Fall 2020

African-American Women Superintendents: Perceived Barriers and Challenges Experienced While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

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AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS: PERCEIVED BARRIERS
AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ACCESSING AND SERVING IN THE
SUPERINTENDENCY

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A Dissertation Submitted to the
Gardner-Webb University School of Education
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University
2020

Abstract

AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS: PERCEIVED BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED WHILE ACCESSING AND SERVING IN THE SUPERINTENDENCY. Goines-Harris, Shelly Geneen, 2020: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

This research study was designed to add to the existing but limited literature that explores perceived barriers and challenges African-American women superintendents experienced while ascending and serving in the superintendency. According to the literature, African-American women are underrepresented in the role of public school superintendents. This study examined the impact of gender and racial discrimination on African-American women superintendent aspirants and those currently serving in the role. This study surveyed and interviewed African-American women superintendents serving in public school districts in North Carolina and South Carolina, examining their perceptions of barriers and challenges experienced while ascending and serving in the superintendency.

Race and gender were the two identified themes found in the analysis of survey and interview data. This study determined that race and gender have an impact on African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the role. All subthemes supported racial and gender biases. Choice of dress, working in a male-dominated field, isolation and exclusion from "good old boy networks," dispelling the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators, and the lack of acceptance by male and non-African-American administrators and staff were all subthemes of the impact of race and gender.

The findings of this study will serve to better prepare African-American women who aspire to and serve in the superintendency when faced with barriers and challenges rooted in racial and gender biases. The findings can be used to better inform school boards, hiring personnel, educational leadership programs, and public school districts of the barriers and challenges African-American women public school superintendents experience and how race and gender impact them in the role of superintendent.

Keywords: African-American, women, superintendency, barriers

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Women in educational leadership positions such as principals, assistant principals and executive directors are not uncommon; however, leadership essentially has been male dominated in corporate, military, political, and other areas of society. Women have obtained entry to executive positions at increasing rates; however, their presence in these positions remains a rarity (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Current research shows a substantial number of teaching positions and school administration degrees and qualifications are held by women; however, men have historically dominated the position of superintendent (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Women remain a rarity within executive positions; and until this problem is accurately diagnosed, it is unlikely an effective cure will be prescribed. A discrepancy exists with women serving in the position of superintendent. The public school superintendent is an elite leadership position women aspire to fill; however, very few of these women are African-American (Bernal et al., 2017).

The small number of women and women of color in leadership positions is a current problem. The deficit of leaders who are women and women of color is predicted to be more critical as those of the baby boomer generation begin to advance toward retirement. It is believed that women in leadership positions can occupy these vacancies (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). African-American women, as double minorities, are a rarity; and as a result of this status, they face exceptional and unexplored barriers that hinder their careers, including the development of skills needed for leadership roles (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Men dominate the position of superintendent in the nearly 14,000 public school

districts of our nation, even though K-12 education consists mainly of women. Women make up a large number of licensed staff in the educational system of the United States. The U. S. Department of Education reported that in 2011-2012, 76% of public school teachers were female; however, males held approximately 80% of the superintendent positions (U. S. Dept. of Education, as cited in Superville, 2016). Superville (2016) found 52% of principals and 78% of central office administrators are women. Although women account for "less than a quarter of all superintendents" (Superville, 2016, p. 14), these numbers represent advancement since 2000, when 13% were women (Bernal et al., 2017; Superville, 2016). This study examined the perceptions of barriers and challenges encountered by the 13% of women who are African-American.

Brown (2014) found three factors contributing to the challenges in the hiring and retention of African-American women superintendents. These challenges can be categorized into three themes: (a) influence of the civil rights movement, (b) Black Feminist Movement, and (c) public school district social politics. Biases, such as race, gender, and culture, were found to be roots of the identified common challenges (Brown, 2014).

Brown's (2014) study examined the matters of African-American women superintendent recruitment and retention. Commonalities were identified in this study as were racial, gender, and social political differences. The participants were eight African-American women who either served or were currently serving as superintendents of school districts located in the southeastern region of the United States. Each of the participants was the first African-American woman to occupy the position of superintendent in their districts and states. Each participant shared their perspective as it

related to the following research question, "What affect do race, gender and social politics have on the recruitment and retention of African-American women to the superintendency" (Brown, 2014, p. 576).

Based on the data from Brown's (2014) study, the one determining factor of recruitment and retention is not gender; however, it was found that African-American female gender influences recruitment and retention. Primarily, race and gender for African-American women, also alluded to as "double jeopardy" (Brown, 2014, p. 581), affect recruitment and retention (Brown, 2014).

The reality of race in the recruitment was described by one participant: "He told me, he said you were the best candidate and I couldn't in good conscience not vote for you, but others did not, and they did not because of the color of your skin"(Brown, 2014, p. 578). Another participant connected the issue of gender with stereotypical beliefs: "Black women are seen as very dominant and we're supposed to be mothers, cooks, cleaners, Ms. Fixer Uppers, but we're not leaders, so everyone takes advantage of us. We're the mothers of the land for all races" (Brown, 2014, p. 579).

One participant provides evidence of intersectionality or double jeopardy–being both a woman and African-American:

> I think being a woman certainly has its disadvantages but being an African-American woman has more disadvantages in terms of our ability to be retained for a couple of things in terms of we tend not to have the opportunity to build the networks like the 'good old boy relationships' because we don't golf or hunt. Maybe we fish, but they build different kinds of relationships than we as females. Accessibility is a huge issue because business of connections, social connections,

country club memberships, etc. As African-American women, we must try to insert ourselves into the connections which they (White males) have privileged access. (Brown, 2014, p. 581)

Brown's (2014) research is relevant to my study as it is also a phenomenological study examining the impact of race and gender on African-American women's experiences as they aspire to and serve in the role of superintendent. The Black Feminist Movement (Black feminist thought), one of three categorized themes discovered through Brown's research, was used as the framework for my study.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) referenced the term "shifting" in their 2-year (2000-2002) research study. When describing how Black women comply with certain standards, the term shifting emerged. Shifting is described as a game of pretend as Black women alter their voices, attitudes, and opinions to meet the societal expectations. These shifts are relative to the societal expectations of gender, race, and class (Brown, 2014; Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

The perceptions and experiences of Black women as they relate to racism and sexism are the basis of Jones and Shorter-Gooden's (2004) comprehensive research study. Jones and Shorter-Gooden wanted to learn in what ways Black women changed how they act in order to counter stereotypes and how they handle candid acts of discrimination.

Jones and Shorter-Gooden's (2004) research study consisted of a survey and interviews. Of the 1,700 distributed surveys, 333 Black women completed and returned them. The participant sample included women ages 18-88, living in 24 states and Washington, DC. Participants resided in large cities, suburbs, small towns, and rural areas. They represented various ages, educational backgrounds, incomes, and marital

statuses (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2004).

The survey titled, "African-American Women's Voice Project," used in Jones and Shorter-Gooden's (2004) study was open-ended and included participants writing about: (a) their perceptions of stereotypes of Black women, (b) their major difficulties as Black women, (c) whether and in what ways they have experienced discrimination based on race and gender, (d) whether they feel the burden of having to act differently, and (e) what helps them to persevere. The interviews were conducted with 71 Black women ranging in age from 18-88. Jones and Shorter-Gooden's survey results were as follows:

- *Gender discrimination against Black women is pervasive:* 69% of the participants reported that they have encountered gender bias or discrimination.

- *Most Black women shift their behavior to accommodate others:* 58% of the participants disclosed that they have altered the way they behave to be given credence by White people. Of the 58%, 79% stated that they altered the way they speak, altered their mannerisms to appear less offensive, and participated in conversations with topics they believed were of interest to White people to achieve acceptance. Participants also stated that they avoided controversial topics.

- *Discrimination is experienced most frequently at work:* 69% of the participants indicated that their encounters of racism and sexism in the workplace were related to issues of getting hired, receiving equitable pay, and being fairly promoted.

The conclusion drawn by Jones and Shorter-Gooden (2004) gathered from the data in their study and their review of related research studies shows that the physical and

emotional anguish experienced by Black women is a result of racial and gender discrimination strongly connected to the myths and stereotypes society places on Black women.

Once hired for a superintendent position and while serving in this role, African-American women are learning how to overcome racial and gender discrimination. The number of African-American women superintendents continues to increase; however, this growth does not compare to the number of White women and men serving in this position. Recruiting and retaining African-American women superintendents is a unique challenge. According to the findings of Brown's (2014) study, racial and gender biases are common challenges they encounter.

This research study explored the lived experiences of African-American women superintendents with a focus on their perceptions of barriers and challenges they have encountered while in the role and how or whether gender or race have an impact on their role as an African-American woman superintendent.

Research Problem

Before the turning point case of *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), research on African-American superintendents did not exist. African-Americans serving in the position of superintendent became a focus of inquiry during the 1970s. Similar to the studies on Black principals, the studies on African-American superintendents is usually thrown into one big grouping of women and minorities, and precise numbers of Black superintendents are not detailed (Glass, 2000; Taylor & Tillman, 2009).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) began collecting

nationwide data on the demographics of the superintendency in 1953; however, race was

not used as a classification until 1982, and even then, Black superintendents were

classified as "minorities." In 1982, 57 Black superintendents represented 0.7% of the

nation's superintendents. That number increased to 142 Black superintendents

representing 1.6% of the nation's superintendents by the 1989-1990 school year (AASA,

as cited in Taylor & Tillman, 2009).

There is a recognized discrepancy between the female gender role and the

leadership role. Women are seen as communal, causing them to be perceived as less

competent for leadership roles when compared to men. Men are seen as more agentic and

more skilled than women, and women are seen as more emotional than men. Such

stereotypes suggest that the congenial characteristics of leadership of women leaders are

seen as less favorably because those behaviors are not consistent with what is considered

suitable female behavior (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Sczesny et al., 2004).

The theory of role congruity proposes that a group will be positively rated if the

group's attributes are accepted as being aligned with that group's stereotypical social

roles. Role congruity theory, coined by Eagly and Karau (2002), proposes there exists an

idea that prejudice toward female leaders and potential leaders takes two forms: (a) an

unfavorable appraisal of women's leadership potential because leadership potential is

stereotypically seen of men and not women and (b) unfavorable evaluation of the

authentic leadership behavior of women because such behavior is seen as more desirable

in men than in women. These two forms of prejudice are expressed in more favorable

opinions toward male leaders than women leaders. Women experience more difficulty as

a result of these forms of prejudice when seeking success in leadership positions (Eagly

& Karau, 2002).

Males are perceived as being task oriented, while females are seen as being person oriented. In research conducted by Sczesny et al. (2004), female and male students studying management in Australia, Germany and India were asked to gauge the percentage to which one of the three stimulus groups had person-oriented and task-oriented leadership attributes. The three stimulus groups were (a) executives (not gender specific), (b) men executives, or (c) women executives. Students completed questionnaires asking which personal attributes and behaviors were pertinent in a leadership theme. Results from this study attributed executives with more task-oriented traits than person-oriented traits. Participants estimated female executives to possess person-oriented traits more often than executives in general. Stereotypes of gender influencing the perception of leadership was found to be a result of the study (Sczesny et al., 2004).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women as they ascended to the superintendency and while serving in this educational leadership role. Perhaps by doing so, we can effectively address the barriers and challenges and begin to examine ways to provide these African-American women with mentorship and sponsorship to provide them with ways to overcome or better deal with these barriers and challenges.

Studying African-American women superintendents is important for at least two reasons: (a) the number of women superintendents is low and (b) understanding the barriers and challenges encountered by African-American women superintendents can

help in the development of ways to better support them. Understanding potential issues and challenges can assist in breaking down barriers to guarantee African-American women who aspire to be a superintendent have an unbiased chance to do so.

Derrington and Sharratt (2009) found that several barriers exist discouraging women from the position of superintendent. In 1993, Derrington and Sharratt surveyed female professional job listing subscribers regarding the barriers that kept them from obtaining a superintendent position. They replicated this same study in 2007, and the perceptions of barriers remained the same; however, the significance the participants placed on the barriers changed.

In the 1993 study, Derrington and Sharratt sent questionnaires to 200 female Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) subscribers. In the replicated 2007 study, they sent the same questionnaire to 140 female WASA subscribers, the same professional job listing service. In both studies, participants were asked to rate how each barrier negatively influenced their desire or ability to seek the position of superintendent. In the 1993 study, 80% of the questionnaires were completed, and 67% were completed in 2007. They found that the barriers discovered between their 1993 and 2007 study were tremendously similar (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Derrington and Sharratt (2009) recognized that a noticeable shift was present when comparing the results from 1993 to the results of 2007. The top barriers of 1993 were sex role stereotyping and discrimination and absence of mentors to lead women into the superintendency. The 2007 study revealed that barriers to being hired for the superintendency are often self-imposed. They also revealed that the "good old boys" network only helps men, and school boards are not knowledgeable as it relates to

identifying qualified women candidates (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Survey comments interpreted "self-imposed" as not securing the superintendency or avoiding the position due to family responsibilities, including the inability to relocate. Familial obligations, including motherhood, strongly influenced women's decisions to seek the superintendency. Balancing the demands of the superintendency and home life expectations were indicated to be difficult by the women participants of this study (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Women participants in Derrington and Sharratt's (2009) study who attained superintendency suggested ways to combat the struggles women superintendents encounter. Resolve, balance, negotiation, and cultivating support are the four subcategories under which the suggestions are organized. Women must resolve to be one of those who meets the challenge and succeeds. They must balance their personal and professional life. Women must also cultivate support by asking for and expecting family members to share household duties, instead of working both at the job and at home. When working with the school board, women need to negotiate boundaries or ask for alternatives before strong decisions are made. According to the overall findings of this particular study, in order to succeed in the role of superintendent, women perceive they must act differently. For women superintendents, the role of parenthood was the biggest barrier for when considering their career pathway (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Research Questions

This mixed method study was designed to explore the lived experiences of African-American women superintendents in North Carolina and South Carolina utilizing data from individual virtual interviews seeking to answer the following:

1. What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

2. In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

3. In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

Overview of Methodology

The methodology of this study was mixed method research. Participants were African-American women superintendents who serve public school districts in North Carolina and South Carolina. A survey questionnaire and virtual interviews were the instruments utilized to collect data from participants. Data collected were analyzed to identify themes of participant perceptions of barriers and challenges they experienced while accessing and serving in the role of superintendent. Through the analysis of identified themes, it will be determined whether gender or race have an impact on their role as African-American women superintendents.

Significance of the Study

This study sought to identify perceived barriers and challenges faced by African-American women in seeking the superintendency and while serving in this position. This study determined whether the participants view race and/or gender as influences impacting them as African-American women while ascending and serving in the role of superintendent. It sought to provide African-American women, who aim to serve in an executive educational leadership position, with information they may use to prepare

themselves to advance into the superintendency.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

History of the Superintendency

The demands of the job of superintendent have become greatly complex. Increased complexities can be expected in the future. For more than a century, superintendents have been the persons with the greatest individual responsibility for the welfare of local and state school systems. A variety of needs factored into the initial decision to hire school superintendents. The responsibilities of managing schools became too much for lay board members to assume without interfering with the wages they received from their primary employment. Superintendents were hired to act on their behalf (Blount, 2006, p. 975).

In addition to the allocation of funds and resources received from the state and the settling of boundary disputes, superintendents were also responsible for monitoring instruction, coordinating the professional development of teachers, and monitoring the use of resources. Being that one of the major duties was managing the distribution of funds, county superintendents tended to be elected, rather than appointed, officials. Many women teachers sought and won county superintendent positions throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. By 1930, women accounted for as many as 27% of all intermediate (county) superintendents (Blount, 2006, p. 976).

Educators who were seeking executive pay, duties, and status desired the authority of the superintendency. The increasing demands of the superintendency brought about a change in educators' paths to the position since the mid-1800s, when the first superintendents were hired. During the early years of public school education, a person who became a superintendent had more than likely served as a teacher for an average of 6

or 7 years before moving into their first administrative position, which is typically an assistant principalship or a principalship. Some who have worked in larger districts move into central office administrative positions, while those in smaller districts might go directly from a principalship to superintendency. Most aspiring superintendents today will have received extensive training before assuming the superintendency. This training includes graduate study to obtain advanced degrees and credentials (Blount, 2006, p. 977).

Since 1923, every 10 years, AASA has conducted a State of the Superintendency report. Kowalski (2011) documented that of approximately 1,900 superintendents across the United States, 24.1% were women. This number was a considerable improvement from the last time it was measured in 2000, when only 13.2% were women. Historical data describing the number of persons of color holding superintendencies does not exist; however, persons of color have accounted for no more than 1% of all superintendents at any given time (AASA, as cited by Blount, 2006; Bernal et al., 2017; Kowalski, 2011).

Gender Stereotypes

Stereotypes are often powerful barriers to the promotion of women to positions of leadership. When examining the absence of women superintendents, one would wonder what role gender inequality plays when examining this claim (Koenig et al., 2011).

Women are linked with having communal qualities. Communal qualities communicate compassion for others. Men are linked with agentic qualities, and these qualities communicate characteristics of assertiveness. Agentic traits are often associated with productive leadership. Historically, males have predominantly occupied positions of leadership, which makes it difficult to disconnect leadership and male associations (Eagly

& Carli, 2007).

The influence of race and dominant interpersonal perceptions of female leaders has been examined. Livingston et al.'s (2012) study sought to answer the question of whether agentic Black women can advance in their career. Prior to Livingston et al.'s (2012) study, previous research found that "agency penalties" (p. 354) are often experienced by women when they exhibit behaviors of assertiveness, anger, competition or dominance; however, research investigating whether Black female leaders are subject to the same agency penalty did not exist.

Acknowledging previous research which suggests White women leaders experience an agency penalty, Livingston et al. (2012) examined whether the same is true for Black women leaders. In this study, there were two predictions regarding the agency penalty for Black women:

1. The agency penalty experienced by Black female leaders is like or greater than the penalty White female leaders will experience when they display agentic behaviors. This can be referred to as double jeopardy, as they represent two minority groups–female and Black.

2. Black female leaders' agency penalty experience is smaller than what is experienced by either Black male leaders or White male leaders, as the result of the prototypical Black is male and the prototypical woman is White. Black women are considered "non-prototypical," meaning both their race and gender often render them "invisible" (Livingston et al., 2012, p. 355).

This research study included 84 participants who identified themselves as non-Black (64% women, 36% men). In exchange for their participation, participants had the

opportunity to win a gift card valued at $50. Participants were assigned to the following

conditions of the study: 2 (leader's race: White vs. Black) x 2 (leader's gender: male vs.

female) x 2 (leader's behavior: dominant vs. communal; Livingston et al., 2012, p. 355).

Participants were shown a description and picture of a fake Fortune 500 company's vice

president. In the description of the meeting between the leader and an employee, the

dominant leader expressed their disappointment with assertiveness and demanded that

certain actions take place for improvement. The communal leader was described as

showing compassion toward the employee and encouraged them to take steps toward

improvement. Each leader was rated by participants on the following questions

(Livingston et al., 2012):

1. How well do you think the leader handled the situation with the employee?

2. How effective is the leader at maximizing the employee's performance?

3. How much do you think the leader is admired by his or her employees?

4. How respected is this leader by the other executives at the company?

5. Ranging on a scale from 1 ($100,000) to 9 ($500,000), what do you think the
   leader's annual salary should be?

No proof of agency penalty against Black women leaders was found in this

research study; however, the results were consistent with research from the past, finding

evidence of an agency penalty against White women leaders. Participant responses to

Black women leaders were of a similar configuration as their responses to White male

leaders. This finding caused researchers to question the mystery of their results, asking

this question, "If Black women leaders and White men have similar scopes of behavior,

why are there not more Black women in executive positions, such as the position of

superintendent" (Livingston et al., 2012, p. 356).

Schein's (1973) analysis of the relationship between sex role stereotypes, essential management characteristics, and examinations of managerial sex role stereotyping found that the belief among middle managers was that males are better managers or leaders. The overall generalization is when you think male, you think manager (Schein, 1973), thus the birth of the "think manager-think male paradigm" (Schein et al., 1996, p. 33) establishing the theory that middle managers who are successful are seen as having qualities and attitudes more attributed to men than to women (Schein, 1973; Schein et al., 1996).

Fischbach et al. (2015) modified Schein's (1973) think manager-think male paradigm and examined stereotypical gender expressions of specific emotions like sorrow, anger, and fright. Through the examination of the similarities of emotion expression among women, men, and successful managers, Fischbach et al. found that women are believed to lack the emotional expression essential to being successful as a leader (Schein et al., 1996).

The perceptions that managers possess masculine-stereotyped traits have been studied. Sczesny et al. (2004) explored the influence of cultural background as it relates to perception of incongruity between the feminine and leader roles. Sczesny et al. also examined how women and men described their leadership traits. It was found that the stereotypes associated with gender continue to impact how leadership is perceived (Sczesny et al., 2004).

Von Stockhausen et al. (2013) examined hiring decisions for masculine-typed leadership roles and for feminine-typed professional roles. Eagly and Karau's (2002) role

congruity and Heilman's (1983) lack-of-fit theories provided the theoretical framework in

this particular study. Thirty-seven University of Heidelberg students and young graduates

ranging in ages from 19-30 years were participants in this study. In addition to the

portraits of female applicants and male applicants, participants were given one of two

gender typical job advertisements: (a) project leader–requiring dominant, assertive, and

competitive traits (a masculine-typed advertisement); or (b) team member–requiring

communicative and socially competent traits (feminine-typed advertisement). How

participants visually explored applicant portraits was studied by researchers through

tracking their eyes (von Stockhausen et al., 2013). According to von Stockhausen et al.,

by utilizing the eye-tracking method, researchers could assume there is a connection

between what someone sees and what someone processes. Participants were given one of

two gender typical roles. The project leader position that is forceful, assertive, and

competitive was described in the masculine-typed advertisement; and the team member

who was team-oriented, communicative, and socially competent was described in the

feminine-typed advertisement (von Stockhausen et al., 2013).

Similar to role congruity theory, this study found that masculine-looking

applicants were recommended for masculine-typed roles (project leader) and feminine-

looking applicants were recommended for feminine-typed roles (team member). Thus,

hiring decisions are impacted by the congruity or incongruity between an applicant's

gender and a professional role (Eagly & Karau, 2002; von Stockhausen et al., 2013).

Leaders are seen as more agentic than communal and more masculine than

feminine, thus leadership is seen as culturally masculine. The think manager-think male,

agency communion, and masculinity-femininity research models show that the

stereotypes of leaders are masculine. Leaders are viewed as being similar to men but not very similar to women (Koenig et al., 2011).

When examining various studies, it can be concluded that the expectation of leadership is masculine and women do not meet masculine expectations. This is a powerful bias. Has this paradigm, or way of thinking, caused many organizations to fail to see leadership potential in women? Does the think-male, think-manager paradigm create a problem for women who aspire to or who occupy leadership positions?

Kowalski's (2011) study included 1,867 superintendents as participants. Of the 1,867 superintendents, 1,340 were male and 426 were female. The number of female superintendents (24.1%) doubled from the 2000 study (13.2%). Glass (2000) suggested 13% of superintendents of schools were women; however, only 5% were African-American women, according to Kowalski. These data suggest gender and racial inequities exist in the superintendency. The data also suggest that African-American women superintendents were rare during times of these studies and that documented research focused on the lived experiences of African-American women superintendents is deficient (Glass, 2000; Kowalski, 2011).

Gender Bias and the Superintendency

How does gender inequality contribute to the absence of women superintendents leading American public school districts? Garn and Brown (2008) studied how 15 women leaders in southwestern state public school districts perceived the affect gender bias had on their progress accessing the superintendency and while serving in the superintendency.

Four of the 15 women superintendents in the study identified themselves as minorities. They led districts with enrollments ranging from 150 to 25,000 students. Six

participants led school districts with enrollments of 300 students or fewer. Several of these women were new to their current job. These 15 participants ranged in years of experience serving in the superintendency up to 15 years (Garn & Brown, 2008).

Data collected through interviews included participants being asked to describe a gender-related professional experience. Data were collected and examined for statements of how these superintendents experienced gender bias in their profession. The three themes that materialized were (a) overcoming challenges in the career path, (b) the importance of mentoring, and (c) overcoming gender-related stereotypes of leadership (Garn & Brown, 2008).

The perception of gender bias being a factor in the careers of female superintendents is reality for the participants in this study. Gender bias was perceived as an element in their work as school superintendents. In relation to gender bias, they shared challenging encounters with faculty, coaches, and community and school board members that were grounded in gender-based stereotypes. The superintendents believed they were challenged because of their gender, not because they were in need of education, experience, or professional preparation. The research participants perceived that gender stereotypes were ingrained in their path to the superintendency and work experiences. The participants shared that early on in their career, instead of aspiring to top administrative roles; they built their confidence and changed their career aspirations (Garn & Brown, 2008).

A gap in the formal mentoring framework was also identified in Garn and Brown's (2008) study. The formal mentoring framework did not consider the needs of the women aspiring to top level educational administrative positions; however, those already

in the position were recommended. According to the participants of this study, having a professional mentor was significant to their ascension to the superintendency. While some participants were assigned mentors through a formal mentoring program, others found mentors on their own (Garn & Brown, 2008).

Women superintendents reported gender stereotypes being planted in the career path and in work experiences. Participants described challenges that were gender related and believed that these challenges would not have been issues for male superintendents (Garn & Brown, 2008).

Bernal et al. (2017) examined the role of superintendent and perceived leadership qualities, barriers, challenges, and opportunities. They examined the career pathways of superintendents. This research study was a mixed method design. Participants were six superintendents from southern California, three women and three men. Participant ages ranged from 41 to 61. Five of the participants were serving in the superintendency, and one was retired. Two of the participants were married, two were single, and one was divorced. All of the participants reported having children ranging in age from 22 months to 39 years old. The researchers studied participant responses from interview questions and data collected using a demographic survey and a leadership orientations instrument (Bernal et al., 2017).

A comparison of female and male participant responses discovered recurring themes in the female comments, while no themes were identified in the male comments. The female comments appeared to be interpersonal in nature and people oriented. The qualities needed to be a successful superintendent identified by the male participants were relative to the school district and overall success. The distinction in perceived qualities of

leadership was clearly demonstrated in the difference in responses (Bernal et al., 2017).

The utilization of a SWOT analysis was employed to review participant responses and to uncover themes. A SWOT analysis assesses the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of a business or organization. The six superintendents participating in this study were asked to identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats they have experienced as superintendents. Themes found in the women participant responses were relationships, vision, communication, and gender issues. Through the interview process, gender-related issues and feelings of inequity were discussed. Gender issues were perceived as a weakness. One female participant reported that a question regarding how she dressed was posed during her formal evaluation. Dress attire was not a component of evaluation review mentioned by the male participants (Bernal et al., 2017).

One participant shared an experience of a time when she was discouraged by a male mentor from being a superintendent. The mentor explained that in his opinion, being a superintendent in a high school district was not reasonable for a mother with young children due to late night obligations. The participant perceived this encounter with her mentor as a barrier.

Findings from the SWOT analysis revealed the emergence of the following similar themes from male participants: communication, relationships, and vision. Gender issues and feelings of inequity were not a defined theme from male participants.

No common themes were found within the responses of the male superintendents. Female superintendents noted many challenges related to gender bias; however, gender-related concerns were not mentioned by the male superintendents.

Women, when compared to men, are still viewed as inferior in both strength and intellect. There is still a fear of women making emotion-based decisions. Gender biases discovered in this study were found to be common experiences for the women superintendents. The biggest discovered barrier for women, when considering their career pathway, was the role of parent. Parenthood was not found to be a barrier for any of the male superintendents (Bernal et al., 2017).

Intersectionality: The Impact of Gender and Race

African-American women find themselves at the intersection of racism and sexism. This study sought to determine if and/or how race and gender impact African-American women serving in the role of superintendent.

Kimberle Crenshaw, a Black feminist and legal scholar, first coined the term "intersectionality" in 1989 (Christoffersen, 2017). The theory of intersectionality developed as a concept of Black feminist thought and activism (Christoffersen, 2017). Intersectionality is used to "describe how Black women's experiences and identities are marginalized by tendencies to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories" (Christoffersen, 2017, p. 3). As a legal scholar, Crenshaw shared examples of cases where Black women had to choose to file a claim of discrimination either based on race or gender. They could not claim discrimination based on both. The theory of intersectionality explains that the facets of identity are interdependent of each other and not independent of themselves (Christoffersen, 2017). Intersectionality is also referred to as a concept introduced to the feminist theory which maintains that people are discriminated against by multiple origins of mistreatment and injustice, which include race and gender (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008). Considering the implication of

intersectionality as it relates to this research study, African-American women superintendents cannot choose to be African-American superintendents or women superintendents. Being African-American and being a woman are interdependent of one another, not independent.

According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), the number of women superintendents has increased throughout the years; however, racially and ethnically diverse leaders are still underrepresented. Women of color encounter challenges based on gender and racial stereotypes as they strive to attain and perform in leadership roles. African-American women in leadership roles have been ignored in the development of research and theory. Some studies have examined women in leadership roles; however, these studies disregard the impact of race and ethnicity (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) described the challenges that women of color encounter as they seek to carry out their responsibilities in leadership roles. They discussed the barriers and challenges that women encounter with a specific focus on the influence gender and race have on leadership. They recognized the barriers African-American women encounter caused by racism and sexism. They concluded that "women can achieve leadership positions but only by carefully traversing complex paths as they confront issues associated with childcare needs, racism, sexism, and discrimination on the basis of identity" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 172).

Stereotypical Images of African-American Women

Both types of discrimination (gender and race) experienced by Black women are planted in stereotypes and controlling images. Stereotypical controlling images continue to degrade Black women based on racist and sexist perceptions of being women. West

(1995) identified three historical images of Black women and described these images'

effect on psychological functioning through the examination of the implications of

psychotherapy. She noted that not all images of Black women can be grouped into only

the three image categories; however, these three controlling images are the most

predominant of those identified. As stereotypes are a convenient way of processing

information, they play an important role in how Black women are initially viewed and

evaluated by others in the workplace (West, 1995). In addition to the challenges of racism

and sexism, African-American women have to fight against these historical stereotypical

images, which affect the way people in the workplace may perceive and treat them

(Lewis et al., 2016; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Black women do not have authority over their own image and are often accused

of being the origin of their problems. Black women have been portrayed in a combination

of three images through history, culture, and media. These three images are (a) as

maternal, family-oriented, and self-sacrificing Mammies; (b) as threatening and

quarrelsome Sapphires, also referred to as the angry Black woman; and (c) as seductive,

sexually irresponsible, and promiscuous Jezebels (Hein, 2017; West, 1995). Collins

(2009) stated that agency and individual perspectives are lost and repressed using these

controlling images.

"Mammy" is a common depiction of Black women. This image materialized in

the south throughout the time of slavery. The image is characterized as an overweight,

dark-skinned woman. Domestic servitude was her main role, which included her being

nurturing and sacrificing herself. The Mammy is seen as the household servant who is a

friend and advisor. She has complete control of the household's domestic affairs. The

Mammy supports the stereotype that Black women cheerfully seek the responsibilities of numerous roles, including worker and family caretaker, effortlessly meeting the obligations of these roles without any eagerness to delegate responsibilities to others (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; West, 1995).

The Sapphire or the angry Black woman is opposite to the likeness of Mammy. This image developed in the 1940s and 1950s. She is portrayed as hostile, nagging, iron-willed, and insulting of Black men (West, 1995). Physically portrayed as large but not obese, the Sapphire undermines Black men with verbal assaults and is considered loud and animated. Seen as intimidating and aggressive, the Sapphire is described as the angry Black woman. As figures of authority, Black women are often stereotyped as overassertive and forceful, and their attempts to be authoritative are often viewed as aggressive. When internalizing the Sapphire image, Black women may accept ownership for the discomfort and fear of others or alter their actions to be seen as nonthreatening during interactions with other ethnic groups (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; West, 1995).

Reynolds-Dobbs et al. (2008) described the image of Jezebel as the seductress who uses her sexuality to get what she wants. Although the image of Jezebel surfaced more than 100 years ago, the image still exists in the corporate workplaces of today. A Jezebel today is characterized as being overly aggressive and willing to do whatever it takes to reach her goals (Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Jerald et al. (2017) explored how perceived gender-specific racism in the form of controlling image stereotypes of Black women diminishes their mental health and well-being. This study examined how Black women perceptions of gendered racial stereotypes

are associated with a decline in their mental health, self-care, and use of alcohol and drugs for coping (Jerald et al., 2017).

Jerald et al. (2017) recruited female students from two universities who identified as Black/African-American. One of the universities was a large, predominantly White educational institution located in the midwestern region of the United States. The second university was a small, historically Black educational institution located in the southeastern region of the United States. The participants were undergraduate and graduate students. The mean age of the participants was 22. Each university's office of registrar provided Jerald et al. with demographic information for the selection of participants. Once selected, participants received an email inviting them to participate in a study focused on the health and well-being of Black women. Participants anonymously completed a 1-hour online survey. Jerald et al. used various instruments to assess participant awareness of the following: (a) meta-stereotypes, (b) mental health symptoms, (c) self-care behaviors, (d) drug and alcohol use, and (e) racial identity. Students rated their agreement with statements relevant to the awareness being assessed on scales of various increments (Jerald et al., 2017).

Jerald et al. (2017) discovered that for Black women who internalize these images, there are unfavorable consequences. Internalizing the controlling image of the Jezebel stereotype could lead to the engagement of dangerous sexual behaviors, excess drinking, and drug abuse. Internalizing the Sapphire stereotype is linked with the suppression of anger to not appear aggressive or argumentative. Jerald et al. asserted that Black women do not have to internalize these controlling images for them to be harming to their health and mental well-being. Jerald et al.'s findings suggested that just being

aware of the existence of these stereotypes and that others use these stereotypes to judge the behavior of Black women may be enough to cause stress.

Greater negative stereotypes are encountered by African-American women as a result of being both female and African-American (Hoyt, 2005). As a result of multiple stereotypes linked with gender, race, and ethnicity, African-American women in leadership roles may therefore experience "triple jeopardy" (Sanchez-Hucles et al., 2007, p. 174). Self-perception and the perceptions of others are affected by stereotypes. The manner in which the media portrays African-American women makes it problematic for others to perceive them as functional leaders. By understanding these perceptions, perhaps we can begin to comprehend the barriers and challenges African-American women leaders and those who desire to lead encounter. Workplace experiences of African-American women are entirely different from other women of color, which results from their unique history in America (Catalyst, 2004; Hoyt, 2005; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Sanchez-Hucles et al., 2007).

In previous research, Devine (1989) administered three studies which tested beliefs resulting from a theoretical model rooted in the separation of self-activating and controlled processes involved in prejudice. Through Devine's research on stereotypes and prejudice, it was discovered that in spite of a person's level of prejudice, automatic (self-activating) stereotype activation was equally powerful for both high and low prejudiced persons when the participants were in contact with a member of a stereotyped group. Having knowledge of cultural stereotypes, people often have voluntary activation of their biased ideas and act on those stereotypes (Devine, 1989).

For the purpose of relativity to this research study, "Study 1: Stereotype Content

and Prejudice Level" of Devine's (1989) three studies is the study of interest. Forty White

psychology students were the participants of Devine's study. To ensure the participants

remained anonymous, they were isolated from each other. Devine told participants that

the research was developed to understand social stereotypes centered on the cultural

stereotypes of Blacks. Participants were told that their personal beliefs were not of

interest; however, their knowledge of the cultural stereotypes was of interest to Devine.

The psychology students were given a page in a booklet and were asked to list the

elements of the cultural stereotype. Participants then completed a Modern Racism Scale

(seven items) designed to measure participant anti-Black attitudes in a nonreactive

manner. Participants were instructed to express their agreement with each of the items

listed, using a rating scale (McConahay et al., 1981, as cited by Devine, 1989).

According to Devine's (1989) research, "the basic argument of the *inevitability of

prejudice* perspective is that as long as stereotypes exist, prejudice will follow" (p. 5);

and the implications of this perspective argue that no one can get away from learning

accepted attitudes of prejudice and stereotypes assigned to marginalized ethnic groups

because these ethnic attitudes and stereotypes are segments of the social inheritance of

society (Devine, 1989). It is important to acknowledge the presence and strength of

stereotypes within organizations to fully comprehend the barriers and challenges

experienced by African-American women in the workplace.

This search study examined the barriers and challenges experienced by African-

American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the

superintendency. Identified themes emerged from the examination of experienced

barriers and challenges, and the data determined whether race and/or gender had an

impact on African-American women as they serve in the role of superintendent.

Barriers and Challenges of Women in Educational Leadership

Recent studies on women superintendents narrate the current issues women leaders are encountering, including personal issues such as marriage, children, relocation, and the professional challenges of opportunity and gender bias (Bernal et al., 2017).

Robinson and Shakeshaft (2015) studied women who left the superintendency. They examined the stressors participants discussed and the relation of these stressors to their health. Robinson and Shakeshaft reexamined their 2013 study for a second analysis of the interviews for the purpose of understanding why women superintendents leave their positions. Women superintendents identified long days, their status as an outsider, responsibilities and requirements of the position, visibility, relationship with the school board, and feelings of helplessness as their most significant stressors (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015).

A list of 49 women who served in the role of superintendent in the state of Virginia was compiled. Of the 49 superintendents, 34 were contacted; and of the 34 contacted, 20 women agreed to be interviewed. The majority of the women were White. Two of the women identified as being African-American. Four of the participants retired from the superintendency. Seven of the participants left the superintendency for another position in PK-12. Four of the women left the position to go into higher education. One of the female participants left the superintendency to go into a position outside of PK-12 or higher education, while four left for another superintendency (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015).

Interviews were conducted between June 2011 and May 2012. Interviews were

face to face except for one, and the average amount of time for each interview was 2.5

hours. The interview transcripts were analyzed, specifically for issues of stress, health,

and well-being topics. The superintendents' stories often focused on the job-related

factors that led to overall stress experienced while in the superintendency. The study

discovered the following stressors: long days, visibility and tokenism, position

requirements, school board relations, and helplessness (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015).

All women mentioned working more than a 50-hour week. One superintendent

viewed working so many hours as what was needed to get the job done. Some of the

participants worked in small rural districts and drew the conclusion that due to limited

central office staff, long hours were required. Living outside of the district also led to

long days due to commuting back and forth to work (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015).

No matter where they lived or worked, the women superintendents described the

stress of being both visible as the superintendent and a token as a woman superintendent.

The combination of both increased the stress women experienced. One superintendent

referred to herself as "quite the attraction"(Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015, p. 455) when

she was first hired because she was not only the first female superintendent in her district

but in the entire region. She described herself as an oddity (Robinson & Shakeshaft,

2015).

Although strained relations between superintendents and school boards are not a

female-only stressor, participants mentioned the many challenges of working with a

school board. One superintendent mentioned the challenge of feeling as though she was

at the "beck and call" (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015, p. 446) of the school board. She

also mentioned that most of the time spent in dealing with the school board included

clarifying information based on rumors and solving problems that did not yet exist.

Others noted the stress from the challenge of being micromanaged by the school board

(Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015).

Regarding the theme of helplessness, one participant reported being threatened,

receiving threatening phone calls and messages, being verbally attacked in public, and

being called baby doll and White trash. This themed stressor stemmed from the challenge

of maintaining appropriate demeanor during these difficult times.

Stress caused participants to struggle with sleeping, eating, maintaining exercise,

and maintaining relationships with family and friends. It appears the demands of the job

also have an overall effect on the stress level and health and well-being of the

superintendent, not only while she is serving in the position, but in many cases even after

she left (Robinson & Shakeshaft, 2015).

Barriers and Challenges of African-American Women Superintendents

Texas Education Agency found that 1,247 school districts in Texas were led by

school superintendents in 2011-2012. Of the 1,247 school districts, only eight (less than

1%) were led by an African-American woman. As a result of such a small number of

identified African American women in the role of superintendent, there was a need to

study the experiences of these women as they served in rural and urban school districts

(Texas Education Agency, as cited in Wiley et al., 2017).

Wiley et al. (2017) studied challenges and barriers experienced by African-

American women superintendents in the state of Texas. Wiley et al. also studied the

challenges, supports, and personal backgrounds that influenced their rise to the

superintendency and once they attained the position. Individual interviews were the

origin of data for this study. Based on Wiley et al.'s findings, it is believed that the experiences encountered by the participants will help districts develop the knowledge needed to help African-American women superintendents combat the distinctive nuances of their leadership experience.

During interviews, none of the participants overtly stated race or gender as challenges they encountered. "Sub-question 1 asked, *what challenges have African American women superintendents in Texas encountered in acquiring superintendent positions?* Emergent sub-themes were formal preparation and reflecting on and learning from experiences" (Wiley et al., 2017, p. 21). Many African-American women viewed their dual minority status as a barrier to their entrance into the superintendency; however, the participants did not embrace their dual minority status as a barrier (Wiley et al., 2017).

The challenge of being African-American and female has compelled African-American women to live an existence filled with conflict, confusion, and isolation. By understanding their stories, it was the hope that through this research, future generations of aspiring African-American women superintendents would benefit from the stories of the challenges, supports, and personal backgrounds of these superintendents (Wiley et al., 2017).

Angel et al. (2013) examined the perceptions of African-American women district-level administrators who had applied for the superintendency as it related to barriers to ascending to this position. Angel et al. desired to determine why so few African-American women were ascending to the superintendency in the state of North Carolina. Angel et al. aimed to determine factors in their experiences impacting their

personal identifications as district-level leaders and their desire and determination to seek the superintendency.

The experiences of 10 African-American women district-level administrators from three regions of the state of North Carolina who were qualified to apply for the position of superintendent were the focus of the research. In-person and telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed. Data from these interviews were coded for thematic identification. Selection of the participants was based on their current job assignments and their academic qualifications. Participants served in district-level leader positions of director, assistant superintendent, or associate superintendent (Angel et al., 2013).

Findings from the evaluation of interview data included the emergence themes of personal indicator, participant experiences, and externally imposed barriers (Angel et al., 2013). Identified personal indicator themes included ethical systems, influence, and preparedness. Participants indicated a strong belief system–honesty, equity, and respectful treatment to all. Participants credited their career path to the supportive influence of others, including maternal figures, community, female relatives, and others in leadership positions with whom they had a close relationship. Necessity of preparedness was described as having the necessary credentials to be a superintendent. Participants either had a doctoral degree or were enrolled in a doctoral program. Participants believed that in order to have a chance of securing a superintendent position, they needed to have the proper credentials and work experience (Angel et al., 2013).

Participants perceived the external theme of oppression to include institutional, societal, and political barriers as challenges they have experienced. Participants discussed

what others perceived to be a woman's role in society and the stereotyping of roles. Issues of racism and gender, which are referred to by Angel et al. (2013) as "double whammy" (p. 596) and what Collins (2000, as cited by Angel et al., 2013) referred to as intersectionality, were prevalent. In the words of one participant,

> I really don't think that North Carolina is open and willing to embrace Black female leadership, although I don't think that most North Carolina leaders will ever admit it. Let's be real here for a moment; there are places in North Carolina that I would not apply for a superintendent's position because they don't look like me there and they don't want anybody that looks like me in their town. That is reason enough for me to never apply. (Angel et al., 2013, p. 605)

Political power was recognized as a barrier described as the powerful and influential structures within a community. Participants stated that it is believed by many that ideas must come from the people within the community who are seen as having the power. Participants did not feel that their ideas or opinions were welcomed. Participants identified North Carolina law giving school boards the power to choose and appoint a superintendent as a concern (Angel et al., 2013).

Research findings defend the existence of the interconnectedness of race and gender that Collins (2000, as cited by Angel et al., 2013) identified as a crucial component of Black feminist thought.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

Collins's (1990) Black feminist thought serves as the theoretical framework for this study. Black feminist thought has been identified as the blending of activism and theory. Black feminist thought acknowledges that all Black women develop a unique

standpoint that facilitates their survival as a marginalized cultural group in a discriminatory society. The theory focuses on the interpretation of the experiences and ideas of Black women that provide a unique opinion of self, community, and society. The standpoint of Black women can also be expressed through ideas, writings, and art. Collins (1990) developed Black feminist thought theory to urge Black women to build a model of inclusive feminist knowledge that enhances the understanding of gender and Black experiences (Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

The three core themes of Black feminist thought are (a) interconnected nature of race, class, and gender oppression in the personal and work lives of Black women; (b) the embodiment of a positive self-definition and rejecting the stereotypical and controlling images of others (such as Mammy, Jezebel, and Angry Black Woman); and (c) focus on individual and group empowerment while actively struggling to resist oppression (Collins, 1990; Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

This study examined the interlocking nature of race and gender oppression in Black women's work lives as public school superintendents. Through the identification of perceived barriers and challenges experienced by the participants, I determined whether the perceived barriers and challenges were linked to the stereotypical and controlling images of others.

Early Black feminist thought (1830s-1900) emerged from two sociopolitical movements of race discrimination and women's rights during the United States era of the early 19th century to the early 20th century. Black feminist thought provides a platform for meaningful dialogue around racism and sexism to assist in understanding the oppression and discrimination Black women currently face (Collins, 2009; Perry, 2009, p. 73). Black

women's survival is dependent upon their ability to find a place to freely express their experiences with persons similar to themselves (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Maria Stewart and Sojourner Truth were two of the many significant Black feminists throughout history who were committed to both sociopolitical causes of race discrimination and women's rights. These Black women also found themselves torn between these two movements. The lived experiences of these Black feminists promoted their consciousness of how race and gender are interrelated (Perry, 2009, p. 73).

Maria Stewart (1803-1879), one of the first Black feminists of her time, is recognized as the first American woman to speak publicly on political issues. She challenged Black women of her time to renounce the negativity associated with Black womanhood which identified race and gender as the leading cause of Black women's poverty. Stewart not only spoke on relevant issues of the Black community such as economic empowerment and racial unity, she urged Black women to free themselves from gender definitions and to seek formal education and careers outside of the home. She was also adamant about Black women assuming roles of leadership (Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

Like Stewart, Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) lectured on abolition and women's rights. She was deemed as a Black feminist-abolitionist. One of her most memorable speeches, "Ain't I a woman?" focused on the intersection between women rights to vote and the rights of Blacks. Truth's speech identified ways both movements failed to acknowledge Black women. Truth's speech proved the belief that women are weaker than men to be false while challenging society's definition of womanhood:

That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted

over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into

carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place! And ain't I a woman?

Look at me! Look at my arm! I have ploughed and planted, and gathered into

barns, and no man could head me! (Guy-Sheftall, 1995, p. 345)

African American women experience the world differently from those who are

not Black or not female. In his explanation of life for African-Americans, W.E.B. DuBois

created the phrase "double consciousness"(Wiley et al., 2017, p. 20), the awareness of

being both African and American. For African-American women, there is an additional

level to double consciousness, which is the awareness of being Black and being female

(Wiley et al., 2017).

Black women are seen as representatives of knowledge regarding the

interconnectedness of sexism, oppression, and racism. Black women have unique

knowledge based on their experiences, and their perspectives should be viewed as

accounted for based on their experiences in a role of societal inferiority. Experiences of

Black women are a marked feature of Black feminist work. Black feminist thought gives

a voice to African-American woman whose lived experiences remain outside the domain

of knowledge or interest of most. Black feminism finds value in the experiences of Black

women. Variations of one's experiences lead to differences in perspectives (Collins,

2009; Wiley et al., 2017).

According to Collins (1989), African-American women have a "self-defined

standpoint" (p. 747) on their own mistreatment; and their standpoint is characterized by

two "interlocking" components: (a) the world is experienced differently by African-

American women compared to non-Black women, and (b) the African-American

woman's experiences stimulate Black feminist consciousness concerning their reality. In addition to experiencing different realities from those of other groups, African-American women also interpret their realities differently (Collins, 1989, as cited by Guy-Sheftall, 1995).

One distinct attribute of Black feminist thought stems from a tension linking experiences and ideas of Black women. Black women encounter common challenges; however, it cannot be concluded that all Black women have the same experiences. It also does not mean that all Black women agree on the significance of their varying experiences (Collins, 2009).

African-American women's distinct standpoints, experiences, and day-to-day struggles inform the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought. Experiences obtained from living as African-American women trigger Black feminist sensibility. African-American women who have lived through certain experiences are more plausible and convincing than those who have only read or thought about such experiences. Personal experiences are valued as evidence of concrete knowledge. Using communication in evaluating knowledge claims is critical. The narrative method allows a person to tell their story or share their experience. Experience births knowledge, and the best way to understand African-American women's ideas is to allow them to share the experiences that led to the development of their unique standpoint and ideas (Collins, 1989).

This research study provided African-American women superintendents an opportunity to share their perceptions of barriers and challenges they have experienced while ascending and serving in the superintendency. According to Collins (2009), Black

feminist thought includes explanations of Black women's reality by those who have lived and experienced it. Commonalities of experience suggest that certain themes will be notable in Black women's standpoints. Acquired information from survey and interview responses was examined to identify common themes and was further analyzed to determine whether these themes are relative to race, gender, or both (Collins, 2009). This study identified the barriers and challenges as described through the participants' lived experiences. Common themes of the perceived barriers and challenges were identified. This research aimed to develop an understanding of the participants' standpoints based on their experiences as African-American women superintendents and to determine whether the perceived barriers and challenges are relative to race, gender, or both.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Restatement of the Purpose

The identification of what African-American women superintendents perceive as challenges and barriers to accessing and serving in the superintendency was the purpose of this study. This research surveyed the perceptions of African-American women public school superintendents from varied geographic areas within the states of North Carolina and South Carolina to gain their perspective on challenges and barriers they have experienced while accessing and while serving in this role. Data were utilized to determine themes of identified barriers and challenges and the impact of race and/or gender on African-American women superintendents as they serve in the role. The objective of the research was to utilize surveys and interviews to find commonalities centered on the three research questions:

1. What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

2. In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

3. In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

In responding to these questions, I gained insight on African-American women superintendent perspectives of challenges and barriers and determined their relativity to gender and racial biases and discrimination. Based on the data collected and literature, this research may offer suggestions on ways to break down identified barriers and

challenges to improve the experiences of African-American women while accessing and serving in the role of public school superintendent.

Studying African-American women superintendents is important for at least two reasons: (a) the number of African-American women superintendents is low; and (b) we should understand further the barriers and challenges African-American women superintendents face so support and assistance can be provided in these positions. Understanding potential issues and challenges, known and unknown, can assist in breaking down barriers to guarantee that African-American women have unbiased experiences while serving in the superintendency and have the tools to successfully navigate any challenges they may encounter while in the position.

Where the research study of Angel et al. (2013) only focused on the challenges and barriers experienced by those who aspired to the superintendency, this research study included a focus on the barriers and challenges experienced while serving in the role of superintendent (Angel et al., 2013).

Methodology

The methodology was a mixed methods research study. There are three approaches to research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined mixed methods research as an inquiry approach involving collection of both qualitative and quantitative data. Mixed method research designs involve theoretical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Qualitative and quantitative data are integrated to provide more information than only one form of data alone can offer.

The quantitative component of this study was designed to survey 23 currently

serving African-American women superintendents in North Carolina (12) and South Carolina (11). Survey research provided a numeric description of trends, attitudes, or opinions of population by studying a sample of a specific population. It included using questionnaires for data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The survey questionnaire utilized in this study measured participant perceptions of barriers and challenges as well as their perceptions of strategies that can be employed to assist African-American women in combatting identified barriers and challenges.

The phenomenological design of this study used qualitative data from virtual interviews. The data were analyzed, and thematic commonalities in participants' lived experiences were identified. In phenomenological research, I described the lived experiences of participants. Phenomenological design has a theoretical foundation and usually includes conducting interviews. I examined participant perceptions as they related to experienced challenges and barriers rooted in gender and racial biases and discrimination.

In qualitative research, researchers use a theoretical perspective to provide an adjusted lens of study questions targeting issues of marginalized groups, such as race, class, and gender. Feminist perspectives, such as Black feminist thought, represent one of the qualitative theoretical perspectives available to researchers (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). I generated an interpretation of data collected from participants and determined whether the study was rooted in the three core themes of Black feminist thought. Black feminist thought is characterized by the knowledge of Black women as it relates to the intersecting oppression of race and gender which dominates them in a society that undervalues both women and people of African descent. Black feminist thought

recognizes intersectionality as a crucial element to understanding the experiences that frame Black women's lives because they have been placed in positions that often require them to choose between or prioritize different features of their identities (Collins, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Macias, 2015).

Design

This mixed method study was designed to collect qualitative and quantitative data using virtual interviews and a survey questionnaire as research instruments. A survey questionnaire was administered via email to each of the 23 African-American women superintendents who were currently listed in state directories as superintendents serving public school districts located in North Carolina and South Carolina. A link to the survey questionnaire was embedded in an introductory letter which outlined the purpose and description of this study. A participation consent form was included in this communication. One of the questions included in the survey questionnaire asked if the superintendents were willing to participate in a 45-60 minute virtual interview with me. Virtual interviews were conducted with a minimum of three and no more than five African-American women superintendents.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated, "a survey design provides a quantitative description of trends, attitudes, and opinions of a population, or tests associations among variables of a population, by studying a sample of that population" (p. 147). The survey design of this research provided a quantitative description of the demographics and quantitative data of trends or themes in African-American women superintendent perceptions of barriers and strategies to address barriers while accessing and serving in the superintendency. The survey questionnaire (Appendix A) that was utilized to collect

information in this research study is an adaptation of a questionnaire that was adapted and utilized by Walker (2014). With permission from Dr. Veronique N. Walker (Appendix B), the survey questionnaire was modified to meet the purpose of this research study. The adapted survey questions were designed to collect demographic and perceptual data.

The survey questionnaire used in this research study included three sections of questions: (a) demographic and biographical information, (c) perceptions of barriers to which African-American women contend while accessing and while serving in the superintendency, and (c) perceptions of strategies to assist African-American women superintendents in accessing and maintaining their role as superintendent. Survey questionnaire data were utilized to formulate questions to be asked during scheduled virtual interviews based on the most prevalent themes.

Some of the questions in the demographic and biographical information section of the survey questionnaire included (a) age range, (b) marital status, (c) number of children, (d) age of youngest child, (e) highest degree earned, (f) number of students in the district where employed, (g) present salary range, (h) number of years in present position, and (i) age at first superintendency.

Participants rated their responses to their perceptions of barriers on a scale of 1 to 5 with a rating of 1 representing "not a major barrier" and 5 representing "a major barrier." Examples of perceptions of barrier questions include (a) conflicting demands or career and family, (b) the belief that women do not make good administrators, (c) the belief that African-Americans do not make good administrators, (d) gender bias in the screening and selection process, (e) racial bias in the screening and selection process, and (f) lack of a mentor/sponsor. In this section of the survey questionnaire, participants had

an opportunity to respond to the open-ended statement, "Please cite other barriers that you perceive to impact on African-American women while accessing and serving in the superintendency."

The third and last section of the survey questionnaire asked participants to select the number on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 representing "not successful" and 5 representing "highly successful") that best represents their perception of each strategy as it relates to African-American women accessing the superintendency and maintaining their role as they serve in the superintendency. Examples of perceptions of strategies questions are (a1) increasing visibility in professional circles, (b) using a women's network similar to the "good old boy network," (c) using an African-American network similar to the "good old boy network," (d) enlisting a mentor/and or sponsor, (e) learning coping skills to deal with conflicting demands of career and family, and (f) learning how to deal with race discrimination. At the end of this section, participants had an opportunity to respond to the open-ended statement, "Please cite other strategies you perceive to be successful to African-American women in accessing the superintendency and maintaining while serving in the role of public school superintendent."

In addition to this study's purpose of identifying perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women as they ascended to the superintendency and while serving in this educational leadership role, perhaps by utilizing the data from the perceptions of strategies section of the study's survey, we can begin considering ways to effectively address and provide African-American women with the needed support to aid them in overcoming barriers and challenges they encounter.

Participants

       The participants in this study represented public school districts located in the states of North Carolina and South Carolina. Of 200 public school districts in North Carolina (115) and South Carolina (85) combined, 23 (11.5%) are led by African-American women superintendents. All 23 African-American women superintendents in North Carolina and South Carolina received an email introduction letter briefly explaining the study (Appendix C), an IRB-approved informed letter of consent (Appendix D), an online survey consent form with embedded survey link (Appendix E), and an informed consent form indicating their willingness to participate in a virtual interview (Appendix F). The informed consent form explained that study participants would be given a pseudonym to protect their identity. It also outlined participant rights to refuse to answer a question or to stop the virtual interview at any time, reschedule, or withdraw from the study.

       The first three superintendents, from either North Carolina or South Carolina, who submitted their informed consent form and contact information form indicating their willingness to participate in a virtual interview were selected to participate in an interview. Selected interview participants received a copy of their audio-recorded interview transcript to review and approve its content for accuracy.

Instrumentation

       Qualitative data were collected via virtual interviews lasting 45-60 minutes. The interviews included key questions that helped define the areas that were explored: the perceptions of barriers and challenges they have experienced while accessing and serving in the role of superintendent. Interview questions derived from the data collected from

participant responses to the survey questionnaire items. The virtual interview format permitted the interviewer and the interviewee to deviate in order to follow an idea or response in more detail. "The flexibility of this approach, particularly compared to structured interviews, also allows for discovery or elaboration of information that is important to participants but may not have previously been thought of as pertinent by the research team" (Gill et al., 2008, p. 291). Study participants were given a transcript of their interview for review to make certain their ideas and thoughts were captured accurately.

The Survey on Perceptions of Barriers and Challenges Impacting African-American Women While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency was used to survey participating African-American women superintendents in the states of North Carolina and South Carolina. Prior to Walker's (2014) adaptation of the instrument, the survey was originally created by Dulac (1992) for her research study examining profiles and perceptions of barriers and strategies that have an effect on women in attaining the superintendency. The reliability of the original instrument was established by Dulac using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient through the use of a computer application program. The reliability coefficient of Section 2 of the survey, measuring respondent perceptions of barriers, was determined to be 0.96 (Walker, 2014). There are a varied number of reports citing acceptable alpha values ranging from 0.70 to 0.95. I deemed the survey instrument to be reliable and valid and accepted the survey instrument with an alpha of 0.96, which is slightly outside of Tavakol and Dennick's (2011) acceptable range by 0.01 (Dulac, 1992; Walker, 2014).

Data Analysis

Dulac (1992) utilized a computer application program to perform an analysis of collected survey questionnaire data. Sections 2 and 3 of the survey questionnaire include Likert scale items. The data in these sections were analyzed at the interval measurement scale which includes the calculation of a composite or mean score. Descriptive statistics employed in Dulac's and Walker's (2014) studies, using the same survey instrument administered in this study, included the mean for central tendency and standard deviations for variability. Frequency distributions and measures of central tendency were compiled to provide profiles of the survey respondents. Frequency distribution was used to describe respondent perceptions of barriers and strategies for accessing and serving in the superintendency (Dulac 1992; Walker, 2014).

Virtual interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Each interview's narrative text was coded to identify themes. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined coding as "the process or organizing the material into chunks or segments of text and assigning a word or phrase to the segment in order to develop a general sense of it" (p. 247). According to Bennett et al. (2018), most approaches to qualitative analysis share common features. The first common feature, immersion, occurs when the researcher becomes more familiar with the data as they repeatedly listen to the audio, read transcripts, or look at the data. These actions provide researchers with an opportunity to check the quality of the transcription. Bennett et al. reported the second common feature as the actual process of coding the data. Theme identification is considered to be one of the most essential tasks in qualitative research (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The analysis of text involves (a) discovering themes and subthemes, (b) sorting through themes to get to a manageable

number, (c) building hierarchies of themes, and (d) linking themes into theoretical models or frameworks (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I utilized line by line analysis as the technique to discover a theme. Sandelowski (1995, as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2003) "observed that analysis of text begins with proofreading the material and simply underlining key phrases 'because they make some as yet inchoate sense'" (p. 88). I looked for repetition throughout the narrated text, searching for topics that occur and reoccur. Specific to this study, the technique entailed reading through the transcripts multiple times, making notes of words and phrases being repeated, and highlighting (coding) them (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982, as cited in Ryan & Bernard, 2003).

According to Ryan and Bernard (2003), themes come from data and the theoretical understanding of the phenomenon being studied, which in the case of this research study is Black feminist thought. Ryan and Bernard also reported that even with a fixed set of open-ended questions, all the themes that emerge before the data are analyzed cannot be anticipated. Once emerging themes from the data were identified, I determined whether themes were relative to the core themes of Black feminist thought theory and to the research questions of the study. Are the identified themes of barriers and challenges which emerged from the survey questionnaire and virtual interviews directly tied to the impact of race and/or gender as African-American women superintendents ascend to or while they serve in the superintendency?

Limitations of the Study

Two possible limitations of this research study were considered: (a) the small number of African-American women superintendents of K-12 districts in North Carolina and South Carolina and (b) my own bias as the researcher. As the researcher of this study

and an African-American woman currently serving in an educational leadership role, my own experiences and cultural bias may be a limitation. Allowing each participant to review their interview transcript guaranteed that the transcript accurately reflected what they stated, which was a safeguard that was put into place to remove the possibility of this bias as a limitation of this study.

Summary

The limited number of women serving in the role of superintendent has been a topic of intrigue for many researchers; however, research centered on the underrepresentation of African-American women in this role, identifying their perceived barriers and challenges, and determining the impact of race and gender on their experiences as superintendents is limited. The goal of this mixed method study was to gain insight through the identification of themes derived from African-American women superintendent perceptions of barriers and challenges experienced while ascending to and while serving in the superintendency. This research determined whether race and/or gender have an impact African-American women in the role of superintendent. Chapter 3 gives an overview and explanation of the methodology that was used to conduct the research. This study utilized a survey questionnaire and virtual interviews to gather qualitative and quantitative data around the perceptions of barriers and challenges and possible strategies to combat identified barriers and challenges. The data collected can be used to support educational leadership preparation programs, school boards, and school districts in understanding African-American women superintendent perspectives to influence positive change in future practices considering ways to combat or eliminate barriers and challenges that were identified in this study. Chapter 4 gives an analysis of

the data collected from the survey questionnaire and virtual interviews. Data are

presented in narratives and headings of any themes and subthemes that emerged from

participant responses as they related to the research questions of this study.

Chapter 4: Analysis of the Data

The purpose of this study was to identify perceived barriers of African-American women superintendents and to determine whether race and gender have an impact on their roles as African-American women superintendents while ascending and serving in the role of superintendent. Three questions guided this research study:

1. What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

2. In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

3. In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

Data were collected from survey questionnaires and individual interviews to identify perceptions of barriers and understand the lived experiences as described by participants. The phenomenological design of this study used qualitative data from an open-ended survey question at the end of Section 2 of the survey and from participant responses during interviews. I examined participant perceptions as they related to experienced barriers and challenges rooted in gender and racial biases and discrimination. Quantitative data from Section 2 and Section 3 of the survey identified superintendents' perceived experienced barriers and their perceptions of what they deem to be highly successful strategies to employ when encountering barriers and challenges.

During the first phase of this study, an introductory email was sent on May 5, 2020 to the 23 African-American women superintendents who, at the time this research

began, were listed as currently seated public school district superintendents serving in North Carolina or South Carolina. The purpose of the introductory email was to recruit participants for the study. Superintendents were asked to complete the online survey and to indicate their willingness or agreement to participate in a virtual interview. The introductory email included an explanation of the study, an online survey consent form, a link to the online survey, and an informed consent form for interview participation. Superintendents were able to complete the online survey without making a commitment to participate in a virtual interview. During this phase of the study, it was discovered that one of the superintendents was no longer serving in the position and the interim was a male and therefore did not meet the criteria needed to participate in this study. It was also discovered at this time that another superintendent was on leave and had tendered her resignation effective June 30, 2020, thus bringing the number of currently seated and available African-American women superintendents in North Carolina and South Carolina to 21.

Of the 21 remaining African-American women superintendents, 12 (57%) completed the survey. The goal set for survey participation was 75%. In order to have reached this goal, 16 (76%) surveys would need to have been completed. I exhausted all efforts to increase the number of surveys completed. These efforts included (a) the initial introductory letter explaining the research study for the recruitment of survey respondents and virtual interview participants was emailed to superintendents on May 5, 2020; (b) a reminder email was sent on May 12, 2020, including the online survey link and online survey consent form; (c) a second reminder was sent on May 19, 2020 requesting that they complete the survey, if they had not already done so; (d) phone calls were made to

the offices of the superintendents on June 10, 2020, requesting their survey participation, if they had not already done so. Most of these calls resulted in leaving voice messages; however, two calls resulted with me speaking with one superintendent's administrative assistant and one superintendent; and (e) hard copies of the surveys were mailed the week of June 15, 2020 via United States Postal Service, including self-addressed and stamped return envelopes, to ensure anonymity. Mailing the surveys resulted in five surveys being returned. Having received only 10 completed surveys, another email was sent to superintendents on July 16, 2020, as a final plea to receive additional survey participation. Sending this email resulted in two additional surveys being completed online, bringing the total number of completed surveys to 12.

During the second phase of this study, survey data were collected and interviews were conducted concurrently. After briefly analyzing the first four completed surveys, interview questions were developed, and the scheduling of interviews began. Within the first month of data collection, three superintendents returned their signed informed consent form, indicating their willingness to participate in a virtual interview. At my request, an additional superintendent agreed to participate in an interview, bringing the total number of interview participants to four. The goal of this research study was to recruit at least three and no more than five interview participants. After the first virtual interview was conducted, the three remaining superintendents requested that their interviews be conducted via phone, due to scheduling conflicts and participant changes in interview format preferences. Interview questions were emailed to each interview participant at least 1 week prior to their scheduled interview. All interviews conducted, virtually and by phone, were audio recorded and transcribed within 1-2 days of the

interview. Interview transcripts were mailed, via United States Postal Service, to three of the superintendents. One interview participant requested that their transcript be delivered to them via email.

This chapter is a presentation of the survey results, identified commonalities or themes in participant and respondent perceptions, and the impact of race and gender on African-American women superintendents as they serve in their role. The findings are organized to address the research questions. Survey and interview data are summarized separately.

Description of the Sample

Survey respondent ages ranged between 40 to 60 years or older. All respondents identify as African-American. Two (17 %) of the respondents are single, while seven (58%) are married, and three (25%) are either divorced or separated from their spouse. Eleven of the 12 respondents (92%) have a doctoral degree. Respondents served public school districts in rural, urban, and town or small city locations with student enrollments ranging from 600 to 50,000 or more. Four (33%) of the respondents were between the ages of 40 to 49 at the time of their first superintendency, while eight (67%) were between the ages of 50 to 59. Seven (58%) of the respondents have held one superintendency, including the one held at the time of this research study, while five (42%) were currently serving in their second superintendency. The annual salary of the respondents ranges between $101,000 to more than $251,000. The total number of years the respondents have served as superintendent ranged from 1 to 12 years. Respondents served in various positions in the K-12 educational system prior to attaining the position of superintendent. Some of these positions include but are not limited to teacher, assistant

principal, principal, human resources coordinator, deputy superintendent, assistant

superintendent, and chief academic officer.

Table 1

Biographical Profile of Survey Respondents

Biographical Information	n	%
Age		
40-49	1	8
50-59	7	58
60 or more	4	33
Marital status		
Single	2	17
Married	7	58
Divorced	3	25
Highest degree earned		
Doctorate	9	92
Educational Specialist (Ed.S)	1	8
Students in district		
600-999	2	17
1,000-2,999	3	25
3,000-4,999	3	25
5,000-9,999	2	17
10,000-24,999	1	8
50,000 or more	1	8
Location of district		
Rural	10	83
Urban city or large city	1	8
Town or small city	1	8
Present salary range		
$101,000-$150,000	6	50
$151,000-$200,000	4	33
$201,000-$250,000	1	8
$251,000 or more	1	8
Years in present superintendency		
Less than 1 year	2	18
1-4 years	5	46
5-8 years	2	18
9 or more years	2	18
Years in present superintendency		
1	7	58
2	5	42
Number of superintendencies held including present one		
1-3		
4-8	4	33
9-12	5	42
	3	2

Biographical Information	n	%
Age at first superintendency		
40-49	4	33
50-59	8	67

Interview participants identified as African-American women, and their ages ranged from 40-59. All the interview participants have served between 1 to 4 years in the superintendency. One of the participants is currently serving in her second superintendency, while the other three are serving in their first superintendency. All interview participants serve public school districts located in rural areas in North Carolina and South Carolina. Interview participant school district enrollments range between 1,500 to over 16,000 students. Interview participants served in various positions as they ascended to the superintendency. These positions included but were not limited to teacher, assistant principal, principal, state-level administrator, director, and area/deputy/regional superintendent.

Research Methodology

The methodology used was based on mixed methods design. Qualitative and quantitative data were integrated to provide more evidence than only one form of data alone could offer. The phenomenological design of this study used qualitative data from virtual and phone interviews to find thematic commonalities in participant perceptions of experienced barriers through their lived experiences as African-American women superintendents. I examined participant perceptions of experienced barriers and challenges as they ascended to the superintendency and while serving in the superintendency. Qualitative data were also examined to determine participant perceptions of the impact of race and gender on their role as superintendent. The open-ended question at the end of Section 2 of the survey was analyzed to determine survey

respondent perceptions of barriers and challenges that were not included in the list of barriers previously rated using a Likert scale.

Quantitative data were collected from a survey questionnaire developed to measure African-American women superintendent perceptions of encountered barriers and challenges experienced while ascending and serving in the superintendency. I obtained permission to adapt the Survey on Perceptions of Barriers and Challenges Impacting African-American Women While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency. This instrument was originally adapted and used by Walker (2014). Walker's study examined the demographic profiles of African-American women superintendents; their perceived barriers and strategies; and whether there were any differences among the superintendents based on their age, degree, location, and years served in the position. Prior to Walker's adaptation of the instrument, the survey was originally created by Dulac (1992) for her research study examining profiles and perceptions of barriers and strategies that have an effect on women in attaining the superintendency. The reliability of the original instrument was established by Dulac using Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient through the use of a computer application program. The reliability coefficient of Section 2 of the survey, measuring respondent perceptions of barriers, was determined to be 0.96 (Walker, 2014). There are a varied number of reports citing acceptable alpha values ranging from 0.70 to 0.95. I deemed the survey instrument to be reliable and valid and accepted the survey instrument with an alpha of 0.96, which is slightly outside of Tavakol and Dennick's (2011) acceptable range by 0.01. The sample size of the survey respondents was small; therefore, SPSS was not able to be utilized to analyze the survey results. The minor adaptation of Walker's

survey instrument entailed deleting only four perception statements in Section 2 that were determined not pertinent to the research study. Per Walker's suggestion, when giving permission to use her adaptation of the instrument, the salary ranges were modified in Section 1 of the survey to more accurately reflect the current salary scales for superintendents today. The survey instrument utilized in this research study was converted from a paper-pencil format to an electronic format, using Google Form. Survey data were collected online, via Google Form, where they were analyzed, yielding pie charts and bar graphs to display data for interpretation. The biographical and demographical data in Section 1 of the survey were displayed using pie graphs. The measured assessment of respondent perceptions of barriers from Section 2 of the survey were displayed using bar graphs, indicating the number of respondents who selected a specific Likert scale rating for each barrier from 1 (not a barrier) to 5 (a major barrier).

Data Analysis

Survey Data

Data from the survey questionnaire were analyzed during the first stage of data analysis to uncover any commonalities or themes among respondents' perceived barriers. Section 2 of the survey questionnaire measured respondent perceptions of specific barriers utilizing a Likert scale of 1 to 5 as follows: 1–not a barrier, 2–a minor barrier, 3– a moderate barrier, 4–a serious barrier, and 5–a major barrier. Section 2 also included an open-ended question asking respondents to cite other barriers they perceived to have an impact on African-American women while ascending and serving in the superintendency. I combined the ratings of 3 (moderate barrier), 4 (serious barrier), and 5 (major barrier) to determine what superintendents perceived as barriers. Any barrier with a combined rating

percentage (rated 3, 4, and 5) of 75% (nine respondents) or higher was determined to represent a perceived barrier.

Gender

Based on survey data, six barriers were selected by at least 75% (nine) of the respondents as perceived barriers impacted by gender:

- the predominance of male candidates for administrative positions (92%),

- the belief that women must be better qualified than men in order to attain top-level administrative positions (92%),

- existence of the "buddy system" in which men refer other men for jobs (83%),

- lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff (83%),

- the belief that women do not make good administrators (75%), and

- ineffective or nonexistent recruiting procedures for enlisting women to the superintendency (75%).

Race

Based on survey data, nine barriers were selected by at least 75% (nine) of the respondents as perceived barriers impacted by race:

- the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators (100%),

- the belief that African-Americans must be better qualified than non-African-Americans in order to attain top-level administrative positions (100%),

- existence of the "buddy system" in which non-African-Americans refer other non-African-Americans for jobs (92%),

- lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff (92%),

- covert race discrimination (83%),

- racial bias in the screening and selection process (83%),

- lack of acceptance by African-American administrators and staff (83%),

- colleague insubordination in working for an African-American boss (82%; only 11 responded to this item), and

- the predominance of non-African-American candidates for administrative positions (75%).

Several gender-related and race-related barriers were found in the quantitative data from the survey and qualitative data from participant interview responses. Common perceived barriers of both survey respondents and interview participants were

- the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators,

- the predominance of male candidates for administrative positions,

- lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff,

- racial bias in the screening and selection process,

- gender bias in the screening and selection process,

- lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff, and

- exclusion from informal socialization process of "good old boy network."

Table 2 presents an analysis of the data from this survey indicating perceived barriers rated by respondents with a percentage of 75% (nine respondents) or higher. Data collected from the survey indicated that 100% of the respondents perceived the following as the top two perceived barriers: (a) the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators and (b) the belief that African-Americans must be better qualified than non-African-Americans in order to attain top-level administrative

positions.

Table 2

Survey Results–Superintendent Perceived Barriers

Perceived barriers	Number of respondents	Percentage
The belief that African-American women do not make good administrators	12	100
The belief that African-Americans must be better qualified than non-African-Americans in order to attain top-level administrative positions	12	100
The predominance of male candidates for administrative positions	11	92
Existence of the "buddy system" in which non-African-Americans refer other non-African-Americans for jobs	11	92
Lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff	11	92
The belief that women must be better qualified than men in order to attain top-level administrative positions.	11	92
Existence of the "buddy system" in which men refer other men for jobs.	10	83
Racial bias in the screening and selection process	10	83
Lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff	10	83
Lack of acceptance by female administrators and staff	10	83
Lack of acceptance by African-American administrators and staff	10	83
Covert race discrimination	10	83
The belief that women do not make good administrators	9	75
The predominance of non-African-American candidates for administrative positions	9	75
Exclusion from informal socialization process of "good old boy network"	9	75
Ineffective or non-existent recruiting procedures for enlisting women to the superintendency	9	75
Ineffective or non-existent recruiting procedures for enlisting African-Americans to the superintendency.	9	75
Colleagues' insubordination in working for an African-American boss	9	75

Section 2 of the survey asked respondents to cite other barriers they perceive to have an impact on African-American women while ascending and serving in the

superintendency.

Table 3

Survey – Superintendent Perceptions of Barriers

Respondent	Open-ended responses
1	"receiving the same level of pay or more for the position and work" "expected to perform as an African-American woman compared to non-African-American counterparts"
2	"Race and gender are the greatest issues."
3	"acceptance as a woman in a male-dominated profession"
4	"noise when things are difficult but silence when things are going well"
5	"lack of true support from every subset: individual support but no systemic support"

Using preliminary data from the first four survey submissions, questions around the themes of perceived barriers and the impact of race and gender were developed to be asked during the individual virtual and phone interviews:

1. Have you encountered any barriers and challenges as you ascended to the superintendency? While serving in the superintendency?

2. What is your perception of gender and how others perceive you as a woman in the role of superintendent?

3. What is your perception of race and how others perceive you as an African-American in the role of superintendent?

Data Analysis

Interview Data

Within a span of 6 weeks from receiving IRB approval, I conducted four 30- to 50-minute virtual and phone interviews with participants. The virtual interview with

Superintendent 1 was conducted via Zoom video-conferencing; however, at the request of

Superintendent 2, Superintendent 3, and Superintendent 4, their interviews were

conducted via phone. The virtual interview with Superintendent 1 and the phone

interview with Superintendent 2 were conducted as scheduled. The interviews with

Superintendent 3 and Superintendent 4 were rescheduled at least once due to various

conflicts in their schedules and availability. The audio recording of each interview was

transcribed and sent to participants for them to review and ensure that their thoughts were

accurately captured. The transcripts from the interviews were mailed, via U.S. Mail, to

Superintendent 1, Superintendent 2, and Superintendent 4. At the request of

Superintendent 3, their interview transcript was sent to them via email. Participants were

asked to contact me with any questions regarding their transcript. They were informed

that if I did not hear from them, I would consider the transcript to be an accurate

representation of their thoughts and would continue with the research study.

Depth was added to the survey results of this study through the voices of these

four African-American women superintendents during their interviews. Interview

participants were poised, articulate, and captivating as they shared the experiences of

their journey to the superintendency and their experiences as they currently serve in this

position. The range of questions prompted these women to share barriers, challenging

issues, and situations they encountered as they ascended and while currently sitting in the

seat of superintendent. In addition to sharing experienced barriers and challenges and

indicating the impact race and gender have on them in their role, the superintendents

shared strategies they perceive to be successful in combatting the barriers and challenges

they identified. Superintendents gave diverse responses as they shared their experiences

and whether race and gender have an impact on their roles. Based on information provided by participants during interview discussions, some subthemes were implicitly evident, while other subthemes and described lived experiences were unmistakably explicit and rooted in racial and/or gender bias and discrimination.

In several instances throughout the interview discussions of experienced barriers, it was difficult to discern whether race or gender impacted superintendent roles as they encountered the barriers, as they appeared to often be intertwined. Many identified subthemes overlapped and encounters could be rooted in both gender and race. As discussed in Chapter 2, according to the theory of intersectionality, being African-American and being a woman do not exist independently of one another. They are interdependent and cannot be separated. For this reason, in some shared lived experiences, participants could not say with 100% certainty that a barrier existed only because of their race or only because of their gender.

Interview transcripts and audio recordings were analyzed utilizing the process of data reduction. Data reduction is a form of data analysis that "sharpens, sorts, focuses, discards and organizes data in such a way that 'final' conclusions can be drawn and verified" (Namey et al., 2008, p. 139). Interview transcripts were uploaded into an electronic platform designed to detect word and word phrase frequency; however, there were no frequently repeated words or phrases of significance discovered in the interview participant responses. Moving beyond counting words and phrases, focus was placed on identifying and describing implicit and explicit ideas using a data-driven approach. I became immersed in the data by repeatedly listening to the audio recordings of each interview and carefully reviewing the transcript of each interview participant. This

allowed me to become familiar with the details of the data collected. As I read and reread

each response from the transcripts, I paid close attention to any trend and commonalities

or themes in the experiences the participants shared that were able to help frame the

thematic analysis. Once commonalities or themes were listed, I listened to the audio

recordings again to keep record of how many times certain ideas and thoughts were

presented in participant responses. Participant responses were then sorted, organized, and

aligned to each interview and research question. By doing this, I was able to view each

participant response as it aligned to each interview and research question. From these

actions, the identification of commonalities among participant perceptions of barriers and

challenges and the impact of race and gender on these barriers were determined. Some

thoughts and ideas were more frequently stated than others during the course of the

interviews. The two themes found to be consistent throughout all interview participant

responses and lived experience were race and gender. Implicit and explicit subthemes

were identified for each theme.

Impact of Gender

Gender defined as it relates to the context of this research study refers to the

attributed characteristics of women and men and how gender norms, as the result of these

characteristics, influence the workplace and society. Despite evidence of women being

effective in leadership roles, people often prefer male leaders. Sanchez-Hucles and Davis

(2010) reported that because of preference of male leaders, it is still harder for women to

be promoted into leadership roles than it is for males. Compared to men, it is harder for

women to be seen as effective leaders.

Issues of gender bias are ever present. One study found that women still are

perceived as being inferior in both strength and intelligence when compared to men. Women participants in the study conducted by Bernal et al. (2017) described their perceived struggles as women superintendents and discussed how being a woman has its own set of unique challenges, including the feelings of inequality. Gender-related concerns were not mentioned by any of the male participants in their study (Bernal et al., 2017). Gender-related themes from my research that emerged from the data analysis described participant perceptions of how gender impacts them as African-American women in the role of superintendent: choice of dress, male-dominated, isolation and exclusion, "good old boy network," and salary and compensation.

Choice of Dress

Dress attire was one gender-related issue shared by African-American women participants perceived to have an impact on their role as superintendent. One woman participant in a study conducted by Bernal et al. (2017) shared that during her formal evaluation, a question was asked about how she dressed; however, the male participants in their study stated that dress attire was not a point of discussion during their formal evaluation (Bernal et al., 2017).

Superintendent 1 discussed and provided examples of how choice of dress influences how others perceive African-American women in the superintendency. African-American women perceptions of gender should not matter; however, they have learned that it definitely matters to others. They described the strategic manner in which they carefully determine how they need to dress for specific types of meetings and how they select their outfits. What they choose to wear depends on the audience and whether their style of dress needs to depict a sense of "business," "cutesy," or casual.

Superintendent 1 stated,

> For that first meeting this morning, it was the city manager, the county manager,
> commissioner … that's business. They were all men. I was the only lady on the
> call. Perception … it is critically important that I better be very well aware of that
> at all times. I tell my principals as I coach them through their daily work …
> whenever you come before the board, "blazer it up." It stands for business. It
> means business. There are some meetings where I won't even wear a skirt suit. I
> wear a pant suit. On Thursdays, when I go to Rotary, I wear a pant suit, but if it is
> a formal meeting, where a lady should be about business and it should look rather
> formal, I will wear a skirt suit because a pant suit is considered a little dressed
> down for ladies. So, I try to go by all the very traditional rules for ladies and
> women in leadership.

Superintendent 1 shared an experience when their husband was assisting them
with selecting an outfit for the following day. At first, they told him to just grab
something out of the closet; but seconds later, they remembered the group with whom
they would be meeting and therefore they had to strategically plan what to wear: "I went
oops, never mind! There's a commissioner in the group. I need to have a blazer because it
needed to be about business. I didn't need to have on a dress. I didn't need to look
cutesy."

Superintendent 2 believes that their manner of dress represents their vision and
who they are as a professional woman. They explained the importance of having a vision
and being able to represent your vision, articulately and visually, through dress and style;
and because of this, they do not participate in "dress down" days in the workplace.

Throughout the interview with Superintendent 2, they repeatedly stated the phrase, "I'm always on," meaning they are always "on" display or being observed:

> You have to have a vision and to be able to articulate that vision. You're always on and so, you know, when it's "Dress Down Friday," so to speak, for the staff, I never dress down. My dress is still who I am, that you see every day during the week because I'm always on. I'm always on.

Male-Dominated

Kowalski and Brunner (2011) stated that since the position of superintendent was first created in the early 1800s, demographics alone established the school superintendency as a White man's position. The superintendency represents White men. "In national studies, with aggregate findings from representative samples, the responses of white men dominate the conclusions so heavily that the responses of women and persons of color are virtually lost" (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011, p. 150). African-American women superintendent participants shared how they have found it difficult to exist while working in a male-dominated field. African-American women superintendents shared how working in a male-dominated field has impacted them in their role as superintendent during their ascension to the role, specifically during the selection and hiring process.

Superintendent 3 stated that the selection and hiring process is competitive and that it tends to favor male candidates:

> Well, let me just say this – usually in interviews, it is a male-dominated field and the competition – the competition is swift. You can have your credentials – your credentials can be similar to a male's or even better and your experience and –

people tend to favor men in these types of positions and so, I would say, yes, I've

had to interview several times and knowing that I was prepared and certainly had

the credentials to do what I'm doing and I would say, was not really considered as

a serious contender because of my male counterparts.

Superintendent 4 provided an historical perspective of how they felt the need to

prove themselves as they ascended to the superintendency. This need presented itself as

early as the years they spent as an undergraduate student majoring in a male-dominated

field of study and it remained present as they later worked as a teacher in this same male-

dominated discipline. As the only female majoring in that discipline, they remember

hearing derogatory comments from their peers, who were all of color. Others questioned

their decision to major in what they perceived to be a "males only" discipline. They

recalled a very offensive comment made by of one of their peers, stating that their place,

as a woman, was in the kitchen:

> I believe that ever since I've entered into the world of – probably in my undergrad
>
> studies, I have always been in a position where I've had to prove myself – either
>
> prove myself as a woman or prove myself as a Black woman.

Isolation and Exclusion

According to the term "outsider within," coined by Collins (2009, p. 13), African-

American women superintendents appear to be members of the same male-dominated

group of superintendents based on having the necessary qualifications for the job and

being hired to occupy the position; however, they do not enjoy all of the benefits,

including the comradery afforded to the male superintendents. The experiences of

African-American women call attention to the stress and pressure experienced by any

group of less powerful outsiders facing the representative thought of a more powerful "insider community" (Collins, 1986, p. 529). While working in a male-dominated field, participants expressed feelings of isolation and exclusion when in the presence of their male counterparts at district-level and state-level meetings.

Superintendent 3 stated that they often feel isolated during state-level superintendent meetings where they are in the presence of approximately 100 male superintendents. Male superintendents do not make an effort to include the women superintendents or make them feel welcomed. The women superintendents are treated as outsiders within the profession. Superintendent 3 stated,

> I feel that way in professional meetings when I am with – there are 115 superintendents in the state of North Carolina. I don't feel that way in my district. I feel that way when we get together on a state level, a state-wide level. It is so obvious that women are underrepresented in the field and again, you don't see necessarily the men making any effort to be inclusive with the women. You really don't see a lot of effort taking place there.

Superintendent 4 explained the importance of finding a space to speak and engaging with male counterparts during majority male attended meetings. They believe that when opportunities are not made available for you to speak, it is important to create that space. Superintended 4 stated,

> Again, superintendency, as you know from the work that you're engaging in, is a male-dominated profession. We are always looked at as the quote/ unquote, underdog, as a woman. The experience that I most recently had is we have a small cluster of superintendents that meet. When we meet and I come into the room,

you feel it. You feel the tension. You feel the – there are times when they are

engaged in conversation and it's almost like "know your place." So, the space

isn't always provided for me to speak, but at the last meeting we had, one of the

superintendents said, "we need to let our queen speak" and I didn't know if that

was condescending or if he were authentic or that he recognized that I hadn't said

a word and really that the space wasn't provided for me to speak.

"Good Old Boy Network"

According to Revere (1987), the position of school superintendent has

traditionally been a male domain continued mainly through the "old boy" network.

School boards have also added to the network by giving preferential treatment to White

males in their selection of school superintendents. This custom or practice has led to the

number of superintendents in the United States being almost exclusively Male and white

(Revere, 1987).

An extension of the subtheme of isolation and exclusion is superintendent

perceptions of not being allowed to infiltrate what they perceived to be a "good old boy

network." A "good old boy network" is considered to be an informal system in which

men form friendships and develop career-oriented connections. Through these

connections and friendships, an exclusive network is formed where ideas are exchanged

and assistance is provided in opening doors to new opportunities. This type of

"networking" is considered a non-inclusive practice. Professional networking is

perceived to help careers in many ways, including obtaining jobs and promotion and

possibly even securing a raise in salary.

According to Combs's (2003) research on the duality of race and gender, African-

American women in managerial and executive positions, such as the superintendency, may be forced into "out-group" status in terms of informal social network. Informal networks such as "good old boy networks" for African-American women superintendents may be less available to them and may function under different magnitudes than for their African-American male and White female and male counterparts (Combs, 2003).

Aspiring African-American women superintendents and those currently serving in the role need consistent and long-term mentoring and sponsorship. The findings of a study conducted by Fields et al. (2019) revealed lack of networking as one of the barriers facing aspiring African-American women superintendents. It is difficult for African-American women to establish a network or link to organizations that are capable of seeing their potential as leaders and assisting them in their ascension to the superintendency when most of stakeholder beliefs are still rooted in the "good old boy's system" (Fields et al., 2019; Taylor & Tillman, 2009). Limited access to formal and informal networks of influence may explain why few women advance to higher levels in leadership. These types of networks are often crucial to career progression (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

It is obvious to Superintendent 3, when in the presence of male superintendents, whether at meetings or at conferences, these men have built collegial relationships, establishing their own system of networking:

> And also, when I attend professional meetings in the state, again, you know, you
> see there's a sea of men and what you're finding yourself – you can see the
> networking that is taking place and so, you have to get in there and start building
> relationships with other superintendents. You can see the networking that goes on

with the men and I would even say after hours. When the professional development is over, you can see the on-going comradery, whereas you don't see women invited to the after-hours conversations.

A strategy Superintendent 3 employs when they encounter situations of isolation and exclusion when in the presence of male superintendents "networking" is to invite themselves into their conversations:

I just go up – I just join the group. I just go up and start talking – implant myself – just embed myself into their conversations. I'll ask for their cards, their numbers. I'll call and find out who has a specialty or a strength in a certain area and especially if it's an area – I'm in a small rural district, so if it's an area that they have a strength in that I feel can benefit my district, I put no shame in my game. I go up and try to get to know that person whether they want to build a relationship with me or not. I call them. I ask questions.

In addition to the perception of being isolated and excluded from their male-counterparts, Superintendent 4 shared an experience she encountered while ascending to the superintendency, serving in the role of principal. The school had a large population of families who were of African or Jamaican descent; and therefore, Superintendent 4 believed one particular encounter with a parent occurred solely because of their gender, not their race:

It was one day that one of my parents came in and he said, quote/unquote, "I want to speak with the headmaster." Superintendent 4, who was the principal at this time, stated, "Well, we don't have no headmaster here but I'm the principal." The father then said, "I don't want to talk to you. I want to talk to him." (referring to

the male assistant principal). After learning that the male he was referring to was her assistant principal, the father still insisted that he speak with him, saying, "Well, I don't want to talk to you." She responded, "Well, let me help you understand, regardless as to the decision, it's going to ultimately be approved by me, but since you don't want to talk to me, I'm not going to force your hand," She then told her assistant principal, "You have that dialogue with him. We'll talk later" and she walked off.

Superintendent 4 explained that at that particular time and with that particular person, there was nothing they could do to change their perception of them as a woman in a leadership position. They believed it was cultural; and at that point, they had to step away because it was about the child and not about getting into a power struggle with the child's father.

Salary or Compensation

According to the results from The School Superintendents Association's 2018-2019 Superintendent Salary and Benefits Study, the median base salary for male and female superintendents is consistent; however, there are marked discrepancies: The lowest-paid female superintendent for a district serving fewer than 300 students reported a $42,000 base salary, while the lowest-paid male superintendent in the same district subgroup earned a $60,000 base salary. The highest-paid females in that category earned $158,967, compared to $249,598 for the males – more than a $90,000 difference (McCord & Finnan, 2019; Tate, 2019).

According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), when analyzing gender and pay equality in terms of men versus women or African-American versus White, the

distinctive experience of African-American women is impossible to discern. "The higher pay of White women masks the lower pay of African-American women relative to White women; the lower pay of African-Americans masks the lower pay of African-American women relative to African-American men despite African-American women's greater education" (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010, p. 176).

Superintendent 3 shared their perception of how gender impacts salary and compensation for women when compared to males. They specifically recalled a male superintendent of a neighboring school district with demographics similar to theirs being paid a significant amount more than their salary. The difference was not based on experience or qualifications. The participant and the male superintendent were both in the first year of their superintendency. Superintendent 3 stated,

> So, let's start with pay. I would say compensation. For example, I'm in the first year superintendency and I had a male counterpart in a neighboring district. He's also first year, but he was paid almost $20,000 more than I was, for the same size district with similar demographics.

Superintendent 2 perceives that when compared to males, women experiences are not considered, and therefore they are not paid equal to their male counterparts with the same or less experience, based on the salary scale:

> You look at me starting in a starting position and not what I bring to the table so you will follow the pay scale for me verbatim. If I have zero years of experience, you're going to find that I'm going to be on the zero years of experience scale, not even at the middle portion of it. You're going to place me at the beginning level unless I challenge that and prove myself to you.

Impact of Race

The biases in job attainment because of gender are apparent, but race is an additional burden found to be difficult for African-American women superintendents to overcome as they serve in the superintendency. Attitudes against women and African-Americans are expressed in subtle and blatant ways; therefore, their ascension to top-level positions, such as the superintendency, is more difficult. Women, especially African-American women, find it difficult to achieve the position of superintendent. The remaining effects of discrimination and the efforts of resolution for African-American women have presented barriers throughout the years and negatively impact their progress Leadership obstacles are more difficult to overcome for African-American women than for White women and for men (Revere, 1987; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

African-American women superintendents are more likely to experience covert discrimination and subtle prejudice as they operate in their leadership role, experiencing professional segregation as the result of both racism and sexism. Although not explicitly stated in each participant's responses, African-American women superintendents did share their perceptions of how race impacted their ascension to the superintendency and how race continues to impact them as they currently serve in this role (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

The impact of race as it relates to this study is focused on African-American women superintendents experiencing discrimination or being treated unfairly because of their race or ethnicity. According to Horowitz et al. (2019), Blacks or African-Americans are more likely than other groups to say their race has hurt their ability to succeed, while Whites most likely say their race has helped. When asked about specific situations or

experiences they may have faced because of their race or ethnicity, 65% of Blacks or African-Americans state that someone has acted as if they were suspicious of them and 60% state that someone has acted as if they thought they were not smart (Horowitz et al., 2019).

All participants replied in a very reserved manner, implicating racism in their responses. Neither participant was explicit in their shared lived experiences about race, as it impacted their role as a superintendent. Superintendents acknowledged the existence of racial discrimination experienced while in their roles; however, they do not allow race to have a negative impact on their role as African-American women serving in the superintendency.

Two participants stated in their discussions that they do not see color. Both stated they are aware of race and how others may perceive them as an African-American serving in the role of superintendent; however, they do not allow race to have a direct impact on how they do their jobs. Superintendent 1 explained that she is a leader of an institution for children of all races; therefore, regardless of their race, they are able to advocate for children of all races:

> You can be a race, but you can be connected to all races…if you choose to be. I can advocate for Indian children. I can advocate for Hawaiian children. I can advocate for Caucasian children. Female. Male. Transgender. I can advocate. Right is right and wrong is wrong. I don't care what color or gender. My job is to do what's right by people's children and I love that role. I absolutely love it.

When asked, "What is your perception of race and how others perceive you as an African-American woman in the role of superintendent," Superintendent 2 stated that

they do not see color; and from their perspective of race, they value a person for who they are and not the color of their skin. They trust people as professionals and as individuals of integrity and character until they give them a reason not to. Superintendent 2 is not afraid to have crucial conversation when necessary. They went on to explain that once a person gives them a reason to no longer trust them and they feel as though race becomes an issue, they will address the situation by having the appropriate conversation with that person. Superintendent 2 stated,

> So, my perspective is very clear. I really don't see color and I don't want people to see color, although I know they do. So, in this position as superintendent, when it comes to race, although you may see me as an African-American woman, you will also see my intelligence, you will also understand my intelligence and you will also understand my work ethic and you will also understand my experience.

The interview participants in this study implicitly stated several ways in which they perceive race has impacted their ascension to the superintendency and continues to impact them as they serve in the role of superintendent; however, they remain poised and conduct themselves as professionals and do not allow encountered barriers to adversely impact their ability to do their jobs. The following race-related themes were identified: unfair treatment in the hiring and selection process, African-American women do not make good administrators, lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators or staff, and overt racism.

Unfair Treatment in the Hiring and Selection Process

Inadequate career opportunities, racial differences in speech, lack of acceptance by society, controlling images, and stereotypes are a few of the reasons for the slow

progression of African-American women in leadership. Unfair treatment in training, preparation, and career advancement leads to limited access to professional networks for African-American women leaders and aspirants (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010).

In terms of attaining school superintendencies, African-American women have shown the least gain of all other categories of White males, White females, and Black males. African-American women are nonexistent at the top tiers of public school districts. African-American women are often pushing against inhibiting selection and hiring criteria that screen them out (Revere, 1987). Discrimination by school boards and individuals who do the hiring is difficult to prove. The four participating African-American women superintendents clearly stated that they experienced barriers in the selection and hiring process as they ascended to the superintendency. Three of the four interview participants shared lived experiences of being more than qualified for positions; however, the position was given to a less qualified person, either a non-African-American candidate or a male candidate.

Superintendent 2 discussed the politics involved in the selection and hiring process. They explained how one major barrier for them is the politics involved in the selection and hiring process. "Politics" meaning they have encountered situations where they felt they were the best candidate for the position but prior to them interviewing for the position, it had already been determined who would be hired for the position. They provided a scenario of having interviewed for a position where interviewing a certain number of candidates was just a formality of human resources compliance and legalities. This was a situation where another candidate had already been promised the position and was selected. Superintendent 2 stated,

The major barrier for me, honestly, has been the "politics of it all." You can be

the best candidate for the position, but because that position is either already

determined or pre-determined for someone else and they're just going through the

motions to do the interview process as a "check off" that they've completed it, has

probably been one of the most major barriers as I've ascended through this

trajectory of my career.

Superintendent 2 recalled being told after they interviewed for a position that they

were overqualified; however, when they asked the person responsible for hiring to

elaborate on their "overqualifications," they were unable to do so:

Ascending just with the degrees that I have, acquiring those degrees and applying

for the position or you are – you are told the experience you have – it just doesn't

fit the role in which we were looking for and when you are asking individuals to

basically maybe expound upon that, there is no reason, so to speak, it was just

something that you (they) said and you (they) probably didn't think you (they)

were going to get a follow-up question behind it.

Superintendent 2 believes that others' perceptions of African-American women

not being as knowledgeable as non-African-Americans or males impacts how African-

American women superintendents are paid or compensated:

I've been in affluent districts as well, but the – one of the barriers most certainly

is the notion that African-American women, particularly young women, may not

be as knowledgeable as the white male or the older white male and so, therefore

you don't believe that the pay – you look at me starting in a position and not what

I bring to the table so you will follow the pay scale for me verbatim.

African-American Women Do Not Make Good Administrators

Revere's (1987) research study described the career and success patterns of Black women as top-level administrators of public school districts and the circumstances that affected their present status and future role in the superintendency. Many African-American women in this study perceived themselves has being seen by others as "superwomen," having to constantly prove themselves and having to outperform the normal expectations of the position. The African-American women in this study believed their work had to be of higher quality than that of their peers and that there is a different manner of respect shown to African-American women superintendents than their White peers (Revere, 1987).

Rosette and Livingston (2012) stated that studies have shown that Blacks are generally perceived as less effective leaders than Whites as the result of negative stereotypes not being aligned with expected leadership attributes. The results of Rosette and Livingston's research study established that Black women leaders experience double jeopardy and were evaluated more negatively when compared to Black men and White women. According to Brown's (2014) study on the recruitment and retention of African-American women superintendents, African-American women are not seen as intelligent or capable of leading public school districts (Brown, 2014; Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

It can be concluded from Rosette and Livingston's (2012) study that African-American women leaders are disproportionately penalized for making mistakes on the job. According to their study, African-American women may be evaluated differently when compared to their non-African-American peers, regardless of whether their organization's or school district's performance is positive or negative. A shared barrier of

three interview participants is having to combat the notion that African-American women do not make good administrators, including the belief that African-Americans are not capable of being successful in positions of leadership and because of this belief, African-American women superintendents have higher expectations placed on them compared to their non-African-American and male counterparts. They discussed having to work harder than others to prove that they are worthy of serving in the role of superintendent (Rosette & Livingston, 2012).

Superintendent 1 discussed the challenge of expectations being higher for them, as an African-American woman, than of those who are non-African-American or male:

And those challenges include things around higher expectations of you than it could be for your counterparts who are male or who were of other races. You could see them get away with sloppy work, but you'd better not have sloppy work. You could see them get away with showing up late or just not having top-notch performance, but you'd better not show up that way. So those were the challenges, where sitting in the back of my mind at all times were the thoughts, "That had better be excellent." "This had better be superior." "This had better be "A, Number One." "This had better be exemplary." Although I can look around and see – that wasn't good. What she produced was crap and she's getting Teacher of the Year or AP of the Year or Principal of the Year and she didn't even half do anything and you are still sitting there, you know… producing.

Superintendent 2 shared that working hard to prove themselves while navigating the municipalities and the political climate is a barrier they experience as they serve in the role of superintendent. Becoming politically knowledgeable about school board

politics and local community dynamics is important. Superintendent 2 stated,

> And I think my other barrier in this position, honestly, has been working harder to prove myself among the municipalities – the political climate. I've had to learn to navigate and really truly being able to make a decision and stand on that decision knowing that you're going to be challenged.

To combat the notion of African-American women not making good administrators and African-American women not being knowledgeable enough to be successful administrators, Superintendent 2 explained how they work hard to stay abreast of educational trends and topics and how they prepare themselves to always be ready to make a statement or to answer questions when called upon to do so:

> And so, I do find myself making sure that I'm well-read, that I do more studying at night to make sure that I understand literature and what's current, and I'm able to articulate so, that if I am ever posed a question, yes, I'm going to be able to give an intelligent response.

Superintendent 2 also expressed the importance of knowing that as an African-American woman superintendent, you are always being watched. Someone is always watching how you conduct yourself, and it is important to always handle yourself in an intelligent and appropriate manner. Superintendent 2 mentioned that they always carry themselves in a manner that portrays high morals and values: "Always know that somebody is always watching, whether you see them or not. So, whatever you say, ensure that it's what you want people to hear and ensure that's what you want people to see."

Lack of Acceptance By Non-African-American Administrators or Staff

African-American women superintendents shared their awareness of who they are as African-Americans and as women. Superintendent 2 discussed and shared the feeling of "awkwardness" when they walk into rooms where they are often the only African-American or African-American woman present among all White males:

Again, I've walked into several rooms and I'm the only Black individual in there, the only African-American in there, and I'm the only African-American female in the room amongst all white males and it is awkward. You can see that there are some that will try to make you feel welcomed but then there are some that are not going to approach you at all because they don't feel you belong.

In light of the recent racial tension and social unrest being experienced in the United States during the time of this research, specifically the killing of George Floyd, the issue of police brutality against African-Americans and the various "Black Lives Matter" protests throughout the country, Superintendent 4 discussed how they have had to facilitate conversations with their executive staff about social injustice and identifying implicit biases. Their executive staff is predominately comprised of White males and White females. Through these conversations, they realized that their team genuinely did not understand why these kinds of conversations are needed, as they recalled one of their team members saying, "I don't understand what the noise is all about." Another team member made the statement, "People have been mean all along." Superintendent 4 explained that at first they were offended; and once they thought about it, they realized that this is an opportunity to make the executive team more aware of these issues and an opportunity to educate them: "It's not about people being mean. It's about being mean

towards someone who doesn't look like you. … Let me show you years of oppression, years of targeting people because of color, just because of the color their skin."

Overt Racism

Overt racism was the only barrier explicitly identified as a perceived barrier by one of the African-American women superintendent interview participants. Fifty percent of survey respondents perceived overt racism as a barrier. Superintendent 4 shared the most explicit lived experience with overt racism, as they recalled being referred to as a "little colored girl." While serving in the position of assistant superintendent, a White male parent contacted their office and told the secretary that they wanted to speak with "the girl." Once the secretary told them that there was no "girl" working in their office, he then stated that he needed to talk to the "little colored girl." The secretary's response to the parent was, "First of all, we don't have anybody here who's colored and we don't have a girl that's here." The parent then asked to speak with someone other than "her." Once the secretary made it clear to him that Superintendent 4 was the person in authority that he would need to speak with, he then said, "Well, I don't want to speak with her" and hung up. Superintendent 4 recalled how the parent later emailed the district's superintendent demanding to speak with "someone" because they could not get in touch with anyone in Superintendent 4's office:

> I got that you don't want to speak to me because of my gender and my color, man, but we can't help this and if your purpose was to really resolve an issue for your child, this is not the way to get it done.

Intersectionality

As presented in Chapter 2, African-American women find themselves at the

intersection of racism and sexism. Closely aligned with the theory of Black feminist thought, the results of this research study indicated how intersections of race and gender influence the work experiences of African-American women superintendents. The theory of intersectionality is used to "describe how Black women's experiences and identities are marginalized by tendencies to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories" (Christoffersen, 2017, p. 3). According to the theory of intersectionality, African-American women cannot choose to be only an African-American or only a woman. Being African-American and being a woman are interdependent of one another, not independent.

Considering the implication of intersectionality as it relates to this study, the African-American women superintendent participants recognize their double minority status as having had an impact on their ascension to the superintendency and it continues to impact them, in this role, as they serve; however, these African-American women superintendents do not embrace their status as a double minority as a barrier.

Simply stated, Superintendent 3 sees herself as an African-American woman superintendent. Two African-American women superintendent participants stated that their identification, whether as an African-American superintendent, a woman superintendent, or an African-American woman superintendent depends on the audience and the message they need to convey.

Superintendent 1 believes that it depends on their audience:

That's funny. It depends. I wake up in the morning as a superintendent…period.

As my day goes on, that role changes in how it needs to change to get people's

attention. Does that make sense? There are some meetings where I need to be

very clear that I am an African-American female delivering a message but then there are some meetings where I need to be very clear that I am a female superintendent speaking and it has absolutely nothing to do with race. Most of the time though, I'm finding that in this society, I'm just a superintendent advocating for children because somehow that is getting lost in the shuffle, in general. But there are some conversations where I have to put on that hat and be loud and clear about who I am as a female superintendent, who I am as an African-American female. So, I use whichever one of those voices happens to be appropriate at that time to get people's attention so they will listen to whatever I have to say on the behalf of the children.

Superintendent 4 identifies as an African-American woman, but believes that it is more important to be recognized as a human first:

You know that's a good question. To be truly honest with you, I don't know. I just see myself as someone who is working for children and I don't think I've isolated myself in any of those categories. I've never had to. I think sometimes it goes into code-switching. Like it depend on where I am. Where I am and again, going back to knowing the audience. I never forget that I am a Black woman, first and foremost and I've told people on several occasions, "I'm human first."

Superintendent 2 identifies as an African-American superintendent. They believe that in addition to being a woman in the role of superintendent, another element that makes them unique is that they are considered be a young African-American woman superintendent:

I identify myself as – in all honesty, an African-American superintendent because

that's what I am. I'm an African-American superintendent and I identify myself

that way cause for me it's a proud factor to lead, to be able to lead, to be one of

the few that can lead. Knowing that there are two things that can potentially be

regarded and that's being a female and an African-American and for me a third

would be being young in my role.

Summary

African-American women superintendent interview participants in this study were

competent and felt they had the skills to perform the job of superintendent. They were

full of high energy and enthusiasm. These women were very confident in their abilities to

lead their school districts. It was apparent during their interviews, as each African-

American woman superintendent shared their lived experiences, that they are strong-

willed and not easily dispelled as they combat the gender-related and race-related barriers

they encounter and each one's impact while ascending and as they serve in the

superintendency.

To examine the African-American women superintendent perspectives of barriers

and challenges and the impact of race and gender on their role as superintendent, I used a

mixed methods research design to answer three research questions:

1. What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-
   American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving
   in the superintendency?

2. In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-
   American woman in this position?

3. In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for an African-

American woman in this position?

One hundred percent of African-American women superintendent survey respondents rated "the belief that women do not make good administrators" and " the predominance of male candidates for administrative positions" as the two most perceived barriers experienced as they ascended to and while serving in the superintendency.

Survey and interview data collected indicate the following as the most commonly perceived barriers of both survey respondents and interview participants:

- the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators,

- the predominance of male candidates for administrative positions,

- lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff,

- racial bias in the screening and selection process,

- gender bias in the screening and selection process,

- lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff, and

- exclusion from informal socialization process of "good old boy network."

Participants in this study perceive that gender had an impact on them, as African-American women, while ascending to the superintendency and that it continues to have an impact as they currently serve in this role. Shared lived experiences illustrate the impact of gender on how they methodically choose their dress attire; how they handle working in a male-dominated field; how they deal with the isolation and exclusion, which results from the lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff; their inability to connect with informal professional networks similar to the "good old boy network"; and the marked difference in their salary and compensation when compared to their male counterparts.

Participants in this study also perceive that race had an impact on them, as African-American women, while ascending to the superintendency and that it continues to have an impact as they currently serve in this role. Shared lived experiences illustrate the impact of race during the selection and hiring process when compared to non-African-American candidates, as they combat the stereotypes and controlling images that fuel the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators, in how they handle the lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff, and experiences with overt racism.

Based on survey data results and data from interviews, African-American women superintendents perceive that they have encountered many barriers during their ascension to the superintendency and while serving in the role of superintendent. The quantitative data show that many of the perceived barriers can be categorized as race-related or gender-related barrier issues. The qualitative data find that race and gender had an impact on the African-American women participants of this study on their journey to the superintendency and how race and gender continue to impact them in their role as superintendent.

Chapter 5 provides a conclusion to the study and recommendations for further research. Chapter 5 relates the findings to literature on the topic and discusses applications and recommendations for the findings.

Chapter 5: Discussion

African-American women superintendents are underrepresented. Based on reviewed literature and statistics presented in Chapter 2, the public school superintendency is a male-dominated position. African-American women, as double minorities, are a rarity; and as a result of this status, they face exceptional unexplored barriers that hinder their careers, including the development of skills needed for leadership. Being Black and female in the United States continues to expose Black women to certain experiences. A discrepancy exists with women serving in the position of superintendent. The public school superintendency is a position woman aspire to occupy; however, very few of these women are African-American (Bernal et al., 2017; Collins, 2009; Reynolds-Dobbs et al., 2008).

Women may experience gender discrimination; however, African-American women experience both racial and gender discrimination. Race and gender discrimination linked together make it difficult, if not impossible, for African-American women to determine the true cause of discrimination they encounter when they are overlooked as they aspire to ascend to the superintendency and when they experience certain barriers and challenges while serving in the superintendency.

The intent of this study was to identify African-American women superintendent perceptions of barriers and challenges experienced while ascending and serving in the superintendency. It was also an intent of this study to determine the impact that race and/or gender have on African-American women superintendents as they serve in the superintendency. By conducting this research, we can effectively address the barriers and challenges and begin to examine ways to provide African-American women

superintendents and those who aspire to the superintendency with strategies or ways to overcome or better handle some of the identified common barriers and challenges found in this study. The design of this study was mixed method research, collecting survey and individual interview data and determining thematic connections and commonalities in participant perceptions and lived experiences. The research questions were developed and explored to identify the perceptions of challenges experienced by African-American women superintendents and the impact race and/or gender have on them as they serve in the role:

1. What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the superintendency?

2. In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

3. In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position?

This chapter provides an overview of the findings, a discussion of the framework, the limitations of the study, and recommendations for future studies.

Discussion of the Findings

Chapter 4 presented an analysis of the data based on the survey results and the individual interviews with African-American women superintendents serving public school districts in North Carolina and South Carolina. Research that examines the impact of race and/or gender on African-American women superintendents while ascending and as they serve in the role of superintendent is limited. Superintendent perceptions were the

prevailing foundation for the qualitative and quantitative data collected in this study. I collected qualitative data to find thematic connections in the lived experiences of survey respondents and interview participants and synthesized the commonalities of their experiences and perceptions.

As the result of analyzing the perceived barriers of the African-American women superintendent participants, the overriding themes that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data collected through interviews and survey responses were race and gender. Several subthemes emerged for each theme. I was able to develop themed questions to ask during the individual interviews. Participants were allowed to elaborate on their personal experiences and encounters when responding to the questions.

In response to Research Question 1, "What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the superintendency," the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators and the belief that African-Americans must be better qualified than non-African-Americans in order to attain top-level administrative positions were the highest rated perceived barriers by survey respondents. One hundred percent of respondents perceived both as major barriers.

Commonly perceived barriers experienced as participants ascended to the superintendency and while serving in the role included unfair treatment during the selection and hiring process (racial and gender biases in the screening and selection process), the African-American female working in a male-dominated field which led to other barriers such as feelings of isolation and exclusion from male and non-African-American counterparts, and not having access to networking systems within their

profession.

Based on thematic analysis of perceived barriers of survey respondents and interview participants, it was determined that the commonalities or themes of the perceived barriers were race and gender. Superintendent perceptions of experienced barriers and challenges are rooted in race and gender biases and discrimination.

In response to Research Question 2, "In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position," interview participants provided specific lived experiences illustrating the impact of gender while ascending and as they serve in the role of superintendent. Gender impacts superintendent choice of dress, specifically noting when to look "business," "cutesy," or casual. Style of dress is believed to be an extension of who they are, as a professional woman working in a male-dominated profession. It is perceived by the African-American women participants that gender has an impact on the manner in which their salary or compensation is determined. Participants believe that when determining how males and females are compensated for the same job, decisions are subjective and not based on qualifications and experience. This results in their male counterparts, of similar or less qualifications and experience, receiving higher salaries. Another effect of the impact of gender on African-American women superintendents is feeling "awkward," isolated, and excluded when attending meetings where they are the underrepresented minority among a large group of males. African-American women superintendents are excluded from the professional networking system they have witnessed exists, often referred to as a "good old boy network." African-American women superintendents do not have space or a voice while in the presence of predominantly male-attended professional meetings and events.

Based on the data collected from survey respondents and interview participants, African-American women superintendents have been and still are impacted by gender. It is mainly embedded in unfair treatment during the selection and hiring process, challenges working in a male-dominated field, the isolation and exclusion from male-dominated informal networking systems, and not having a space or voice as professionals when in the presence of male counterparts.

In response to Research Question 3, "In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position," superintendents shared lived experiences of being more than qualified for a position; however, the position was given to a less-qualified non-African-American candidate. African-American women superintendents perceive the existence of racial discrimination during the selection and hiring process either by school boards or individuals responsible for hiring. African-American women superintendents discussed that race has impacted and impacts their role while ascending and while serving in the role, specifically as it relates to the belief that African-American women are not capable of being good administrators and they lack the qualifications and knowledge needed to be successful. African-American women superintendents believe that because of the stereotype of African-Americans not being smart enough to be in a role of leadership, their decisions are constantly being challenged. African-American women superintendents shared their experiences of the expectations placed on them as being higher than those placed on their non-African-American colleagues. African-American women superintendents must work harder, produce exemplary work, and always be prepared to be put on the spot to answer a question or make a statement.

Based on the data collected, African-American women superintendents are aware of their race, how it impacts them in their role, and how others perceive them as African-American women serving in the superintendency. The African-American women superintendents who participated in this study do not allow racial discrimination and others' perceptions of them as African-Americans to negatively impact them in their role nor hinder them from doing their job. Remaining composed and keeping their focus on what is right for children was evident as one superintendent recalled an experience when she encountered overt racism from a parent which included being referred to as a "little colored girl."

The findings from this study indicate that African-American women superintendents have encountered gender-related and race-related barriers and challenges while ascending and serving in the superintendency and that both race and gender have an impact on them as African-American women in the role of superintendent. The gender-related barriers include the predominance of male candidates for administrative positions, lack of acceptance by male administrators, selection of dress attire, the belief that women do not make good administrators, gender bias in the selection and hiring process, working in a male-dominated profession, and the existence of the "good old boy network" which results in isolation and exclusion of African-American women by their male counterparts. The race-related barriers include the belief that African-American women do not make good administrators, lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff, racial bias in the selection and hiring process, and the belief that African-Americans must be better qualified than non-African-Americans in order to attain top-level administrative positions and overt racism.

The results of this research study are similar to the findings of a study conducted by Angel et al. (2013) which addressed barriers described in the lived experiences of 10 southern African-American women who aspired to the superintendency. Angel et al. used the theoretical framework of Black feminist thought to examine participant perceptions of barriers and challenges to ascending to the superintendency. The external themes of their study revealed obstacles to applying for the superintendency similar to the ones described by African-American women superintendents in my study, such as the disconnection from networks, oppression, and selection processes.

Participants of Angel et al.'s study discussed their experiences of oppression encompassing institutional, societal, and political barriers. They discussed racism, sexism, and the impact of intersectionality or "double whammy" on women in leadership roles. Participants shared their concerns regarding the amount of power local school boards are given by North Carolina law in the selecting and hiring for the superintendent position. They also mentioned the lack of networking and support systems available for state's African-American women. They stressed the value of having formal and informal networks and sponsorship, including mentors (Angel et al., 2013).

Contrary to the findings of Robinson and Shakeshaft's (2015) study, work-life and home-life balance, long days at work, visibility and tokenism, position requirements and qualifications, and school board relations were not barriers mentioned by the African-American women superintendents in my study. Robinson and Shakeshaft explored the barriers and challenges which led women superintendents to leave the profession and how these barriers became stressors that negatively impact their health. Conflicting demands of career and family were perceived as not being a barrier by 58%

of respondents, and it was not mentioned by any of the interview participants in my study.

Recommendations

The findings of this research study advanced awareness of the lived experiences and perspectives of barriers and challenges of African-American women who are underrepresented as public school superintendents. This study also explored the impact of race and gender while the African-American women superintendents ascended and as they serve in the role of superintendent.

The African-American women superintendent respondents and interview participants of my research study perceive that the following strategies have a successful impact on African-American women accessing the superintendency and maintaining their role as they serve in the superintendency. The following were rated as "highly successful" by 100% (12) of the respondents:

- Obtaining a doctorate

- Reliance upon religious or spiritual belief systems

- Gaining access to community power groups

- Knowing current trends in education

- Developing self-confidence in public sphere activities such as interacting with community organizations, nurturing contacts, and addressing audiences

- Developing a strong self-concept

- Developing a political "know-how"

- Learning strategies of successful women in other fields

- Learning how to deal with sex discrimination

- Learning how to deal with race discrimination

- Developing a networking system for African-American women superintendents

Based on my research findings, it is recommended that school boards, hiring personnel, educational leadership programs, and executive leadership organizations work together with African-American women superintendents to design and implement strategies to combat perceived barriers and lessen the impact that race and gender bias and discrimination have on African-American women superintendents as they progress toward attaining the position of superintendent and as they serve in the role.

Public school districts and educational organizations should recognize the barriers and challenges African-American women superintendents encounter and be sensitive to the need for more attention to be focused on their experiences. My hope is that this research inspires solutions to the barriers encountered by African-American women superintendents, including identifying factors closely associated with professional inclusion and exclusion.

It is recommended that implicit bias and diversity and inclusion training be provided for the before-mentioned entities to bring awareness and support to those who are in positions of power to make the necessary changes that can positively support African-American women superintendents and African-American women who aspire to this position. It is also recommended that African-American women superintendents serve as mentors for those who aspire to the superintendency.

Limitations of the Study

For this study, I solicited volunteers from what remained as a small sample pool

to complete the survey and to participate in individual interviews. I had to depend on the truthful accounts and recollections of each interview participant, regarding their lived experiences of perceived barriers and challenges encountered while ascending and serving in the superintendency.

As an African-American woman who aspires to an executive educational leadership role in the future, I eliminated the inclusion of my thoughts and opinions when reporting the findings from the qualitative data. This was accomplished by audio recording the interviews and sending interview transcripts to each interview participant for review to ensure that I captured their thoughts and ideas accurately.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Based on the current literature and the findings of this study, several issues need to be explored for future research. Future research should collect data through the lived experiences of African-American women superintendents, as there is a lack of research that shares their standpoint and voices. This study sought to identify commonly perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American woman superintendents serving public school districts in North Carolina and South Carolina while ascending and as they serve in the superintendency. This study should be replicated to include African-American women superintendents from other regions of the United States. Studies that include a wider geographic area would provide additional insight into the phenomenon of barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women serving as public school superintendents. Focusing on a larger geographic area of the United States could possibly increase the study's sample size of participants. This study sought to determine the ways in which gender and race impact the role of superintendent for African-

American women is this role. Although this study was limited to four interview participants and 12 survey respondents, it provided a comprehensive examination of how African-American women understand their experiences as superintendents, the impact of race and gender on their role, and strategies they perceive to be successful. Future studies can include the perceived barriers experienced by African-American women superintendents compared to African-American male superintendents, White male superintendents, or White women superintendents. One finding of this research was the perceived lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff. A future study could examine the perceptions of non-minority and non-minority male perceptions of their professional relationship with African-American women superintendents. African-American women perceive racial and gender biases during the selection and hiring process. A future study could examine the relationship of school boards with their African-American women superintendents and determine if or how race and gender impact the relationship.

Theoretical Framework of the Study

The theoretical perspective of Collins's (2009) Black feminist thought was used to provide an adjusted lens of study questions targeting issues of marginalized groups, such as race and gender. Mixed method research design involves theoretical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. Black feminist thought theory clarifies a standpoint of and for Black women. Through the application of this theory, it was found that African-American women superintendents have a distinctive standpoint on, or perspective of, their lived experiences during their ascension and while serving in the superintendency. It was also found that there are certain commonalities of the perceptions shared by African-

American women superintendents as a group. I generated an interpretation of data collected from participants and determined that the study was rooted in the core themes of Black feminist thought:

1. *Interconnected nature of race and gender oppression in the personal and work lives of Black women* – The condition of African-American women superintendent employment, especially racial discrimination in the workplace, was examined. According to Collins (1990), the effects of institutionalized racism remains visible and is so intense that it almost seems tangible for African-American women. African-Americans face racism in everyday situations, including workplaces, schools, stores, and daily interactions. Qualitative and quantitative data from my research study found perceptions of disparity in compensation; a lack of acceptance by non-African-American administrators and staff; unfair treatment in the hiring and selection process; and in some encounters, overt racism.

2. *The embodiment of positive self-definition and rejecting the stereotypical and controlling images* – All four superintendents conveyed strength, assertiveness, and self-confidence as they shared their lived experiences encountering barriers. They shared not being afraid to speak their minds and to stand up for what they believe is right and in the best interest of children. They have refused to alter their behavior to appear meek and mild, as to not appear stereotyped by the controlling images of "Sapphire" or "angry Black woman" as discussed in Chapter 2. As apparent during interview discussions, participants are well aware of the stereotypical and controlling images that

society has placed on them as African-American women, and they are also aware of how others perceive them as African-American women superintendents. As a result of this awareness, they work hard to ensure that they embrace who they are as African-American women, while combatting any notions of African-American women not being knowledgeable or capable of succeeding in a leadership position.

3. *Focus on individual and group empowerment while actively struggling to resist oppression* – Just as the theory of Black feminist thought stresses the importance of positive self-definition, Superintendent 4 echoed the same sentiment when sharing their thoughts on strategies to assist other African-American women who aspire to executive leadership roles. She expressed the importance of African-American women currently serving in roles of leadership coming together and forming networks supporting one another and at the same time negating the stereotypes and controlling images society has placed on them:

> And I think that we, as a Black woman, need to galvanize and support one another because the competition and the inequities are real and I think that coming together and formulating a group for leaders is something that would be positive and that is something that I crave for right now. Just being around a group of women who understand the plight and that they can become your thought partners.

Based on the findings in this mixed method study, in order to support African-American women superintendents as they combat experienced barriers and challenges

and deal with the impact race and gender have on their role as African-American women superintendents, we must identify the barriers and develop strategies to employ to give these women and women who aspire to the position the tools necessary to be successful. This is a conversation that needs to take place now more than ever. Just as we ask our teachers and staff to evolve in their awareness and understanding in order to be effective in their jobs, we must hold district-level personnel and school boards to the same standards, requiring them to collaborate with African-American women superintendents and address the identified barriers and challenges inhibiting their success and longevity in the superintendency.

Conclusion

In this study, I explored the perceptions of African-American women superintendents serving in public school districts in North Carolina and South Carolina through their lived experiences. I wanted to know: (a) What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women public school superintendents while ascending and serving in the superintendency; (b) In what ways does gender impact the role of the superintendent for an African-American woman in this position; and (c) In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for an African-American woman in this position? During this study, African-American women superintendents reported barriers they encountered while ascending and serving in the superintendency and how race and gender impact them as African-American women in this position. It is important to understand African-American women superintendent perceptions of barriers and the impact race and gender have on them as they serve as African-American women in this position. The needs of African-American women superintendents should be examined;

and holistic plans need to be developed to aid in their success as they navigate the

superintendency, overcoming obstacles and barriers possibly rooted in race, gender bias,

and discrimination.

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Appendix A

Adapted Survey Questionnaire

Survey Questionnaire on Perceptions of Barriers Impacting African-American Women Superintendents While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

I. Demographic Information

Please select the most appropriate answer.

1. Age

A. Under 25 years

B. 25 - 29

C. 30 - 39

D. 40 - 49

E. 50 - 59

F. 60 or over

2. Marital Status

A. Single

B. Married

C. Widowed

D. Divorced or Separated

3. Number of Children in School (K-12)

A. 0

B. 1

C. 2

D. 3

E. 4 or more

4. Age of Youngest Child

A. 0-5

B. 6 -12

C. 13 - 18

D. 18 or over

5. Highest Degree Earned

A. Bachelor's

B. Master's

C. Doctorate

D. Advanced Degree (ex. Ed.S.)

6. Racial/ Ethnic Origin

A. African-American, non-Hispanic origin

B. American Indian/ Alaskan Native

C. Asian or Pacific Islander

D. Hispanic/ Latino

E. White, not Hispanic origin

F. Other

7. Extended Family in Immediate Area

A. Yes

B. No

8. Number of Students in District Where

Employed

A. 1 - 299

B. 300 - 599

C. 600 - 999

D. 1,000 - 2,999

E. 3,000 - 4,999

F. 5,000 - 9,999

G. 10,000 - 24,999

H. 25,000 - 49,000

I. 50,000 or more

9. Location of District Where Employed

A. Rural

B. Town or small city

C. Suburb

D. Urban city or large city

10. Present Salary Range

A. Less than $100,000

B. $101,000 - $150,000

C. $151,000 - $200,000

D. $201,000 - $250,000

E. $251,000 or more

Survey Questionnaire on Perceptions of Barriers Impacting African-American Women Superintendents While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

11. Number of Years in Present Position

A. Less than one year

B. 1 - 4 years

C. 5 - 8 years

D. 9 or more years

12. Longest Superintendency Held

A. Less than one year

B. 1 - 4 years

C. 5 - 8 years

D. 9 or more years

13. Number of Superintendencies Held

Including Present One

A. 1

B. 2

C. 3

D. 4

E. 5 or more

14. Total Number of Years Served in the

Position of Superintendent

A. 1 - 3

B. 4 - 8

C. 9 - 12

D. 13 or more

15. Age at First Superintendency

    A. Under 25 years

    B. 25 - 29

    C. 30 - 39

    D. 40 – 4

    E. 50 - 59

    F. 60 or over

Please list in rank order all positions you have held in the K-12 educational system beginning with your first position.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Survey Questionnaire on Perceptions of Barriers Impacting African-American Women Superintendents While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

II. Perceptions of Barriers

Please select the number on the scale that best describes your perception of the possible barrier that African-American women must contend with while accessing and serving in the superintendency.

Not a Barrier				**A Major Barrier**
1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

1. Conflicting demands of career and family.

2. Lack of ability to relocate as a result of personal commitment.

3. The belief that women do not make good administrators.

4. The belief that African-American women do not make good administrators.

5. Inappropriate career path experiences.

6. Childhood socializations to "proper" roles for men and women.

7. Childhood socialization to "proper" roles for African-Americans.

8. The predominance of male candidates for administrative positions.

9. The predominance of non-African-American candidates for administrative positions.

10. Lack of a mentor and/ or sponsor.

11. Existence of the "buddy system" in which men refer other men for jobs.

12. Existence of the "buddy system" in which non-African-Americans refer non-African-Americans for jobs.

13. Doubt by those in a hiring position of women's long term career commitment.

14. Doubt by those in a hiring position of African-Americans' long term career commitment.

15. Lack of self-confidence in ability to succeed in top jobs.

16. Gender bias in the screening and selection process.

17. Racial bias in the screening and selection process.

18. Exclusion from informal socialization process of "Good Old Boy Network."

19. Lack of self-confidence in public sphere activities such as interacting with community organizations, nurturing contacts, addressing audiences.

20. Ineffective or non-existent recruiting procedures for enlisting women to the superintendency.

21. Ineffective or non-existent recruiting procedures for enlisting African-Americans to the superintendency.

Survey Questionnaire on Perceptions of Barriers Impacting African-American Women Superintendents While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

22. Lack of acceptance by male administrators and staff.

23. Lack of acceptance by female administrators and staff

24. Lack of acceptance of non-African-American administrators and staff.

25. Lack of acceptance by African-American administrators and staff.

26. Lack of political "know-how" necessary to function at top-level administrative positions.

27. The belief that women must be better qualified than men in order to attain top-level administrative positions.

28. The belief that African-Americans must be better qualified than non-African-Americans in order to attain top-level administrative.

29. Lack of a strong network similar to the "Good Old Boy Network."

30. Covert sex discrimination.

31. Overt race discrimination.

32. Covert race discrimination.

33. Overt race discrimination.

34. Colleagues' insubordination in working for a female boss.

35. Colleagues' insubordination in working for an African-American boss.

Please cite other barriers that you perceive to impact on African-American women while accessing and serving in the superintendency.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Survey Questionnaire on Perceptions of Barriers Impacting African-American Women Superintendents While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

III. Perceptions of Strategies

Please select the number on the scale that best represents your perception of each strategy as it relates to the success of its impact on African-American women accessing the superintendency and maintaining their role as they serve in the superintendency.

Not Successful   **Highly Successful**

1   **2**   **3**   **4**   **5**

1. Increasing visibility in professional circles.

2. Obtaining a doctorate.

3. Using a women's network similar to the "Good Old Boy Network."

4. Using an African-American network similar to the "Good Old Boy Network."

5. Gaining access to community power groups.

6. Enlisting a mentor and/ or sponsor.

7. Obtaining the support of family.

8. Reliance upon religious or spiritual belief systems.

9. Knowing current trends in education.

10. Learning coping skills to deal with conflicting demands of career and family.

11. Developing self-confidence in public sphere activities such as interacting with community organizations, nurturing contacts, and addressing audiences.

12. Developing a strong self-concept.

13. Learning how to deal with sex discrimination.

14. Learning how to deal with race discrimination.

15. Adopting a female role model.

16. Adopting an African-American role model.

17. Developing political "know-how."

18. Learning strategies of successful women in other fields.

19. Learning strategies of successful African-American women in other fields.

Please cite other strategies that you perceive to be successful to African-American women in accessing the superintendency and maintaining while serving in the role of superintendent.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B

Permission to Use Survey

December 7, 2019

Dr. XXXXXX,

I am currently an Assistant Principal in XXX, North Carolina and a doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University which is located in Boiling Springs, North Carolina. My dissertation topic is focused on the perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African- American women superintendents serving K-12 public school districts.

I am writing to you to request your permission to use all or partial contents of your doctoral dissertation's questionnaire. If you grant permission, please sign and return, electronically, the attached form titled, "Consent Form for Use of Questionnaire".

Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact either via email or phone (704-408-8550).

Respectfully submitted,

Shelly Goines-Harris

Shelly Goines-Harris

XXXXXXX@gmail.com

704-XXX-XXXX (Cell)

Appendix C

Letter of Introduction

Recruitment of Participants/ Introduction Email Letter

Dear [African-American Female Superintendent]:

I am currently a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Education at Gardner-Webb University. I am conducting a research study on African-American women public school superintendents and their perceptions of barriers and challenges experienced while accessing and serving in the role of superintendent. I am also interested in the ways they perceive gender and race as factors in how they enact their role as superintendent.

Literature addressing the experiences of the African-American woman superintendent is limited and the experiences of African-American women are often represented as those of white males and women in general. I am inviting you to participate in this study and through your participation, you will be provided an opportunity to contribute to the body of research on the lived experiences of African-American women superintendents. My hope is that this study will serve as a resource for African-American women currently serving in the superintendency and those who aspire to do so. Your participation is completely voluntary.

I have outlined the expectations below to assist with understanding the expectancies of this study:

- Completion of a survey questionnaire within one-week of the receipt of this email. The survey questionnaire is estimated to take approximately 10 minutes to complete. The electronic submission of survey responses is anonymous.

o Informed Consent Form for Online Survey

- Participation in a 45-minute audio-recorded individual virtual interview via Zoom video-conferencing (session will be password protected)

o You can participate in the completion of the survey questionnaire and choose not to participate in an individual virtual interview (see attached Informed Consent Form)

After the audio-recorded virtual interview have been transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review the transcripts prior to the submission of the final draft of my study. This will ensure that I have accurately captured information shared during the interview.

If you accept this invitation to participate in this research study, please complete and return the Informed Consent Form that is attached to this email no later than ***Tuesday, May 12, 2020.***

Confidentiality will be maintained throughout this process. Data collected as part of the interview process will be kept anonymous and no names will be reported or disclosed in

this study. The electronic submission of your survey questionnaire responses will be anonymous. There are no anticipated risks of this study. If you have any additional questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me (XXXXX) or my faculty advisor, Dr. Bruce Boyles (XXXXX).

I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate in this enthusing research study that will expand the body of research on African-American women public school superintendents. As a school-level administrator, I fully recognize the demands on your time. I thank you in advance for your support and attention. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Respectfully,

Shelly Goines-Harris

Doctoral Candidate, Gardner-Webb University

Appendix D

Informed Consent Form

Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: African-American Women Superintendents: Perceived Challenges and Barriers Experienced While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

Researcher: Shelly Goines-Harris /Doctoral Candidate Gardner Webb University

Purpose: The study will answer three primary questions:

1) What are some perceived barriers and challenges experienced by

African-American women public school superintendents while accessing and   serving in this role?

 2) In what ways does gender impact the role of superintendent for

    African-American women while accessing and serving in this position?

 3) In what ways does race impact the role of superintendent for

    African-American women while accessing and serving in this position?

Procedure

What you will do in the study: If you agree to be in the study you will be asked to:

1.   Complete the survey questionnaire: (place link to survey questionnaire here)

2.   Participate in a virtual interview (place link to contact information form here)

Participants are allowed to skip any questions that cause discomfort. Participants can stop participation in the focus group at any time.

Time Required

It is anticipated that the study will require about *90 minutes* of your time.

Voluntary Participation

Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any of your data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identified state.

Confidentiality

Information will be collected from the interview audio-recording. The data will be transcribed and reported in the narrative of the study. Names of participants will not be used in the reporting. Data will be stored on the researcher's password protected laptop and will be deleted at the conclusion of the study.

Anonymous Data

The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data.

Confidentiality Cannot be Guaranteed

Because of the nature of the data, I cannot guarantee your data will be confidential and it may be possible that others will know what you have reported

Risks

There are no anticipated risks in this study.

If, as a result of the study, you experience discomfort and would like to discuss your thoughts or feelings with a counselor, please contact the following individual for assistance.

Benefits

There are no direct benefits associated with participation in this study. The study may help us to understand how school districts can effectively develop strategies to combat identified challenges and barriers to better support African-American women as they work toward accessing the superintendency and as they serve as superintendents. The Institutional Review Board at Gardner-Webb University has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants.

Payment

You will receive no payment for participating in the study.

Right to Withdraw from the Study

You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your audio-recorded interview will be destroyed.

How to Withdraw from the Study

●   If you want to withdraw from the study, please tell the researcher and leave the room. There is no penalty for withdrawing.

● If you would like to withdraw after your materials have been submitted, please contact: Shelly Goines-Harris at 704-408-8550 or sgoines@gardner-webb.edu.

If you have questions about the study, contact the following individuals.

Shelly Goines-Harris

Gardner-Webb University

XXXXXXX

Dr. Bruce Boyles

Gardner-Webb University

XXXXXXX

If the research design of the study necessitates that its full scope is not explained prior to participation, it will be explained to you after completion of the study. If you have concerns about your rights or how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information, or have suggestions, please contact:

Dr. Sydney Brown

IRB Administrator

Gardner-Webb University

Boiling Springs, NC 28017

XXXX XXXX XXXX

Voluntary Consent by Participant

I have read the information in this consent form and fully understand the contents of this document. I have had a chance to ask any questions concerning this study and they have been answered for me.

_____ I agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____ I do not agree to participate in the confidential survey.

_____   I agree to participate in the in-person or virtual interview.

_____   I do not agree to participate in the in-person or virtual interview.

_____   I agree to participate in the interview session. I understand that this interview

may be audio-recorded for purposes of accuracy. The audio-recording will be

transcribed and destroyed.

_____   I do not agree to participate in the interview session(s).

_____   Date: _____

Participant Printed Name

_____   Date: _____

Participant Signature

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix E

Online Survey Consent Form

Gardner-Webb University IRB
Informed Consent Form for Online Survey

African-American Women Superintendents: Perceived Barriers and Challenges
Experienced While Accessing and Serving in the Superintendency

The purpose of this research is to identify the perceived barriers and challenges experienced by African-American women as they ascended to the superintendency and while serving in the role of superintendent. As a participant in the study, you will be asked to complete an online survey questionnaire. It is anticipated that the study will require about 10 minutes of your time. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. Data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

If you have questions about the study, contact:
Researcher's name: Shelly Goines-Harris
Researcher telephone number: XXXX
Researcher email address: XXXX

Faculty Advisor name: Dr. Bruce Boyles
Faculty Advisor telephone number: XXXX
Faculty Advisor email address: XXXX

Dr. Sydney K. Brown
IRB Institutional Administrator
Telephone: XXXX
Email: XXXX
             (Please complete by Tuesday, May 12, 2020)

Clicking the link below to continue on to the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study:

Survey Questionnaire

If you are not 18 years of age or older or you do not consent to participate, please close this window.

Appendix F

Contact Information Form

Contact Information Form

Participant's Name (First and Last):_____

Preferred Phone Number: _____

Preferred Email Address: _____

Preferred day of the week to schedule virtual interview:_____

Preferred time of day to schedule virtual interview: _____

Please share any additional information the researcher may need to know regarding the scheduling of the virtual interview:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____