate the role of the spouses of African American women superintendents. Traditional gender socialization places responsibility of home and family life upon the woman. Limited data is available to support the belief that women superintendents are limited by family circumstances more so than men. The study participants identified the spouses as sacrificial in support of them. This is a reversal to traditional roles in society. A study into the characteristics of the male spouses is advocated. What defining role did the men have in the longevity of the marriage? What are the behaviors and temperament of the men contrary to being the breadwinner and instead in the role of supportive spouse to his wife's career? How were the men instrumental in the career trajectories of their wives?

The research, in the voices of African American women, should address the dual discrimination that challenges African American women as public school superintendents, especially in terms of recruitment and retention. It is important not to speak for those who have suffered injury but to instead provide spaces that allow each injured person an individual voice. Continued research into the underrepresentation of African American women in the public school superintendency will give credence to the theories on the impact of race, gender, and

social politics on the recruitment and retention process of African American women superintendents. Future studies would be instrumental in outlying a rubric for a fair assessment in the selection of K-12 school superintendents and patterns of effective leadership. Finally, the suggested recommendations of AASA (Glass, 2000) for school boards (state and local) and education institutions (universities and K-12 schools) should be explored to gain further insight into how to eradicate the problem of qualified African American women K-12 school superintendents' underrepresentation. It would be advantageous for future studies to cease focus on the deficiencies and center on what are the differentials that have led to successful attainment and retention of the superintendency.

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Appendix A:
African American Female K-12 Public School Superintendents
CONSENT FORM

HUM00193915

Principal Investigator: **Gloria P. Davis**

Faculty Advisor: **Dr. Christopher Burke**

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of African American Female K-12 Public School Superintendents. The study will explore the gender and racial issues that impact African American women's career advancement in the patriarchal dominated K-12 public school superintendency. The goal of the study is to help identify the barriers and obstacles to African American women becoming superintendents. An additional goal is to provide support and effective encouragement to assist African American women who aspire to this position to overcome the barriers.

Participation in the study will involve two recorded interviews on Zoom concerning your professional history and experiences. You may also be asked follow up questions on the phone or through e-mails. Your participation in this study is voluntary, without compensation, and will not be disclosed to any individual or group. At any time you can opt out of participation without question or penalty.

Your identity will be protected during this study and in all public sharing of the findings of this study by assigning a pseudonym to your data. Identifying information will be removed from quotes and information you share and data will be reported in aggregate to help ensure your anonymity in the study. You will also be given an opportunity to review and approve all information that you share during the course of the study before it is published.

If you have questions about this research study, please contact me at ([redacted] or email me at [redacted]. You may also contact my advisor Dr. Christopher Burke at ([redacted] or [redacted].

As part of their review, the University of Michigan Institutional Review Board Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences has determined that this study is no more than minimal risk and exempt from on-going IRB oversight.

I, the undersigned give consent to my voluntary participation in this research. I understand the results of the research study will be used for the publication of a dissertation and all records will remain confidential to protect my personal anonymity.

Signature of the interviewee _____ Date _____

Appendix B:
Interview Protocol Questions

What are the leadership experiences prior to becoming a K-12 public school African American superintendent?

1) Demographic Background/ Educational Experience
   a) How many years of experience in education do you have?
   b) How many years of administrative experience including superintendency?
   c) What age were you when you attained your first administrative position?
   d) What age were you when you attained your (*first)* position as superintendent?
   e) How long were you (*have been*) in your current position?
   f) How did you become aware of the superintendent position opening? (Search Firm, Website, Print/Broadcast Media, Word of Mouth, Mentor, Colleague, Other)
   g) Were you an internal or external candidate?
   h) Describe your school district. (*Rural, Urban, suburban, surrounding community, student demographics/enrollment, community economic status, school board make up, elected or appointed*)
   i) Describe your career trajectory to the position of superintendent. (*Teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Instruction, Assistant Superintendent, Other*)
   j) Tell me about the superintendent that preceded you (race, gender, years in office)
   k) What academic support and/or influence, if any, did you obtain from your predecessor? (How were you supported?)
   l) Do you believe your personal racial makeup effect your leadership of the district? (describe how)

What events experienced within the K-12 public school systems was impactful?

2) Outstanding Experiences/Events
   a) Describe your experiences on your journey to the superintendency?
   b) Do/Did you have a mentor that assisted you along your journey to acquiring the position of school district superintendent?
   c) What experiences do you think led to your choice of a career as an educational leader?
   d) What are the kinds of perceived barriers do African American women experience while pursuing superintendent positions?

e) What barriers to the public school district superintendency do female administrators perceive to exist within the state and/or school district?

f) What are the perceived strategies African American women used to access the superintendency?

g) Do male superintendents face similar challenges? (please elaborate/explain/how so)

h) What barriers and challenges did you encounter on the road to the superintendency?

i) Do you perceive those barriers/challenges to be associated to your gender and/or racial, background? (*Please elaborate/explain*).

j) What methods, procedures, and/or processes do/did you employ to overcome those barriers?

k) What challenges, if any, would you consider were impediments to your advancement?

l) How do racism, sexism, and being marginalized as an African American female impact the pathway to the position of school district superintendent?

m) What are your perceptions on the role that race and gender play in the selection of African American women as superintendents?

n) What impact do *(did)* you perceive sexism had on your superintendency? (if so how)

o) How do barriers and/or opportunities help African American females aspiring to executive level positions in education?

p) Out of those same experiences, which ones prepared you to face the daily challenges of being the superintendent within your educational system?

q) What barriers and challenges exist in your role as superintendent?

r) To what extent has institutional racism hindered access to the superintendency?

s) Do you believe societal norms regarding the unsuitability of women for powerful administrative positions such as the superintendency impact aspiring African American female superintendents? (*please explain/elaborate/how so*)

t) What do you perceive are the problems that arise from the assumptions made about African American female professional competence and personal capabilities, based on dominant culture stereotypes about African American female superintendents?

u) What factors, if any, have contributed to your success as an academic leader?

v) Which aspects of protective factors have been utilized as a strategy for success?

w) How do (did you) African American women attain (maintain) authority as superintendent?

x) What resiliency skills or strategies did (*do*) you employ to attain (*maintain*) your positions?

y) What were the indicators of a racial issue within your administration that impeded your overall goals and strategies for the district?

z) What are your perceptions on the role that race and gender play in the selection of African American women as superintendents?

What would change the perception of African American women leadership abilities to increase the number of African American women K-12 public school superintendents?

3) Process of Superintendent Development/Selection
   a) What are the key assets that contribute to African American women becoming superintendents?
   b) What experiences do you perceive facilitate success to become a superintendent?
   c) What experiences do you perceive as barriers to attainment of the superintendent role?
   d) What supports are needed to help African American females as they aspire to executive level positions in education?
   e) Are you mentoring other aspiring African American female administrators?
   f) What strategies have you identified as best practices for the recruitment and retention for aspiring African American women as superintendents?
   g) Do women leaders imitate male leaders or do you believe women leaders' characteristics are from a feminine perspective?

h) To what extent do you attribute the professional accomplishments of African American female superintendents to the adoption of White male leadership style?

i) What career progression (*patterns of promotion, job title, gender of supervisor, and length of tenure*) is relevant to the trajectory to the superintendency for African American female aspirants that you would recommend to aspirants?

j) What do you perceive to be critical professional development for aspiring African American female administrators?

k) Is the problem of underrepresentation of African American women as superintendents a lack of degree attainment, a lack of experience, or a combination of both?

l) What efforts must be extended for others to notice aspirants?

m) How would you describe your communication with other African American women?

n) With whom do you have your most meaningful communication?

o) Do you communicate differently in different settings? (how so)

p) What communicative practices do you exercise within your daily variance of settings and encounters to encourage African American women to pursue the superintendency?

q) As you reflect on your career in education administration, what factors, if any, do you perceive would influenced your lived experiences? *(If so how? If not, why not*?)

r) What are your recommendations to aspirants?

Appendix C:
Student Enrollment Rate for Postsecondary Degree-Granting Institutions

Table A-16. Actual and projected numbers for enrollment rates of all students at degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by sex, attendance status, and age: Fall 2017, fall 2023, and fall 2028

Sex, attendance status, and age	Actual 2017	Projected 2023	Projected 2028
1	2	3	4
Males			
Full-time			
16-years-old	0.5	0.7	0.7
17-years-old	1.6	1.6	1.6
18-years-old	27.1	27.1	27.1
19-years-old	38.2	38.2	38.2
20-years-old	42.4	42.4	42.4
21-years-old	32.6	32.6	32.6
22-years-old	23.8	23.8	23.8
23-years-old	13.7	13.7	13.7
24-years-old	12.2	12.2	12.2
25- to 29-years-old	5.4	5.4	5.4
30- to 34-years-old	2.0	2.0	2.0
35- to 44-years-old	1.3	1.3	1.3
Part-time			
16-years-old	#	0.1	0.1
17-years-old	0.9	0.9	0.9
18-years-old	4.3	4.3	4.3
19-years-old	9.0	9.0	9.0
20-years-old	8.2	8.2	8.2
21-years-old	8.3	8.3	8.3
22-years-old	9.7	9.7	9.7
23-years-old	10.3	10.3	10.3
24-years-old	7.4	7.4	7.4
25- to 29-years-old	5.6	5.6	5.6
30- to 34-years-old	3.5	3.5	3.5
35- to 44-years-old	3.8	3.8	3.8
Females			
Full-time			
16-years-old	1.2	1.0	1.0
17-years-old	4.1	4.1	4.1
18-years-old	39.7	39.7	39.7
19-years-old	49.7	49.7	49.7
20-years-old	47.2	47.2	47.2
21-years-old	44.9	44.9	44.9
22-years-old	25.1	25.1	25.1
23-years-old	18.1	18.1	18.1
24-years-old	15.4	15.4	15.4
25- to 29-years-old	6.2	6.2	6.2
30- to 34-years-old	2.7	2.7	2.7
35- to 44-years-old	2.2	2.2	2.2
Part-time			
16-years-old	0.6	0.2	0.2
17-years-old	1.1	1.1	1.1
18-years-old	7.2	7.2	7.2
19-years-old	12.8	12.8	12.8
20-years-old	9.3	9.3	9.3
21-years-old	14.7	14.7	14.7
22-years-old	11.5	11.5	11.5
23-years-old	11.6	11.6	11.6
24-years-old	10.8	10.8	10.8
25- to 29-years-old	8.9	8.9	8.9
30- to 34-years-old	4.4	4.4	4.4
35- to 44-years-old	6.6	6.6	6.6

#Rounds to zero.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, Spring 2018; Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Projection Model, 1980 through 2028; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, "Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," 2017. (This table was prepared March 2019.)

Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2020/2020024.pdf#page=75

Appendix D:
Superintendents by State

Table 5.1

State	Total # of Superintendents	Total #of Afr Amer Male Superintendents	Total # of Afr Amer Female Superintendents
Alabama	137	20	10
Alaska	54	2	0
Arizona	228	3	2
Arkansas	235	7	6
California	1052	15	12
Colorado	178	3	0
Connecticut	167	3	4
Delaware	19	1	1
District of Columbia	1	1	0
Florida	67	4	3
Georgia	180	23	7
Hawaii	1	0	0
Idaho	115	0	0
Illinois	863	18	24
Indiana	289	1	4
Iowa	276	0	0
Kansas	284	3	2
Kentucky	173	3	1
Louisiana	70	7	4
Maine	131	0	0
Maryland	24	1	3
Massachusetts	275	3	3
Michigan	522	9	8
Minnesota	350	4	3
Mississippi	144	30	19
Missouri	520	8	5
Montana	200	0	0
Nebraska	242	0	2
Nevada	18	0	0
New Hampshire	90	1	0
New Jersey	507	10	7

New Mexico	89	1	0
New York	727	15	12
North Carolina	116	20	9
North Dakota	177	0	0
Ohio	627	5	7
Oklahoma	530	1	1
Oregon	200	1	1
Pennsylvania	498	8	1
Rhode Island	36	1	0
South Carolina	79	14	11
South Dakota	149	0	0
Tennessee	145	6	5
Texas	1032	29	4
Utah	41	0	0
Vermont	53	1	0
Virginia	135	13	4
Washington	286	3	2
West Virginia	55	0	0
Wisconsin	420	3	0
Wyoming	48	0	0
TOTAL	**12,855**	**301**	**187**

Survey results of Superintendents by State presented by S. Harrison Williams Collins, November 2019 NABSE 47th Annual Conference Executive Leadership Institute