INTERSECTIONALITY AND THE LEADERSHIP OF BLACK WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS

BY

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DISSERTATION

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ABSTRACT

While there has been an increase in the research related to the history and evolution of Black women’s role as leaders in education in the United States since the late 1980s, there is a lack of studies that address the perceptions, and duality of the unique barriers and challenges that Black women superintendents are confronted with in their leadership careers. Through in-depth recorded interviews of selected Black women superintendents, this study, based on a phenomenological narrative design, examined the intersectionality of race and gender in participants’ leadership experiences, focusing on interactions with school boards, local communities, professional networks, and district personnel. Black Feminist Thought was utilized as a theoretical framework to support this research. This framework provided an opportunity for Black women to relate their own stories, helping to fill a void of knowledge of the lives and behaviors of these women, long cited by scholars of educational leadership. The research question was as follows: How has the intersectionality of race and gender impacted the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents?

Key words: intersectionality, Black women, superintendents, Black Feminist Thought
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Finally, I stand on the shoulders of my ancestors. The stories of their courage and perseverance uplift and motivate me each and every day to do my best.
Dedication

In loving memory of my parents

Raymond Eugene Suggs (1928-2014)

and

Hester Barbara Nelson Suggs (1928-2016)

You were my first and greatest teachers!

God blessed me.
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PROLOGUE

Researcher’s Positionality Statement

My proposed study of the intersectionality of race and gender and its implications on the leadership experiences of selected Black women superintendents derives from my own personal experience as a Black woman superintendent of schools in a predominantly Black suburban elementary school district. As a result, I am aware that I bring a level of subjectivity to my study which will influence how I approach my subjects, my data, and my interpretation of that data and any conclusions I might draw. It is important for me to recognize these subjectivities and anticipate how they may influence my work. This positionality statement will clarify those considerations and their possible impact on my research.

Child of a Public School Educator: My mother, Hester Barbara Suggs, was a public school educator who served as a teacher and school administrator and was one of the most powerful influences for me, both personally and professionally. I watched first-hand as this Black woman juggled the roles of student, educator, wife, mother of three, and community leader during one of the most tumultuous times in the country for the Civil Rights Movement, 1961-1972. Both Champaign and Urbana schools were in the process of desegregation, and during her early experiences as a teacher and administrator, she had to combat many racial and gender barriers – receiving anonymous hate mail, being mistaken for the cafeteria lady, experiencing the dismay of white parents when they realized their child had a Black teacher or the dismissive attitude of male principals. She began her career as a kindergarten teacher in the days when one could teach kindergarten with just two years of college. She was encouraged by other Black women to return to the University of Illinois to finish her degree in elementary education when I was eight years old. I remember her sitting at our dining room table, working well into the night on her
assignments, often sharing her completed projects with us, and as a family, proudly attending her graduation ceremony. She was immediately hired by the school where she completed her student teaching, becoming the first Black teacher at Leal School in Urbana, IL. The following year she would work as a fifth-grade teacher at Dr. Howard Elementary School in Champaign. It was there that her leadership skills were noted and in 1971 she was selected as the principal of Booker T. Washington Elementary School. Washington School, long an important educational institution for the Black community on the north end of Champaign, had recently been established as a magnet program in partnership with the University of Illinois as one strategy in the desegregation plan for the Champaign schools and as a showpiece for voluntary integration, under the leadership of Odelia Wesley. For the next twenty-two years, Hester would continue and expand this plan, and in collaboration with her staff, created an innovative humanities and arts-based curriculum that attracted white students from all over the community, as well as Black children from the surrounding neighborhood. Her vision for and commitment to the children of her community, her belief in quality and innovative instruction and a nurturing environment to meet the needs of all children, and her ability to do all of this and overcome the obstacles of race and gender bias, provided me with an educational role model that has left a permanent imprint on the development of my own career path.

**Former Public School Educator:** The pursuit of education has been an extremely important value for my nuclear and extended family. I began my career in education as an instructional aide in the Title VII program in Champaign, Illinois. The following year I would be hired as a junior high school music teacher in Oak Park, Illinois, a suburban elementary school district in its first year of a plan to reconfigure its buildings from K-8 to K-6 and establish two junior high schools, in an effort to promote racial balance and maintain integrated neighborhood schools in
the village. I spent most of my first 22 years as a public school teacher/teacher leader in this school district before moving into educational administration. I was a member of the local bargaining unit of the National Education Association wherever I was employed as a teacher. Teachers were some of the most influential people in my life and I have enormous respect for the vast majority of them, which could impact on my subjectivity. It never dawned on me to think of becoming a school administrator for the first twenty years of my career. It was my experience as a teacher leader working with other teachers to create interdisciplinary curriculum at the dawn of the standards movement that brought me to the realization that I could have a greater opportunity to make positive changes that could impact the classroom as an administrator. As I transitioned to administration, I received criticism from school board members for being too sympathetic toward teachers. On the other hand, I have been frustrated by some teachers who I believe lack discernment, have low expectations for their students, and display a lack of professionalism.

**Former Public School Administrator/Superintendent:** I spent a total of 16 years as an administrator. I was the first Black principal of my elementary school and, ten years later, the first Black female superintendent of schools during a time of racial transition in a suburban community and the district where the student body was predominantly Black and the teaching staff was predominantly white. I vividly recall that the union representative for the building would meet with me to discuss teacher concerns and always prefaced her remarks by saying that much of the stress of the staff resulted because “the faces were different now,” meaning mine, I am sure. Yes, I did bring new ideas and practices to the table regarding curriculum and instruction, and midway through the first year, the union called a meeting of the staff to discuss the morale and direction of the building. Establishing the credibility of my qualifications and expertise in predominantly white environments has always been a challenge. A big part of my
focus during my three years as the principal at the school was working to earn the respect and trust of the teaching staff to bring positive change for the sake of our students. Two years later, I would move to the district office as the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and six years later, I became the superintendent. By and large, I enjoyed the challenge of the superintendency and the opportunity to build a “world-class” learning environment for the children of the community. My personal experience as a district superintendent for six years was extremely complex. I believe this situation was due, in large part, to the elements that impact the relationships between superintendents and school boards – elements of power, personality and politics. I have had experiences with members of the board of education who seemed motivated by personal interests, resented my position and educational background, who felt entitled to spend the public’s dollars on personal needs, and had little desire to improve their knowledge of governance and policy toward real improvement in the educational environment of the community’s children. I have also worked with board members who saw their election to the board as a steppingstone to other opportunities and others who sincerely wanted to provide quality education for their community. I have sometimes been disappointed by school superintendents who seem less interested in improving the education and achievement of their students and more interested maintaining their positions, placating their boards of education, and keeping up appearances. I saw too many predominantly African American suburban school districts who, year after year, failed to show academic improvement. However, I am aware that I may not understand all the factors that impacted this lack of improvement.

Age/Experience: I come to my study with nearly 38 years of experience in public education, growing up and attending school during the height of the Civil Rights Movement and having experienced many forms of school reform during my career as an education professional. This
may influence how I perceive many of the educational situations I encounter, but such experience also gives me special insights into the breadth and depth of school reform from both an historical and personal perspective not usual to most graduate students. I have worked at positions from substitute teacher, instructional aide, classroom teacher, teacher leader, building principal, district office administrator and adjunct faculty at the undergraduate and graduate level.

**Black female:** As a Black woman, I grew up essentially middle class in a predominantly integrated environment in a midwestern, college town. Both gender and racial issues impacted my identity as a Black girl and woman. As I reflect on my childhood and adolescence, I see myself as a part of that transitional generation of girls raised to adhere to traditional male and female roles, but who also witnessed the emergence of the women’s movement in the late 1960s and early 1970s and its impact on our lives. As a Black girl, my father, in particular, pushed me to focus on my education and to acquire certain “male” skills around the home such as mowing the lawn and using a hammer and drill so that I would be armed with the tools that ensured my ability to be self-reliant. However, when I asserted that I wanted to major in music as a freshman at Northwestern University and dreamed of a singing career, he agreed as long as I got my teaching certificate. So, I followed what was both a traditional and practical career path for a college-educated Black woman at the time. All the women in my family worked outside of the home, which provided them with a level of independence and economic viability for their families and they became my role models. During my formative years in the 1960s I frequently found myself being the “only” Black child or one of the “few” participating as a violinist in the district orchestra, attending 4-H summer camp or placed in the junior high school gifted program. Looking back, I realize the enormous pressure I was under to prove myself and my
value as a person to the white teachers and students in these settings. Failure was not an option and perseverance and excellence were optimal because I was in a sense, involuntarily “representing” the race. So, in this isolation I worked at balancing my love of learning, wanting to be successful, but not wanting to draw too much attention to myself. I believe I have been the object of external and internal racism and/or prejudice. As a child and adult, I have received criticism for being “too Black” and “not Black enough,” prompting me such that I learned to adopt a version of cultural code switching. This means of acculturation became an indispensable survival technique. I am adamant about demystifying the achievement gap, particularly between Black, Brown, and white students by providing strategies that can close this gap, and believe that I have been successful, but not acknowledged, for systematically facilitating the closing of that gap.

While I do believe that race was the primary issue for me as an educational leader in my relationship to the dominant white society, I would have to say that gender was my primary issue within the Black community. Although I saw an increase in the number of Black women principals and superintendents over the last twenty years, I often heard a resistance and a resentment toward Black female leadership. All too often the response to issues of student discipline and school violence from certain segments of the Black community was that “we need a man” to fill a principal or superintendent position to better handle these situations. It was as if masculinity was the magic potion to solve these problems. There was often the innuendo that every position held by a Black woman was usurping a Black man’s opportunity for leadership. As a woman educational leader, I felt I had to work to overcome being judged more on my physical appearance, my hair, and my wardrobe than my job performance. These subliminal
messages of sexism suggest a tension that diminishes Black female leadership within the Black community.

**My experience as “the outsider within”:** Both of my grandmothers worked as domestics. My paternal grandmother worked as the housekeeper for a white sorority house on the campus of the University of Illinois. Beginning when I was about 11 years old, at the end of each summer, she asked me if I would go out to the sorority house to help her for the week prior to the return of the girls. Thus, began an annual August ritual which lasted until she retired from the house. As her oldest grandchild, I was very close to her, and it never occurred to me to say “no.”

And so, I got to see, first-hand, my grandmother’s work routines and share in them for a short time. It is only now, as I read and study, that I associate her experiences as “the outsider within,” grounded in Black Feminist Thought. This framework has heightened my understanding of these early encounters.

My grandmother always dressed impeccably, and going to work was no different – pumps, hosiery, make-up, and a belted cotton house dress with room for movement. She lived within walking distance of the sorority house, so we walked the eight blocks to John Street. This house was very impressive to my youthful eyes, with a huge foyer and grand staircase to the second floor. My grandmother took her direction from the “housemother,” an older white woman, who lived in the house, assumed responsibilities for its running, and in those days, served as the girls’ chaperone. My jobs included wiping down the furniture, cleaning the mirrors and collecting books and utensils left in rooms that had been sitting empty over the summer. At lunch, Miss B, the house cook who was white, prepared lunch for the three of us, which we ate in the kitchen, with me listening to the two of them discussing house preparations, and life in general. I recall this time spent with my grandmother with great fondness. It is only recently, as I
reflect on this and other experiences, that I begin to understand how they framed my adult
*standpoint* as a Black woman as described from the perspective of Black Feminist Thought, and
provided me with tools to confront the racism and sexism of the greater society in high school, as
an undergraduate, and on the job with a sense of resilience. For me, the experience is summed up

Tomorrow,
I’ll be at the table
When company comes.
Nobody’ll dare
Say to me,
“Eat in the kitchen,”
Then.

**Constructivist:** This is a form of qualitative framework. “Social constructivists believe that
individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. Individuals develop
subjective meanings of their experiences-meanings directed toward certain objects or things.”
(Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 8). This is a perspective that I share as I begin my research. As
defined, “researchers recognize that their own backgrounds shape their interpretation and they
position themselves in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their
personal, cultural, and historical experiences.” Based on this description, I believe that this
approach to my research will allow for me to use my subjectivities to better provide
interpretation of my data.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the establishment of the position of school district superintendent in public school education, this executive-level job responsibility has been dominated by white males. As late as the 1990s, the U.S. Census Bureau characterized the superintendency as the most male-dominated executive position in the United States (Björk, 2000). Although women have held the majority of teaching positions in public schools since the 1880s (Alston, 2000), as a group they continue to be underrepresented in the ranks of American school district superintendents. The National Center for Educational Statistics report on The Condition of Education (2018) indicated that 77% of teachers in public schools were female. In contrast, the results of a 2015 study on the superintendency by the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), relying on a representative sample of superintendents nationwide, estimated that a little less than 27% of superintendents were female (Maranto, Carroll, Cheng & Teodoro, 2018; Robinson, Shakeshaft, Newcomb & Grogan, 2017). One of the findings from the 2015 Mid-Decade Survey conducted by AASA indicates that “men are still four times more likely than women to serve in the most powerful position in education, and both women and men of color are still grossly underrepresented” (Robinson, et al., 2017, p. 1). While these figures demonstrate an increase in the percentage of women superintendents from previous decades, they highlight the continuation of a gendered system in K-12 education where women teach, and men manage.

Even though the 2015 Mid-Decade Study disaggregated its findings in terms of gender, the study was “not able to provide a current snapshot of race and gender in the position in the United States” (Robinson, et.al., 2017, p. 3). The exact number of Black women superintendents in the United States is difficult to determine because there has been no consistent method for
tracking these figures. However, an examination of previous studies provides some information regarding the gradual increases in the number of Black women superintendents over time.

Between 1946 and 1956, there is only one recorded Black woman superintendent listed in the United States, Velma Dolphin Ashley (Revere, 1989). Between 1978 and 1985, the number of Black women listed as superintendents went from 5 to 25 (Arnez, 1981; Revere, 1985). At the 2004 annual conference of the National Alliance for Black School Educators (NABSE) in Dallas, Texas, it was reported that there were 114 Black women leading school districts out of a total of 15,000 superintendents across the country (Coleman, Collins, & Harrison-Williams, 2004 as reported in Pruitt, 2015). According to this 2004 finding, Black women account for less than 1% of superintendents.

In addition to, or as a result of, the low numbers of Black women in the superintendency, until the late 1980s, research on the superintendency has been almost exclusively dominated by the male perspective, described as “75 years of extant scholarship that relied primarily on White, male participants” (Brunner, 2000, p. 76). This research had been conducted by male researchers, written from a male viewpoint, and exemplified by the use of language that “reinforced the notion of superintendent as male,” by using androcentric terms such as statesman and the pronoun he (Grogan, 2000, p. 122).

As early as the 1980s, researchers were linking the lack of scholarly research that addressed Black female superintendents’ lived experiences, to the scarcity and marginalization of them in school districts throughout the United States. (Sizemore, 1986; Alston, 2000, 2005; Hibbert-Smith, 2006; McClellan, 2012). Another barrier to research surrounding Black women in educational leadership, as described by Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000), is the devaluation of research focused on people of color and its perceived subjugation as a part of the academy’s
canon. Important researchers who pioneered the scholarly study of Black women superintendents, beginning in the 1980s, include Cherry McGee Banks, C. Cryss Brunner, Bettye Collier-Thomas, Margaret Grogan, Effie H. Jones, Barbara Jackson, Xenia P. Montenegro, Amie B. Revere, Charole Shakeshaft, and Barbara Sizemore.

**Statement of the Problem**

Since the 1980s, literature on women superintendents of color has increased, highlighting unique opportunities and challenges they face as district leaders (Alston, 2005; Brown, 2014; Hibbert-Smith, 2006). However, as Downing (2009) reported, “most of the research specific to African American women superintendents has been generated through unpublished doctoral dissertations between 1985 and 2008” (p. 4). The underrepresentation of Black women educators in educational research is a direct result of the historic and socio-political fabric of society (Revere, 1987).

Recently, there is an increasing agreement on the necessity for documenting the lived experiences of Black women superintendents, as Brown (2014) argues:

The voices of many African American women superintendents have been assigned to the voices of White women and African American men. Rarely are the voices of African American women superintendents revealed to solely address the issues and challenges of recruitment and retention faced by African American women to the public school superintendency. Neither, has credence or validation been given to the impact of race, gender, and social politics on the recruitment and retention process of African American women in public school superintendency (p. 576).

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1 Throughout this study, I use the term “Black” to refer to a person with African ancestral origins as a more inclusive term for the collective experiences of this population in the United States. When I am discussing other scholarly works, I use the term African American if it is used by the researcher.
Scholars have begun to examine ways that racism and sexism have affected the career development of Black women and discouraged their interest and full attainment of the school superintendency. When the “gatekeepers” to these positions block diversity in the ranks of educational leadership, school districts and other educational institutions in the United States are denied a valuable source of leadership talent and unique skills and perspectives needed to address the complexities of contemporary educational issues. (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Brown, 2014; Walker, 2015; Pruitt, 2015; Edwards, 2016; Allen & Hughes, 2017). In fact, a major element of the research on the educational leadership of Black women was that “the confounding problem of sexism and racism were seen overwhelmingly as the prevalent causes for the fact that so few Black women occupy the superintendency in the first place” (Revere, 1987, p. 518). While there is strong evidence that race and gender discrimination are obstacles for women of color in accessing positions of leadership, the intersection of these two elements (race and gender) in their lived experiences may also provide them with diverse perspectives and cultural knowledge that enhance their ability to be successful leaders. Intersectionality is a term first introduced by Civil Rights lawyer, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to recognize the overlapping forms of discrimination regarding race, gender, and class as experienced by Black women. Since the term was first introduced, it has been adapted and expanded to reflect the experiences of multiple marginalized individuals or groups. For the purposes of this study, the intersectionality of Black women will be the focus.

**Purpose and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to provide an exploration of the experiences of selected current Black women superintendents to address the personal and professional challenges they have faced as members of at least two marginalized groups (female and Black) on their journey
to the superintendency. Further, the study seeks to examine the impact of intersections of race and gender on their leadership throughout their careers. In so doing, this study aims to provide information to prepare and support a new generation of aspiring Black women leaders.

The principle research question for this study is as follows: How has the intersectionality of race and gender impacted the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents? In addition, three specific questions will guide this study:

1. What were the barriers or challenges to the attainment of the district superintendency as perceived by Black women superintendents?
2. Are there issues or opportunities, as perceived by the participants, unique to the intersectionality of race and gender that impacted their effectiveness as district superintendents?
3. What, if any, “commonalities of perceptions” do the participants exhibit based on their experiences?

**Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought**

Black Feminist Thought will be used as the theoretical framework for this study. It is grounded in the real-life experiences of Black women resulting from generations of oppression and marginalization by the greater society. Foundational scholars include Angela Davis, bell hooks, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and literary figures, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, Audre Lorde, and others. Patricia Hill Collins deserves a special citation for her subliminal work, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (2000). This groundbreaking book, first published in 1990, is both scholarly and accessible. It has at its center seven key themes that reflect the rich diversity and multiple voices of Black women’s experiences and reaffirms the strong tradition power of Black women’s intellectualism.
Black Feminist Thought began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s as Black women began to reassess their place in white feminism, leading them to reject the limited conceptions of feminism purported by white women feminists, and sought to theorize Black feminism in the tradition of such women as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Anna Julia Cooper, Mary McLeod Bethune, Septima Clark and Ella Baker (Horsford & Tillman, 2012, p. 1).

Listing the names of these pioneering Black women gives a sense of symmetry akin to following a tradition of some West African libation rituals when the names of ancestors are called, paying homage to them and their legacy of struggle, resistance, and accomplishment, lest the community forget. According to Collins (1989), “Black feminist thought, then, specializes in formulating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African-American women” (p.750). Alston (1999), in her study to determine the barriers and assistance that Black women encountered in their pursuit of the superintendency, became one of the first Black women researchers to call out the need for a theoretical framework that speaks to the experience of Black women. She concludes that “ I believe a feminist lens of a particular lens quality is required – a lens that might be called a black feminist lens” (p. 87). Black Feminist Thought as a framework contains key concepts that will guide and support the research questions for this study and will provide direction in the interpretation and explanation of research findings.

**Significance of the Study**

This study has the potential to provide insight into unique experiences of Black women superintendents and their careers that will add to the body of knowledge of the changing superintendency. With the changing demographics of the nation and the increasing numbers of women and people of color entering administrative roles (Robinson, Shakeshaft, Newcomb, &
Grogan, 2017), it seems imperative that scholars find ways to examine these emerging trends and their impact on the diversity of leadership in American public education. It will be important through research, to encompass the wide range of voices at the table that can “contribute to reconceptualizing the superintendency” (Björk, 2000, p. 15). The reconception of the superintendency will be greatly enhanced by the knowledge and lived experiences shaped by the race and gender of the diverse and underrepresented women and men who are assuming district leadership. This reconception may provide new and innovative solutions to the complex problems found in education today. Specifically, findings can support the preparation and retention of Black women superintendents by identifying opportunities and constraints that Black women face in becoming superintendents in the United States.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter One establishes the background, context, and rationale for the study, including the statement of the problem, purpose, and research questions. In addition, the theoretical framework and significance of the study are explained. In Chapter Two, I review the relevant literature related to the topic. This will include a brief examination of the historical evolution of the superintendency in American public education, a summary of the history of Black women in education and leadership, with emphasis on the superintendency, an outline of Black feminist thought and critical race theory as frameworks for understanding the intersectionality of race and gender, and a review of selected research related to Black women in the school superintendency. Chapter Three, outlines the qualitative research design, provides information on how participants will be obtained for the study, interview methods, data collection and analysis methods, and summarizes the limitations and delimitations of the research. Chapter Four will report the findings, presenting a description of the data collected from the interviews of the Black women
superintendents in a narrative form. This data will be organized using the research questions presented in the first chapter. Chapter Five will present conclusions, including an analysis and discussion of prominent themes and findings, recommendations, and suggestions of topics for further study.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this review is to survey scholarly sources relevant to the proposed research. This literature review will (a) examine the historical evolution of the district superintendency in public education in the United States, (b) summarize the history of Black women in American education, (c) outline the frameworks of Feminist Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Black Feminist Thought as used to understand the intersectionality of race and gender, and (d) review selected research related to women superintendents, with particular emphasis on women of color.

Once I established my topic, I searched a variety of sources to learn more about previous research published on the superintendency and Black women superintendents in particular. I utilized key words related to the history and development of the superintendency, women superintendents, and Black women superintendents. In general, practitioner magazines such as *Educational Leadership* and the *School Administrator* were not good resources for the first-level search for this literature review. Utilizing databases found through the university’s library research tools and search engines, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and EBSCO, I was able to identify peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and books relevant to these topics. I was particularly interested in looking at the research conducted over time and wanted to include a brief historical background on the development of the superintendency and the development of Black administrative leadership in education, as well as more recent research on the topics. I reviewed bibliographies of books and articles for recurring citations to determine important articles and researchers related to the topic of Black women superintendents. In addition, I was able to identify various theories and theoretical approaches used by other researchers that assisted me in evaluating a framework for this study.
**Brief History of District Superintendents in the U. S.**

The position of the public school superintendent was created in the mid-1800s (Griffiths, 1966) and since its establishment, this leadership role has been dominated by White males. Women as a group continue to be underrepresented in the ranks of American public school superintendents. Maranto, Carroll, Cheng, & Teodoro (2018) suggest that the K-12 school system has a glass ceiling in which “school leaders and education policy makers often fail to see that even after decades of mainstream acceptance of equal opportunity work places, public education careers and promotion pipelines continue to be shaped by narrow gender norms” (p. 12). Until the late 1980s research on the superintendency was almost exclusively dominated by the male perspective. Female superintendents of color face unique opportunities and challenges as district leaders.

The first known superintendent was hired in 1837 in Buffalo, New York. Between 1837 and 1850, 13 urban school districts established this position. By 1890, most major cities employed superintendents (Kowalski, 2013). In the early years, superintendents had little authority and their main responsibility was to assist school boards to ensure that local districts were meeting state requirements. Local political bosses were wary that superintendents might potentially acquire power that would threaten the political and power elites of the community and infringe on the use of political patronage found in many urban centers. As a result, most of the tasks assigned to superintendents by school boards during these early days limited their access to financial and human resource responsibilities. However, over time, with the growth of urban areas, and to address a complexity of financial, facility and employment concerns, the roles of superintendents evolved, and their numbers increased.
The position of district superintendent of schools has evolved over 150 years. Throughout this evolution the position has been concerned with issues of role ambiguity, an expansion of responsibilities, leadership, and the associated power and political influence. The superintendent is the chief executive officer and senior educational leader of a local school district employed by a local board of directors, often referred to as the board of education. The role of the superintendent is to implement board policy, the day-to-day operations, long-range planning, and state requirements for the education of the community’s children (Edwards, 2007, p. 4). The specific duties of the superintendent may vary depending on the size of the school district. However, generally duties include managing the fiscal operations, hiring, and supervising school principals and district staff, overseeing curriculum, instruction, assessment, and school improvement, lobbying with political bodies for additional resources, managing communication with the public, making recommendations for board approval, and preparing the agenda for board meetings.

Callahan (1966) outlined the evolution of the role of superintendents using four conceptions in chronological order: (1) teacher-scholar (1850-early 1900s), (2) organizational manager (early 1900s-1930), (3) educational statesman (1930-mid-1950s), and (4) applied social scientist (mid 1950s-mid 1960s). Given new technologies, school reforms, and the demands of an information-based society, Kowalski (2013) expanded these conceptualizations, adding the role of effective communicator. The first conception, the teacher-scholar, described an individual selected from the teaching ranks to serve as a lead teacher with demonstrated expertise in pedagogy, but usually lacking administrative credentials. With the advent of the scientific management movement espoused by Frederick W. Taylor, superintendents were expected to be organizational managers utilizing the principals of industrial management, as
well as instructional leaders. During the 1930s, the *educational stateman* or democratic leader emerged emphasizing an individual who provided professional direction, balancing the will of the community, the community’s political climate and, a scarcity of resources brought on by the country’s economics.

The fourth of Callahan’s conceptions of the superintendency is the *applied social scientist*. Following World War II there was a dissatisfaction with democratic leadership as a match for the realities of professional practice, as well as a general dissatisfaction with public schools, and a growing call to apply the research in the social sciences to school administration. In the 1950s, supported by the Kellogg Foundation, eight major universities received grants to expanded research in the social sciences and their impact on school administration, leading to an overhaul of professional preparation programs focused on the superintendent as *applied social scientist*. It is interesting to note that this period also represents a decline in the number of women in educational leadership in the United States.

Finally, Kowalski (2013) expanded the four conceptions to five, with the addition of *effective communicator* in the 1980s. To achieve this conception, the superintendent, in pursuit of the school reform initiatives of this period, must develop expertise in what is called “relational communication.” Kowalski defines this as “a communicative process applied consciously as a way to build or strengthen relationships” (p. 397).

In contemporary practice for superintendents, “as each new role emerged, the importance of existing roles fluctuated but never became unimportant” (Kowalski, 2013, p. 17). Thus, these five roles have become essential for effective practice and versions of them appear throughout the literature surrounding the historical development of the local school superintendent position.
Brunner, Grogan and Björk (2005) counter these developmental stages of the superintendency with an evolution of the position that is less orderly, outlined in seven discursive stages. The authors contend that

Such an institution as education has incorporated many different values and beliefs over time. Discourses change according to the social, political, and economic forces at work during any given period. Thus, we begin with a documentation of the historical shifts in the superintendency, in order to determine the nature of those values and beliefs (Brunner, Grogan & Björk, 2005, p. 211-212).

1. 1829-1850 – Superintendents as clerks serving a redeemer nation
2. 1850-1900 – Superintendents as political master education or instructional leader
3. 1900-1954 – Superintendent as expert manager
4. 1954-1970s – Superintendent as communicator to the public
5. 1970-1980 – Superintendent as accountable: Living with conflict
6. 1980-1990 – Superintendent as political strategist focused on excellence
7. 1990s and beyond – Superintendent as collaborator

Brunner, et. al. posits that by the 1990s a major shift in education impacted the role of the superintendent as a professional advisor to the board of education, a leader of reforms, a manager of resources and a communicator to the public. Increasingly, factors such as society’s growing racial and ethnic diversity, a more contentious political environment, expanding expectations for the role of schooling and the accountability from special interest groups in the community resulted in a diminishing of superintendents’ positional power (p. 225-226). While there are some similarities, between the seven discursive stages presented by Brunner, et. al., and the model outline by Callahan and expanded by Kowalski, the impact of the political and social
factors outlined in the discursive stages is a major difference. For instance, Björk and Gurley (2003) believe that the superintendent as a democratic leader or statesman has never accurately reflected the role, and that the superintendent as a political strategist is a more appropriate conception. Using the rationale of the seven discursive stages, superintendents were led to collaborate with others and relationship building with stakeholder, many of whom had been left out of the discussion previously, in order to successfully implement school reforms (p. 225). Such changes set the stage for “a newly defined superintendency” (p. 230) inclusive of women and people of color.

After conducting a thorough search of research literature, education data bases and professional associations, I was unable to find a definitive total number of school district superintendents in the United States. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) states that “currently in the United States there is no set number of superintendents. While the number of school districts is easier to track, school districts without students, county districts containing more than one district, special education districts, juvenile justice districts, and special education service or immediate districts all complicate the count somewhat.” There is data on the number of school districts, the number of students and the number of teachers, but no concrete evidence of the number of superintendents. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), there are 13,598 regular school districts in the United States. The closest number I could find was in an article in the AASA journal, The School Administrator, entitled Where Are All the Women Superintendents? Glass (2000) states, “of our nation’s 13,728 superintendents, 1984 today are women” (p. 28).
Women in the Superintendency

The history of women’s entry into school supervision and the highest position of superintendent aligns with the growth of the suffragette movement in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Blount (1998) provides one of the most comprehensive accounts of this association in her book, Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995. Increasingly, school districts were hiring more women teachers in the late nineteen century. These women were single or widowed and their salaries, although low, provided them with the means to acquire property. However, as property owners, they were not entitled to vote as male property owner could. In addition, school officials and supervisors were elected positions during this period. This meant that male teachers had an opportunity to determine who supervised them by way of their vote. On the other hand, “because increasing numbers of teachers were women, and women could not vote, then many teachers effectively had no voice or control of their own working conditions and salaries” (Blount, 1998, p.66). While women educators had always been a significant part of the movement for women’s right to vote, these issues spurred teacher interest in “organizing and sustaining the suffrage movement” (p. 63) and actively lobbied for and received “the right to vote in school-related elections” (p. 66), also known as school suffrage. According to Blount, “by 1910, twenty-four states had granted women school suffrage.” Needless to say, women actively campaigned for these positions in the states where they had this right to vote. “By 1930 women accounted for nearly twenty-eight percent of county superintendents and eleven percent of all superintendents nationwide” (Blount, 1998, p. 61). It should be noted that the category of county superintendent worked between the state education agency and the local school district, and as such did not directly supervise
schools. However, the election of women to these positions was not without serious opposition from both men and women. While women performed well in these positions, as demonstrated by a review of the performance evaluations they received, they were frequently accused of not having the physical stamina necessary for the jobs (p. 68). They were held to a higher standard than their male counterparts. Superintendents’ associations actively argued that “the superintendency should become strictly appointed rather than an elected position for which candidates were selected based on their expert credentials” (p. 82). One of the organizations most vehemently opposed to elected superintendents and the county superintendency was the National Education Association (NEA). They argued that by appointing individuals to the superintendency, the politics surrounding these positions would be eliminated and the professional standards for the positions would be increased. But, inherent in their arguments was a gender bias that favored men in these positions. Women’s organizations countered that elections to these positions was an essential part of the democratic process, and gave teachers a greater voice in school administration, and, in turn, how schools operated.

A brief history of women and the superintendency in the United States would not be complete without mention of the first woman credited with leading a public school district in a major American city, Ella Flagg Young (Blount, 1998). Young served as the superintendent of schools in Chicago, Illinois from 1909-1915 and as the first female president of the NEA in 1910. She was a gifted and visionary educator and activist who was also a professor of pedagogy at the University of Chicago, where she studied and collaborated with John Dewey and completed her dissertation, *Isolation in the Schools* (1900). In many ways, Young was ahead of her time. She is often quoted for her statement regarding the future of women’s leadership in education. “Women are destined to rule the schools in every city. I look for a large majority of
the big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for superintendent” (Blount, p. 1). In her dissertation she posits “that schools have become highly differentiated institutions where individuals are dehumanized and separated from their intelligence.” She “described the process by which teachers were isolated from their reasoning and decision-making faculties by a class of administrative personnel determined to make all significant education decisions for them” (p. 167). The democratization of education and the influence of teachers are issues that continue to be debated today.

The thirty-five years leading up to the 1930s are sometimes thought of as the “golden age” for women’s leadership in American public education. The percentage of women in these leadership positions declined significantly after World War II “as the women’s movement lost its intensity, and masses of men returned to postwar life and sought work in educational administration” (Shakeshaft, 1989 as described in Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p.11).

**History of Black Women in American Education**

Over the years there has been an increase in the research related to the history of Black women in education (Alston, 2000; Brown, 2005; Collier-Thomas, 1982; Harley, 1982; Perkins, 1982; Rector, 1982; Revere, 1987, 1988 ). The underrepresentation of Black women educators in the literature and educational research is a direct result of the historic and socio-political fabric of society. Accordingly, racism and sexism has affected individuals as well as institutions.

Access to education has historically held great importance in the Black community as a gateway to greater economic and social opportunity as well as self-determination. As stated by Collier-Thomas (1982), “Education has persisted as one of the most consistent themes in the life, thought, struggle, and protest of black Americans. It has been viewed as a major avenue for acquiring first class citizenship” (p. 173).
Although Black people were often denied the opportunity to learn to read and write during slavery, there were some instances where Black women took leadership in educating Black children. During the Antebellum Period, in 1829 a religious order of Black nuns, the Oblate Sisters of Providence, was established in Baltimore, Maryland with the mission to provide for “the instruction of the children of the African race” (Rector, 1982, p. 240). Although a slave state, Maryland did not have the anti-literacy laws adopted by many southern states. Made up of free women of color and led by Sister Elizabeth Lange, the Roman Catholic order established St. Francis Academy in 1833 which enrolled free Black girls in the Baltimore community as well as boarding students from Washington D.C. and Philadelphia.

After the Civil War, newly freed men and women in great numbers seized the opportunity to acquire these skills once they were emancipated. Born into slavery in 1837, Fanny Jackson Coppin was the first Black woman graduate of Oberlin College in Ohio and would serve as the principal of the Philadelphia Institute for Colored Youth from 1869-1899. The Institute was managed by the Quaker Board of Managers and was significant as one of the first institutions of higher learning for Black youth. Coppin was a woman of great influence in the Philadelphia community and the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church and dedicated to the betterment of her race. “Writing to Frederick Douglass in 1877 on the purpose of education as she viewed it, Coppin stated that she was not interested in producing ‘mere scholars’ at the Institute, but rather students who would be committed to race ‘uplift’ ” (p. 190). Coppin State Teachers College in Baltimore, Maryland was named for her in 1909 (Perkins, 1982). During Reconstruction, freedmen schools were established and supported through the government, churches, and various groups such as the Freedmen’s Aid, American Missionary Association, the
American Baptist Home Mission Society, and the Slater, Rosenwald and Phelps-Stokes Funds, to provide the rudiments of literacy, as well as vocational training (Collier-Thomas, 1982).

The Fund for Rudimentary Schools for Southern Negroes was created through the philanthropy of Anna Thomas Jeanes, a wealthy Quaker heiress. She had previously provided monetary assistance to the Hampton Institute in Virginia. At her death, in 1908 she left a one million dollar endowment to create “a movement directed toward maintaining and assisting southern Blacks” (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 6). The Jeanes Supervisors provided one of the earliest opportunities for Black women to assume administrative leadership in education. The first Jeanes Supervising Industrial Teacher was Virginia Estelle Randolph. (Jones, L.G.E., 1937; Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Downing, M., 2009). Her success in Henrico County, Virginia led to the expansion of the use of these supervisory teachers throughout Black schools in the rural south. Focused primarily on industrial skills such as carpentry, masonry and agriculture, and home arts such as cooking and sewing, the supervisors engaged in teacher training, curriculum development, and in-service. Working with county superintendents of schools and the Cooperative Education Association, their efforts created schools that became the center of community education and improvement. Eighty percent of the supervisors were Black women and included many who were married and widowed.

Little has been written about the leadership and significant contributions of individual Black women educators and clubwomen in founding and supporting institutes for vocational training, preparatory schools, and colleges. For these women, “working for race uplift and education became intertwined” (Collins, 1990, p. 148). Most notable among many was Mary McLeod Bethune, the daughter of former slaves. She founded the Daytona Educational Industrial School Negro Women (NCNW) in 1935 (Collier-Thomas, 1882, p. 179).
Black women’s groups such as the NCNW provided a place for activism among educated Black women, including many educators. These organizations provided the opportunity for Black clubwomen to lead groups that sought to improve their communities and the conditions for Black women and children. “These women saw the activist potential of education and skillfully used this Black female sphere of influence to foster a definition of education as a cornerstone of Black community development” (Collins, 1990, p. 147). On the other hand, as Harley (1982) noted, social class differences emerged as “teachers and other professional women in the District and elsewhere frequently disassociated themselves from women of lower social stature and professional achievement in both their social lives even as they embarked upon moral and social uplift campaigns among the ‘lowly’ ” (p. 259). Black women of lower economic status frequently sought to organize themselves through “membership in church women’s groups, female auxiliaries of fraternal orders, and benevolent societies” (p. 260). Despite these differences, both groups were for the most part “unconnected to male-dominated or white institutions or organizations” (Harley, 1982, p. 257). Such untold, unsung stories of Black female leadership provide researchers with rich material to expand scholarly professional literature and give voice to the accomplishments, contributions to education and leadership philosophies of these women.

During segregation, many Black women served as teachers in all-Black K-12 and colleges. Black colleges in the south established preparatory high schools to provide training for students who wanted to pursue their education and many Black women also attended normal schools to be trained and receive certificates as teachers. Collier-Thomas (1982) reports that by 1890 the United States Census identified 15,100 Black teachers and professors in colleges. Of that number 7,864 were female and 7,236 were male. Since that time, the number of Black
female teachers has continued to exceed Black males, as their opportunities for other more lucrative careers and employment have expanded. Black colleges in the south established preparatory high schools to provide training for students who wanted to pursue their education; many Black women also attended normal schools to be trained and receive certificates as teachers. By 1920 there were over one hundred Black colleges and universities that admitted women. Among these were three exclusively for women – Scotia Academy, Spelman, and Bennett. According to Collier-Thomas (1982) it was at the end of the nineteenth century that Black women “became a major force in the segregated education system of the South” (p. 175).

Teaching and the education profession provided these women with an entry into the labor force without having to become maids or housekeepers. Despite their increased numbers, Black women teachers found jobs primarily in rural areas and for lower salaries than their white counterparts, but better than the salaries of most Black women. Haley (1982) states that for Black women, teaching positions were “highly desirable” because the position allowed them to “perform duties commensurate with their professional training” and because being an educator “carried considerable social prestige and status in the black community” (p. 256).

The Supreme Court decision of 1954 in the case of Brown v. Board of Education resulted in finding that separate, but equal educational facilities were unconstitutional. In 1954 there were 82,000 Black teachers in 17 southern and border states, teaching predominantly African American children. With the integration of schools, 11 years later, more than 38,000 Black teachers and administrators had lost their positions in the same region (Alston, 2005, p. 676). Many of these individuals were able to find new jobs, but in subordinate positions. For instance, Black individuals who assumed principal leadership in an all-Black school were often reassigned to lesser positions in formerly all-white schools. Not only was this, in many cases, demoralizing
to the individual and their standing in their communities, but it seriously impeded the ascent on
the career ladder for a generation of Black educational leaders (Alston, 2005).

**Documenting the Status of Black Superintendents**

One of the earliest attempts at documenting the status of Black superintendents in the
United States began in 1969 under the leadership of Charles D. Moody (1973), a Black
superintendent in Harvey, IL. Moody began to complete a list of school districts with Black
superintendents as a part of his doctoral study in 1969 through the Black caucus at the American
Association of School Administrators (AASA) meeting in Atlantic City. Moody sent out a letter
to Black superintendents, inviting them to attend a meeting in Chicago in November 1970, and
requesting them to submit the names of additional Black superintendents. Fourteen district
superintendents and one state superintendent attended this first meeting. All were Black men. A
second meeting occurred in August of 1971 and resulted in the formation of the National
Alliance of Black School Superintendents (NABSS) at its conclusion. Both meetings were
underwritten by the Metropolitan Applied Research Center (MARC), “a non-profit research
corporation concerned with the problems of American urban society”
(archives.nypl.org/scm/20987) and founded by Dr. Kenneth B. Clark. Dr. Clark is perhaps best
known as the psychologist, educator and writer who was an expert witness regarding the
psychological effect of segregation in education for the landmark 1954 U. S. Supreme Court
case, Brown v. the Board of Education. In April 1973, NABSS expanded its focus to include
“administrators and other educational personnel” and changed its name to the National Alliance
of Black School Educators (NABSE) (https://www.nabse.org/about/our-history/).

The next major study that looked at women and minorities was conducted by Jones and
Montenegro (1983) for the AASA’s Office of Minority Affairs. The study investigated the
trends in representation by race and sex in public school administration, the barriers that were preventing greater representation, strategies for overcoming those barriers and the trends in the career paths of those women and people of color who had achieved the superintendency up until that time. Despite problems in documentation, the study indicated the following numbers of Black superintendents from 1961-1982: 1961 – 5, 1968 – 17, 1970 – 21, 1974 – 44, 1982 – 96 (p. 10). These numbers did not distinguish superintendents by gender but provided the most accurate numbers of Black superintendents up to 1982.

The 2015 Mid-Decade Study, Gender and Race

Since the early part of the 20th century, the AASA has regularly conducted a survey on the state of the superintendency. The 2015 Mid-Decade Survey provides researchers with some of the most recent statistics, not only on the state of superintendents in the country, but also provides disaggregated data that is gender and racially based. The online survey utilized 50 items, including new questions to collect data relevant to gender. One of the limits of the survey is the low response rate. Out of a random sample of 9,000 superintendent email addresses, 845 identified their gender.

Robinson, Shakeshaft, Grogan, and Newcomb (2017) reported the gender-related findings for the following areas: career paths and time prior to the superintendency, district demographics, barriers and challenges, reasons for leaving the superintendency, career paths, and women’s perspective on leadership.

In the area of barriers and challenges identified three categories: work-family balance, negotiating partner relationships, stress, challenges, school board relations and mentors. These categories provided some enlightening results. Both white women and women of color are three to four times more likely to be childless. Under challenges, women of color were more than
twice as likely to feel that role conflict is a challenge. This suggests that the duality of being both female and Black or female and Latina, for instance, while performing their job responsibilities, the intersectionality of race and gender creates a good deal of stress.

For women, there was no difference by race in the number of years in the superintendency or their age when they became a superintendent. The average age for women in their first superintendent was 47.1 years and the length of service averaged 6.9 years. Women tended to have more degrees in preparation for their positions than men. There was no statistical difference in the number of years spent as a classroom teacher for men and women. However, there are some differences in the career paths. Fourteen percent more of women superintendents of color spent time as paraprofessionals than did White superintendents. They also brought greater experience from the military and non-educational management. Most superintendents followed the path of teacher, principal, central office/district administrator to superintendent, with minor variations.

The survey allowed for a comparison as to why participants believed they were hired and what their school boards emphasized once they were on the job. Men believed they were hired for their personal characteristics and administrative acumen. Women believed they were hired for both their curriculum and instruction knowledge and their administrative expertise. Fifty percent of women of color had the belief that they were selected by boards because of their ability to be “change agents.” Ultimately, both men and women agreed that once hired, boards emphasized three areas: effective communicator, problem solver and fiscal oversight. While women emphasized their ability with curriculum and instruction, this was a relatively low emphasis for boards of education.
Regarding mentors, 94% of women in the Mid-Decade Study indicated that they had been mentored and 72% of women had served as a mentor to a superintendent or aspiring superintendent. Racially, mentors tended to mentor members of the same race and gender. For instance, males of color mentored males of color more than other groups. A like pattern followed for each demographic group (p. 8). These results suggest that the behavior patterns and comfort level of superintendents reflects those of the greater society.

1. The profiles of women superintendents are becoming more like their male counterparts.
2. All women are more likely to head a district with a larger number of students who are homeless and a larger number of students with disabilities, than men.
3. Women are more likely to bring expertise in curriculum and instruction than men.
4. White women are more likely to be hired in smaller districts than white men.
5. Women of color are more likely than white women to lead majority-minority districts.
6. Women are more likely to be promoted from within than men. (p. 10)

One criticism of the survey is that it relies on a representative sample of superintendents across the country, but still does not provide accurate data as to the exact of men and women superintendents. Still, the data presented is some of the most comprehensive information on the status of school superintendents thus far. In the future, every effort should be made to increase the sampling.

**Research on Women of Color in the Superintendency**

The earliest known Black woman superintendent in the United States is believed to have been Velma Dolphin Ashley (Revere, 1989). She served as the superintendent of the all-Black Boley School District in Oklahoma, from 1944-1956. In its heyday, Boley, Oklahoma was one of most thriving Black towns in the United States with a population of 4,000. At the time of her
superintendency, the district had a student population of 495. She assumed leadership of the
district at age 32, in part due to a shortage of men during World War II. Her tenure as a
superintendent was overlooked by Jones and Montenegro (1983) in their 1982 survey for AASA,
which indicated that the first Black superintendent listed by name was her husband, Lillard
Ashley, who took over for her in 1956. Research indicates that there may have been other Black
women in district leadership in the country before this date, but their positions were either
“unofficial” or unrecorded. In general, Black women’s role in educational leadership was limited
beyond the role of the principalship (Alston, 2000).

Nancy L. Arnez (1982) documented the experiences of two early Black women
superintendents: Barbara A. Sizemore and Ruth B. Love. Barbara A. Sizemore who served as
the superintendent of the Washington, D.C. school district from 1973-1975, is believed to be the
first Black woman to head a major school system in the United States. Another Black woman
who assumed the role of superintendent during the 1970s was Ruth B. Love. She served as the
superintendent of schools in Oakland, CA from 1975-1981 and then moved on to serve as the

Sizemore’s tenure at the Washington D.C.’s schools received one of the first
comprehensive studies of a Black woman superintendent’s leadership experience by Arnez in her
Board Relations in Washington, D.C., 1973-75* (1981). Sizemore’s selection as the
superintendent and the ensuing controversies with the school board drew national attention. Both
Sizemore and most of the school board were Black, and the focus of the case study surrounds the
decision-making process. However, among the key elements that Arnez (1981) identified as
roots of the conflicts were “external factors of racism, classism, sexism, and the colonial status of
the District government” (p. 11). Therefore, it seems apparent that from the beginning of the appearance of Black women in the role of the superintendency, race and gender issues have impacted their leadership.

Revere (1987) studied the “career and success patterns of Black women as chief administrators of public school districts” (p. 512) in one of the earliest attempts at documenting the experiences of Black women superintendents. She verified that there were twenty-nine Black female superintendents employed in thirteen states and the District of Columbia during the 1984-85 school year. This was the largest number of Black women superintendents recorded in the history of the United States, representing 0.18 percent of the over 16,000 public school districts. Revere conducted face-to-face interviews with twenty-two of the twenty-nine superintendents. All of the superintendents began their careers as classroom teachers, although their career paths into administration and the superintendency varied after that point of entry. All were active in social, civic, and service organizations in their communities. Participants were on average older than white women superintendents when they ascended to their first superintendency, ranging from 35 to 55 years of age. The school districts they headed had student populations that ranged from 300 to 88,700, encompassing big cities, rural and suburban locations. The women in the study identified six factors that contributed to their successful rise to the superintendency: competence, industry, self-esteem, strength, interpersonal relationships, and productivity. They often inherited school districts plagued with complex problems, including financial concerns, student academic issues and other concerns. In response, the study found that its participants held common perceptions about the challenge of their positions:

They reported being viewed as ‘superwomen,’ of constantly having to prove themselves, and of trying to outperform the normal expectations of the position.
This, they felt, has been an ascendant theme for both Black men and women superintendents. They believed their work must be of a much higher quality than that of their peers and that a differential manner of respect is shown Black women superintendents that their white peers (p. 518).

These perceptions remind one of a mantra that many Black parents, at least in the past, have used to motivate and prepare their children for the racism parents expect their children to face in life. “You must be twice as good for half the chance.” For these pioneering Black women superintendents, faced with the dual factors of race and sex, this becomes an ever present challenge. Revere concludes that “administrator-bound Black women will need to continue their persistence, emotional stamina, and strong skills in order to counteract the antagonistic pulls on their way upward” (Revere, 1987, p. 519).

Jackson (1999) sought to build on the research conducted by Revere in 1985 by interviewing Black women who were serving as superintendents in 1993-94, as well as former superintendents. Through her interview process, the following themes emerged: family, church, teacher/mentor, role of the superintendent, leadership style, relationships with the school board, politics and power, and gender and race (p. 150). Although each of these themes was examined, special attention was given to the formative years of the superintendents. Jackson (1999) concluded that

from their description of their growing-up years, they had the family, church, and community support to prepare them to take risks, to develop a self-identity, sense of efficacy, and determination to accept the challenging job of leading a school system (p. 153).
By reviewing previous research studies focused on Black women superintendents, a major contribution of this study is a table that provides an accounting of the numbers of Black women superintendents over the years up until 1996. One of Jackson’s goals was to update the names of retired Black women superintendents and the districts where they served. She emphasizes the need for a complete listing of all Black women who had served as superintendents to encourage further study and documentation of their careers.

Alston (1999) identified three major barriers encountered by Black women seeking to work as superintendents: internal, external, and androcentric. Internal barriers are created for women through the acculturation of traditional roles and behaviors considered appropriate for women by way of historical and societal context. The external barriers are structures created by society to discriminate against women and androcentric barriers suggest that women who assume masculine roles, as defined by the society, should operate from a male point of view. However, overall, the women did not see racism or sexism as an obstacle in performing their job.

Regarding “facilitators” in the performance of their job, the women looked to individuals or situations within their school districts, for example, “positive working relations with the school board” or “acceptance by nonblack employers,” and personal or intrinsic factors such as religious beliefs, self-confidence or family and friends (p. 86). Finally, Alston calls for the need for a research that focuses directly of Black women and, as previously discussed, points to the need for a “black feminist lens” (p. 87) to document their lived experiences more accurately.

Alston (2005) examined the intersectionality of Black female superintendents and their leadership styles, suggesting that this intersectionality may be “possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization” (p. 586). It is evident that Alston’s search for a framework with which to fully understand the educational leadership of Black women within a
male and white dominant culture continues to evolve. She illuminates a framework of *tempered radicalism/servant leadership*, asserting that such a model “contributes to removing another layer of educational research and institutional racism that has clouded the importance of that lived experiences to our understanding of what has inadvertently kept the Black female superintendent’s unique form of leadership from being considered as a model for leadership and policy in schools” (p. 683). Tempered radicals are defined as “individuals who identify with and are more committed to their organizations and also to a cause, community or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organizations” (p. 677 as reported in Meyerson and Scully, 1995). Alston provides historical evidence of the radicalism of the actions of pioneering Black women educators in working for the improvement of the community and a mission to serve and educate Black children, often despite profound racist obstacles. She theorizes that the qualities of servant leadership and spirituality also have a strong historical context in the work of Black women leaders in education. It should be noted that leadership grounded in spirituality is not unique to Black women, and, as noted by Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) and outlined earlier in this chapter, is one of the five characteristics of women’s leadership. Alston’s “tempered radical/servant leadership conceptual frame” borrows from the Afri-centric concepts of the Kemetic concept of *Ma’at, Sankofa*, and the *Nguzo Saba* to provide for the analysis of the lived experiences of Black women superintendents.

Using Critical Race Theory as a framework, Downing (2009) examined the lives of eight African American women superintendents at the point where they were exiting their positions. This study sought to “identify and document the experiences that contributed to the decisions of selected former African American women superintendents to exit, voluntarily or involuntarily,
their public school superintendencies and not seek another one” (p. 16). Although politics was not identified as a primary reason for leaving their positions, “African American women in this study acknowledged the existence of politics in the superintendency but were not always prepared to handle its unexpected fierce intensity” (p. 188). Among the multiple areas identified as reason for exiting the superintendency were the refusal to compromise moral and ethical issues, board micromanagement and the recurring challenge of having to prove their abilities and competency to their boards of education, central office staff and others. Although racism was cited as an issue, it is interesting to note that with regard to the intersectionality of gender and race as it impacted their leadership, the superintendents cited that “sexism/gender bias was more of a challenge during their superintendencies than was racism” (p. 189).

Putting Black women at the center of research offers ways to rethink traditional models of leadership. Parker & ogilvie² (1996) state that “power and authority are not terms usually associated with African-American women in the leadership literature” (p. 189). In their study they argue that the ways in which specific racial and gender groups are socialized quite likely leads to differences in leadership styles and behaviors. Their research found that African American females in leadership tended to exhibit a more democratic style of leadership, as opposed to one that was autocratic and that both Anglo-American and African American women were more likely to be transformational, and not transactional in their processes. Evidence substantiated by Bell (1989, 1990) indicates that the presence of African American women in executive positions may change leadership behaviors within dominant culture organizations. African American women executives are found to utilize divergent thinking, creativity, risk-

² The spelling and punctuation of this author’s name is correct as stated by the author – “My name is dt ogilvie, no capitals, no punctuation.”
taking, and boundary spanning to adapt to managing the tensions produced by working in
environments where they must span two cultural worlds – one Black and one white.

While not focused primarily on Black women, Brock (2008) “explored the phenomenon
of professional sabotage among women in educational leadership” (p. 212). The development of
professional networks and mentors has been touted as important to building one’s professional
career, especially women mentoring other women. The purpose was to examine one of the
factors that women identified as a barrier to their career development, that of “woman-to-woman
sabotage” that jeopardized “the attainment of a woman’s career goals and professional success”
(p. 215). One of the findings indicated that, while the number of women who engaged in
sabotage was relatively small, “most respondents believed that childhood socialization of
females was a contributing factor to the indirect aggression used by women when under stress or
engaged in conflict” (p. 217) and that sabotaging behaviors can ultimately damage or slow down
the career advancement of its target. While the incidence of such engagement does exist, one
should be cautious that such research does not cross over into old stereotypes regarding “female”
behaviors.

Ortiz (2001) used the theoretical framework of social capital to interpret the careers in a
case study of three Latina superintendents. The social capital refers to the structure of social
relations that are found in the environment or community where each Latina superintendent
served. “Several forms of embeddedness (social ties, cultural practices, and political contexts)
suggest how social capital inheres in a variety of structures of relations” (Ortiz, 2001, p. 62). An
analysis of each superintendent’s use of social capital and connectedness to the community
resulted in three different social networks. Each superintendent demonstrated some varied
success in their position based on how they utilized their social capital to develop social networks.

1. Kinship Structure of Relations – This superintendent utilized the concept of “bounded solidarity” demonstrating the importance of social ties. She was raised in the predominantly Latino community and partook of their rituals and cultural practices, developing a deep relationship and trust between herself and the community.

2. Technical Structure of Relations – In this case the social capital was limited because it was based on the technical competencies she brought to the position. While she met her intended goals, because the superintendent was not embedded in a structure of cultural or social ties to the community, she ultimately did not have permanence with the school community.

3. Embedded Structure of Relations – The superintendent used social capital that demonstrated deep embeddedness in the social ties, cultural practices and political context spanning the school district community, state, and national levels, providing her with the image of leadership success that expanded her career opportunities.

While stating that this is an exploratory study that should be expanded on a larger scale, Ortiz argues that “More specifically related to appointments of Latinas to the superintendency in rapidly changing communities, the case can be made that they bring social capital by virtue of their gender and ethnicity, which is weakly tied to school districts but is a resource of great value to the district” (p. 81).

Williams (2005) focuses on the intersection of gender, race, age, and leadership in her case study of the career of one Black woman superintendent, utilizing both Feminist Standpoint Theory and Black Feminist Thought to frame her research. Similar to Ortiz’s study of Latina
superintendents, social capital is also used as a framework for William’s research. She observed how the superintendent used her social capital as a “resource,” not so much for her own career opportunities, but for her community and school district is observed. She describes how her subject was able to negotiate “the linkages between the school community and the community at large which often played out as her ability to negotiate the linkage between education and politics” (p. 5). Despite the inequities of social capital within her impoverished community, the superintendent, by virtue of her position and longevity, identification with the members of her community, and access to powerful individuals, social networks, and organizations, was able to leverage her social capital to acquire material resources to enrich the quality of life and education.

Bernadeia H. Johnson (2012) explores the concept of African American female superintendents as resilient school leaders. Feminist theory, Critical Race Theory, and Resilience Theory are used as a framework for “understanding how Black women superintendents perceive their experiences as superintendents from a resiliency perspective” (p. 74). Central to the findings and conclusions of the study was the use of the resilience cycle developed by Patterson and Kelleher (2005). This cycle outlines three dimensions of resilience as it responds to levels of adversity from disruption to ‘normal conditions’ (B. H. Johnson, p. 65). As described by Johnson (2012), Patterson and Keller (2005) suggest that a person’s ‘level of optimism (or pessimism) serves as a filter for interpreting adversity that strikes’ and that ‘interpretation of adversity directly affects your response to the adversity and your overall resilience’ (B.H. Johnson, p. 107). The participants used several terms in describing themselves that reflected their levels of optimism: persistent, passionate, courageous, optimistic, and positive. The study’s findings aligned with the research on resiliency. Other themes on
leadership that emerged were “spiritual grounding and knowledge of educational reform” (p. 104). In comparison, Christman and McClellan (2008), a using a more global feminist perspective that does not include a differentiation by race, focusing on the intersection of gender and leadership, had similar findings on the resilience of women administrators in educational leadership program. They noted that “resiliency involves the ability to overcome adversity” (p. 7) and also associated terms such as persistence, determination, and optimism as characteristics of resilience (p. 8). As both studies note, the research on this topic is limited, but the finding suggest that resilience for women and women of color in educational leadership is a commonality.

Floyd Cobb (2017), a Black male, district-level administrator, speaks to the dilemma of what it means to be Black and to lead in educational settings in the 21st century in a very personal voice, using a technique of critical autoethnography. This allows him to analyze and write about his personal experience, centered in majority white “suburban educational contexts” (p. xxi). “I am truly asking how our intersectional identities interfere with our ability to bring about transformational change for educational equity in our nation’s public schools. How does the Black experience make our leadership challenges unique (p. 94)?” While his study does not focus specifically on Black women educational leaders, his perspective is important because it is evident that Cobb belongs to a younger generation of African American scholar/practitioners who write unabashedly about the hope and inspiration they felt at the election of Barack Obama to the presidency of the United States, and the dream of a post-racial America. He cites the disappointment that emerged for him and his generation as they watched the “tribulations” of President Obama. For Cobb “it was becoming obvious that one’s race determined a leader’s level of political vulnerability” (p. 16). Cobb posits “Like our acceptance of racial profiling,
racial realism is the fundamental acknowledgement that Black Americans throughout history have occupied a subordinate social status despite their many accomplishments” (p. 104). He refuses to be surprised by discrimination the pain of encountering it. Beginning with some tenets of Critical Race Theory, and the words of Frederick Douglass, (“If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”) he has developed a theoretical framework for transformational change, based on his own experiences of working for equity and change in education, *Leading While Black* (LWB). It is composed of three fundamental principles: equity mindedness, racial battle fatigue and racial realism (p. 105). To resist what he calls “racial battle fatigue,” and its psychological and physiological manifestations, the framework provides two pathways or approaches for those committed to “equity-mindfulness and the belief that striving toward educational equity is a necessary, meaningful pursuit in public education.” One approach is with “naïve hope, believing there will be no struggle” and the other is that there will be continuous struggle in pursuit of equity, but that the benefits and gains will justify that struggle. While Cobb is a Black male and may represent that perspective, he also represents a younger generation entering the field of education leadership who will reflect new ideas that should be explored through further research.

Another study that centers of the leadership of the next generation of aspiring Black educational leaders was conducted by Allen and Hughes (2017). They used a narrative methodology correlated with the Critical Race Theory framework as well as glass ceiling theory and generational theory, to better understand the generational differences of African Americans females aspiring to the superintendent position. Three generational cohorts are represented: Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials. Research indicated that “African American women from the Millennial generation have learned valuable lessons from African Americans in previous generations that have extended mentorship and guidance in a network of perceived
matriarchs or mother-like figures” (p. 11). It was evident that the women in this study had advanced collegiate experience. Younger generations of African American women have come of age at a time when they have had more access to diversity as well as a time when policies and laws are present to monitor racial bias and discrimination. As a result, they have less awareness of being the target of racism they may be experiencing. Finally, the research cited “that African American women use various leadership styles, such as relationship focused, servant transformative, and authoritative” (p. 9).

**Expanding Research on the Superintendency**

Data from the 2015 survey is some of the most comprehensive information on the status of school superintendents in the United States, but the data are aligned to a traditional view of leadership. Björk (2000) describes the six stages of research on women and gender in the superintendency based on the work of Shakeshaft (1999):

1. Providing descriptive information about the number of women serving as school and district administrators (1970s and 1980s)
2. Focus on the lives and accomplishments of noteworthy women superintendents of the past
3. Barriers experienced by women aspiring to administrative careers (1990s)
4. How women superintendents perceive, construct, and enact their roles in a male-dominated profession (1990s) “These leadership attributes are closely aligned with expectations for superintendents to be educational, political and managerial leaders as well as change agents.” (p. 10)
5. Effects of gender on human behavior in school organizations and the effectiveness of women in educational administration
6. Focus on “understanding women’s and men’s experiences together.”

Since the compilation of this sequence, the advent of theories such as Critical Race Theory (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017), Feminist Theory (Grogan, 2000), and Black Feminist Theory (Collins, 1990) that center race, gender, and intersectionality, and increases in the number of women educational scholars and scholars of color have changed the nature of research on women
of color in educational leadership. These frameworks have been taken up by scholars focused specifically on researching Black women leaders, as highlighted in the literature just reviewed. Many of the dominant assumptions about leadership and tradition discourse in research have been challenged and research models exploring the nature of the experiences of traditionally marginalized such as women and people of color has expanded in the 21st century. Although Black Feminist Thought will provide the framework for this, it seems appropriate to briefly review each of the other theories as they are frequently utilized in much of the research literature reviewed in this chapter.

Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education is a framework used by many researchers when studying the superintendency of Black women. Critical Race Theory in education is defined by Delgado and Stefancic (2017) as a “scholarly movement that applies critical race theory to issues in the field of education, including high-stakes testing, affirmative action, hierarchy in schools, tracking and school discipline, bilingual and multicultural education and the debate over ethnic studies and the Western canon” (p. 173).

Critical Race Theory has its roots in a legal context, beginning in the 1970s. It originates from the writings of Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman, legal scholars who expressed skepticism at the slow progress of civil rights law and related court decisions in eradicating racism, bias, and white supremacy in American society (p. 4). Critical Race Theory is based on several assumptions. First, race continues to be significant in the United States; second, the United States society is based on property rights rather than human rights, and third, the intersections of race and property creates an analytical tool for understanding inequity.

Research in the area of Critical Race Theory in education focuses on two categories:
K-12 and higher education. It is frequently used in K-12 in terms of the themes of curriculum and pedagogy, policy, school finance and community engagement. (Ledsma & Calderon, 2014). Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) are cited as foundational scholars in advancement of the Critical Race Theoretical perspective in education. Among other ideas, they stressed the importance of ‘naming one’s own voice’ (p. 56-57). Lynn and Parker (2006) have been at the forefront of advancing the Critical Race Theoretical perspective in education for creating a “framework for examining persistent racial inequities in education” (Lynn & Parker, p. 247). More recently, Ladson-Billings (2005) has expressed concern about what she terms the “uncritical” use of narrative or storytelling by some CRT academics, without fully articulating the ideas central to the issues and their context. She has argued (as reported in Ledsesma & Calderon, 2015, p. 206) for a Critical Race Theoretical perspective in education analogous with Critical Race Theory based in legal scholarship. Her critique suggests a more rigorous and theoretical framework for scholarship rooted in CRT’s founding legal tenets. Researchers who have studied the superintendency of Black women have used CRT as a framework, primarily employing the use of narrative or storytelling. Rather than silencing the voices of these women of color, storytelling, using their own voice, allows Black women superintendents “a way to communicate the experiences and realities of the oppressed, a first step in understanding the complexities of racism” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 14). For researchers using CRT as a framework, this is an important goal for examining the leadership experiences of these women.

Feminist postmodernism (Grogan, 2000) is another theory that reconceptualizes the notion of the contemporary superintendency. This theory, motivated by societal changes and education reforms, is based on a combination of feminist literature grounded in disciplines such as philosophy, sociology, psychology, and history that focus on gender issues and feminist
theories. Postmodernism encompasses the concepts of discourse, subjectivity, knowledge, and power, and resistance. Grogan (2000) concludes that a reconception of the superintendency will make it a more effective position that will be more beneficial and effective for the children who are served. In support of the reconception of the superintendency, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2010) further advance that “women’s leadership of schools and districts in the United States suggested a new leadership emphasis that relies on diverse perspective to craft new solutions to problems” (p. 7). In reviewing the literature, they identify five styles that typify the educational leadership demonstrated by women. These are leadership for learning, leadership for social justice, relational leadership, spiritual leadership, and balanced leadership (p. 6). They believe this represents a shift from the past organizational leadership modes that resided primarily with the individual to “form a diverse collective” (p. 3) that suggests more collaborative modes for decision-making that honor diverse perspectives and values. It is important to note that these shifts in leadership, led by women, refocus the superintendent’s role to that of a change agent more focused on teaching and learning and education reform than in the past (Grogan, 2005). Although they do not overtly state it, Grogan and Shakeshaft suggest that the more individualized organizational leadership of the past is a male-dominated model. They conclude that “at one time women were not accepted as leaders unless they acted like men, only to learn that acting like a man was not only uncomfortable but, for themselves, unlikely to be successful” (p. 97). Latish (2014) in a study on the intersection of race and gender with three Black women principals further supports that women principals are ”almost encouraged to distance themselves from any of the intrinsic leadership qualities that may be viewed as feminine.”

A number of smaller studies have drawn on varied theories to think about women superintendents and women superintendents of color in different ways. Brunner (2000) utilized
an adaption of Swindler’s theory of “settled” and “unsettled” discourse for the theoretical framework in her qualitative study of 12 women superintendents look for patterns of talk related to their experiences with inequalities. From her analysis, five themes emerged from their talk: power, silence, style, responsibility, and people. It is interesting to note that women superintendents, when asked to define the term power, seemed to be uncomfortable with the conventional definition (Brunner, 2000). In Brunner’s study, women “struggled when talking about power” (p. 85). This discomfort occurred during what was characterized as “unsettled” talk. She suggests that due to the more traditional models of socialization that many women have undergone, the concept of power has negative connotations for them and is something to be avoided. Brunner, through interviews with women superintendents, found that “By talking about and using power as collaborative and coactive, they shared the mantel of authority with others, making it unnecessary for others to push it off their shoulders”(p. 88). The uneasiness that Brunner’s subjects felt with discussing “power” is in direct contrast to the Black women superintendents studied by Jackson (1999) who offered that “the idea of power was not foreign or uncomfortable” (p. 152). Latish (2014) suggests that Black women educational leaders are comfortable using power for the overall good of students and schools vs. power for power’s sake.

A frequent topic of feminist scholars revolves around the concept of silence, one of the topics of talk identified by Brunner. In this case, the participants provided examples of experiences that prompted their “unnatural silence” through the body language of board members when the women would present information. They also described being a part of male-dominated meetings in which the women are interrupted, ignored, or left out of the conversations. In contrast “settled” discourse provided opportunities for women to be silent
because they are engaged in listening, a way of demonstrating collaboration or shared power. They also typified their style in “settled” discourse as being “soft” as opposed to “direct.” They discussed the negative consequences of being “too direct” or unladylike. Brunner concludes that “the study documented the continuing existence, pervasiveness, and power of gender bias at the highest levels of leadership and decision-making in school districts” (p. 106).

Sesko and Biernat (2009) explore the topic of Black women being overlooked or left out of conversations, suggesting that these experiences where their voices go unheard and contributions ignored, result in intersectional invisibility (p. 357). They suggest that “invisibility is a unique form of discrimination. It does not assume either advantage or disadvantage of dual subordinate category membership, but rather suggests that Black women may experience a qualitatively different form of discrimination in which their non-prototypicality contributes to their not being recognized or correctly credited for their contributions” (p. 360). In one study, the statements and comments of Black women were significantly misattributed to Black men, white women, and white men. The concept of intersectional invisibility has implications for the marginalization of Black women in all walks of life and notably for Black women executives in the workplace.

As more research emerges on women’s experiences in educational leadership, it will be interesting to see if this avoidance changes, if women take on the characteristics of the male dominant culture of educational leadership or if the models for power change to accommodate a framework that is more operationally comfortable for women leaders.

Theoretical Framework: Black Feminist Thought

As stated previously, Black Feminist Thought began to emerge in the 1970s and 1980s and is grounded in the real-life experiences of Black women resulting from generations of
oppression and marginalization by the greater society. The development of Black Feminist Thought is a process that undertakes to reclaim the Black feminist intellectual tradition (Collins, 1990, p. 13) that had been obscured by the white feminist movement. Collins contends that “maintaining the invisibility of Black women and our ideas is critical in structuring patterned relations of race, gender, and class inequality that pervade the entire social structure” (p. 5).

According to Collins (1989), “Black feminist thought, then, specializes in formulating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African-American women” (p.750). As defined by Encyclopedia Britannica (2000), *standpoint theory* is “a feminist theoretical perspective that argues that knowledge stems from social position. The perspective denies that traditional science is objective and suggests that research and theory has ignored and marginalized women and feminist ways of thinking” (www.britannica.com/topic/standpoint-theory).

Black feminist epistemology can and will reflect elements of the epistemologies used by Black people as a group as well as women as a group. However, Black feminist epistemology will also have features that are unique only to Black women. In some areas, Black women may more closely align with Black men and in other areas with women as a group. “Realizing that neither feminist theory focusing on female experiences nor critical race theory focusing on racial experience could fully explore the experiences of Black women, Crenshaw (1989) urged theorists to take both gender and race into consideration and address in their analysis how they intersect to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women’s experiences” (Kim, 2016, p. 51). Collins (1990) reflects that the importance of a Black feminist epistemology is that it provides us with the “ability to enrich our understanding of how subordinate groups create knowledge that fosters both their empowerment and social justice” (p. 207).
Why is this distinctive, self-defined standpoint necessary? McClellan (2014) asserts that “theoretically and experientially, Black women and men should be allies with one another in the fight for equality and justice” (p. 95). However, she acknowledges the double standard for Black men and women she saw reflected growing up in the Black church as well as the way in which activism and organizational skills of Black women were devalued during the Civil Rights movement. Using autoethnography and the frame of Black Feminist Thought, she recounts her own professional experiences which leads her to “critically analyze how my gender and racial identity played a pivotal role” in the development of her leadership identity.”

One of the most intriguing concepts in Black Feminist Thought is the idea of “outsider within” status as delineated by Collins (1986). This concept has evolved from reflecting on the lives of thousands of Black domestics whose accounts of working in White homes stressed “the sense of self-affirmation they experienced at seeing white power demystified – of knowing that it was not the intellect, talent or humanity of their employers that supported their superior status, but largely just the advantages of racism” (p. S14). She suggests that “emerging Black feminist literature reveals that many Black intellectuals, especially those in touch with their marginality in academic settings, tap this standpoint in producing distinctive analyses of race, class and gender” (p. S14-S15).

According to Collins (1986), there are three key themes of Black Feminist Thought:

1. Black feminist thought may be recorded by others, but it is produced by Black women, in separable from the historical and material conditions shaping the lives of the producers. Black women’s self-definition and self-valuation are key to this.

2. Black women possess a unique standpoint on, or perspective of, their experiences. There will be certain commonalities of perception shared by Black women as a group.
3. The diversity of class, region, age, and sexual orientation shaping individual Black women’s lives has resulted in different expressions of these common themes.

Since its conception, Black Feminist Thought has produced a growing body of work that informs the experiences of Black women in a variety of areas, including education. The concept of intersectionality helps to inform the uniqueness of this research. Intersectionality is defined as “the belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits” (Delgado & Stephancic, 2017, p. 177).

Black Feminist Thought and the Superintendency

In this section, I will highlight research literature that specifically utilizes Black Feminist Thought as a framework to investigates various models of and elements in the nature of leadership of Black women superintendents. These include bridge leadership, hope and passion as tools of leadership, the outsider within, resilience, ethic of care, ethic of personal accountability, transformational leadership, tempered radicalism/servant leadership, and social capital.

Horsford (2012) uses intersectionality of race and gender identities in a discussion of how the historic practice by which Black women have been “bridge leaders” in education, “serving as a bridge for others, to others, and between others in multiple and often complicated contexts over time” (p. 17). She suggests that bridge leadership can be a model for leading diverse school communities across the country where there are large numbers of poor, Black, Latino and immigrant children and youth. This study concludes that further examination of bridge leadership and the intersectional identities of Black women and how they model these qualities will increase our understanding of the full potential of school leadership that is centered on working for “diversity, equity, and social justice” (p. 19) in our educational environments.
Karen Stansberry Beard (2012) utilizes six tenets of Black Feminist Theory, emphasizing the ethic of care, to examine the decision-making process of a Black deputy superintendent’s quest to successfully close the achievement gap in her urban school district. Beard makes the case that as an “outlier” or “outsider within,” meaning that the deputy superintendent is a Black woman in a field dominated by white males, she approaches decision-making based on her standpoint, her life experiences, and her ethic of care. The ethic of care was first introduced to feminist theory by Nel Noddings (1984) as an essentially feminine characteristic. Collins (1990) finds that “the convergence of Afrocentric and feminist values in the ethic of caring seems particularly acute” (p. 216). She contends that the ethic of caring and its characteristics of individual expressiveness, emotionality and empathy historically permeates throughout Afrocentric culture closely aligned to Afrocentric culture and Black Feminist Theory by Collins (2000). The six tenets of Black Feminist Theory are listed as

a. lived experiences as a criterion of meaning;
b. the use of dialogue in assessing claims;
c. an emphasis on the ethic of caring;
d. an emphasis on the ethic of personal accountability;
e. an emphasis on positionality as an agent of knowledge; and
f. the recognition of ‘truth’ and the complexity of the pathway toward truth. (p. 61)

Essential to an understanding of the deputy superintendent’s decision-making process and success in achieving her goal of closing the achievement gap in her district were the values and knowledge she brought to the table by virtue of her cultural membership, her life experiences,
her legacy, and her socio-historical background, all, or most of which were markedly different from the dominant cultural leadership.

As one of the tenets of Black Feminist Thought, the ethic of care is also the focus of a multi-case study conducted by Lisa Bass (2012). Although the five Black women educational leaders hold a variety of positions, they were selected for the study because of their reputation in their communities as caring individuals in the conduct of their work. The results of this study reveal that participants exhibited the characteristics of mothering or other mothering as a form of power. Mothering and othermothering is a common practice in the Black community focused on the care and nurturance of the community’s children. “Community othermothers work on behalf on the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability which embrace conceptions of transformative power and mutuality” (Collins, 1990, p. 132). Not only does this frame the participants leadership and decision-making, but it propels the women to break the rules to make decisions in the interest of students/children. Bass calls this the “ethic of risk.” In some cases, these women make decisions which they believe to be in the interest of the child, but which could jeopardize their own positions. They do so because of their empathy for the students and communities they serve and as a reaction to their own experiences with oppression and injustice. Bass, therefore, that suggests their caring is translated into activism (p. 78).

Simmons and Johnson (2008) utilized the frames of both Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Theory to investigate the concept of hope in the lives of four African American female superintendents. The study focuses on three questions:

1. What encounters have some successful female superintendents had with race and gender discrimination, and how did they respond to these encounters?
2. What is the source of their continuous hope?

3. How, and to what extent, do they articulate their hopes? (p. 227)

From the interview process four themes emerged: passion, suffering, spirituality, and hope. Three of the themes can be explicitly linked to Black Feminist Thought. For example, the ethic of care where “personal expressiveness, emotions, and empathy are central to the knowledge validation process” in Black Feminist Thought, as outlined by Collins (1990, p. 215) and the combination of personal expressiveness and emotions in Black culture is reflected through the vocalizing of passion, whether through song, speech, or religious experience. Black Feminist Thought is a systematic reaction to the oppression and suffering experienced by Black women. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) identify spiritual leadership as one of the approaches used by women leaders, and specifically by women of color. “Both women of color and white women administrators discuss the relationship between spirituality and the ways they model behavior and inspire others” (p. 15). The study confirmed “that passion can be used as leadership language to express the leader's hopes for transforming the organization” (p. 243).

Using a phenomenological narrative design, Brown (2014) interviewed eight African American women superintendents to examine how race, gender, and social politics affected the recruitment and retention of African American women for the position of superintendent. Because of combining these two types of approaches, the researcher has produced a rich and authentic narrative of the experiences of these women and their perceptions of the impact of race and gender on their leadership very much in their own unique voice. As such, this study meets one of the key concepts of Black Feminist Thought, the concept of “self-definition” or “the power to name one’s own reality” (Collins, 2000, p. 300). The concept of “standpoint” is also an important consideration in this study. Given the commonalities of their experience, it follows
that one of the results of the study is that all participants agreed that race, gender, and social politics had an impact on the recruitment and retention of African American women for the position of superintendent. The findings of this study provide a strong and clear picture of the considerations these women must often embrace to exercise leadership and sustain their positions over time.

Briefly, the findings of the study provide some insights as to the ways in which race, gender and social politics impact the ability of Black women to be recruited for and to be retained in the position of school superintendent. The participants felt that they are always held to a higher standard of excellence in both their credentials and job performance. They believed that this is necessary in order to overcome the years of racial stereotyping and bias that exists in society. Black women have a disadvantage because of their limited access to those mainstream political and social organizations and networks where power and influence lie. Some of this can be overcome by having strong white males as advocates or mentors for the process of being recruited and retained in the position of superintendent. It is critical that Black women, in preparation for the recruitment process, actively demonstrate interest in acquiring a superintendency so that others begin to see their potential. Race remains one of the most significant factors and a barrier in terms of being recognized as a viable candidate in the recruitment process and in attaining and maintaining the position of superintendent once it is achieved.

The relationship that Black women develop with the school board will have the greatest impact on the retention of their position. Ultimately, the board hires, supervises and evaluates the superintendent and participants stressed that one must pay attention to the culture and climate of the community and be able to “read” people. One superintendent explained the need for this
skill and it was reiterated by others, “you have to interact with board members who are not professionals who think they know what happens in a school district because they went to school there or who want or think their job is your job” (p. 585). Finally, “research continues to support the belief that there appears to be a dominant ascension order for hiring (e.g., White males, Black males, White females, Black females) within the superintendency” (p. 589). The study substantiates that the intersection of race, gender and social politics impacts the ability of African American women to access and retain the position of public school superintendent.

**Summary**

Björk (2000) concludes that “research on women and gender in educational administration has illuminated how culture and professional norms have created masculine myths of the existence of the one best way of leading and have perpetuated expectations and gender bias in the superintendency” (p. 14). Brunner and Grogan (2007) assert that, “in future, we must be careful not to speak too generally of women’s experiences of leadership. Just as men and women in educational leadership do not share a common set of experiences, neither do white women and women of color” (p. 130). Ortiz (2001), Alston (2005), Hibbert-Smith (2006), Simmons & Johnson (2008), Downing (2009), Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011), Horsford (2012), B. H. Johnson (2012), Pruitt (2015), Allen & Hughes (2017), and Cobb (2017) have also suggested the need for more scholarly research in these areas, focused on the increasing diversity of the individuals in these roles. As the number of women and people of color enter the ranks of the superintendency, the paradigm of a more traditional, male-dominated leadership model may be experiencing a shift.

For the last forty years, the United States has seen Black women ascend to the school district superintendency in a period that crosses four generations. The great preponderance of the
research that has been conducted employs qualitative design, utilizing case study or narrative forms. However, a search of current research and literature suggests that there are still significant gaps in scholarship documenting the experiences of women of color in this leadership role and other related topics. It is startling that the United States Department of Education does not have a data gathering system to accurately determine on an ongoing basis, the number of district superintendents serving in the United States, as well as data regarding the numbers of women and people of color in these positions, who they are and where they serve. Access to this demographic data would be extremely beneficial for monitoring and research. Gaps in scholarship include the lack of research that compares and contrasts the leadership of Black women as superintendents in different settings – urban, suburban, and rural. Does the racial composition of the district’s student population, as well as the racial and gender composition of the school district’s staff, have an impact on the leadership experiences of the Black women superintendents? Is the superintendent’s relationship and interactions with predominantly Black boards of education different from those dominated by white leadership or a white power structure? Recent studies indicate that students of color in the United States are more likely to attend schools where most of their peers are poor or low-income (Peske & Haycock, 2006; NCES, 2018). In such districts, the members of the board of education are more than likely to reflect the economic status of the community. How does a Black woman school superintendent from an essentially middle class background bridge the class divide with a school board that may be made up of members from a lower economic status? Finally, Black America has changed since the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s, 60s and early 70s, and one can observe increasingly distinct economic, social, and political demographics within this segment of the population. According to a survey conducted by the Pew Research Foundation (2007),
“African Americans see a widening gulf between the values of middle class and poor blacks, and nearly four in ten say that because of diversity within their community, blacks can no longer be thought of as a single race” (p. 1). Writers such as Eugene Robinson (2010) and Charles Johnson (2008) reflect that one cannot discuss Black America as a monolithic entity in the 21st century, if one ever truly could. Given these shifts, have the leadership traits of the Black Millennial generation changed, based upon their lived experiences that may differ from previous generations? I contend from reviewing this literature that the dynamics of leadership for these women will be different from older generations, depending on the context and that current scholarly research does not fully address these nuances.

With the changing demographics of the nation and the increasing numbers of women and people of color entering administrative roles, it seems imperative that scholars find ways to examine emerging theories of leading that will encompass the wide range of voices at the table that can “contribute to reconceptualizing the superintendency” (Björk, 2000, p. 15). As important, the presence of Black women in the uppermost leadership positions in education can lend support for policies and strategies that will effectively improve equity and equality for all children.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents a qualitative design to address the research questions. This study examined the intersections of race and gender in participants’ leadership experiences, focusing on interactions with school boards, local communities, and district personnel.

The research question was: How has the intersectionality of race and gender impacted the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents? In addition, three subsidiary research questions guided this study:

1. What were the barriers or challenges to the attainment of the district superintendency as perceived by the Black women superintendents?
2. Are there issues or opportunities, as perceived by the participants, unique to the intersectionality of race and gender that impacted their effectiveness as district superintendents?
3. What, if any, “commonalities of perceptions” do the participants exhibit based on their experiences?

Research Design

The research design for this study was qualitative in nature. Qualitative methodology is a method that is used to understand participants’ perspectives and experiences. Qualitative methods are “used in research that is designed to provide an in-depth description of a specific program, practice or setting” (Mertens, 1998, p. 229). This method allows the researcher to explore a topic based on the meaning people bring to it.

The study was based on a phenomenological narrative design, combining two approaches to qualitative research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) define phenomenological research as a
design of inquiry coming from philosophy and psychology “in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants in a study” (p. 249). The phenomenon that I studied was the lived experiences of Black women superintendents. Lived experiences is defined in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods* (2000), as “a representation and understanding of a researcher or research subject’s human experiences, choices, and options and how those factors influence one’s perception of knowledge” (p. 489).

Data collection involved interviews based on a narrative approach. Also defined by Creswell and Creswell (2018) is narrative research. This research model is “a qualitative strategy in which the researcher studies the lives of individuals and asks one or more individuals to provide stories about their lives. This information is then often retold or restored by the researcher into a narrative chronology” (p. 249).

Because of the combination of narrative and phenomenology approaches, it was projected that the researcher would be able to produce a rich and authentic narrative of the experiences of these women and their perceptions of the impact of race and gender on their leadership very much in their own unique voice. In addition, the researcher looked for common themes in each of the narratives.

**Data Collection**

Snowball sampling was used to identify Black women superintendents in the Midwest region who currently served as public school superintendents. Snowball sampling is defined as “a non-probability method of survey sample selection that is commonly used to locate rare or difficult to find populations” (Johnson, T.P, 2014, p.1). I began with my network of educational leaders and asked them to share my recruitment email with potential participants.
The main data collection method was an in-depth, interview process conducted on an online platform. This draws on the study’s theoretical framework, Black Feminist Thought, to meet one of its key concepts, the concept of “self-definition” or “the power to name one’s own reality” (Collins, 2000, p. 300). The concept of “standpoint” is an important consideration in this study. The study focused on the standpoint of the Black women superintendents, allowing them to tell their stories from their perspective.

**Participants**

For the purposes of this study, four Black women superintendents were interviewed. This sample size was appropriate for qualitative research and the phenomenological narrative design used in the study. In qualitative studies, sample sizes tend to be smaller than in quantitative research. Creswell and Creswell (2018) posit, “From a review of many qualitative research studies, we have some rough estimates to advance. Narrative includes one or two individuals; phenomenology involves a range of 3-10” (p. 186). The individuals who participated in the study are representative of the population of Black women superintendents and were able to provide an authentic understanding of the challenges and issues experienced by this population. As a result, the rich descriptions that the four participants imparted in discussing their experiences was sufficient to reach saturation in my data collection and, thus, provided an adequate sample for this study.

Three of the women are currently serving as superintendents and one is a retired superintendent. Two of the three current superintendents could be described as mid-career and the other near the end of her active career as a superintendent. All participants hold doctorate degrees. By all traditional standards, each of these women have established, successful careers,
marked by significant awards and recognitions at local, regional, and national levels from professional organizations, highlighting their work as educational leaders.

Each interview consisted of a series of semi-structured questions designed to help the interviewer learn more about the lived experiences of the participants as school superintendents. The questions were categorized in the following groups: general background, mentoring/networking, reflections on the superintendency, the impact of race and gender on interacting with stakeholders, current trends and the impact on race and gender, and closing recommendations for Black women aspiring to educational leadership and a brief self-description. The specific questions can be found in Appendix D.

The interviews were conducted using the on-line platform, Zoom, in keeping with protocols required by the University during the COVID-19 pandemic. Each participant was informed of interview protocols in writing which were followed throughout the process. I developed the protocol based on the framework of Black Feminist Thought and the tenet that provides for the participants to express their experiences in their own authentic voice, from their standpoint as Black women. The goal was to allow them a comfortable and secure space in which to define their own reality.

To ensure privacy and confidentiality, privacy settings were used. In addition to the taped conversations, I kept written field notes during each interview, noting important words and phrases and observations to facilitate my memory of each session. Each interview was audio-taped, and a verbatim transcription of each conversation was created. This allowed me to use the narrative data to analyze for key concepts during the first cycle of coding. In order to protect the identities of the of the participants, each woman was given a pseudonym. Specific locations and names of other individuals mentioned in our discussions were either changed or not used.
A second cycle of the coding process was conducted to further generate categories and themes shared by the study’s participants.

**Data Analysis**

Kim (2016) describes data analysis in qualitative research as a three-prong process. After examining the raw data, the researcher reduces them to themes through coding and recoding processes. Finally, these data are represented in a final research text which can include tables, figures, and narrative. “We analyze narrative data in order to develop an understanding of the meanings our participants give to themselves, to their surroundings, to their lives, and to their lived experiences through storytelling” (Kim, 2016, p. 189).

To begin the process of data analysis, an inductive coding system was developed to look for common themes among the participants. According to Saldaña, “Coding is thus a method that enables you to organize and group similarly coded data into categories or ‘families’ because they share similar characteristics – the beginning of a pattern” (p. 8). There are four basic elements to the coding process: codes, categories, patterns, and themes. The coding process occurred in two cycles. In the first cycle, I reviewed interview transcripts and observation notes of the participant to identify short phrases that captured pertinent meanings unique to the individual related to my research questions. This is known as a code. Once these codes were created, I then reviewed and linked the codes to create categories for each participant’s responses to the interview questions.

I then created a narrative of each participant’s story. Each interviewee received a copy of the transcription for their clarification, deletions, or additions where appropriate.

In the second cycle of the coding process, I looked across the transcripts again to further generate categories, themes and concepts that were shared by the participants. As a result of this
multiple coding process, salient themes across each participant were given meaning to a combined narrative.

**Criteria for Qualitative Research**

The development of criteria to evaluate trustworthiness in qualitative research is extremely important. “Trustworthiness or rigor of a study refers to the degree of confidence in data, interpretation, and methods used to ensure the quality of the study” (Pilot & Beck, 2014 as reported in Connelly, 2006). To be considered trustworthy, the qualitative researcher must demonstrate that the methods used to collect and analyze the data are well defined, consistent, and meticulous. Given & Saumure (2008) comment that “trustworthiness can be thought of as the ways in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability are evident in their research” (p. 896). These four criteria were first proposed by Guba (1981).

To ensure the trustworthiness of the research, I incorporated several protocols found in the criterion established by Guba and Lincoln. Credibility is considered “one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness” (Shelton, 2004, p. 64). To achieve this criterion, I utilized well-established qualitative research methods for my study. Second, I provided the participants with the assurance of confidentiality and opportunities throughout the interview to withdraw from the study at any time. As a result, the participants felt free to respond honestly during the interview process. A review of related research literature and a theoretical framework, in this case Black Feminist Thought, to support my findings has been included. Iterative questioning, including probes to elicit detailed data, were utilized in the data collection and analysis with the goal of providing a rich, thick description of the study’s findings. In
addition, participants had the opportunity to review the transcriptions of their interview to ensure that what is stated accurately reflects what they intended to communicate.

“Transferability refers to the degree to which the results of qualitative research can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings” (Trochim, 2006). Providing a rich, thick description of the phenomenon that clearly outlines the context of the study was important in establishing transferability to studies with comparable context.

If similar results can be replicated in other studies that use the same research design and procedures, this is known as dependability. While some researchers argue that attaining dependability in qualitative research is difficult to attain, “Lincoln and Guba stress the close ties between credibility and dependability, arguing that, in practice, a demonstration of the former goes some distance in ensuring the latter” (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). As an example, one could incorporate the use of both focus groups and the individual interview as a way of establishing both credibility and dependability. The provisions that have been established and previously stated to ensure credibility for this study also addressed the study’s dependability.

Confirmability speaks to the extent that the findings of the study are based on the experiences of the participants and thus, are objective based on the data. Confirmability was established by the inclusion of my positionality statement which put forward an admission of my values and bias. Another technique that was employed is the use of an audit trail. As defined by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (2006), “an audit trail is a transparent description of the research steps taken from the start of a research project to the development and reporting of the findings.”
The use of the techniques outlined within the context of the four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, determined the quality, rigor, and trustworthiness of the study.

**Limitations of the Study**

The number of Black women superintendents who agreed to be interviewed for the study could be a potential limitation. This study is not generalizable because of the small sample. Another limitation was the interview. I only collected data from each participant in one interview. I did not be collect data from their employees or school board members.

**Delimitations of the Study**

The boundary for the study is Black women superintendents, including as subjects only members of that demographic. The sample for this study did not include Black women superintendents from charter or private schools and/or districts. Black male superintendents and white women superintendents were not excluded from the sample as well.

**Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to outline the qualitative research method used to answer the research question and its subsidiary questions. A phenomenological narrative design was utilized, combining these two qualitative approaches. A discussion of the procedure, study participants, data collection and interview questions, data analysis, and criteria for qualitative research outlined the specifics of how the study was conducted and who participated in the study. The outlined methodology was used to identify opportunities and constraints that face Black women who seek to become district superintendents. All study participants contributed to the identification of these elements by sharing their experiences as Black women superintendents and their perspectives on the impact of race and gender on their leadership experiences.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter will review and summarize a comprehensive set of findings resulting from interviews conducted with four Black women superintendents. The theoretical framework for the study is Black Feminist Thought. This framework provides the support for this study and its findings because, it “places the experiences of Black women at the center of analysis in producing new knowledge about intersecting forms of oppression that impacts educational opportunities, economic freedom, and political enfranchisement” (McClellan, 2011, p. 90).

The purpose of this study was to provide an exploration of the experiences of selected Black women superintendents to address the personal and professional challenges they have faced as members of at least two marginalized groups (female and Black) on their journey to the superintendency. Further, the study sought to examine the impact of the intersections of race and gender on their leadership throughout their careers. In so doing, this study aimed to provide information to prepare and support a new generation of aspiring Black women leaders.

The principle research question for this study was as follows: How has the intersectionality of race and gender impacted the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents? In addition, three specific questions guided this study:

1. What were the barriers or challenges to the attainment of the district superintendency as perceived by Black women superintendents?

2. Are there issues or opportunities, as perceived by the participants, unique to the intersectionality of race and gender that impacted their effectiveness as district superintendents?

3. What, if any, “commonalities of perceptions” do the participants exhibit based on their experiences?
In this chapter, I first discuss each participant. I then look across the four participants to address the study’s research questions. Each participants’ biographical summary includes information about their general background, a description of their pathway to the superintendency, leadership practices, their advice for aspiring Black women educational leaders, and a brief self-description of themselves as superintendents.

Participant #1: Dr. Sarah Nelson

Dr. Nelson is currently serving in her second superintendency in a racially diverse, pre-K through 8 suburban school district. She is in her 12th year as a superintendent and her sixth year in her current district. Her prior school district was also pre-K-8 with a smaller, largely white student demographic.

Growing up in a low income environment in a large eastern city, Dr. Nelson described a neighborhood where, “When I was growing up, instead of weather closures for early dismissal, our schools were closed early if the principal got word there was going to be like a gang war.” Dr. Nelson was conscious that this was a tough place to grow up and she was determined to find a way out. “I wanted to get out of the neighborhood even though my immediate neighbors were like family.” That way was made clearer for Dr. Nelson when her third grade teacher took notice of her excellent academic performance and bestowed on her the title of “Doctor.” From then on, Dr. Nelson made up her mind that “I would be a doctor for little kids,” and throughout middle school and high school she pursued a university track and made up her mind to apply to college as a pre-med major.

Pathway to the Superintendency

Dr. Nelson’s career ladder differs from the other participants in that she did not begin it working in education. Once in college she determined that she had no desire to be a medical
doctor and majored in a technical field and business management. After graduating from an Ivy-
league university, she began her career working successfully for several years in business for a
major corporation. Still, she indicates “There seemed to be something missing.” It was through
her community and church volunteer experience, working with a group of Black boys who had
been expelled from schools and were being educated in an alternative learning setting, that she
found her calling to be a teacher. This led her to use an alternative route process to receive her
teaching and administrative credentials. “I personally never aspired to be a superintendent.” But
after six years as a teacher, she was approached by the principal of her school about taking a
position as the Dean of Students. Thus, began her journey up the administrative ladder, with the
encouragement of others along the way. Briefly, she accepted an executive position with a for-
profit education management organization that serviced inner city schools. But she soon
discovered that the organization’s mission conflicted with her own values of social justice. “I
just felt like this was trickery,” is how she described an experience that she felt focused too much
on test results and an ineffective use of resources. A year later, she returned to the public school
education sector. Although she has worked in a variety of both urban and suburban settings,
some of which were predominantly white, she has always had a desire to work for districts with
more Black students. She stated, “I would say I really enjoyed being a principal. I still had that
itch and desire, though, to serve underserved communities or children of color.”

Dr. Nelson identified the most extensive diverse list of mentors, in terms of race and
gender, who have followed her throughout her career. Her first mentor was the pastor of her
church, a community activist who took on the responsibility of providing an instructional and
support program for a group of local adolescent Black boys who had been expelled from school.
He hired Dr. Nelson to work with the boys. Her work with these students caught the attention of
the middle school principal who hired her to teach at his school and mentored her through a year-long, alternative certification program so that she could obtain a standard teaching license. Both the pastor and the principal were Black males. After a few years, she was approached by a white female principal who talked with her about taking a position as Dean of Students. Once more she was mentored by the principal to complete an alternate route process to secure her administrative license and a promotion to an assistant principalship in a K-4 building. In total, Dr. Nelson identified eight individuals that she considered mentors – four African American men, two white women, and two white men.

**Leadership Practice**

Dr. Nelson cites her most important strengths and skills as “being able to take stuff without losing my cool,” the quest to learn, being a life-long learner, having great passion for her work, and believing that educating children is her calling. Her extensive, racially, and gendered list of mentors have followed her throughout her career. She also holds memberships in a most diverse group of professional organizations and networks.

“The idea of leadership grounded in spirituality is a strong theme found in research on women leaders – particularly in the comments of women of color” (Grogan 2011, p. 13). Accordingly, “Studies document an additional dimension that some women add to their social justice, moral, or servant leadership approach (p. 13). Spirituality and religious faith are significant aspects of Dr. Nelson’s personal and professional identity. It is her belief that God has guided and sustained her on her career journey. “I feel that it is my ministry, my calling, what God has for me, the reason I’m here. I really feel that God called me to do what I’m doing.” Dr. Nelson speaks of her work as a mission and connects her spirituality to the themes of social justice and equity. It is clear from her comments that disassembling structures that support
systemic disparities that marginalize children of color in the current education programs and replacing those structures with frameworks and strategies that yield an equitable education for all students is her mission.

Dr. Nelson responded to the question of how she navigates the dynamics of power within her district in order to serve the overall school community. She described her process. “I think my MO [modus operandi] has been listening, learning, trying to put a framework around it, and then coming up with a series of cycles like action research.” She indicates that she is very deliberate “about creating that innovator space, those innovator spaces, being very intentional about recruiting people to be in those spaces” and that this seems to work in her current district as a strategy to bring about change. “They get really excited about it. They’re talking about. And…before you know it, that group in the middle…they wanna try it out, too.” Dr. Nelson compares this process to that espoused by Malcolm Gladwell and his concept of “the tipping point” used in business and marketing (2000). A tipping point is defined by the merriam-webster.com dictionary as “the critical point in a situation, process, or system beyond which a significant and often unstoppable effect or change takes place” (Retrieved March 8, 2021). She recognized that teachers in her school community have a great deal of influence and that once she had a critical mass of teachers supporting such strategies as co-teaching or equity inquiry, she had a better chance of gaining the community’s support for such changes.

Observing the way in which her staff was able to embrace the changes she was trying to implement was cited by Dr. Nelson as her most memorable experience. Her district was a part of a consortium of districts devoted to improving the academic success of students of color and she was sitting in on the presentations her staff had prepared. Her observations of these presentations made her realize that positive change was taking place. “Just recognizing that we
went from point A to point B. You could definitely see that we were at point B, even though from day to day it doesn’t feel that way. Because I see the journey is so murky and sloppy. But it was like one of those moments that you could recognize, wow, you have concrete evidence that we’ve made substantial, and I feel, lasting impact on, not just our students, but also our staff members.”

In discussing her ability to manage work-life balance, Dr. Nelson believed that personal losses over the past couple of years were a wake-up call from God that she needed to improve this aspect of her life. “So, I try to be more intentional about self-care and not have everything be just work, work, work…before I think I was spending a lot of time working as hard as I did to validate that I belong there or to validate that I know what I’m doing. And it just kind of hit me that there’s no amount of work that I could do to bring that validation.” She emphasizes her faith in God, her relationships with other church members, prayer, meditation, and journaling have allowed her to be more conscious of her need for greater self-care.

Dr. Nelson described herself as a visionary, an equity/social justice advocate and a designer of systems. Her recommendation to other Black women seeking leadership in education was “to be themselves and to find a place where they can be themselves. Just being authentic and to find that place.”

**Participant #2: Dr. Elizabeth Berry**

Dr. Berry is in her second superintendency and currently serves in a predominantly Black, pre-K through 8, suburban school district. She is in her 11th year as a superintendent and has taught in both urban and suburban settings in middle and high schools. She was born in the southern United States and spent her formative years there.
Pathway to the Superintendency

Similar to two other participants, Dr. Berry had no intention of becoming a superintendent. For her, the ultimate goal was to oversee curriculum and instruction for a school district. She began as a classroom teacher and her career followed a traditional trajectory in public education until she took a four-year detour when she had the opportunity to work as an educational consultant in the private sector. She was still relatively early in her career when she transitioned back to public education and into her first administrative position and has held a series of administrative positions at the elementary, middle school and high school levels in both urban and suburban communities. These included teaching at both the middle school and high school levels, department chair, grant director, assistant principal, high school associate principal and an assistant superintendent. What motivated her to eventually pursue the superintendency was the encouragement of one of her two mentors who suggested that if she didn’t apply for the position, she might end up with someone who did not share her vision for the direction of the district. “She convinced me that if I wanted to see our district continue to move, that I really needed to put my name in and at least step up to the plate and be willing to do the work.”

Interestingly enough, when Dr. Berry began her doctoral studies, she approached her dissertation chair about conducting a study about Black women in the role of the superintendent but was dissuaded because there was limited literature available. Dr. Berry spoke highly of the preparation she received during her doctorate program as being beneficial because it balanced theory with practice. “You did all the theory, but they really wanted you to deal with relationships with people, the budgetary components. So, we had a lot of practical experiences which I really appreciated.” However, Dr. Berry believes that during her tenure as assistant superintendent, her superintendent “kept us in our silos” and did not include his administrative
staff in decision-making. As a result, she believes she could have benefited from learning more of the nuts and bolts of the business side (budgets, tax levies, personnel) in that district, as well as how to manage the political landscape and power dynamics necessary to lead a district. She recognized her local professional association with providing her with a mentor during her first year, which was most beneficial. “He was the one who really talked me through a lot of the logistics and steps that I had to make sure I followed.”

**Leadership Practice**

Dr. Berry maintains a robust involvement in a number of traditional professional organizations and networks, such as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), its state affiliate, and regional superintendent roundtables, although she acknowledges that “I’m just aware that when I walk into the room, I know that I don’t fit their mold. But I’m not going to change who I am.” Her primary mentors are a white female and a white male, both superintendents. Interestingly enough, Dr. Berry is one of the two superintendents who suggested that she perceived a lack of support and competitiveness on the part of other Black women. Dr. Berry indicated that this has included some Black women superintendents as well as Black women school board members who have underestimated her ability to do the job based on their perceptions of her outward appearance, age, and/or background. “We, as Black women, we’re always competing with one another instead of trying to support.” She felt that some of these women have been roadblocks in her path. These are roadblocks she has had to overcome.

In responding to how she navigates the dynamics of power in her school community, she emphasized that it is not always necessary to talk and advocated the importance of observing and listening. Her initial process for her current district was to conduct a “watching and listening” tour which allowed her to discover the influential players in her school community, whether it
was union members or school board members. She then set up regular, ongoing meetings with these groups or individuals, not only to keep them informed, but to listen to their concerns in an effort to be proactive and get ahead of any potential crisis. This also allowed her to anticipate any shifts in power as a result of politics or attrition.

Expressing her most memorable experiences as a superintendent, Dr. Berry cites graduation. “Just seeing every single graduation feels like this whole phenomenal experience with kids and just who they are, what they can become.”

In describing how she achieves work-life balance, Dr. Berry states that “I don’t try to balance it. I just make sure it’s integrated. I just integrate my life. My family is my priority always…If I can’t make something for the school district because of that (family obligations), I just say, hey, here’s the scenario.”

Dr. Berry identifies her greatest strengths as two skills she has had to develop – the ability to not take things personally and the ability to “read” people, particularly board members, to assess their needs and concerns so that the work of the district can be accomplished. Her greatest challenge is maintaining her patience with others who have tasks to complete, but don’t always do so in a timely manner.

Dr. Berry’s recommends to other Black women considering a position as a superintendent, “Don’t think that the title in and of itself is the end game. It’s the work that has to be done. And I would say you’ve gotta stay true to yourself. Don’t try to be somebody you’re not and then you end up more miserable than you really should be. And, if it’s not a good fit, like every superintendency is not going to be the perfect fit, and if it’s not, keep it moving.” Dr. Berry displays a very confident manner in her conversation. She describes herself as collaborative, empathetic, and no-nonsense.
Participant #3: Dr. Emma Earnest

Dr. Earnest is currently serving in her third superintendency in a suburban K-12 school district that she describes as transitional, meaning that the demographics of the student composition are becoming more racially and economically diverse. She is in her fifth year at her current school district where she is the first Black woman to serve as superintendent. She is in her 15th year as a superintendent overall. Brought up in the southern United States, Dr. Earnest is a self-described “Baby Boomer” with over 40 years in public education.

Pathway to the Superintendency

Dr. Earnest says she came up the ranks at a time when she was led to believe that it was important to know every job in the organization. She reflects that her diverse range of experiences in education over her career,

provided a level of confidence for me, because other than having been a custodian and worked in the cafeteria, I’ve pretty much done about every position in a school district.

From my early career as an assistant principal, I was a certified bus driver. So, I’ve done a lot of things cause I love to learn, and I love the experiences. But I also think it made me stronger and it certainly made me more confident.

Dr. Earnest believes that her engagement in a wide range of positions within a school district was a good choice for her, but that it may not be a necessity for moving up the career ladder.

While Dr. Earnest indicates that she always had people pushing her to the next level, she was always interested in leadership, and had that internal drive and motivation to take advantage of the opportunities to increase her knowledge and influence. While her first mentor was a male superintendent who encouraged her to become a superintendent, it was two females who have mentored her over time. She describes them and her observations in great detail.
One became a superintendent of our largest school district and she has been a friend and mentor. We always connect and I always call her or ask her, and she was always a professional reference and a networker for me. I have always stayed in touch with her… The other one was the first female superintendent with whom I’ve ever worked. She was a white female and I saw…I mean she was very open and honest. At the time, I was an assistant superintendent, so I was in a position to see how she was treated. I kept thinking, as a white woman, if they treat her this way, I don’t know what they would do to me. And ‘they’ being the system, the organization, the boards, the whole thing. But she was in her first superintendency and it was challenge after challenge, and obviously, I don’t think it was racism, but it was serious sexism…those two women, I think, were the most impactful for me. And to this day, I can call either one, or text either one, and just speak with them. They are just true colleagues and true professionals. I’ll be forever indebted to them.

Dr. Earnest cites the encouragement of her mentors, her preparation, and timing in moving her career along. She also suggests that her internal drive is related to the values instilled in her growing up.

I think preparation is the key. It is not without our parents, our generation of parents who instilled in me as a Black girl and then as a Black woman – you need to get your credential. You need to be prepared, and when you get your education and preparation, that’s something that nobody can take from you.

This generational drive and expectations from her parents have proved important in her continuous career development.
Dr. Earnest cites three important mentors in her career development – two white females and one white male. She indicates in discussion that in her experience with microaggression, “And do understand, it’s not always white people. It’s not always from men. And so that’s what I call ‘a little known Black history fact.’ Some of your worst enemies will be Black women. Also, some of your best allies will be Black women, probably most of them.” When I asked if that was a dichotomy, she agreed.

**Leadership Practice**

While Dr. Earnest acknowledges that as superintendent one must balance a number of often competing interests with her board, parents, and community. A common theme throughout her conversation is her unshakeable commitment to children and what is best for them.

I think the other is being clear on why I do what I do. I’m a teacher. I’m a teacher at heart. I’m very proud of being a teacher. Sometimes I’m not proud of my profession and how we behave and what we prioritize, but I’m a teacher. I’m proud of that credential because what that does is, it helps me to stay focused on why I’m here. I’m not here for adults. Now I know that I need adults to do the work, but I’m here for these children. I’m here for that next generation. I’m here to elevate the people who do the work for children.

When Dr. Earnest speaks, there is great passion in her voice. Although she does not mention spirituality, she seems to view her work as her mission. “I’m often, as superintendent, the last stop for refining and refocusing what we do and why we’re doing it and what’s the impact on our first priority, the impact on children.”

Dr. Earnest is an active member of a number of boards, committees, and advisories in the community which allows her to build relationships, as well as social capital with community
powerbrokers. “So, I think you navigate power through relationships, with some of the
relationships, by being available to let people know that you and them have the same goal and
you’re part of the same community.” Perhaps the most important group where she must navigate
power, is her school board who are in the end, politicians. She states very succinctly, “the board
is not your friend. You’re their employee.” She acknowledges that in her first superintendency
she learned the hard lesson that “if you don’t manage the politics, you won’t get to be the one
who helps educate children.” Board members, as elected officials have constituents that they are
obligated to.

When you have competing priorities among board members and differing constituents,
it becomes even more complicated. But you have to understand their political landscape
and be willing to work within that, as well as the other big thing. Try to do as much
board development as you can so they’ll understand their role. But never negotiating
the power and the obligation you have to children.

Dr. Earnest concedes that working with her board and understanding their needs and
balancing those with her non-negotiables is a learned skill and one that she works to improve
upon every day.

In addressing work and life balance, Dr. Earnest describes her commitment to self-care.
“You have to take care of yourself. I get my sleep. If I’m not working, I’m probably relaxing or
sleeping, “ noting that she exercises regularly and watches her diet. She cites the advantage of
being an empty nester with a supportive husband, who assumes many of the home
responsibilities. As important, she has agreed upon protocols with her school board and
administrative staff that provide for time away from school responsibilities on the weekends,
except for emergencies that demand immediate attention.
In describing herself as a superintendent, she states that she is “resilient and unwavering in preserving and delivering the education for these children. Unwavering and, also, uncompromising in that commitment.”

**Participant #4: Dr. Geneva Turner**

Dr. Turner is a retired superintendent who served 11 years in one superintendency and worked in education for 45 years. The school district from which she retired encompasses pre-K through 8 and is located in a medium-sized city. The district is racially diverse, with a majority Hispanic population and a significant low income population. Dr. Turner did not share a great deal about her upbringing, but was raised in a low-income, working class neighborhood in a large urban center.

**Pathway to the Superintendency**

Dr. Turner states, “My choice has always been to work with high minority populations. That was my commitment. That I would do everything that I could to improve the school conditions for minority students – African Americans.” Most of her work has been in large urban centers in the Midwest, beginning with 14 years as an elementary school teacher and a variety of district-level administrative positions, particularly in special education and curriculum and instruction, before becoming a superintendent.

Dr. Turner cites two important strengths and skills that have assisted her career trajectory and her ability to perform her jobs successfully. First, she possesses great determination and motivation for her own continuous improvement. Second, her knowledge of curriculum and instruction and the skills she acquired as a researcher in her doctoral program, particularly in data analysis and programming, have provided her with the most beneficial tools.
Dr. Turner had three important mentors, two Black females and one white male, who were very helpful in recommending her for their positions as they would prepare to depart for other jobs. The first mentor to recognize her abilities was Dr. Ray Wright, who encouraged her to apply for his position as the Director of Special Education for 7,000 students. Her next promotion came by way of Dr. Cheryl Jones, who again urged Dr. Turner to apply for her job as the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction for a school district serving 64,000 students. “You’ve got it and I want you to apply for my job. This is something you can do, and it will be beneficial to the district.” Dr. Jones persisted. Finally, her third mentor was the district’s new superintendent, Dr. Violet Glover. She assigned Dr. Turner to become her Senior Deputy Superintendent and consciously prepared her to take on a superintendency. According to Dr. Turner, “She saw so much in me that I probably didn’t see in myself because I might have been very afraid to step out into the superintendent’s role.”

Dr. Turner was always hesitant to pursue a superintendency because, as she stated, “There was a lot of turnover for superintendents at that time. I think we had four different superintendents in five years. So, I didn’t see superintendents as having a lot of longevity, which gave me pause, having responsibility for my child.” Over her career she held nine different positions, eight of them as a district-level administrator in one job or another, before taking a superintendency. After finding out that the previous superintendent had been with the district for ten years she stated, “Okay. There’s some stability there. So, this is a district where I can expect to go and have longevity and anticipate retiring from.” It is interesting to note that her predecessor was the district’s first Black woman superintendent, a factor that she felt acted in her favor.
Leadership Practice

Dr. Turner was very active in the district’s community, serving on organizational boards such as the United Way or the local hospital, and various commissions. Through her active participation in local activities, the public was able to see her commitment to the betterment of the overall community. It was something she enjoyed doing and impacted her ability to lead effectively. “So, I knew all the decision-makers in the community beyond the school district. I had connections and interactions with them; I could gain their support for the kind of things that needed to be done in the district.”

Important to Dr. Turner’s success were the positive relationships she was able to maintain with her building administrators and teaching staff. With her building administrators, she suggests that they viewed her as “tough” with high expectations for their performance. “They really worked hard. I had an expectation that you had to work hard in order to make things happen for kids.” As a result, they respected her because she recognized their work ethic and supported them. She still keeps in touch with many of them. Her relationship with her teachers’ union “had twists and turns sometimes,” and had its challenges, but she was persuasive in her negotiations because she “always made kids the core” of her discussion.

Some of Dr. Turner’s most challenging situations have involved occasional negative interactions with a Black board member or Black parent. In several instances she was accused of being “anti-Black male” because she recommended sanctions or termination of Black men employees. “Being a Black woman, it was probably one of the deepest hurts in itself that I could have received.” As a superintendent, Dr. Turner took great pride in her ability to communicate with the district’s parents. On one occasion, however, a Black mother did not agree with Dr. Turner’s decision regarding her child at the building level and displayed her outrage, becoming
angry with her, using profanity-laden language, and making disparaging accusations toward the superintendent. Dr. Turner, startled by what she saw was a lack of respect and remarked, “I’m thinking, I’m old enough to be your mother.” But as the superintendent, Dr. Turner believed that it was her responsibility to work with the parent and principal to resolve the concern.

Dr. Turner counts as her most memorable moments the times when she could enter a building “and the students would know who I was. That was just amazing, you know, that I had made myself a significant enough of a presence that my students knew.” The three individuals who acted as Dr. Turner’s mentors not only prepared her for her next position, but assumed the role of sponsors. Each of them created, by way of their position and influence, opportunities for her to advance her career and her pathway to the superintendency.

When questioned about how Dr. Turner managed work-life balance, she responded, “not too well.” She speaks of her adult daughter and how proud she is of the woman she has become, “She did a lot of wonderful things and I wasn’t always able to be at every event because I had obligations. But I certainly did the best I could.” Being divorced, she also acknowledged that during her tenure as an educational administrator, balancing her personal and professional life was often difficult because of the time commitments to her job.

When she was asked about the advice she would have for other women who were considering pursuing a position as a superintendent, she responded enthusiastically,

You can do it! You’re capable and to expand the women in our field would be absolutely wonderful because we have a whole unique perspective that we bring as women and also, our perspective is the same as other professionals. But I would say, do whatever you can and what you need to do and go for it. That’s the lesson that I learned. Don’t be content to stay where you are. Always look beyond that.
Dr. Turner spent a total of forty-five years in public education. When asked to provide words or phrases that would describe herself as a superintendent, she simply stated, “Did my best!”

Responses to Research Questions

Below are a set of collective findings for each of the three research questions that guided this study.

Research Question #1: What were the barriers or challenges to the attainment of the district superintendency as perceived by Black women superintendents?

The four Black women superintendents who participated in the study were able to identify barriers and challenges to their attainment and sustainability as a district superintendent. These have included a general lack of respect for their personhood, a lack of respect by the media, being held to a higher standard than their male counterparts, and a failure to respect their knowledge and expertise, and intersectional invisibility.

Dr. Nelson described that she was conflicted about her current position because of the difficulty she was experiencing trying to make structural changes that would improve her district and positively impact students. “I will say that most times I regret coming to this district. It’s interesting when I compare my experiences with my two “red” communities (her previous districts) where it was like me and maybe the janitors that look like me. I felt like I was able to get more done than I am here in this progressive, liberal place, honestly.” Her frustration stems from those influencers in the community who feel they are losing privileges when ideas are proposed that would create more equitable structures and they stymie the process.

Following a pattern that all the participants exhibited at some point in referring to Black historical figures or recent anti-Black racism, particularly towards women, Dr. Nelson discussed comments made by Malcolm X in a speech he gave on May 22, 1962 in Los Angeles, California.
His exact words were as follows: “The most disrespected person in America is the black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the black woman. The most neglected person in America is the black woman.”

I never heard the Malcolm X quote until this year, and I think it was before the death of Brianna Taylor. But the quote that says the most disrespected person in this country is a Black woman. And again, it’s become more evident to me in my current situation. I am still feeling that these days, whether it's the campaign of Kamala Harris or if it's a Brianna Taylor. I'm not quite sure why my lens has that view these days. But no, I think if anything, a Black woman in this role has a way harder way to go…whether it's the little nuances, microagressions or the large macroaggressions. There's not an automatic belief in what she says. There's no automatic belief that she has the knowledge to say it and it's just the constant, constant, constant, constant, constant questioning. And you know, the way that people do it, so nuanced.

Dr. Nelson was commenting on the frequent instances in her current position where board members or community members questioned her knowledge and abilities, often in public. Prior to her current experience, Dr. Nelson did not feel she had encountered roadblocks or barriers to her ascendancy to the superintendency. However, many of the interactions she has had in her current position and many of the racially aggressive encounters she has observed Black women experiencing in the greater society, made her more painfully aware of being the target of disrespect.

Dr. Berry addressed the old motif Black elders have espoused to generations of young Black people that you can’t just be good at what you do. You must be “twice as good for half as much” as your white counterparts in order to meet their expectations and move forward half as far as they do, whether in school or in your professional environment.

Absolutely, as a Black woman you gotta, you gotta know more, you gotta jump higher, run faster, swim faster. You just have to do all of that as a Black woman and I think you know it also causes you to have to really be more focused because we don't have the same luxury that our white counterparts do or even that Black men do. Cause they can come in and they can have that whole “I'm a guy” thing and everybody buys into it. Well, we don't have that. So, you know, as a Black woman you have to cultivate how do I move to the front of line if that’s where I want to be.
She further differentiates the intersection of gender and race in setting the expectations for Black men and Black women.

Dr. Earnest spoke about the level of scrutiny that she often receives from the local press, particularly early in her tenure when her salary was an issue for some in the public, despite the fact that it was considered in line with former superintendents.

The media doesn’t love me, and media doesn’t love most Black women…If you are Black, and female, particularly, it’s a level of scrutiny, it’s a level of criticism, it’s a level of meanness and its straight up racism and sexism…So, no, being female, you don’t get the benefit of the doubt. Being Black, you definitely don’t get the perks. The media will love to hate you, unless you’re one of the beloved, and sometimes you’ll get the benefit of that.

A recent article featuring area superintendent’s salaries used her picture and salary on the front page of the article, when there were white men with similar salaries and much smaller districts in the region. She believes her picture and salary triggers unconscious bias from the general public who might accept the salary from a white male, but who resent that a Black woman would command the salary, even if it is for one of the largest districts in the region, and the results of her work have brought improvement to the district from both a financial and academic view.

Dr. Turner responded to the interview question about the intersectional invisibility of Black women in the workplace as a unique form of discrimination where their voices or presence are not recognized. According to Jones and Norwood (2017) “This refusal to see Black women as professionals happens regardless of how they are attired or the activities in which they are engaged” (p. 2034).

And so, there’s a different level of respect. There’s a different level of treatment often times, just being a woman and then you add the additional layer being a Black woman. So, oftentimes that level of respect that is automatically given to your white male counterparts doesn’t come with that. You have to earn it, or you have to stand firm in your actions to demand it.
There was an instance where we were building some buildings and we were meeting with the architectural company. And I was there. My assistant superintendent for business was there and the firm’s representatives. So, he asked a question. “What did we think about one of the firm’s presentations and drawings that they had made?” I said, “da, da, da, da, da-da, da. Here’s my opinion, da, da, da, da, da, da.” So, after I spoke, he looked at my assistant superintendent, who was a white male, and said, “What do you think?” I said, “Let me stop you right there. My word is the final word.” And I said, “If you don’t want the final word, then don’t ask me first. But once I speak, there is no one else, who can speak beyond that.” So, there were times when you had to call it for what it was and put a stop to it. And I think that person turned so red (laugh), he didn’t know what to do. But it's like, nope, that's not how you’re gonna treat me. So often times it was like standing up for myself and calling behavior out, but in a very professional manner, but just not allowing it to continue.

While the member of the architectural firm may have been projecting an unconscious bias, either because she was female or Black or both, Dr. Turner illustrated that this was unacceptable behavior and that she would not allow herself to be marginalized.

Dr. Berry described being occasionally mistaken for the secretary in the workplace as “subtle racism,” although she did not want to attribute this solely to race, but a combination of the intersections of race, gender, and age. Such incidents are another example of the invisibility that Black women sometimes face. Dr. Berry’s way of deflecting these incidents was through the use of humor, “Yes. I’m the superintendent. I know it’s hard to believe, but, yes, it’s true!”

**Research Question #2:** Are there issues or opportunities, as perceived by the participants, unique to the intersectionality of race and gender that impacted their effectiveness as district superintendents?

Overall, participants highlighted the benefits of both formal and informal professional networks that impacted their effectiveness.

All of the participants in the study indicated that they belong to traditional professional organizations that would provide formal networking, as well as more informal networks defined by gender, race, or both. All were involved in the AASA, their state affiliates, and other related
organizations such as The National Superintendents’ Roundtable or National School Superintendents (NSS). Only two participants identified affiliation with the National Association of Black School Educators (NABSE) and one participant indicated membership in the Council of Urban Boards of Education (CUBE), an arm of the National School Board Association. Ideally, the inclusion of Black women as members of these networks should assist them in their career ascendency and stability. However, participants were more likely to reach out to informal networks for support. “Informal networks differ from formal networks in that their membership is voluntary and in that they help workers achieve work-related, personal, and social goals through unofficial channels” (Ibarra 1993 as cited in McGuire, 2002, p. 304).

Dr. Nelson indicated that she has always been partial to networks that were structured as cohorts that nurtured and supported its members over time. Very early in her career, Dr. Nelson became part of an informal network of all of the Black administrators, mostly male, in her district for dinner. These dinners were hosted by a community member and provided the opportunity for fellowship and conversation that most often led to sharing their experiences in education. She described an informal group of superintendents who are women of color across the country that she connected with weekly. A major purpose of the group was to provide support for each other as they managed their school districts through the COVID pandemic, and this group has been very beneficial for her.

Dr. Nelson also participated in more traditional professional networks. One network of particular note was the result of her selection for a national fellowship which evolved into a cohort of educational leaders focused on racial equity. Another formal network that she highly valued was a result of her previous position in another state. This state-wide network of rural, urban, and suburban superintendents focused also on sustained district improvement that
impacted all students and met monthly. Dr. Nelson recounted that these two networks “just fed my soul and have really, really deepened my growth over the years.”

Dr. Earnest recounted an “informal group” of women she met with over breakfast prior to the pandemic, hosted by a retired woman superintendent. She indicates that what has evolved from that group is a sub-set that meets once a month with aspiring superintendents of all races that grew out of a “desire to help groom the next generation.” She is an active member of this sub-set and has provided leadership in their events. On the other hand, she is a member of a more formal network of superintendents of both races and genders but is aware that within this group there is a more informal network of superintendents where she has not been included. She states, “a lot of what elevates people to the superintendency or to success is the informal and it’s still a good ole boys’ network.” She makes it clear, “Quite honestly, I don’t aspire to be a part.” Despite her observation, she has managed to be elevated to three superintendents.

Like Dr. Earnest, the other participants were involved in both types of networks. Dr. Berry says about her attendance at the meetings of several networking groups, “I go because I think it’s important to be at the table…but I know for sure that I’m not 100% accepted on a daily basis.” Dr. Turner indicated that her involvement with NABSE allowed her “to improve my knowledge as well as interact with like-minded people in the same job.” She further elaborates about her other affiliations, “I just always felt like there’s only so much time in the day, in your week, in your month…But my priority was to be dealing with the issues related to the school district. So no, I’ve never felt excluded. I always felt welcomed and some of the friendships that develop within those organizations, some of them continue on to the present.”

McGuire (2002) found in her study on informal networks and inequality in a work organization, “that network members were less likely to invest in women than in men because of
cultural beliefs that rank women below that of white men.” She further suggested that “women, in effect, face a double-edged sword; they obtain less instrumental help than men do from their informal networks members, but if they turn to formal outlets to meet their instrumental needs, they risk being further marginalized (p. 319). It would appear that the participants of this study have had mixed results in their participation with formal and informal networks, depending on the race, gender, and purpose of the groups.

**Outsider Within**

Beard (2012) presents that Black women educational leaders, by virtue of their race and gender and operating in a predominantly white male field of practice are “outliers” whose “standpoint, life experiences and ethic of care inform their decision making.” This provides them with a unique perspective for solving problems such as the achievement gap.

Collins (1986) outlines “Some of the potential benefits of outsider within status include: (1) Simmel's definition of "objectivity" as "a peculiar composition of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference"; (2) the tendency for people to confide in a "stranger" in ways they never would with each other; and (3) the ability of the "stranger" to see patterns that may be more difficult for those immersed in the situation to see.”

Each of the participants indicated that at one time or another, they have felt like an outsider, while serving as an educational leader, whether within a professional organization or network, or interacting with board members or community stakeholders. At least some of them believe that by virtue of their experiences as a Black woman educator, they bring unique perspective to the educational setting. Dr. Nelson commented, “I will say I do believe strongly that my experiences as a Black woman probably makes me see the structures that, you know,
help to design or produce the inequities that we have. I wonder if I weren’t a Black female, if I would be able to see it the same way.”

One of the incidents discussed by Dr. Earnest happened when she had some Black parents who she felt were being used by white parents in her district as a mouthpiece for ideas the superintendent believed were not in the best interest of Black children. So, the superintendent commented that she knew she had to address her Black parents directly. She laughed, “And I went ‘Black’ with her…And so I just spoke from the heart…They thought that they had their grandma, and they were going to do what I said.” Being able to address certain concerns by being “authentically Black,” correlates to the use of social capital that Ortiz (2001) found in her case study of three Latina superintendents, discussed in Chapter 3. Dr. Earnest’s strong ties with the Black community and her understanding of its cultural practices allowed her to operate from a cultural perspective in this context that proved to be an effective use of her social capital illustrative of Ortiz’s concept of Kinship Structure of Relations.

**Research Question #3:** What, if any, “commonalities of perceptions” do the participants exhibit based on their experiences?

Several “commonalities of perceptions” emerged in discussion with the participants, based on their lived experiences. These included the desire to “give back” in helping to prepare the next generation of women educational leaders, a commitment to equity and social justice for Black children, the presence of racial battle fatigue, the role of bridge builders in exercising their leadership, and their emergence as tempered radicals/servant leaders.

A common thread that runs through the discussion with the participants is their desire to “give back” by helping to prepare the next generation of women educational leaders, particularly Black women. One shared,
I did for others, other Black females, what was done for me. When I would identify some skills, all kinds of positive qualities, I would encourage them to look beyond where they were and explore the opportunities. Two of the folks that I’ve mentored, I keep in touch with them. One became superintendent. Another became superintendent. And so, yes, I tried to be a bridge builder. I tried to encourage them like I was encouraged because without that push, that encouragement, I might've been stuck where I was and not seeing myself beyond the role I was playing.

This type of comment was common across the interviews.

**Commitment to Social Justice and Equity for Black Children**

Every participant spoke directly to their commitment to social justice and equity for Black children in the educational setting and viewed the commitment as central to their work as superintendents. Beard (2012) and Bass (2012) both noted that this concern for Black children, emphasizing the ethic of care and the ethic of risk in Afrocentric culture characterizes the leadership and decision-making of Black women educational leaders. Dr. Berry expressed how important it is to address the resources and other needs of the Black children and families in her district in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Earnest stated, “One of the basic tenets of equity is access and opportunity. So, I will not endorse or recommend anything that takes away educational access and opportunity for any students, particularly not ours, who need it most.”

Dr. Turner explained her commitment to Black children, “There’s always been a lot of negative perceptions about the learning capabilities of Black students. So that made me even more determined to close the gap, the equity gap between how Black students who came prepared to learn and what they needed to learn and to be able to make progress.” Finally, in speaking of the frustration she sometimes felt in trying to move her district toward a social justice and equity
perspective, Dr. Nelson referred to a book by Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, entitled *Countering the Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys* (1985) that focused on the institutional racism encountered by Black boys in the public education system as one of the major contributors to the destruction of African American boys. She mentioned the book to reaffirm that her “ultimate desire is social justice…not wanting any child to lose their love for learning and that quest for learning.”

**Racial Battle Fatigue**

Another common theme was racial battle fatigue. Cobb (2017) in his book, *Leading While Black*, explains racial battle fatique as the “strain exacted on racially marginalized groups and the amount of energy lost dedicated to coping with racial microaggressions and racism” (Smith, Allen, and Danley, 2007, 555 as cited in Cobb, 2007). Racial battle fatigue results when “Black Americans are forced to emotionally cope in cultural environments that are unsupportive, combative, and, at times, hostile.” According to Cobb, Black Americans who have greater professional success are greatly affected by racial battle fatigue (p. 102). He further states, “Equity-minded Black educational leaders are prime candidates for racial battle fatigue.” Among study participants, another commonality was their consciousness of the racial unrest that bombarded towns and cities across the United States during the period from 2019-2020, and its impact on themselves personally and professionally. References to the murders of Brianna Taylor, George Floyd and the vice presidential campaign of Kamala Harris were part of the participants’ conversations, just as these incidents and others weighed heavily on Black Americans across the country. The question I posed to each participant was if they had experienced racial battle fatigue over the past year. They did express that facing the increased level of racism was exhausting and disheartening, especially those who were old enough to remember the struggles of the 1960s and 70s. While each of them indicated that they had,
referencing concern for their own families and their school communities, they were adamant that they could not slow down in their efforts to bring about change.

Dr. Turner, the only one of the participants not currently operating as a superintendent responded,

My choice has always been to work with high minority populations. That was my commitment. That I would do everything that I could to improve the school conditions for minority students – African Americans, and so it’s always been there. There’s always been, I think, from my own perspective, people who just crawled out from under the rock that they’ve been under before. It’s always been there.

Dr. Turner believed that the racism being displayed at the current time had always been present in society, but that those who held these views were in hiding. Therefore, she asserted that the current racial strife should not deter from one’s commitment to providing educational opportunity for African American children.

Dr. Berry commented, “You know it’s kind of interesting because the whole racial thing that’ happening right now, it has been very disheartening for me, I mean it has hurt my heart…I’m not going to call it battle fatigue because I know that this is a war, and these are short battles, we just got to make it through.”

Dr. Nelson shared, “I’m very fatigued these days.” She describes a series of recent events that have contributed to that fatigue. In one situation where she became a finalist for a position in another community, a member of the current school community attempted to sabotage her public interview and candidacy with negative comments to the interviewing board. She commented on “pointing things out to my current community and the board related to structures that need to be tweaked,” changes she believed to be vital for equity and inclusion to “make every student and
family welcome and comfortable.” Yet she describes how the “components of the power structure in the community” manage to block change. “I don’t feel that that component is the majority, but those are the loudest voices that we hear…So, yes, definitely fatigued.”

The combination of racial strife and COVID-19, which has further spotlighted the racial inequities of society challenged all of the superintendents. Dr. Earnest remarked, “Now with COVID, this is unchartered territory. That’s when whatever leadership skills you have will kick in and you have to transfer that leadership, because I’m running schools in a way I’ve never run schools before.”

Dr. Earnest reacted, “Fatigue doesn’t mean I’m giving up. Fatigue means, what Black folk used to say, ‘I’m just sick and tired of being sick and tired!’” She was echoing the words of the Civil Rights icon, Fannie Lou Hammer, who spoke these words in her speech before the 1964 Democratic National Convention in Atlantic City. But Dr. Earnest further explained, “But sometimes that makes you fight even more. And at this point in my career, I can fight a little differently because what I know about what happens to Black folk who are employed at six figure salaries, the ‘system’ wants to silence you. And they can do a better job at that when you feel that your house mortgage, and your car and your children and various clothes are at risk. I mean, people who have a level of integrity are never truly silenced. But they can make you mitigate what you’re gonna say. I’m at a point in my career where I don’t have those worries and so I feel that I have an obligation to be a more vocal, stronger voice. And I’m good with that.”

The racial fatigue experienced by Black educators committed to equity is the result of white society’s implicit biases, perceptions, and racial stereotypes. These Black educators have prepared themselves professionally, earned excellent credentials and are committed to their
work, feeling they have earned the right to an equal seat at the table. “With this reality in mind, victims of racial battle fatigue become mentally weary as they perform their working identity, causing them to suffer in silent rage, paralyzed by the reality of their positionality” (Cobb, p. 102). The participants of this study have all experienced some type of racial fatigue brought on by the constant resistance to change or to their leadership. Yet each one indicates that such resistance cannot deter them from their commitment to social justice and equity for students. The reality is that this is a struggle, and one survival technique is to develop coping mechanisms grounded in reality. I am reminded of the words spoken by abolitionist, Frederick Douglas in 1857. “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”

**Bridge Leadership/Bridge Builders**

Each of the participants saw themselves as “bridge builders,” defined by Horsford (2012) as “serving as a bridge for others, to others, and between others in multiple and often complicated contexts over time” (p. 17). This particular terminology was introduced through the interview questions. All of the women spoke about their commitment to Black children, the Black communities they served and closing the equity and achievement gaps by dismantling the structures that perpetuate racist systems in education. Grogan (2011) indicates that “Many women of color and many white women are motivated by a strong desire to transform the learning conditions and opportunities for those who have been at least well served by current educational policies and practices” (p. 11). Dr. Turner’s reflection on how she uniquely and personally communicated this to her administrators and teachers supports the supposition.

The words I would tell my administrators is I want you to look at me and remove every Black, minority child and you see me. Because that was me. I was a poor little girl raised in Chicago’s Westside and look where I am. So, you need to look at every student
and see the potential in them, not look at them for their race. And then, if you see me in that student and you’re going to give more and do your best to make sure that someday they, too, become superintendent.

The strong imagery and personalization Dr. Turner created with this statement could only be fully communicated by a Black woman. It sent a strong message about her own journey and her expectations for her staff and her commitment to the children she served.

Dr. Nelson suggested that she thought of “a bridge builder in terms of community engagement requiring principals to incorporate listening to stakeholder voice, students and families with decisions or school improvement planning.” Dr. Berry saw herself as a bridge builder in her efforts to create regular and comprehensive articulation between the predominantly Black local high school district and its connecting elementary districts, inclusive of administrators, teachers, and board members to better improve collaboration for curriculum alignment, and student achievement. A common theme of bringing about systemic change appears in the vision of the participants as bridge builders. Dr. Earnest expressed that she had to utilize bridge leadership to bring about an understanding of district’s past with its present for board members, staff, and the community. When she first arrived at her district and reviewed the demographic data, it was apparent to her that the current status of the district was that of a transitioning district, meaning that it had historically been a predominantly white, middle class district, but that the demographic was changing to a more culturally and economically diverse school community. When she stated publicly that they were now a predominantly Black district, this disturbed many who through their lens of implicit bias, viewed the identification of being Black as a negative condition. She had to persuade her school community to understand that the district had the resources and talent to serve all of its children well and maintain its level of
excellence. “And so, I had to bridge sort of a reality check gap with my board, my community, my administrators, my teachers to say we can be, because we do have resources, unlike many districts that make the demographic transition, the socio-economic transition.”

**Tempered Radicals/Servant Leaders**

Two other attributes that were observed from the responses by the study’s participants were *tempered radicals/servant leaders*. Alston (2005) outlines the concepts of *tempered radicals and servant leaders* in Black women superintendents and other Black women educational leaders. *Tempered radicals* are defined as individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations and also to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of the organization (Lorde, 1984 as cited in Reed, 2012). These women are considered *radical* because the ideals are progressive and committed to marginalized people but *tempered* because they operate within the system. Dr. Berry spoke emphatically of her district’s response to COVID-19 and leading a district with “African American kids, African American staff and parents.” She stated that as a Black woman, it was a priority for her to identify and address “the needs of our African American kids in terms of our digital needs…My parents need support.” The responses during the interviews of Dr. Earnest and Dr. Turner, their strongly stated commitment to progressive values and strategies to improve the education systems for children of color, that borders on righteous indignation, as well as their willingness to work with the dominant culture to facilitate change, makes them candidates for the title of *tempered radicals*.

*Servant leaders* exhibit the following six characteristics: demonstrate a strong sense of efficacy, dedicate themselves to the care of children, practice survival skills, use collaboration that is more relational, and consensus building, and believe in God (Alston, 2005, p. 682). Based
on the responses from Dr. Nelson, I would suggest that she displays all of the characteristics of a servant leader, as well as the those of a tempered radical. Although the other three superintendents also exhibited five of the six characteristics, during their interviews they did not consciously discuss the last characteristic, their spirituality or religious faith.

**Summary of Findings**

The themes of findings of this study align with literature and previous research related to the educational leadership of Black women and the theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought. These themes include barriers and challenges: a lack of respect within dominant cultural structures based on implicit bias, microaggressions and macroaggressions, double standards for Black women, systemic inequities, being the outlier/outsider within, and commonalities: commitment to equity and social justice, commitment to children of color, commitment to mentoring future educational leaders, ethic of care, responses to racial fatigue, formal and informal networks, and the model for tempered radicals/servant leaders.

Collins (1991) writes that, “Race, class, and gender represent the three systems of oppression that most heavily affect African American women.” There is evidence of colorism and classism and generation gaps within the Black community, which are suggested in some of the comments made during our interviews. These are relatively unexplored topics impacting the leadership of Black women. Andrews (1993) noted that the “double whammy of race and gender…compounded by the attainment of a high level of education, predictably creates problems on both a professional and personal level.” These topics as well as the themes resulting from the findings established during the interview process will be further discussed in Chapter 5.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

While there has been an increase in the research related to the history and evolution of Black women’s role as leaders in education in the United States since the late 1980s, there continues to be a dearth of studies that address the perceptions, and duality of the unique barriers and challenges that Black women superintendents are confronted with in their leadership careers. The purpose of this study was to provide an exploration of the lived experiences of selected Black women superintendents. The findings of this study assist in addressing the gap in research on Black women superintendents that provides for a framework that examines the characteristics of their leadership and allows them to express their experiences using their own voice. Through in-depth recorded interviews of four Black women superintendents, this study, based on a phenomenological narrative design, examined the intersectionality of race and gender in participants’ leadership experiences to address the personal and professional challenges they have faced as members of two marginalized groups, female and Black. Black Feminist Thought was utilized as the theoretical framework to support this research. Chapter Five will present conclusions, including an analysis and discussion of prominent themes and findings, recommendations, and suggestions of topics for further study. The primary research question for this study was as follows: How has the intersectionality of race and gender impacted the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents? In addition, three specific questions guided this study:

1. What were the barriers or challenges to the attainment of the district superintendency as perceived by Black women superintendents?
2. Are there issues or opportunities, as perceived by the participants, unique to the intersectionality of race and gender that impacted their effectiveness as district superintendents?

3. What, if any, “commonalities of perceptions” do the participants exhibit based on their experiences?

The use of a phenomenological narrative design allowed each of the women in the study to share their stories and speak in their own unique voice. As a result, the conversations were spirited, often inspiring, filled with thick and rich descriptions. As such, the methodology aligned well with the framework of Black Feminist Thought, which “places the experiences of Black women at the center of analysis in producing knowledge about intersecting forms of oppression that impacts educational opportunity, economic freedom, and political enfranchisement” (Collins as cited in McClellan, 2011), providing a platform for “self-definition” in which the participants were empowered to name their own reality.

Discussion of Findings

The issues of race and gender as they have impacted the leadership experiences of four Black women superintendents served as the focus of this study. The findings resulted in the emergence a number of common themes among the participants during the interview process. As well, there were some differences between the participants and between the interview results and current literature that will also be discussed.

All of the women interviewed were seasoned educational professionals with many years of experience and held doctorate degrees and had strong backgrounds is curriculum and instruction. The career paths of each of the women followed a similar traditional pattern of teacher to site administrator to assistant superintendent to superintendent, although two of the
women spent a short period working with for-profit educational organizations, quickly returning to the public education sector. This traditional career path pattern connects directly to the data on career paths outlined in AASA’s 2015 Mid-Decade Study. In the AASA study, most superintendents followed a path beginning as a teacher, principal, central office/district administrator to superintendent. One difference is in the area of mentors. While mentors in the 2015 study tended to be of the same race and gender, the mentors of the four participants in this study were much more diversified by both race and gender. Each of the women held eight positions prior to their first superintendency, with the exception of Dr. Earnest who held six different positions prior to her first job as a superintendent. The participants demonstrated mobility in their career decisions with all finding positions in more than one district or state. With the exception of Dr. Turner who held one superintendent position for eleven years, the other participants had all served as a superintendent in more than one district, and all had 11-15 years of experience as a superintendent. These factors represent a shift in the experience level and access to multiple positions than that of Black women superintendents in the past. The factors of mobility, working in more than one district and/or more than one state during their careers, was greater than the data indicated in the 2015 Mid-Decade Study for all superintendents. This would appear to be a rather recent phenomenon.

The women in this study were able to sustain their positions over time, evidence that they possessed a strong set of leadership skills, strategies, and tools to navigate the challenges of their organizations. Also, each of the participants had received significant recognition from their formal professional networks, a demonstration that they have achieved positive hypervisibility within these organizations and a sign that the greater dominant culture acknowledged and recognized the excellence of their leadership skills.
I would suggest that their longevity and success in their position is the result of several factors. They are not perfect, but each of them possesses these characteristics to a large degree. First, they are highly intelligent and knowledgeable about their field and the day-to-day requirements of their job and this is recognized by their Board of Education, administrative and teaching staff. They are constantly learning, inquisitive, and reflective. They have an outstanding ability to navigate the dominant culture of their district and/or community. They know who they are, demonstrate integrity, and in the big picture, remain true to themselves as Black women. They have learned how to manage stress and have a strong support system. Their race and gender provide them with a unique set of experiences, perspectives, and tools that they use, perhaps unconsciously, to solve problems and make decisions. Finally, they are committed to the care and education of young people.

In an effort to probe the four participants for their self-definition, an important part of the Black Feminist Thought framework, I utilized an interview question similar to one used by Johnson (2012), asking each of them to give me three words or phrases that they would use to describe themselves as a superintendent. Many of these self-described characteristics aligned with similar findings in other literature about Black women educational leadership: collaborative, equity/social justice advocate, resilient, and unwavering in the commitment to the education of children. Collins (1986) states, “Regardless of the actual content of Black women’s self-definition, the act of insisting on Black female self-definition validates Black women’s power as human subjects” (p. S17). In addition, the manner of each participants articulation of “personal expressiveness and emotion” used in their conversations demonstrated the passion language similar to that found in Simmons and Johnson’s (2008) investigation of the concept of hope in the lives of four African American female superintendents. Simmons and Johnson
suggested that the use of such language “vocalized from a deep commitment to justice, and articulated with emotional imagery of tone, diction, and context that conveys one’s convictions for hope” (Simmons & Johnson, 2008, as cited in Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011, p. 16-17).

Each of the superintendents exhibited strong and vibrant personalities and a great deal of confidence. Although the question of age was never formally discussed, based on the career experiences of these women, the range in age is approximately fifteen years. This age gap is not huge, but wide enough to suggest some subtle differences in perspective among the four superintendents. At least two of the women grew up during the era of the Civil Rights Movement and experienced some segregation, whereas the two younger superintendents had greater access to diversity during their formative years and in their early careers. There was some evidence that these experiences influenced their attitude toward the systemic racism and police brutality being recorded toward Black men, women, and children. These incidents served as a wake-up call for the younger superintendents who may have been lulled into a level of idealism during the Obama administration.

Findings related to work-life balance were mixed. While all of the participants acknowledged the importance of work-life balance, only one superintendent believed that she has successfully achieved it to a significant level.

**Research Question #1**

Each of the superintendents were asked to identify barriers or challenges to the attainment of the district superintendency. They were as follows: general lack of respect for their personhood, a lack of respect by the media, being held to a higher standard than that of their male counterparts, a failure to respect their intellect, knowledge, and expertise, and at some point, in their careers, the presence on intersectional invisibility. In Chapter 4, I provided
examples for each of these challenges as recorded by the participants. These barriers appear to be consistent with the research literature (Revere, 1987; Sesko & Biernat, 2009; Brown, 2014). However, the women in this study appeared to transcend these barriers through savvy leadership skills and political know-how to succeed in their positions.

Research Question #2

None of the participants felt that being a Black women superintendent presented any opportunities that could impact their effectiveness as district superintendents. They indicated in their discussions that there were really no advantages to being a Black woman in their leadership roles. Some wondered why more Black women did not express anger for the slights and injustices they had experienced in the workplace. They did believe that being Black women provided them with a unique perspective that made them more sensitive and committed to the education of Black children.

Another example of the unique perspective that Black women superintendents can bring to the table involved the incident described in Chapter 4, in which Dr. Earnest stepped outside of her formal role as superintendent to dialogue with her Black parents. The fact that the superintendent was Black and spoke to these parents as bluntly as she could, one Black person to another, in a manner of “code switching,” engendered trust and acceptance from Black parents, at least in this instance. Being Black and a female of a certain age may have added to her credibility. This unique perspective resulting from close social ties with the superintendent’s Black community demonstrates the social capital that can be brought bear in solving issues by virtue on one’s gender and race, a concept discussed by Ortiz (2001) and her concept of Kindship Structure of Relations. These findings also connect to what Williams (2005)
highlighted in the use of social capital on the part of Black women superintendents to acquire resources and solve problems for their districts though the use of social networks.

The perception that each of the participants brought a unique perspective to their leadership positions because of the intersections of their race and gender suggests that they were often outliers or outsiders within at various points in their career in the dominant culture. Existing research suggests that this unique standpoint may provide opportunities for Black women leaders in their ability to problem solve. Beard’s (2011) case study of a Black woman deputy superintendent, for example, found that this unique standpoint “informed [her participant’s] ability to frame the problem of the achievement gap in ways reflected by her leadership values and decision-making” (p. S17).

The use of both formal and informal professional networks by the four participants showed evidence that each of these women may have found ways to leverage their memberships in both types of networks to increase their knowledge base, strengthen their social capital, and, by way of a hypervisibility, to gain positive recognition from these traditional organizations. This differs from the research results highlighted by Brown (2014) where it was suggested that Black women were at a distinct disadvantage because of their limited access to mainstream political organizations and networks. Perhaps because the numbers of Black women superintendents have increased, the Black women superintendents in this study were more comfortable in these formal professional networks and the networks are now more open to their involvement.

Research Question #3

The four participants in this study exhibited five “commonalities of perceptions” based
on their experiences as superintendents. Those five commonalities are as follows and are closely tied to the tenets of Black Feminist Thought:

- Commitment to equity and social justice for Black children
- Giving back to future educational leaders
- Racial Battle Fatigue
- Bridge Leadership
- Tempered Radicals/Servant Leaders

One of the strongest commonalities among the participants was their strong commitment to equity and social justice for Black children and imperative to provide structures that would lead to the closing of the achievement and opportunity gaps that Black children access to a quality education. Participants expressed the need to assist and encourage future potential candidates for educational leadership as they had received similar assistance as they moved up. The combination of racial strife and COVID-19, which has further spotlighted the racial inequities of society has challenged all of the superintendents. Balancing the needs of students, parents, and staff during the COVID pandemic while working with the school board, staff, and the community in addressing racial inequities has resulted in racial battle fatigue by all of the participants. Cobb (2017) writes of racial battle fatigue as a social/emotional condition frequently experienced by equity-minded Black educational leaders who feel unsupported in the of racist institutions. However, each participant was careful to note that having fatigue has not discouraged them from continuing to fight for social justice and equity for their students. It only made them more determined.

Black women have historically utilized bridge leadership to “bridge people and purpose for social justice in education” (Horsford, 2012, p. 17). Horsford posits that bridge leadership “can serve as an effective model for leading diverse school communities where race and class divides continue to stifle learning opportunities for large numbers of poor, Black, Latino,
immigrant children and youth in the USA” (p. 11). Each of the participants cited several examples of how they demonstrated their ability to serve as bridge builders across a number of groups or individuals in order to bring about unifying dialogue to achieve positive change.

Finally, the identities of tempered radicals and servant leaders (Alston, 2005) were very apparent in the lived experiences of the four women superintendents. These findings connect to what Alston (2005) expressed in suggesting these concepts as a framework for research related to the leadership of Black women leaders. Tempered radicals are committed to their school organizations, but also to a cause – as in the case of the four participants, to achieving equity and social justice for the children they serve, which may be juxtaposed with the dominant culture. Servant leaders have similar commitments but are distinguished by their strong belief in God or a strong spirituality, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) also highlight the relationship between spirituality and the ways in which women of color inspire others to transform their organizations. A discussion of these concepts in greater detail is found in Chapter 4. According to Alston (2005),

As the demographics of the nation rapidly change, Black female school superintendents continue to persevere and keep commitments they have made to the children, the families, and communities they serve. The lived leadership experiences of Black female leaders in the 21st century can facilitate a new look at the principles of leadership in education (p. 685).

As discussed in Chapter 4, the participants in this study exhibited many of the traits Alston suggests are grounded in the conceptual frame for tempered radicalism/servant leadership. Alston has advocated that this conceptual frame has not been sufficiently utilized in the research that has produced the most influential, prevailing education leadership literature,
resulting in the absence of significant and unique qualities present in the leadership of Black women superintendents.

**Recommendations**

I now discuss a series of recommendations based on the findings from this study.

**Recommendations for Policy**

While there is some question as to whether there is a shortage of highly qualified candidates for school district superintendents (Glass & Björk, 2003), there is evidence to show the lack of racial diversity in the pool of candidates across the country. Findings from this study, highlighted in Chapter 1 (Bork, 2000; Alston, 2000), show that there is a lack of Black women candidates disproportionate to the women and women of color employed as teachers in the United States. In addition, no fully accurate data base on the current status of women superintendents or Black women superintendents exists (Robinson, et. al., 2017). To address this the lack of diversity in the candidate pool, state agencies should develop policy and work with university preparation programs for the superintendency to find ways to attract women of color. In addition, state agencies can support programs to better to balance theory with practical experience through internships and a establish mentoring program for superintendents in their first year in the position. Based on the responses of the participants in the study, having strong mentorship is advantageous for supporting these women, especially in their early years as administrators.

State boards of education should review their Leadership Standards for District-Level positions, including the superintendency to ensure the perspectives of Black women and leaders of other underrepresented groups are included. When new policies are developed, focus groups and advisory committees should include Black women and other people of color. The AASA
developed eight professional standards for superintendents in 1993. Given the changes in education and society in general over the last 28 years, it is recommended that these standards be re-evaluated and include a diverse representation of committee members, including Black women superintendents or university faculty who specialize in educational leadership in the process. The Educational Leadership Constituent Council updated its professional standards for educational leaders at the district-level. The National Educational Leadership Preparation (NELP) Program Recognition Standards were revised in 2015 and may be a good resource.

**Recommendations for Practice**

It is recommended that school districts involved in the superintendent search processes include Black women candidates for these positions. As suggested by Brown (2014), race remains one of the greatest barriers to recruitment. In addition, Black women superintendents must work to develop positive relationships with their school board as that relationship is one of the greatest factors to retaining their position. At least two superintendents listed their ability to “read” people and understand their needs as skills they valued, and it appears that Brown (2014) found that the Black women superintendents in her study identified this quality as an essential skill for maintaining their positions.

The day-to-day responsibilities of the district superintendent are comprehensive, and in most states, superintendents are directly responsible for student academic performance, continuous school and district improvement and principal performance, amongst many other tasks. Boards of Education should ensure that superintendents have adequate and qualified support staff to assist with fiduciary responsibilities, organizational management, and teaching and learning (curriculum and instruction) based upon district size.
Recommendations for Leadership Preparation

Leadership preparation programs need to better address the needs of Black women. The AASA has established several programs directed to aspiring women educational leaders including the Aspiring Superintendents Academy for Female Leaders and the Women’s Leadership Consortium. Similar programs have been implemented through state affiliates, also. While none of these programs directly targets Black women, they do focus on mentoring and networking with a more diverse group of potential leaders. Another interesting program that targets Black educational leadership is the partnership with AASA and Howard University, a historically Black university, in sponsoring an Urban Superintendent Academy. Programs such as these can provide ongoing support, networking opportunities, and knowledge focused on issues relevant to Black individuals of both genders in the early stages of their careers who aspire to the superintendency.

Three of the four participants who indicated that they participated in one or more of these programs through AASA or its state affiliates spoke positively of their experience. These programs have provided them with the opportunity to meet with other women superintendents, network and develop a support system. They are beneficial in allowing participants to study issues and leadership research related to gender and bringing attention to concerns directly related to work-life balance for women superintendents. It is recommended that these programs provide time on their agendas to address issues related to women of color.

In addition, all university superintendent preparation programs should include at least one class devoted to the superintendent and leadership practices that would be expanded to include leadership models such as tempered radicalism, as suggested by Alston (2005) and bridge leadership, as outlined by Horsford (2012). Such programs would assist students seeking the
superintendent’s license in securing internships that encompasses responsibilities that provide authentic practice of leadership skills identified with the position of district superintendent. It would be very beneficial for interns to have the opportunity to work with and experience the leadership style of at least one Black woman superintendent.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The topic of professional sabotage on the part of some Black women to another was suggested by two of the participants. Within the Black community, this is probably a sensitive subject that few would want to discuss outside of the community and would want to keep “in the family,” but it does exist. This finding reinforces what Brock (2008) suggests that regardless of race, the issue of professional sabotage among women “coexists alongside collaboration and mentorship” (p. 211). Why do women in educational leadership sabotage each other? The data is sparse but suggests competition for a limited number of opportunities for advancement, a change in equal status among groups when one person receives a promotion and the status quo changes, jealousy, and ambition. While Brock indicates that such behaviors are limited to a small number of women, it can be at least a temporary barrier to the career development of women. These reasons that lead to sabotage exist, whether or not a Black woman is in a white institution or a predominantly Black one. One could speculate that within white institutions, ascendency to leadership might be perceived as being available as limited tokenism, prompting competition. In predominantly Black institutions, limited resources may spur one to undermine other Black women. Whatever the rationale, I would suggest that as Black women, we cannot afford to be divided in our goals and objectives as educational leaders. The education of Black children is just too important. It is imperative to have these discussions among ourselves, particularly with the new generation of potential leaders to get to the root of this phenomena and
find ways to better network and support each other. Research into whether this sabotage occurs, how often, and how to best support Black women leaders in working together is necessary to establish a collaborative and supportive environment in which these women can be effective and successful leaders. Further research will establish the authenticity of such behaviors, an understanding of the nature of the sabotage and, to develop strategies by which this type of behavior can be prevented and/or eliminated.

Another topic for future research would be to examine the dynamics of leadership for Black women who lead predominantly Black districts with predominantly Black school boards as opposed to those who are superintendents in more racially diverse districts with more diverse school boards, identifying differences and similarities. Some of the discussions that result from this study may indicate that there are some differences in the political and cultural natures of the boards and communities which could impact a superintendent’s leadership style.

Based on the comments of the four participants, there is evidence of colorism, classism, and generation gaps within the Black community that impact on their leadership and that remain unexplored in current literature. Further research is recommended to assist in better understanding how these factors impact the effectiveness of the leadership of Black women.

It is also a recommendation to develop a national data base that maintains accurate information on the statistics related to the various demographics of superintendents – Black women, white women, Black men, white men, Latinx women and Latinx men and other significant groups. This type of baseline data was not available at the onset of this study and would be very beneficial to researchers to accurately measure and analyze trends overtime. One of the agencies that I initially sought as a source was The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Department of Education. It currently
keeps statistics for teachers and principals. Teachers are disaggregated by gender and principals are disaggregated by gender and race. It is recommended that NCES’s data base be expanded to include similar information for school superintendents.

A Final Reflection

In 1975 I was a master’s degree student in music education at the University of Illinois, enrolled in a class entitled The History of Music Education, taught by a very distinguished visiting professor. We were asked to get his approval for the topic of our final paper. I preface this by saying that my year at the U of I had been gloriously heady, enriched by my opportunity to work with three important Black educators in the School of Music, experiences that were singularly unique – my voice teacher, Mattiwilda Dobbs, who had a pioneering singing career at the Metropolitan Opera and in Europe, William Warfield, an internationally recognized baritone of oratorio, recordings, and film, and Robert Ray who had recently written, The Gospel Mass, a groundbreaking choral composition that put the Roman Catholic liturgy to a gospel setting. I approached my professor with my topic, motivated by my enthusiasm of working with such distinguished and historically significant Black faculty members. My topic was to research the history of Black music educators. And while he approved my research paper, he cautioned me that I did not want to get the reputation of being focused only on “Black” topics. I listened but kept silent. In my mind I thought, if I don’t research and write about these things, who will? His words to me have stayed with me over the years. What his words illustrated for me was that the history of people of color and the pursuit of research related to these topics was devalued as a part of the academy’s white, male canon. It is this perspective which dominated research for many years.
The field of research has evolved over the years as did my career choice, as I ultimately focused on educational administration. While there continues to be a scarcity of research about women in the superintendency and other educational leadership positions, these barriers are being broken down as more Black women assume these leadership positions, as well as positions as researchers and academics in higher education. My initial goal in pursuing this dissertation topic was because I wanted to better understand my six years as a district superintendent. While I had great preparation classes and a great internship, nothing quite prepared me for the political and racially-charged dynamics of becoming the first Black woman superintendent in a district that was transitioning racially from white to Black. I believe that I have achieved my initial goal, as well as the objective to explore the lived experiences of a group of dynamic Black women superintendents and the impact of being both Black and female has had on their development as leaders.

Dr. Glenda Glover (2020), president of Tennessee State University, one of America’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), addressed this unique time in the history of Black women and their impact in this country in an online article entitled, An Open Letter on the Politics of Ambition.

Despite seemingly insurmountable odds, African-American women have excelled in all areas of human endeavor including corporate America government, law, medicine, education, sports, and the arts, among other fields. Yet, African-American women continue to wrestle with a nation that repeatedly questions and diminishes their worth, competence, and capacity to add distinctive value (para. 2). Glover posits that instead of American society being consumed with negativity towards the emerging leadership of Black women, the country should take advantage of the opportunity to
fully comprehend what the leadership, power, political savvy, and energy of Black women with purpose can do to make this world a better place.

Interviewing the four participants in this study was an inspiring experience for me. Although they were quite willing to acknowledge that they continued to learn and improve as leaders, I was impressed by their expertise, their willingness to share their experiences, and their insights about the nature of leading while Black and female in their own authentic voices. Our increasingly diverse society has much to learn about the unique perspective and leadership skills of Black women that has the capability of informing and transforming the way our public education system is led in the future.
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APPENDIX A: IRB FORM: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Protocol Form

IRB Number: #20533

Human Subjects Research – Protocol Form

Guidelines for completing this research protocol:
• Please submit typed applications via email. Handwritten forms and hard copy forms will not be accepted.
• For items and questions that do not apply to the research, indicate as “not applicable.”
• Provide information for all other items clearly and avoid using discipline specific jargon.
• Please only include text in the provided boxes. The text boxes will expand as they are typed in to accommodate large amounts of text.

Before submitting this application, ensure that the following have been completed.

• Protocol Form is complete.
• Relevant CITI modules have been completed for all members of the research team at www.citiprogram.org.
• Informed consent/assent/parental permission document(s) are provided.
• Relevant waivers and appendices are provided.
• Recruitment materials are provided.
• Research materials (e.g., surveys, interview guides, etc.) are provided.
• Any relevant letters of support are provided.

Instructions on the non-exempt review process and guidance to submitting applications, can be found on the OPRS website. You may also contact OPRS by email at irb@illinois.edu or phone at 217-333-2670.

Submit completed applications via email to: irb@illinois.edu.
Protocol Form

Section 1: PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (PI)
The Illinois Campus Administrative Manual allows assistant, associate, and full professors to act as PI. Other individuals may serve as PI after obtaining approval from the necessary party.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Last Name:</th>
<th>Roegman</th>
<th>First Name:</th>
<th>Rachel</th>
<th>Degree(s):</th>
<th>Ed.D.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dept. or Unit:</td>
<td>Education Policy, Organization and Leadership</td>
<td>Office Address:</td>
<td>359 Education Building</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street Address:</td>
<td>1310 South Sixth St.</td>
<td>City:</td>
<td>Champaign</td>
<td>State:</td>
<td>IL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
<td>(414) 702-1914</td>
<td>E-mail:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:roegman@illinois.edu">roegman@illinois.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Urbana-Champaign Campus Status:
Non-visiting member of (Mark One) 
- x Faculty
- Academic Professional/Staff
(Student Investigators cannot serve as PI)

Training
- Required CITI Training, Date of Completion (valid within the last 3 years), 2/7/2019
- Additional training, Date of Completion,

Section 2. RESEARCH TEAM
2A. Are there other investigators engaged in the research?
- Yes (include a Research Team Form)
- No

2B. If yes, are any of the researchers not affiliated with Illinois?
- Yes
- No

Section 3. PROTOCOL TITLE
Intersectionality and the Leadership of Black Women Superintendents

Section 4. FUNDING INFORMATION
4A. Is the research funded?
- Research is not funded and is not pending a funding decision (Proceed to Part 5).
- Research is funded (funding decision has been made).
- Funding decision is pending. Funding proposal submission date:

4B. Indicate the source of the funding.
- University of Illinois Department, College or Campus, please specify:
- Federal, please specify:
- Commercial Sponsorship & Industry, please specify:
- State of Illinois Department or Agency, please specify:

---

*3 Clarify whether or not sponsor requires specific language in the contractual agreement that impacts human subjects research
*4 Clarify whether or not the sponsor requires the protocol adhere to ICH GCP (E6) standards*
Section 5. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

Please indicate below whether any investigators or members of their immediate families have any of the following. If the answer to any of the following items is yes, please submit the University of Illinois approved conflict management plan. If you have any questions about conflicts of interest, contact coi@illinois.edu.

5A. Financial interest or fiduciary relationship with the research sponsor (e.g. investigator is a consultant for the research sponsor). □ Yes □ No

5B. Financial interest or fiduciary relationship that is related to the research (e.g., investigator owns a startup company, and the intellectual property developed in this protocol may be useful to the company). □ Yes □ No

5C. Two or more members of the same family are acting as research team members on this protocol. □ Yes □ No

Section 6. RESEARCH SUMMARY

6A. In lay language, summarize the objective and significance of the research.

This proposed study will examine the intersections of race and gender in the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents, focusing on interactions with school boards, local communities, and district personnel. The research questions I seek to answer is: How has the intersectionality of race, gender, and leadership impacted the lived experiences of Black women superintendents? In addition, there are four subsidiary research questions that will guide this proposed study:

1. What were the barriers or challenges at the attainment of the district superintendency as perceived by the Black women superintendents?
2. Are these issues or opportunities, as perceived by the participants, unique to the intersectionality of race and gender that impacted their effectiveness as district superintendents?
3. What, if any, “commonalities of perceptions” do the participants exhibit based on their experiences?
4. Are there leadership attributes typically observed in Black women superintendents that are not observable in other education leaders? (servant leadership, outsider within, bridge leadership, etc.)

6B. Indicate if your research includes any of the following:

□ Secondary data (use of data collected for purposes other than the current research project)
□ Data collected internationally (include International Research Form)
□ Translated documents (include Certificate of Translation Form and translated documents)
□ Research activities will take place at Carle

6C. Letters of support from outside institutions or entities that are allowing recruitment, research, or record access at their site(s) are attached. □ Yes □ Not Applicable
Section 7. PERFORMANCE SITE

7A. List all research sites for the protocol. For non-University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign sites, describe their status of approval and provide contact information for the site. If the site has an IRB, note whether the IRB has approved the research or plans to defer review to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

Performances Sites

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>a location convenient for the participant that will ensure privacy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If there are additional performance sites, include them on an attachment and check here: [ ]

7B. Is this a multi-center study in which the Illinois investigator is the lead investigator, or the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is the lead site?  [ ] Yes [ ] No

If yes, answer 7C and 7D. If no, move to Section 8.

7C. Who is the prime recipient of funding, if funded?

7D. What is the management and communication plan for information that might be relevant to the protection of research subjects (e.g., unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects, interim results, and protocol modifications)?

Section 8. PARTICIPANTS

8A. For each performance site, indicate the estimated total number of participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Performance Site</th>
<th># Male</th>
<th># Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTALS</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If additional performance sites are included on an attachment, check here: [ ]

8B. Select all participant populations that will be recruited.

Age:
- [x] Adults (18+ years old)
- [ ] Minors (≤17 years old)
- [ ] Specific age range, please specify:

Gender:
- [ ] No targeted gender (both men and women will be recruited/include)
- [x] Targeted gender, please indicate: [x] Men/boys [ ] Women/girls [ ] Other, please specify:

Race/Ethnicity:
- [ ] No targeted race or ethnicity (all races and ethnicities will be recruited/include)
- [x] Targeted race or ethnicity, please specify: Black

College Students:
- [x] No targeted college population
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ UIUC general student body</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Targeted UIUC student population, provide the instructor or course information, name of the departmental subject pool, or other specific characteristics:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Students at institution(s) other than UIUC, please specify:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other:</td>
<td>Any research with students on UIUC’s campus needs to be registered with the Office of the Dean of Students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Inpatients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Outpatients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ People who are illiterate or educationally disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ People who are low-income or economically disadvantaged</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ People with mental or cognitive disabilities or otherwise impaired decision-making capacities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Adults with legal guardians</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ People who are non-English speaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ People with physical disabilities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Pregnant or lactating women, human fetuses, and/or neonates</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Prisoners or people with otherwise limited civil freedoms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Other, please specify:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8C. Describe additional safeguards included in the protocol to protect the rights and welfare of the populations selected above.

Section 9. RECRUITMENT

9A. Select all recruitment procedures that will be used.

- □ Student subject pool, please specify:  
  - □ Email distribution
  - □ MTurk, Qualtrics Panel, or similar online population, please specify:
  - □ US Mail
  - □ Flyers/brochures
  - □ Website ad, online announcement (e.g., eWeek), or other online recruitment, please specify:
  - □ Newspaper ad
  - □ Verbal announcement
  - □ Other, please specify:
  - □ Not applicable (secondary data only)

9B. Drafts or final copies of all recruitment materials (including verbal scripts) are attached.

- □ Yes □ Not Applicable

9C. For each group of participants, describe the details of the recruitment process.

   Snowball sampling will be used to identify 3-5 African American female superintendents in the Midwest region who currently serve as public school superintendents. Contact information will be obtained soliciting referrals from the networks of superintendents. Potential participants will be contacted by email. A sample of the email to be used for recruitment is attached.
### Section 10. WITHHELD INFORMATION

10A. Do you propose to withhold information from subjects prior to or during their participation?
- [ ] Yes  [x] No

If yes, complete the rest of Section 10 and also submit the [Alteration of Informed Consent Form](#). If no, move to Section 11.

10B. What information will be withheld?

10C. Why does this information need to be withheld for the purposes of the research?

10D. How will participants be debriefed?

10E. A draft or final copy of a written debriefing that will be provided to participants is attached.
- [ ] Yes  [ ] Not Applicable

### Section 11. SCHOOL-BASED RESEARCH

If subjects will be recruited from Illinois public or private elementary or secondary schools, additional deadlines and procedures may apply. Criminal background clearances might be required. Special consideration must be given to the exclusion of protected populations. Please contact the School University Research Relations ([researchplacements@education.illinois.edu](mailto:researchplacements@education.illinois.edu)) for more information.

Select one:
- [ ] Illinois schools will be used
- [x] Illinois schools will not be used

### Section 12. INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION CRITERIA

12A. List specific criteria for inclusion and exclusion of subjects in the study, including treatment and control groups.

12B. Explain how the inclusion/exclusion criteria will be assessed and by whom. If special expertise is required to evaluate screening responses or data, list who will make this evaluation and describe their training and experience.

Inclusion criteria are Black, female, and current superintendent.

12C. Drafts or final copies of all screening materials are attached.
- [ ] Yes  [ ] Not Applicable

12D. Describe procedures to assure equitable selection of subjects. Justify the use of the groups marked in Section 8B. Selection criteria that target one sex, race, or ethnic group require a clear scientific rationale.

### Section 13. DEVICES & EQUIPMENTS

Indicate if your research includes any of the following.

- [ ] Equipment [Researchers collecting physiological data, not testing the device] *(include Appendix A, the Research Equipment Form)*
- [ ] Devices [Researchers planning to test devices on human subjects] *(include Appendix B, the Device Form)*
- [ ] Materials of Human Origin *(include Appendix C, the Biological Materials Form)*
- [ ] Drugs and Biologics
Section 14. RESEARCH PROCEDURES

14A. Select all research methods and/or data sources that apply.
☐ Surveys or questionnaires, select all that apply: ☐ Paper ☐ Telephone ☐ Online
☒ Interviews
☐ Focus groups
☐ Field work or ethnography
☐ Standardized written, oral, or visual tests
☐ Taste or smell testing
☐ Intervention or experimental manipulation
☐ Exercise and muscular strength testing
☒ Noninvasive procedures to collect biological specimens (e.g., hair and nail clippings, saliva, etc.)
☐ Noninvasive procedures to collect physiological data (e.g., physical sensors, electrocardiography, etc.)
☐ Procedures involving radiation
☒ Recording audio and/or video and/or taking photographs
☐ Recording other imaging
☐ Materials that have already been collected or already exist, specify source of data:
  ☐ HIPAA-protected data
  ☐ FERPA-protected data
  ☐ GDPR-protected data
  ☐ Other, please specify:

14B. List all testing instruments, surveys, interview guides, etc. that will be used in this research.

Interview protocol

Drafts or final copies of all research materials are attached. ☒ Yes

14C. List approximate study dates. July 1, 2020 – October 31, 2020

14D. What is the duration of participants’ involvement? 45-60 minutes

14E. How many times will participants engage in research activities? 1 time

14F. Narratively describe the research procedures in the order in which they will be conducted.

Interviews will be conducted virtually with each participant in a location convenient for the participant that will ensure privacy via virtual meeting software. Each interview is expected to take between 45-60 minutes. Each participant will be informed of interview protocols in writing which will be followed throughout the process. Prior to beginning, they will be asked to sign an informed consent form that is online. Each interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. A verbatim transcript for each interview will be created. A coding system will be developed to look for common themes among the participants. The researcher will assign an anonymous identity for each participant to maintain confidentiality. Each interviewee will receive a copy of the transcription for their clarification, deletions or additions where appropriate. All pertinent data will be secured in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s residents and on a password-protected computer.
Section 15. SUBJECT REMUNERATION

Refer to the University Business and Financial Policies and Procedures for further guidance on the compensation process and reporting requirements.

15A. Will subjects receive inducements or rewards before, during, or after participation?
- Yes ☒ No
If yes, complete the rest of Section 15. If no, move to Section 16.

15B. Select all forms of remuneration that apply.
- Cash, please specify amount:
- Check, please specify amount:
- Gift Certificate, please specify amount:
- Lottery, please specify amount: and odds:
- Course Credit, please specify amount: and specify equivalent alternative activity:
- Other, please specify:

15C. Will payment be prorated before, during, or after participation?
- Yes, please specify how:
- No

15D. For each group of participants, describe the details of the remuneration plan, including how, when and by whom they will be notified.

15E. The information listed above is provided on the relevant consent forms.
- Yes

Section 16. SUBJECT OUTLAY

Will subjects incur costs for research-related procedures (e.g., longer hospitalization, extra tests, use of equipment, lost compensation, transportation over 50 miles, etc.)?
- No ☒ Yes, please explain:
## Section 17. CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY

### 17A. How is participant data, records, or specimens identified when received or collected by researchers? Identities include, but are not limited to, name, date of birth, email address, street address, phone number, audio or video recordings, and SSN.

- [ ] No identifiers are collected
- [ ] Direct identifiers are collected
- [ ] Indirect identifiers (e.g., a code or pseudonym used to track participants);
  - Does the research team have access to the identity key? [ ] Yes [ ] No

### 17B. Select all methods used to safeguard research records during storage:

- [ ] Written consent, assent, or parental permission forms are stored separately from the data
- [ ] Data is collected or given to research team without identifiers
- [ ] Data is recorded by research team without identifiers
- [ ] Direct identifiers are removed from collected data as soon as possible
- [ ] Direct identifiers are deleted and no identity key exists as soon as possible
- [ ] Participant codes or pseudonyms are used on all data and the existing identity key is stored separately from the data
- [ ] Electronic data is stored in a secure, [UIUC-approved location](#), please specify U of I Box
- [ ] Hard-copy data is stored in a secure location on UIUC’s campus, please specify
- [ ] Other, please specify:

### 17C. How long will identifiable data be kept?

- July 2022

### 17D. Describe provisions to protect the privacy interests of subjects.

The researcher will assign an anonymous identity for each participant to maintain confidentiality. The pseudonym key will be kept in a secure location separate from the audio recordings and transcriptions of participant interviews.

### 17E. Describe the training and experience of all persons who will collect or have access to the data.

Rachel Roegman has taken several courses on qualitative research methods. She has conducted several studies using interview methods, and she has presented and written on her research extensively.

Barbara Suggs Mason has also taken several qualitative research methods courses and assisted on research studies using interview and focus group methods.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section 18. INFORMED CONSENT PROCESS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>18A. Indicate all that apply for the consent/assent/parental permission process.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Written informed consent (assent) with a document signed by</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ adult subjects ☐ parent(s) or guardian(s) ☐ adolescents aged 8–17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Waiver of Documentation (signature) of Informed Consent <em>(include the relevant Waiver Form)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ adult subjects ☐ parent(s) or guardian(s) ☐ adolescents aged 8–17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Waiver of Informed Consent <em>(include the relevant Waiver Form)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ adult subjects ☐ parent(s) or guardian(s) ☐ adolescents aged 8–17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Alteration of Informed Consent <em>(include the relevant Alteration Form)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ adult subjects ☐ parent(s) or guardian(s) ☐ adolescents aged 8–17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18B. List all researchers who will obtain consent/assent/parental permission from participants.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbara Suggs-Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18C. Describe the method for obtaining consent/assent/parental permission.</strong> Interview participants will be asked to review and sign an electronic copy of the attached consent form. All prospective research participants will be allowed to review, ask questions and/or decline to participate at anytime.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18D. Describe when consent/assent/parental permission will be obtained.</strong> Consent will be obtained prior to the interview.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18E. Will participants receive a copy of the consent form for their records?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Yes ☐ No, if no, explain: if they choose to download one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18F. Indicate factors that may interfere or influence the collection of voluntary informed consent/assent/parental permission.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ No known factors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Research will involve students enrolled in a course or program taught by a member of the research team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Research will involve employees whose supervisor(s) is/are recruiting participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Participants have a close relationship to the research team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Other, specify any relationship that exists between the research team and participants:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If applicable, describe the procedures to mitigate the above factors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18G. Copies of the consent form(s) are attached.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ Yes ☐ Not applicable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>18H. Will this project be registered as a clinical trial?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ Yes ☒ No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, effective January 21, 2019, an informed consent form must be posted on the Federal Web site after the clinical trial is closed to recruitment, and no later than 60 days after the last study visit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Section 19. Dissemination of Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19A. List proposed forms of dissemination (e.g., journal articles, thesis, academic paper, conference presentation, sharing within industry, etc.).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19B. Will any identifiers be published, shared, or otherwise disseminated?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, does the consent form explicitly ask consent for such dissemination, or otherwise inform participants that it is required in order to participate in the study?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19C. Do you intend to put de-identified data in a data repository?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If yes, explain how data will be de-identified.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Section 20. Risks & Benefits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>20A. Describe all known risks to the participants for the activities proposed, such as risks to the participants’ physical well-being, privacy, dignity, self-respect, psyche, emotions, reputation, employability, and criminal and legal status. Risks must be described on consent forms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks to the subjects are minimal. The respondents have an opportunity to answer open-ended questions, and there is risk that the responses provided could be sensitive in nature. However, the researcher will not attribute any of these comments to any specific individual or to a specific site and will not share any individual names that are provided in the responses in the findings.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20B. Describe the steps that will be taken to minimize the risks listed above.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risks will be minimized by not sharing or including anyone’s name or any identifying information in any written products or any conversations.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>20C. Indicate the risk level.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☒ No more than minimal risk</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(The probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated for participation in the proposed research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>☐ More than minimal risk (answer 20D)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20D. If you checked that the research is more than minimal risk, describe the provisions for monitoring the data to ensure the safety of subjects, such as who will monitor data and how often, what criteria will be used to stop the research, etc.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20E. Describe the expected benefits of the research to the subjects and/or to society.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While participants may not directly benefit from participation in this study, it is hoped that the findings from this research will contribute to the literature that will assist aspiring and current Black women superintendents.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20F. Weigh the risks with regard to the benefits. Provide evidence that benefits outweigh risks.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The benefits outweigh the risks in this study. The data that results from the study will be helpful for school and academic leaders who seek to increase the effectiveness of preparation programs in the area of leadership.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Section 21. INVESTIGATOR ASSURANCES

- I certify that the information provided in this application is complete and correct.
- I certify that I will follow my IRB Approved Protocol.
- I accept ultimate responsibility for the conduct of this study, the ethical performance of the project, and the protection of the rights and welfare of the human subjects who are directly or indirectly involved in this project.
- I will comply with all applicable federal, state and local laws regarding the protection of human subjects in research.
- I will ensure that the personnel performing this study are qualified and adhere to the provisions of this IRB-certified protocol.

The original signature of the PI is required before this application may be processed (electronic signature are acceptable).

May 27, 2020
Principal Investigator

May 27, 2020
Date

Section 22. DEPARTMENTAL ASSURANCE (OPTIONAL)

If the PI is not eligible to serve as PI under the Campus Administrative Manual, the applicable academic dean, institute director, or campus administrative officer indicates their approval of the researcher to act as Principal Investigator. Please note that departmental assurance only needs to be provided in the initial application.

Applicable Authorizing Officer

Date
APPENDIX B: RESEARCH LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Barbara Suggs-Mason and I am a graduate student from the Education Policy, Organization & Leadership Department at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. I am writing to invite you to participate in my research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the intersection of race and gender in the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents. You are eligible to be in this study because of your achievement as a Black woman educational leader who is currently serving as a school superintendent. I obtained your contact information from [describe source].

If you decide to participate in this study, I will conduct a virtual interview with you at a time and in a location convenient for you and that will ensure privacy. The purpose of the interview is to gather information about your career experiences. The interview is expected to take between 45-60 minutes and will be audio-taped and transcribed. I will assign an anonymous identity for you to maintain confidentiality and you will receive a copy of the transcription for your review and to provide clarification, deletions, or additions where appropriate. I will use the information to complete my doctoral research, it is hoped that the findings from this research will contribute to the literature that will assist aspiring and current Black women superintendents.

Remember, this is completely voluntary. You can choose to be in the study or not. If you'd like to participate or have any questions about the study, please email or contact me at bsuggsmason74@gmail.com or at (708) 341-7952. I look forward to your response!

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Barbara Suggs-Mason, Doctoral Student
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
bsuggsmason74@gmail.com
Social Behavioral Research Consent Form

Intersectionality and the Leadership of Black Women Superintendents

You are being asked to participate in a voluntary research study. The purpose of this study is to examine the intersection of race and gender in the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents. Participating in this study will involve one-to-one interviews, conducted virtually with each participant in a location convenient for the participant that will ensure privacy. Each interview is expected to take between 45-60 minutes. Each participant will be informed of interview protocols in writing which will be followed throughout the process. Prior to beginning, they will be asked to sign an informed consent form. Each interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. A verbatim transcript for each interview will be created. A coding system will be developed to look for common themes among the participants. The researcher will assign an anonymous identity for each participant to maintain confidentiality. Each interviewee will receive a copy of the transcription for their clarification, deletions or additions where appropriate and given a two-week period to respond or not. If I do not receive a response within that period of time, I will assume that the participant is satisfied with the transcript. All pertinent data will be secured in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s residence and on a password-protected computer. To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you incur in daily life. There are no significant risks related to this research; while you may not directly benefit from your participation in this study, it is hoped that the findings from this research will contribute to the literature that will assist aspiring and current Black women superintendents. The alternative to participating in this study is to not participate in this study or to not answer any question.

Principal Investigator Name and Title: Barbara Suggs-Mason, doctoral student
Department and Institution: Education Policy, Organization and Leadership, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Contact Information: bsuggsmason@gmail.com, (708) 341-7952

Why am I being asked?
You are being asked to be a participant in a research study about the leadership experiences of Black women superintendents. The purpose of this research is to provide an exploration of the experiences of selected current and former successful Black women superintendents. Further, the study seeks to examine the intersection of race, gender and leadership in the development of their careers. In so doing, this study aims to contribute to the literature on the experiences of successful Black women superintendents that will assist in preparing a new generation of aspiring and current Black women education leaders.

You have been asked to participate in this research because of your successful experience as a Black woman who has served or is currently serving as a public school district superintendent.
Approximately 3-4 participants will be involved in this research at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Your participation in this research is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future dealings with the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without affecting that relationship.

**What procedures are involved?**
The study procedures are as follows:
The researcher will meet with each participant for a one-to-one interview, conducted face-to-face at a mutually agreed upon location, convenient for the participant that will ensure privacy. Each interview is expected to take between 45-60 minutes. Each participant will be informed of interview protocols in writing which will be followed throughout the process. Prior to beginning, they will be asked to sign an informed consent form. Each interview will be audio-taped and transcribed. A verbatim transcript for each interview will be created. A coding system will be developed to look for common themes among the participants. The researcher will assign an anonymous identity for each participant to maintain confidentiality. Each interviewee will receive a copy of the transcription for their clarification, deletions or additions where appropriate and given a two-week period to respond or not. If I do not receive a response within that period of time, I will assume that the participant is satisfied with the transcript. All pertinent data will be secured in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s residence and on a password-protected computer.

This research will be performed at mutually agreed upon site in your area. You will need to meet with me one time at an agreed upon site over the next three months (April 1-June 30, 2020). Each of those visits will last 45-60 minutes.

**What are the potential risks and discomforts?**
To the best of my knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would experience in everyday life. Your responses to the interview questions are anonymous and a pseudonym will be assigned to each participant and locations will not be identified.

**Are there benefits to participating in the research?**
You will not directly benefit from participation in the research. While you may not directly benefit from your participation in this study, it is hoped that the findings from this research will contribute to the literature that will assist aspiring and current Black women superintendents.

**What other options are there?**
You have the option to not participate in this study.

**Will my study-related information be kept confidential?**
I will use all reasonable efforts to keep your personal information confidential, but I cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. When this research is discussed or published, no one will know that you were in the study. But, when required by law or university policy, identifying information (including your signed consent form) may be seen or copied by:
- The Institutional Review Board that approves research studies;
- The Office for Protection of Research Subjects and other university departments that oversee human subjects research;
University and state auditors responsible for oversight of research.

**Will I be reimbursed for any expenses or paid for my participation in this research?**
You will not be offered payment for being in this study.

**Can I withdraw or be removed from the study?**
If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time. The researchers also have the right to stop your participation in this study without your consent if they believe it is in your best interests or you were to object to any future changes that may be made in the study plan.

**Will data collected from me be used for any other research?**
Your information will not be used or distributed for future use, even if identifiers are removed.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**
Contact the researchers Barbara Suggs-Mason, doctoral student, at (708) 341-7952 or bsuggsmason74@gmail.com, if you have any questions about this study or your part in it, or if you have concerns or complaints about the research. You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Rachel Roegman at (414) 702-1914 or rroegman@illinois.edu.

**What are my rights as a research subject?**
If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this study, please contact the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign Office for the Protection of Research Subjects at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu.

I have read the above information. I have been given an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this research. I will be given a copy of this signed and dated form.

__________________________________________  ________________
Signature                                      Date

__________________________________________
Printed Name

__________________________________________  ________________
Signature of Person Obtaining Consent          Date (must be same as subject’s)

__________________________________________
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent

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APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOLS

Intersectionality and the Leadership of Black Women Superintendents

Questions for Superintendent Interviews (semi–structured)

Introduction: Thank you so much for your time today. My name is Barbara Suggs-Mason and this interview is a part of my dissertation work on how the intersection of race and gender impacts the leadership of Black women superintendents. The goal of this interview is to present to you a series of open-ended questions that will help me to learn more about your experiences as a Black woman in this leadership position. Further, the study seeks to examine the intersection of race, gender, and leadership in the development of your career. In so doing, this study aims to contribute to the literature on the experiences of successful Black women superintendents that will assist in preparing a new generation of aspiring and current Black women education leaders.

Please answer as honestly as you can. Your name, or any name that you mention in this interview will not be shared with others, I will use pseudonyms instead. I expect our conversation will last no more than one hour.

Before we start, do you have any questions?

If not, let’s get started with the first questions.

Background

1. Briefly, tell me about yourself, your professional background and experience. How many years have you served as a superintendent and in how many districts?
2. What motivated you to want to become a superintendent?
3. What aspect of your preparation, do you believe, was most beneficial in getting you ready for your role as a superintendent?

Mentoring/Networking

1. Did you have mentors as you moved up the ranks of the career ladder? If you did, tell who they were (including race and gender) and how they assisted your success as a superintendent?
2. Do you have the opportunity to interact with other superintendents? Black, white, or other races and ethnicities, female or male?
3. Who mentors you or acts as an advocate to support you currently?
4. What professional organizations have been the most helpful in supporting your career?
5. In what networks were you included? Were there any networks from which you felt you were excluded? If so, why do you think you were excluded?
Reflections on the Superintendency

1. What strengths or skills do you believe you possess that have assisted your success as superintendent?
2. What was your most memorable experience as a superintendent?
3. Do you feel that being Black and female has provided opportunities or added to your ability to serve successfully as a superintendent? Why or why not?
4. What roadblocks or barriers have you experienced in your career path?
5. In your ascendency to the superintendent’s position have you ever experienced racism? Sexism? If so, please give an example of each.
6. As the leader of your school district, how have you navigated the dynamics of power in your district to serve the overall school community and children?

Impact of Race and Gender on Interacting with Stakeholders

1. Identify a situation that has been particularly challenging to you as a superintendent?
   How did you navigate the situation? Do you think being a woman influenced your ability to navigate through the situation? Do you think being Black influenced your ability to navigate through the situation? Describe why you think so.
2. Describe how you believe your race impacted the building of relationships with the following groups. Please give examples.
   a. School board members
   b. Building administrators
   c. Teachers
   d. Parents
   e. Community
3. Describe how you believe your gender impacted the building of relationships with the following groups. Please give examples.
   a. School Board members
   b. Building administrators
   c. Teachers
   d. Parents
   e. Community
4. Horsford (2012) uses intersectionality of race and gender identities in a discussion of how the historic practice by which Black women have been “bridge leaders” in education, “serving as a bridge for others, to others, and between others in multiple and often complicated contexts over time (p. 11).” Do you believe you have served in this role during your superintendency? If so, can you describe the experience?
5. As the leader of your school district, how have you navigated the dynamics of power in your district to serve the overall school community and children?
6. Several researchers have highlighted the *intersectional invisibility* of Black women in the workplace as a unique form of discrimination where their voices or presence are not recognized. Have you been the object of these behaviors from others and do you feel that you are being heard at this moment in time as a Black woman leader.
Current Trends and the Impact on Race and Gender

1. Has the current racial unrest and the spotlight on racial bias and inequities in society impacted your leadership? Have you ever experienced racial battle fatigue and if so, how?

2. The Covid-19 pandemic and its effects how we conduct K-12 education have presented a unique set of issues for educational leaders. How have these events impacted your work as a Black women superintendent?

3. How do you manage work-life balance?

Closing questions

1. What advice or recommendations do you have for other Black women who are considering pursuing a position as superintendent?

2. Give me three words or phrases that you would use to describe yourself as a superintendent.

Closing: This concludes our interview. Over the next few weeks, I will send you a transcribed copy of our conversation for you to review. I would ask you to contact me should you have any corrections. Again, I want to thank you for your time and insights during this interview.