2022

Attainment of Superintendent Roles for African American Women in Rural U.S. School Districts

Likisha Tamese Coleman
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Likisha Tamese Coleman

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. James Bailey, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Kathleen Kingston, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Dan Cernusca, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2022

Abstract

Attainment of Superintendent Roles for African American Women in Rural U.S. School

Districts

by

Likisha Tamese Coleman

EdS Delta State University, 2009

MEd, Mississippi Valley State University, 2002

BS, Mississippi Valley State University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2022

Abstract

African American women are underrepresented in the attainment of superintendent roles from a racial and gendered standpoint. African American females hold only 1% of superintendent positions in a field in which 27% of superintendents are women and 8.6% of superintendents are African American. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to describe the barriers and supports experienced by African American women in their attainment of superintendent roles in rural U.S. school districts. Black feminist thought and intersectionality provided the conceptual frameworks for this qualitative study. Data were collected from semistructured interviews with eight African American female superintendents from rural U.S. school districts. Data were analyzed from open coding to gather categories and axial coding to establish themes. Findings from data analysis indicated seven themes: high educational and professional qualifications; apparent or nonapparent racial inequity; inequity as it relates to gender bias; cultural lens of the conservative rural concept; the structural lens as trailblazers; resiliency to overcome isolation and self-imposed barriers; and support from mentors, family, and the school community. Aspiring African American female superintendents, educational leadership preparation programs, school districts, and search firms may use the findings from this study and contribute to social change leading to the increased representation of African American women in superintendent roles.

Attainment of Superintendent Roles for African American Women in Rural U.S. School

Districts

by

Likisha Tamese Coleman

EdS Delta State University, 2009

MEd, Mississippi Valley State University, 2002

BS, Mississippi Valley State University, 1999

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2022

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Willie L. Riley, and my son, Michael T. Coleman, Jr. Each of you unconditionally love and support me in unimaginable ways. I recognize we are more alike than different and hold ourselves and each other to strict accountability to be the best versions of ourselves. Thank you!

Acknowledgments

I humbly thank my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for covering and protecting me through this dissertation and all other phases of my life. Job well done to Dr. James Bailey, my committee chair, and Dr. Kathleen Kingston, my second committee chair, for their timely feedback and support throughout this process.

Table of Contents

iv

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

This study focused on the role attainment of African American female superintendents in rural U.S. school districts. The number of African American female superintendents does not proportionately reflect the population of educators in the field, nor does it reflect the student population in schools. The American Association of School Administrators (date, as cited in National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016) found that across the United States the underrepresentation of people of color was more prevalent among superintendents than teachers and principals. The American Association of School Administrators (2020, as cited in American Association of School Administrators [AASA], 2015) also reported that of the 8.6% African American superintendents, African American women held only 1% of the superintendent roles. Further, Campbell (2015) reported that students of color make up more than 50% of the student population in southern rural school districts. By 2024, the number of students of color is expected to increase to 54% (NCES, 2016). As the demographics in schools shift to an increasing population of students of color, it is important that changes occur in top-level school leadership positions as an example of how to build more inclusive communities and schools (Capper & Young, 2014). Brown (2014) noted that African American women who attain superintendent roles learn, teach, and model how to overcome racism, sexism, and oppressive sociopolitics.

Researchers postulated that female educational leaders are not in positions that traditionally lead to superintendent roles (Glass, 2000). Similar to the disconnect between female leader preparation and the low attainment of superintendent roles of other women,

African American female leaders' experiences are due to the disconnections credited to the intersections of their multiple marginalized identities (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Rural school leadership involves multiple challenging factors that disconnects and isolates it from urban and suburban school leadership. African American female leadership and rural school district leadership share complexities. Like rural school leadership, African American female leadership does not align with traditional leadership characteristics. African American female leaders present dynamics of at least two constructs: gender and race. In conjunction with gender and race, the rural context serves as an additional construct that includes poverty, inequity, and isolation requiring adaptive leadership (Klocko & Justis, 2019).

Barriers and professional supports impact the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women. McCluney and Rabelo (2019) examined the impact of gender and race on how marginalized people are perceived, evaluated, and assigned to midmanagement level positions. The glass ceiling effect based on gender barriers and the concrete ceiling effect based on racial barriers affects the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women (Beckwith et al., 2016). Hoyt and Murphy (2016) contended that African American women were disadvantaged from a historical vantage point with barriers such as stereotypes, which in many cases lead to isolation in educational leadership. Whether inflicted upon by others or self-imposed, inequity in the attainment of superintendent roles by African American women will be more disproportionate as the demographics of women of color continue to increase in the United States (Pace, 2018). Howard et al. (2017) explored the impact of mentors and the

power of networking on mentees' career advancement. They recommended continuous support to lessen the effects of the glass ceiling and concrete ceiling.

The current study was significant because I sought to provide a better understanding of the barriers and supports African American female superintendents face and receive in their attainment of superintendent roles in rural U.S. school districts. This study was an original contribution to addressing the issue of a lack of representation of African Americans in educational leadership positions that can be documented as far back as the 1954 supreme court case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka,* which integrated schools but not the educational leaders within the schools. The findings from this study may lead to changes that could affect the number of African American women in superintendent roles in rural school districts by providing an understanding of the barriers and supports for aspiring African American female superintendents. This study could also lead to changes that could affect the educational outcome for students of color by having an identifiable educational leader who looks like them.

Chapter 1 introduces the study on the attainment of superintendent roles of African American women in rural U.S. school districts. This chapter includes the background of the attainment of superintendent roles, the problem statement in relation to underrepresentation in the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women in rural school districts, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. Additionally, Chapter 1 includes the study's conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance, and a summary.

Background

Gender, race, and class are intersectional constructs that impact the attainment of superintendent roles in the United States. In a narrative inquiry involving five female superintendents, Gammill and Vaughn (2011) discovered the attainment of superintendent roles was dependent on the school community's views of acceptable womanhood. Similarly, Bernal et al.'s (2017) comparative study of three men and three women on the gender bias within the superintendency found that gender bias was prevalent for women due to their role in parenthood. Samuel and Mokoaleli (2017) analyzed the stereotypes of gender and leadership roles and determined that prejudice toward female leaders was dependent on biases of the evaluators who were typically men. Koch et al. (2015) investigated the employment decision making by gender and found that women exhibited a near-zero bias and men exhibited a much larger pro-male bias. Extensive research over the decades has revealed the condition of African American women's double disadvantages based on race and gender produced a different experience from all other women and racial groups (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Five women in a study conducted by Davis and Maldonaldo (2015) confirmed that the intersections of race and gender informed their development as leaders. More specifically, Holsey et al. (2020) revealed that African American female administrators perceived race as a factor in the denial or acceptance in role attainment. Beckwith et al. (2016) indicated that the dual bias of race and gender isolates African American women in search of role attainment. In addition to gender and race, constructs like class are essential to overcome simplistic, one-dimensional approaches by engaging the

multiplicities of African American women's circumstances (Tefera et al., 2018).

Beckwith et al. (2016) reported that educational leaders entering organizations to attain the superintendency were expected to adopt the existing organizational norms framed by the White male majority leaders in the field. Studies have been conducted on the attainment of superintendent roles. However, the African American female perspective has been limited in the research or attributed to the gendered perspective of White women and the racial perspective of Black men (Brown, 2014). Two conceptual frameworks, Black feminist thought and intersectionality, aligned the gendered and racial perspectives with addressing the Black feminist plight and the multitude of oppressions that can occur in conjunction with gender and race, like class. Researchers posited gender, race, and class as multiple oppressions that minimalize African American women's existence in superintendent role attainment and in the literature (Collins, 2000).

African American women's educational leadership limitation is attributed to the "glass ceiling," an invisible barrier to advancement based on attitudinal or organizational biases (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Should an African American female ascend to the superintendent position, Beckwith et al. (2016) found that the "concrete ceiling" would make it difficult to penetrate the apparent barriers in an organization based on stereotypes relating to multiple oppressions categorized by gender, race, and class.

In the rural school context, African American women presented with gender, race, and class issues experience inequity and isolation in their attainment of superintendent roles. Academic performance in rural schools has improved in recent years, but it is

important to note that achievement gaps are based on race in rural schools, mirroring what happens in urban and suburban school districts (Showalter et al., 2019). Lavalley (2018) found that regardless of region, poverty created inequalities that disproportionately affected racial minority children. African American female educational leaders and students of color share a similar plight of attainment in both schools and in society. Additionally, the transformational leadership style exhibited by African American women demonstrates resiliency that can be transferred to leadership in rural schools (Klocko & Justis, 2019). When people implement strategic measures that adequately address challenges, the action steps may be applied to other situations. Although barriers exist for African American women, supports to make the attainment of superintendent roles possible exist.

Most studies examined the superintendency from the White male perspective. Other studies presented the superintendency from the White female perspective or the Black male perspective, further demonstrating how positionality in society supports the need to study the Black female perspective. Beyond missing gender and race perspectives on the superintendency, research on school districts was not always inclusive of rural school districts. After a review of research, I found a gap in practice regarding understanding how African American female superintendents in rural school districts in a southern state in the United States attained their superintendent roles. This study addressed the underrepresentation in the attainment of roles for African American female superintendents in rural school districts. This study has the potential to effect positive change related to representation in the attainment of superintendent roles for African

American women by adding to the literature on African American female leaders and rural school district leadership.

Problem Statement

The problem that was the focus of this study was the underrepresentation of African American female superintendents in rural school districts. Though about 75% of the nation's professional educators are women, almost 75% of the superintendents are men, exposing a gender gap in educational leadership (Allred et al., 2017). According to Allred et al. (2017), women express their aspirations through preparation. Allred et al. reported that women were more proportionately represented in doctoral degree completion, years of teaching experience, and completion of administration educational preparation programs than men but were underrepresented in the attainment of superintendent roles in public schools. Because at least half of all students living in southern states are enrolled in rural school districts, role attainment for African American female superintendents impacts 50% of the public school districts (Showalter et al., 2019). The population of African American female superintendents is also disproportionate to the population of students in schools.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. African American women currently serving as superintendents were asked to discuss their experiences attaining their roles. Specifically, African American female superintendents were asked to discuss the barriers they had

faced and describe how they overcame them to attain their roles. Participants were also asked to discuss how they were supported in the attainment of their roles.

Research Questions

The following research questions (RQs) guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?

RQ2: How did African American female superintendents overcome barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts?

RQ3: What types of support do African American female superintendents perceive as beneficial in helping them attain superintendent roles in rural school districts?

Conceptual Framework

This study was framed within the conceptual models of Black feminist thought and intersectionality. Black feminist thought was coined by Crenshaw (1989) and developed by Collins (2000) to empower African Americans within the context of social injustice sustained by intersecting oppressions. Applicable to educational leadership, Black feminist thought investigates the discrimination of African American women as superintendents (Crenshaw, 1989). Black feminist thought proposes that African American women are represented by both race and gender simultaneously. Intersectionality demonstrates the degree to which multiple oppressions like race, gender, and class make African American women subordinate in society (Crenshaw, 1989). Further, Crenshaw described intersectionality as overlapping biases.

The logical connection between the framework and this study was understanding

African American women's attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts. Black feminist thought explores the experience of African American women in their capacity as leaders. Moreover, intersectionality explains the relationship of intersecting oppressions that include race, sex, and class. In this study, the literature review addressed racism, sexism, and classism as intersecting factors impeding African American women's attainment of the superintendent role. Black feminist thought and intersectionality were used to support the perspective of African American women in superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. Chapter 2 provides a more detailed analysis of Black feminist thought and intersectionality. Moreover, Chapter 2 shows a progression of the concepts from a historical standpoint to a more current analysis of the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women in rural school districts.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I selected a qualitative case study design. Qualitative research methodology "attempts to understand individuals, groups, and phenomena in their natural settings in ways that are contextualized and reflect the meaning that people make out of their own experiences" (Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 2). Check and Schutt (2012) indicated that terminology can create bias in research. As a result, reducing bias can be observed in framing the problem and questions that seek an explanation from participants rather than present any preconceived conclusions. Qualitative researchers aim to understand how people make sense of the world from their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Case study research is "the in-depth study of one or more instances of a phenomenon in its real-life context that reflects the perspective of the participants

involved in the phenomenon" (Gall et al., 2007, p. 447). Case studies are also bounded by time, place, and shared experiences (Creswell, 2013). The current qualitative case study included African American women currently serving as rural school superintendents in a southern U.S. state. Rural school districts represent half of all districts in most southern states in the U.S., and the participants in this case study represented the population from half of the total public schools in the southern U.S. state in which the study was conducted. Case study research methods include multiple data sources or cases in which one source or case is used to check or verify another (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the current study, data were gathered from eight African American women serving as superintendents in rural school districts in a southern state. This qualitative case study enabled the participants, African American female superintendents, to describe the barriers and supports they experienced in their attainment of the superintendency in rural school districts. Data were collected from one-on-one semistructured interviews lasting between 20 and 40 minutes. Interviews were held in an agreed upon location to maintain the participants' privacy and confidentiality. Interviews were recorded, notes were taken, and data were analyzed using coding and thematic analysis.

Definitions

The following terms were used throughout the study:

African American female leadership: Racialized and gendered role expectations above and beyond those expected of other administrators (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003).

Attainment: Acquiring roles based on challenges of historical and sociopolitical factors within regions (Brown, 2014).

Black feminist: An individual who makes the case that Black women must deal with the concept of the double bind socially and politically as a Black person and as a woman (Davis & Brown, 2017).

Barriers: Internal and external obstacles to career progression (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Career path: The various ways in which leaders ascend to administrative levels based on their years of experience and career choices (Holsey et al., 2020).

Educational leadership: People who occupy positions of power in an educational organizational (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2016).

Ethics of care: Benefits centered around interpersonal and institutional relationships from people with shared conditions (Horsford, 2010).

Female leadership: Women faced with challenges when working in male-dominated organizational cultures because success may be dependent on women's adaptation to the organizational culture adhering to the attitudes and values traditionally observed by male leaders (Carli & Eagly, 2001).

Gender bias: Issues female leaders face involving personal and professional challenges (Bernal et al., 2017).

Gendered perspective: Women competing with men for leadership roles are disadvantaged by the perception that leadership is a male trait or role (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015).

Intersectionality: Theorizing of women of color regarding race, gender, sexuality, and other forms of inequality (Tefera et al., 2018).

Isolation: Characterized by geographical, racial, or gendered vastness (DeFeo & Tran, 2019).

Racial inequality: Issues relating to racial marginalization (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020).

Racial perspective: Adaptation to identities; a strong Black racial identity or a corporate identity defined by White standards (Bell, 1990).

Rural school leadership: Unique leadership based on the context in which the role is impacted by lack of resources, multifaceted responsibilities, and expectations of a high-profile role in the community (Klocko & Justis, 2019).

Superintendent role: Institutionalized as men's work that began with an emphasis on management to improve the overall school system operations by prioritizing time and efficiency and later focused on instructional leadership (Robinson et al., 2017).

Supports: External assistance within and outside of organizations focused on position or role attainment and retention (Wiley et al., 2017).

Assumptions

Wolgemuth et al. (2017) asserted that assumptions come from social, historical, political, and cultural constructs used to anticipate how research problems are framed and solutions are formulated. The current qualitative case study was based on three assumptions. The first assumption was that the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women differs from other genders and races of educational leaders. I assumed that African American participants would offer a unique perspective on superintendent role attainment. The second assumption was that African American

women experienced barriers in attaining their superintendent roles. This assumption was necessary to bring credibility to the experiences of the participants in the study. I assumed the participants had integrity based on their position of power and responsibility in their organization. The last assumption was that African American women experienced supports in the attainment of their superintendent roles. The study's dependability was bounded by the participants' responses that addressed the barriers and supports in attaining superintendent roles.

Scope and Delimitations

According to Theofanidis and Fountouki (2019), the scope of a study outlines the confinement to which a study is held based on its research questions and methodology. The current study's scope was the barriers and supports experienced by African American female superintendents in their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. The participants' recruitment was bounded by gender and race, current attainment of the superintendent role, and representation in a rural school district in a southern U.S. state.

Delimitations are not positive or negative, but rather provide a detailed account of the reasoning that clarifies the study's focus related to the design and conceptual framework (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The current study's findings cannot be generalized to all rural school districts in the southern state in which the study was conducted or to rural school districts across the United States. Additionally, this study cannot be generalized to all African American women who attained superintendent roles. Furthermore, this study was limited by the small available population from which to

select a sample.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses of a study outside of the researcher's control linked to the research design and constraints of conducting the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2019). The first limitation of the current study was the targeted sample size of between eight and 10 participants. Another limitation was my potential bias as both the data collector and data analyst. However, exhaustive efforts were made to mitigate my biases. Finally, a limitation was participants' honesty in their responses to the questions as well as their willingness to discuss the challenges they faced in attaining their superintendent roles.

Significance

This study was significant because it was expected to reveal the barriers and supports African American female superintendents faced in their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts. An original contribution may be made in educational leadership to address the issue of underrepresentation in the attainment of roles for African American female superintendents in rural school districts. I sought to lead the efforts to create awareness that may stimulate changes that may increase the number of African American women who attain superintendent roles in rural school districts. Specifically, I strove to impart an understanding of the barriers and supports of superintendent attainment for aspiring African American women, educational leadership preparation programs, school districts, and school boards and search firms who hire superintendents. This study could also lead to changes for disadvantaged students of

color. As the percentage of people of color increases in the United States, including students and African American women, it is important to note that underrepresentation may be more statistically disproportionate racially if changes do not occur in role attainment in schools and in society.

Summary

I explored how African American female superintendents described their attainment of the superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. Although all women and people of color are underrepresented in the attainment of superintendent roles, the disparity is more distinct for African American women. This study was aligned with the phenomenon of interest to explore the barriers and supports experienced by African American female superintendents in their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. This study's framework was adopted from Black feminist thought and intersectionality conceptual models to understand the underrepresentation in the attainment of roles for African American female superintendents in rural school districts. Black feminist thought explores the experiences of African American women in their capacity as leaders. Moreover, intersectionality explains the relationship of intersecting oppressions that include class, race, and sex. Black feminist thought and intersectionality supported the identification of the perspectives of African American female superintendents in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state using a qualitative case study approach. This chapter also included the research questions, definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Chapter 2 includes the literature search strategy, sources, and keywords used in the search that formed the literature review. Also, scholarly discussion of the conceptual frameworks tied the historical analysis to current application to the research problem is included. Chapter 2 includes a review of the literature on educational leadership of African American women in a rural context.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This qualitative study addressed the barriers and supports experienced by African American female superintendents in their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. Despite being highly qualified for the position, African American female superintendents are underrepresented in role attainment in rural school districts. The NCES (2019) reported that postsecondary institutions conferred the doctoral degrees of African American women at a rate of between 10.3% and 10.5% each year since 2014–2015. Nonetheless, AASA (2015) revealed that African American women account for only 1% of all superintendents. These statistics are especially alarming considering that African American women struggle to attain superintendent roles in rural school districts with large populations of racial minority students and students living in poverty (Lavalley, 2018). As a result, it was imperative to have African American female superintendents serving as superintendents in rural school districts explain the barriers and supports in attaining their positions.

Although a diverse population of educators have held the superintendent role, research has documented its complexity from the White male standpoint. Björk et al. (2019) asserted that the superintendent's role has evolved from manager to leading change in schools. Fields et al. (2019) proposed that the superintendent's role was to ensure school boards stay abreast of district business, activities, requirements, and develop administrative plans that drive day-to-day operations in alignment with board policies. Although the superintendent role has changed, there has been little change in the representation in the role attainment of superintendents in schools. According to the

available research, the African American superintendent is underrepresented (Fields et al., 2019). Further, there is even less representation of African American female superintendents. Alston (2000) called for an increase in the study of African American female superintendents and leadership roles focused on women in administration. The current study was conducted to: (a) explore the perspectives of African American female superintendents regarding their experiences in attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts, (b) explain how African American female superintendents overcame barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts, and (c) explain how African American female superintendents were supported in the attainment of their superintendent roles in rural school districts.

Literature Search Strategy

The references used in this study were found through a comprehensive search of literature on the barriers and supports experienced by African American female superintendents in attaining their positions in rural school districts. Several resources were used, including *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *Digital Commons*, *Educational Leadership*, ERIC, Google Scholar, *Harvard Business Review*, *Higher Education*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, Online Search Services, National Center for Education Statistics, ProQuest, *SAGE Journals, Scholar Works*, The School Superintendents Association, and other Walden University Library research services. The search was conducted using the following key terms: *superintendent roles*, *gendered perspective*, *racial perspective*, *black feminist*, *intersectionality*, *female leadership*, *educational leadership*, *educational*

administration, *career path*, *adaptive leadership*, *inequality of attainment*, *female representation*, *ethics of care*, *rural schools*, *racial inequality*, *gender bias*, *isolation of women*, *female stereotypes*, *attainment barriers*, and *attainment supports*.

Conceptual Framework

Black feminist thought and intersectionality were the two conceptual frameworks in this study. These conceptual frameworks connected social identities that intersected structures of oppression (Harris & Patton, 2019). Crenshaw (1989) noted that intersectionality was derived from Black feminist thought. For this reason, Black feminist thought and intersectionality were concepts that grounded the study. Intersectionality is a more evolved concept that builds on Black feminist thought describing an increased number of intersecting structures.

Black Feminist Thought

Black feminism began in the 1970s, evolving from the Civil Rights and feminist movements (Davis & Brown, 2017). Collins (2000) was credited with developing Black feminist thought to empower Black women. Black feminist thought's foundation rests on the premise that race and gender contain inherent power differences but must be viewed dually (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Black feminist thought provided a standpoint for examining the oppression experienced by African American women relative to their location of historical power (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

Davis and Brown (2017) asserted that African American women's exclusion and marginalization could be documented from both a historical and contemporary perspective. Black women's characterization in history was described as patterns of

invisibility in areas such as research, consideration in the development of policies, and equitable representation (Rankin-Wright et al., 2020). Because of this, little research exists on African American women in leadership. In addition, false narratives such as the double-advantage hypothesis of researchers affirmed how African American women who attain leadership roles fail to be backed by policies (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Furthermore, educational leaders do not work collaboratively to build an inclusive field holding all members accountable for the academic achievement outcomes of all students (Capper & Young, 2014). Black feminist theory emerged due to Black women's exclusion in the feminist theory framework (Crenshaw, 1989). Crenshaw (1989) maintained that empowered Black women held no value for feminist theory. The feminist theory's position was taken from the White female perspective that disqualifies it as a theory inclusive of the Black female viewpoint. As a marginalized group, African American women experienced dismay with African American males. As opposed to shared activism to address common oppressions, African American women were historically expected to serve agendas led by men for men's benefit (Collins & Bilge, 2016). The extent of the marginalization surrounding Black feminism was the racism unknown to their White counterparts and the sexism lost on their male counterparts (Davis & Brown, 2017).

Black feminist thought is a multidisciplinary approach by Black feminists to combat oppression. This theory brought awareness of black feminism defined by

- classism and stereotypes due to place in society
- invisibility or isolation

- exclusion in research, policy, and representation

- marginalization by gender and race

- inequity in representation through gender in the field, racial population,

  preparation, and attainment of leadership roles (Crenshaw, 1989)

Intersectionality

Crenshaw (1989, as cited in Harris & Patton, 2019) was credited with introducing

the concept of intersectionality to frame the marginalization of Black women in

antidiscrimination law in which overlapping oppressions were acknowledged.

Acceptance of intersectionality as a school of thought sets precedence in conceding that

Black women's issues are unique and must be evaluated from multiple lenses (Crenshaw,

1989). Crenshaw cited three Title VII cases: DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors, Moore

vs. Hughes Helicopter, and Payne vs. Travenol, which posed challenges for

intersectionality in the judicial system. In DeGraffenreid vs. General Motors, five Black

women sued General Motors, alleging hiring discrimination before the Civil Rights Act

of 1964 and unjust firing after 1970 against Black women. Crenshaw reported that the

court ruled that their suit must be examined as race discrimination or sex discrimination,

but not both. The idea of race discrimination alone did not apply because Black men's

experiences nullified that narrative. Similarly, sex discrimination was improbable

because White women dispelled the myth of sex discrimination. In the case of Moore vs.

Hughes Helicopter, Moore claimed Hughes Helicopter discriminated against Black

females by refusing to promote them to senior-level positions within the company

(Crenshaw, 1989). The court stalled intersectionality progression by failing to certify

Black females as class representatives questioning the legitimacy of the suit, having no claim of females' Equal Employment Opportunity Commission violation but a claim as Black females only, which excluded White females (Crenshaw, 1989). Comparably, two Black females won a race discrimination suit involving a pharmaceutical plant in Payne vs. Travenol. However, the court refused to extend the ruling to Black men, continuing the divide of Black women not representing the Black race as a whole.

Intersectionality emerged from law into other fields taking on intersectional perspectives of race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, religion, citizenship, ability, and age (Tefera et al., 2018). Further, intersectional analysis was classified through structural, political, and representational lenses (Agosto & Roland, 2018). In leadership, intersectionality describes the multiple aspects of identity, providing a rich understanding of diverse leaders (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017). Agosto and Roland (2018) explored intersectionality in K–12 educational leadership literature focused on reducing education inequalities. Position in society, race, gender, and class chronicled the multiple dimensions of the experiences unique to women of color (Crenshaw, 1989).

Any two intersections joined by a third intersection create greater barriers in attaining educational leadership roles. Moorosi et al. (2018) interviewed three Black female educational leaders from England, South Africa, and the United States. Findings indicated the intersection of race and social class compounded with gender limited the attainment of their position to schools that fit their identities. Sanchez-Peña et al. (2016) analyzed literature considering the overlapping identities of race, gender, and class of Latina women in academia. Sanchez-Peña et al. found that race and class were

exacerbated by gender as women's cultural norms in Latino culture influenced Latinas'

professional goals. A study was conducted on Asian American administrators'

intersection of gender, race/ethnicity, and leadership (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017).

Liang and Peters-Hawkins (2017) determined that Asian female administrators struggled

with gender and race augmented by cultural discrimination that was the driving force in

attaining their positions to impact students' lives who looked like them. Discourse in

organizations or systems that refuse to acknowledge that inequality exists fail to

acknowledge the genuine needs and concerns of underrepresented groups and their

stories (Liang & Peters-Hawkins, 2017).

Moorosi et al. (2018) defined intersectionality as multiple forms of discrimination

experienced by women while being Black. With Moorosi et al.'s definition in context,

intersectionality describes how additional constructs that reach an impasse for

marginalized African American women. A review of the literature on intersectionality

showed

- Gender and race served as the foundation for the addition of another construct.

- Opposers to this school of thought challenged multiple oppressions calling for

  the identification of one construct at a time.

- The field may dismiss claims that did not apply to the dominant race or

  gender.

- Black women were represented by both dimensions, race and gender

  (Crenshaw, 1989).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts and Variable

Several databases were used to search the literature related to the study. The results yielded literature in the form of dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, peer-reviewed studies, books, and excerpts from each of these. The literature search's focus included Black feminist thought, intersectionality, history of superintendent roles, African American female leadership, leadership in rural school districts, barriers impacting the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women, and supports impacting the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women. In this literature review, scholarly discussion from previous research was applied to the current study.

History of Superintendent Roles

Since its inception in 1837, research on superintendent roles has failed to represent the field's changing population. In 1874, Phebe Sudlow, a White female, became the first female superintendent in a public school district in Iowa. Credit to this progression of Sudlow and other females who attained the superintendent role was the absence of men in education who were away fighting in the Civil War (Bonney, 1981). DiCanio et al. (2016) maintained this trend continued throughout the Civil War but declined from 1945 through 1970. AASA (1992, as cited in Glass, 1992) reported women accounted for 7% of the superintendents. The AASA (2015, as cited in Robinson et al., 201) found that 24.1% of women were superintendents in 2010 and 27% of women were superintendents in 2015.

The history of African American women as superintendents in the United States is

unclear. However, Velma Dolphin Ashley was credited as being the pioneer who served as the superintendent of a Black school district from 1944 to 1956 in Oklahoma (Alston, 2000). Since that time, AASA (2015) indicated that African American women represent less than 1% of superintendents. Uncertainty in African American women's data as superintendents exists because the number of Black female superintendents is unknown compared to the total population of all superintendents and other female superintendents (Alston, 2000). The fact that it is difficult to ascertain African American women's representation as superintendents is further substantiated due to the minimal participation of racial and ethnic groups in surveys (Tate, 2019).

Preparation for the Superintendent Role

Although the qualifications for superintendent roles differ today, the qualifications were the same as they were for principal roles in 1837. The history of African American female leaders serving in superintendent roles began in 1944 with Velma Dolphin Ashley. Alston (2000) found there were five Black female superintendents in 1978, 11 in 1982, 16 in 1983, 29 in 1984, and 25 in 1985. Currently, educators accept the AASA's estimate of 1% for African American female superintendents in the United States because no state or national government agency collects data correlating gender, race, and superintendency (Sanchez & Thornton, 2010). Since the establishment of superintendent roles, the qualifications for attainment include educational administration preparation programs for the superintendency.

Allred et al. (2017) reported that women were interested in the superintendent's role as demonstrated in their preparation. Gender-related findings from AASA's 2015

Mid-Decade Survey indicated 61.1% of African American women exceeded 49.7% of all males and 60.5% of all females in doctoral degree attainment and therefore demonstrated educational preparation (Robinson et al., 2017). To add to the discussion on attainment, Robinson et al. (2017) summarized AASA's 2015 Mid-Decade Survey revealing that African American female superintendents were more likely to lead urban school districts with 3,000 or fewer students while White women tended to lead rural school districts highly populated with students of color. For these reasons, African American women may want to prepare themselves by selecting and enrolling in educational administration preparations programs that focus on awareness in rural school leadership.

Career Path as It Relates to Aspiration

African American female leaders must be conscious of the superintendency's traditional career path from various intersectional perspectives: gender, race, and class. From a gendered perspective, women attained superintendent roles later in life than men because, comparatively, they spent eleven or more years teaching while men spent five or fewer years teaching before becoming educational administrators (Robinson et al., 2017). Robinson et al. (2017) found that men's typical career path was teacher, high school principal, and then superintendent, while women's typical career trajectory was teacher, elementary principal, central office director, and then superintendent. According to Robinson et al. (2017), the determining factor for men in attaining superintendent roles was first to become high school principals because the brevity of the responsibility of the position was more closely aligned to that of the position as superintendent.

AASA's 2015 Mid-Decade Survey published statistics regarding female

superintendents' career path by race, with African American female superintendents leading in six out of nine career path categories. Nonetheless, African American women represented only 1% of the 27% total population of all female superintendents. In addition to gender, African American female leaders aspiring to attain superintendent roles were also compelled to consider race before selecting a career path. African American females were more likely to ascend to the superintendency at a higher percentage than White women if they matriculated through the system as paraprofessionals, master teachers, assistant principals, district coordinators, military service members, or other professional in the educational field. Whereas White women were more likely to ascend to the superintendency at a higher percentage than African American women if they matriculated through the system as teachers, principals, and assistant superintendents (Robinson et al., 2017).

The discussion surrounding social categories led scholars to equity issues that continue to tie the African American female leader into a triad inclusive of gender, race, and class that cannot be viewed as separate categories (Salem, 2018). In a phenomenological qualitative study of five Black female administrators in a resourced-deficient rural school district, Holsey et al. (2020) found that the opportunity to attain positions may be higher for aspiring superintendents who sought role attainment from the class of people they understood and had an intimate relationship with through experience. Recruitment of talent into resourced deficient areas is challenging for school districts but can be remedied with the grow-your-own model mirroring talent development with prospective teachers and principals (Holsey et al., 2020).

Outside of the intersectional perspectives of gender, race, and class, discussion of career paths focused on generational awareness and the insider path. Allen and Hughes (2017) recognized three generations of educators in public schools: Baby Boomers, Generation X, and Millennials. A multi-generational study of 22 aspiring African American superintendents in Texas was conducted by Allen and Hughes to determine whether generational membership affected career perspectives. They reported the significant difference of career perspectives across generational membership was affected by societal influence on the African American community within the educational field. Similarly, Gullo and Sperandio (2020) investigated aspiring superintendents' career paths and found the insider path in a system or organization was the most successful path for role attainment. Since female superintendents' representation is low and one of the deterrents to superintendent role attainment is gender, researchers suggest the source of contention, meaning gender, be the tool used to contradict the existing condition (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020). Female leader attributes include intrapersonal relationships that can be tapped into through the insider path as a career path for African American female leaders seeking superintendent roles.

Inequality of Attainment of Superintendent Roles

Women are not excluded from leadership positions but are disproportionately concentrated in lower levels of leadership (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The disproportion of African American females as superintendents, the top executive position in a school district, illustrates the inequality of superintendent roles in the United States. Before the eighteenth century, men led education in learning and teaching (Wiley et al., 2017). Now

that women are leading in learning as measured by doctoral degree attainment and

teaching representing 75% of the teaching population, White males continue to dominate

educational leadership in superintendent role attainment. In the case of *Brown vs. the*

Board of Education of Topeka, the United States supreme court ruled to end racial

segregation of students in schools. Likewise, inclusion in schools was mandated in 1975

so that all students of varying ability levels could learn together in diverse educational

settings. However, demographic shifts resulted in a more diverse American society and

even greater inequities in schools due to court rulings and mandates (Turner, 2015). With

such interference in favor of social change promoting diversity and inclusion, African

American women's ascension to the superintendency should have increased at a greater

rate than 1% of the total population of superintendents in 185 years of its existence.

A leader with a deep awareness of constructs resulting in oppression, exclusion,

and marginalization of others was desired to enact social justice (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

African American female leaders possessed this awareness as recipients of oppression,

exclusion, and marginalization as experienced because of their gender, race, and class.

Nonetheless, a disconnect between theory and practice persists as the practice of

inequitable attainment of superintendent roles for African American female leaders looms

in school districts that theoretically fit their leadership style. Davis and Maldonado

(2015) researched the implications of race and gender for African American women in

academia and found they persevered and demonstrated the ability to rise above and

perform with tenacity in environments where inequalities existed. Realistically, a position

or role may be challenging but contain reasonable limits. African American women face

inequality relating to unreasonable expectations. The experiences of African American women in executive-level leadership roles investigated through intersectional lens unveiled the following inequitable expectations: constant pressure to prove oneself, knowledge of the job whereby minimal to no help is needed, avoidance of mistakes, and agreement to take on countless tasks to prove the worthiness of the position (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). McDowell and Carter-Francique recognized these high expectations demonstrated inequity in the attainment of superintendent roles that aspiring African American female leaders must concede.

African American Female Leadership

Research centered on African American female leadership described from an intersectional vantage point adds a perspective in literature that is needed to fully understand their experiences (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Admonishment of African American female leaders occurs when the totality of their multiple identities is not realized. African Americans female leaders' racial awareness based on their racial social identity in schools is anticipated in their roles as leaders. In the same manner, gender awareness based on their gender social identity is expected in their roles as leaders in schools. The increase of African American female superintendents is dependent upon acceptance of the intersections of race, gender, and social politics (Brown, 2014). Additionally, transformational leadership attributes of African American women are nonnegotiable.

African American female leaders understand how interpersonal caring (needs they perceive students have as a member of a segregated society), and institutional caring

(academic, social, and psychological needs of students) will inform many of their practices (Horsford, 2010). Moreover, African American female leaders are expected to exhibit communal attributes ascribed to women by focusing on the group instead of themselves as well as address relational and interpersonal problems over direct problem-solving (Kubu, 2018). Yet, African American female leaders are called upon to take on challenging assignments that entail the exercise of agentic attributes typically associated with male leaders that include influencing others, initiating actions to complete tasks, leading problem-focused activities, and being innovative in their practices (Kubu, 2018). Davis and Brown (2017) believed African American women navigate and transform social structures. As an example of the potential of African American women's ability to be change agents, Kubu (2018) described the need to attain transformational leaders in schools because challenges were opportunities to demonstrate leadership effectiveness and challenge the status quo, which is a prerequisite for bringing about positive social change.

Representation of African American Women in the Research

African American women are not well represented in research based on their dual identities relating to gender and race (Brown, 2014). A hierarchy in society begins with White men, Black men, White women, and then Black women that transfers into dominance in the research, ascension to the superintendency, and many other constructs (Brown, 2014). Based on societal norms, research involving educational theory or educational leadership was constructed as masculine and was predominately written by men, for men, and from the male perspective (Allred et al., 2017; Skrla, 2000). By virtue

of representational dominance, society's masculine view of the superintendent role was reinforced by those who researched it, taught it, and published it (Allred et al., 2017). After discontentment with their place in society regarding race behind Black men during the Civil Rights era and the displeasure with trailing White women during the feminist movement, Black women developed the black feminist movement (Lomotey, 2019). From this era, the impassioned pleas from Collins (2000) and Crenshaw (1989) to accept intersectionality to sufficiently address the way African American women were subordinate in society ensued (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Theoretically, Black feminist thought or intersectionality's application satisfies African American women's research simultaneously.

As a result of holding the last place of importance and relevance to the educational field by low representation, African American women were often excluded from research literature and practice in social sciences (Dillard, 2000). Minimal representation in research of African American women was reflected in a review of literature because the consequence for Black women who viewed themselves in terms of an intersected identity was divisive when viewed from a gendered perspective against White women and in opposition to Black men when viewed from a racial standpoint (Crenshaw, 1989). As an illustration of minimal representation, AASA's Deborah Kerr reported African American female superintendents were not represented in their studies because they did not participate in surveys (Tate, 2019). Brown (2014) posited that the lack of access to powerful societal and political organizations was the reason African American female leaders was not represented in the research. Lomotey (2019) reported

representation of African American women in the research was limited to dissertations focused on gathering an account of their lived experiences through interviews using qualitative methods.

Gendered Perspective of Superintendent Roles

In its 185-year history of existence in school districts, White men have dominated the lead role in schools as superintendents. The white male superiority in education began with teaching, but now lies within the superintendency. DiCanio et al. (2016) asserted that gender roles traditionally associated with women contradict successful leadership traits. As with many other aspects of executive leadership positions, societal and cultural norms ascribed the superintendency as a male-gendered profession articulated by the organization (Bernal et al., 2017). Robinson et al. (2017) believed the attainment of superintendent roles emphasized the managerial aspect of the position, an attribute commonly associated with male leaders. Moreover, male superintendents' desirable attributes like competitiveness, assertiveness, and aggressiveness were perceived as negative attributes in women (Marshall, 1986). As a deterrent for women, the superintendent's role was often categorized as unappealing (Superville, 2017). Though all potential superintendents face adversities on their jobs, external factors and challenges are unjustly assumed when considering women as potential superintendents. Studies revealed aspiring female superintendents faced attainment issues relating to marriage, children, and location (Bernal et al., 2017). These issues prove to be a gendered perspective of women as superintendents because those studies fail to demonstrate how these factors impacted men as superintendents.

Maranto et al. (2019) described U.S. public education as a gendered career system. About 75% of teachers are women (Robinson et al., 20017). Women's educational leadership progression is demonstrated in its majority percentage rate of 54% as principals with the greatest representation in elementary schools (NCES, 2016). Despite this, the 27% rate that represent women as superintendents is not proportionate to teachers' or principals' percentages (DiCanio et al., 2016). Rodriguez (2019) noted that the number of women who attained superintendent roles was also disproportionate to the number of qualified women. Rodriguez's claim is backed by the fact that women outnumber men as doctoral students in educational administration programs for superintendents (Kowalski et al., 2011). In 2020, The Council of Graduate Schools (CGS) released its 2019 annual report, revealing women earned most of the doctoral degrees for the 11th year in a row exceeding the men in the education field with 68.4% of the doctoral degrees attained. Undoubtedly, women and men bring varied perspectives to the superintendency that are differentiated by their experiences in education. Female leaders typically have more experience in teaching, curriculum development, and professional training (Sperandio & Devdas, 2015). In contrast, male leaders are more likely to transition to administration from opportunities from influence over stakeholders in career paths that include the high school principalship and athletic coaching (Maranto et al., 2019). While men tend to be more managerial and discipline-focused, women tend to be more child-centered and instructionally focused (Robinson et al., 2017). Gendered patterns among superintendents suggest women are associated with better academic performance as measured by their instructional focus (Meier et al., 2006).

Racial Perspective of Superintendent Roles

The difficulty of African American superintendents can be traced back to their unintended regression in education due to the public schools' desegregation. Before the landmark case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* in 1954, half of all African American professionals in the United States were teachers (Wiley et al., 2017). Immediately following the case, the employment of African American educators was scarce. In the case of *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka,* the U.S. Supreme Court unanimously ruled to desegregate public schools forcing the closure of segregated Black schools that increased the competitiveness in education between White and Black teachers, principals, and superintendents in the newly integrated public schools (Alston, 2005).

The underrepresentation due to the role attainment of African American superintendents can be attributed to the generation of Black educators lost due to *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka,* which decreased the availability of jobs (Wiley et al., 2017). Since the ruling of the *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* case, students of color experience teachers, principals, and superintendents that do not look like them (Riser-Kositsky, 2019). Although students of color make up more than half of public-school students (52.4%), teachers of color represent only 20.7% of all teachers and 22.3% of all principals (Riser-Kositsky, 2019). Fields et al. (2019) reported the disparity in role attainment was even greater with superintendents as African American males and females account for only 2.5% of the total superintendent population.

Adaptive Leadership Style of African American Females

Brown (2014) related the challenges of African American women in the attainment of positions to equitable opportunity, an idea not attainable to African American women. African American women are continually underrepresented in the attainment of superintendent roles, underrepresented in research, nonexistent in leading educational theory not driven by social or political efforts, not presumed as the topic of the gendered perspective ahead of White women, and not thought of as the lead in the racial perspective ahead of Black men. With such bleak reverence in society, African American women adapt their leadership style to survive.

In an intersectional analysis of African American women's experiences as athletic directors, representational intersectionality was explored of the marginalization of women of color (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Gendered criticism of the female leaders included: accusations that they were not as knowledgeable as men, they were criticized more quickly, and they faced occupational stereotypes based on their gender (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). The intersections of gender and race associated the negative stigma of African American women as "angry Black female" which means assertive or passionate behavior of any kind is not accepted (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017). Similarly, the analysis conducted by McDowell and Carter-Francique disclosed the intersection of criticism relating to race and class through assumptions that African American women's attainment of position was based on affirmative action as opposed to qualifications.

To conform to organizational expectations, African American women often do

what is called masking, shifting, or code-switching (Brown, 2014). African American women change their voices, attitudes, and posture in the workplace to minimize marginalization based on gender, race, and class (Brown, 2014). Kubu (2018) reported results from a 2003 meta-analysis examining gender differences in leadership styles that women scored higher than men on transformational leadership variables. This skill is advantageous to African American women. McDowell and Carter-Francique (2017) recognized at any given moment African American women experienced identity negotiation subconsciously when personal and professional identities conflicted in quick response to contextual factors. The attainment of the superintendent role presented a struggle for African American women while maintaining the superintendent role required constant masking and identity negotiation to combat intersecting stereotypes (McDowell & Carter-Francique, 2017).

Ethics of Care

The premise behind the ethics of care is that people who share multiple oppressions and marginalization are more likely to understand and personify aspects of culturally responsive leadership (Lomotey, 2019). School districts that accredit gender and racial categories but fail to acknowledge their oppression and marginalization reinforce resistance to positive social change. Campbell (2015) reported that more than half of public-school students are of color. Academically, students of color (one-half of the student population) perform lower than White students (one-half of the student population). Because Frankenberg and Ayscue (2013) believed racially diverse schools improved the academic achievement of students of color without hindering White

students' academic achievement, ethics of care can be accomplished through inclusive education of students. In an exploratory review of dissertations, journal articles, and a book, Lomotey found that African American educational leaders play a unique role in increasing the success of students of color through ethics of care expressed in a positive relationship.

School districts are charged with providing more equitable and just schooling for students of color (Turner, 2015). Based on lived experiences and intersectionality, African American women in leadership roles have had to address issues of ethics of care at a greater capacity than White men, Black men, and White women in leadership roles. Historically, African American schools and educators emphasized strong interpersonal and institutional relationships to benefit students of color (Horsford, 2010). Superintendents who come from the same background as their students understand their needs (Campbell, 2015). Consequently, the inclusion or exclusion of African American women as leaders send subliminal messages of attainment for students of color. Those in position as superintendents and aspiring superintendents are innately aware that ethics of care must be viewed through an intersectional frame of reference for students of color. Though an expectation of equitable education for students of color exist, childhood does not negate the intersections of gender, race, and class they will experience.

Leadership in Rural School Districts

Although more than half of all operating school districts are located in rural areas, the low representation in research and low consideration in policymaking negatively impacts millions of students (Holsey et al., 2020). Moreover, rural students are not

equally distributed nationwide as 13 of the 50 states disproportionally make up over 33% of rural school districts (Lavalley, 2018). Lavalley defined rural school districts by population size and distance from the nearest metropolitan center. Rural school districts can be categorized as rural fringe, on the road system of one hour or less driving time; rural hub, accessible by plane; or remote-rural, which means driving is off-road in areas with small populations (DeFeo & Tran, 2019).

Because most public schools exist in urban and suburban settings, the needs of rural school districts are not widely known (Lavalley, 2018). Allred et al. (2017) and Kowalski et al. (2011) reported women served in rural school districts in higher proportions relative to their representation in the superintendency. In rural school districts with 3,000 or fewer students, 60% of superintendents who ascend to the position are women. Because female leadership is underrepresented in research, then the rural setting they more proportionately represent as leaders is also underrepresented in research, thus impacting rural school district advocacy and policymaking.

Another observation of rural school district leadership emphasizes place-based education in which community partners, the natural environment, and local history shape the curriculum (Sugg, 2016). Any idea defying the place-based standard held by the majority in the community will often fail due to the lack of appeal to the constituents with the most power and influence. The constituents include, but are not limited to, school district leaders, education associations, educational preparation programs, educational policymakers, politicians, and lawmakers at various levels. Constituents' financial impact on local school districts affects leaders' educational decisions, most often based on the

community. Place-based education in rural school districts often embraces agriculture

and industry instead of a curriculum centered around global education (Lavalley, 2018).

Superintendent Roles in Rural School Districts

Much like racial minority representation in the field of education, the

superintendent role in rural school districts is understudied, although the superintendent

role in rural school districts impacts over 9 million students with 50% of these students

representing 13 states (Blad, 2019). Lavalley (2018) reported poverty in rural school

districts existed at a 17% higher rate than in urban school districts. Nonetheless, state

funding for education severely lacks equity to address poverty rates, a growing racial

minority population, and hard-to-fill-staff positions (Lavalley, 2018). Furthermore,

Holsey et al. (2020) revealed poverty issues uncovered increased challenges for

superintendents in rural school districts related to students' academic performance and

adherence to educational legislation based on the lack of available resources. Assessment

of the overall public-school system lacks attention to leadership in rural places impacting

rural students' achievement and interest in school (Miller, 2008).

Davidson and Butcher (2019) sought to explain the resiliency needed to balance

many roles as the superintendent in a rural school district. Miller (2008) revealed that one

of the superintendent's responsibilities in the rural school districts involved attracting and

retaining talent to locales that may be unattractive to those unfamiliar with rural areas.

Additionally, other challenges specific to superintendents in rural school districts

included fiscal, educational resource, and infrastructure limitations while being held to

the same standard as urban and suburban school districts (Preston et al., 2013). The grow

your own initiative is a strategic plan developed by school districts to mentor potential teachers through the teacher certification process (Miller, 2008). Miller concluded the same approach should be taken to produce superintendents in rural school districts. Holsey et al. (2020) suggested African American female administrators' chances of becoming a superintendent in rural school districts was greater in their hometown where their work and reputation were known.

Rural School Districts' Representation in Public Schools

The research and policy written for urban and suburban school districts impacts 80% of America's public-school students because 20% of schools are in rural districts (Blad, 2019). Klocko and Justis (2019) proclaimed 20% totaling over 9 million students represented the rural school student population. More specifically, half of all school districts, one-third of all schools, and one-fifth of all students in the nation are located in rural areas (White House Rural Council, 2011). From these rural student populations, Lavalley (2018) described the following characteristics:

- 64% of students came from poverty

- 13% lived in deep poverty, below half of the poverty line

- Of the 15% of all rural counties, 85.3% lived in persistent poverty, meaning conditions lasted for generations

Urban and suburban school districts also struggle with poverty, academic performance, and retention, but these issues are greater in rural areas (U.S. Department of Agriculture, 2017). Overall, one in four students attending rural schools is of color, and 84% of these students live in persistent poverty in southern states in the United States (Lavalley, 2018).

Rural school districts are also more likely to undergo school consolidation. Lavalley reported the primary reason for consolidation was for school districts to join forces to share educational costs and resources across a region. Ideally, this strategy seems plausible. However, it is difficult in any organization or setting to conceive that sharing can occur between great distances of one to the other.

Challenges Experienced in Rural School Districts

Researchers and policymakers' negligence in addressing rural school interest exacerbate poverty, inequity, and isolation in rural schools (Lavalley, 2018). Superintendent roles are impacted by challenges that include a lack of resources, multi-faceted responsibilities, and expectations of maintaining a high-profile position in the community (Klocko & Justis, 2019). Klocko and Justis (2019) deduced poverty persisted in rural school districts because of their unsustainable funding model of an everchanging and decreasing population. Superintendents in rural school districts are expected to serve many roles to cover many positions that rural school districts cannot afford to fill. Allred et al.'s (2017) naturalistic study reflecting the perspective of seven current and former female superintendents of rural school districts revealed the unique challenges they addressed in rural school districts prepared superintendents for larger, urban school districts. The female superintendents' sentiment was that larger systems without the poverty issues thrived and were less demanding on them as leaders. The authors also believed rural school leaders must be a fit for the position because the assignment of multiple tasks made it difficult to balance personal and professional life. Equally important in rural school districts is a superintendent who actively engages the

community. Class lines and politics demand superintendents in rural school districts be involved with all constituents in the community (Davidson & Butcher, 2019).

The inequality experienced in rural school leadership is similar to climbing a hill where challenges present themselves at the base, the peak, and the slope. The inequality at the hill's base begins with filling positions, limited access to professional development, and selecting teachers who are often less academically prepared than desired (Lavalley, 2018). The inequalities at the hill's peak for rural school leaders include financial constraints and physical distance (Molefe et al., 2017). Holsey et al. (2020) exposed inequality at the slope of the hill for rural school leaders measured by the same standard as urban and suburban school districts with lower salaries and benefits, experiences with isolation in the educational field, and greater responsibilities that include completing multiple tasks.

Isolation expounds on the inequality experienced by rural school districts in approaching challenges specific to small populations and geographical seclusions that affect access to resources (Miller, 2008). Indirectly, an inference may be made by aspiring superintendents that expectations are higher for rural school district leaders given the obstacles they face (Masumoto & Brown-Welty, 2009). To add to the understanding of rural leadership, women leading rural school districts deal with cultural and personal views of womanhood (Gammill & Vaughn, 2011). African American women in rural settings contend with challenges relating to class and social status. Narratives from Palladino et al.'s (2007) qualitative case study of five novice, rural female superintendents revealed men had greater representation in the literature than

women, thus garnering discussion critiquing women in challenging positions. Consequently, size, location, rural leader expectations, race, and gender impact education isolation.

Rural Leader Attributes

Leaders of rural school districts provide a perspective of the position that is as unique as its challenges. McHenry-Sorber and Budge (2018) published a conceptual article challenging insider and outsider constructs to understand rural school superintendency. The authors asserted leaders aware and operating from the insider construct represent their community's interest in a way an outsider cannot relay. More directly, rural school district leaders operating from the insider construct innately manifest critical place-consciousness by advocating on behalf of the rural sector (McHenry-Sorber & Budge, 2018). McHenry-Sorber and Budge claimed critical-place consciousness was responsive to rural realities. Therefore, rural school leaders bare place-conscious leadership defined by mutual and ongoing exchanges between leaders and place that continuously shape one another (DeFeo & Tran, 2019). Rural school leaders; therefore, prepare students for the workforce specific to their rural location.

Businesses provide continuous support to rural school leaders as the parties operate with a shared vision for the community and schools. In as much as rural school district leaders are place-conscious, they are principle-centered. In a qualitative phenomenological narrative inquiry, Davidson and Butcher (2019) found that principle-centered leadership, including personal, interpersonal, managerial, and organizational tenets helped superintendents become effective leaders. Just as rural school district

leaders are often expected to take on multiple tasks and roles, they are expected to display the greatest resiliency in the face of challenges (Klocko & Justis, 2019). Successful rural school district leaders are transformative in adhering to a succinct educational system given the multitude of challenges presented in securing funding, limited resources, acquiring talent, infrastructure, research, and policymaking.

Transformational leadership inspires others by establishing new norms centered around changing people's attitudes that will lead to cultural changes in organizations (Anderson, 2017). Rural school leaders who are transformative motivate the people around them. Farahnak et al. (2020) found a subtle relationship between transformational leadership and implementation success based on attitudes of practices based on evidence. Rural school district leaders demonstrate transformative leadership through their practices, as evidenced by their attitudes that align with insider constructs and place-based consciousness. School district leaders who affirm their identity as rural citizens and serve as allies to their communities illustrate the transformative leadership approach that benefits the leader, the school district culture, and the greater community (Graham & Nevarez, 2017).

In a qualitative case study of five novice, rural, female superintendents, Palladino et al. (2007) identified successful superintendents' characteristics included leaders with people skills, moral responsibility, and instructional leadership skills. These attributes can be applied to all leaders; however, they do not explicitly describe rural school district leaders. Place-based consciousness is a prerequisite to fostering leader skills. Place-based consciousness serves as the situational awareness of leaders in the rural environment.

Furthermore, moral responsibility is heightened through the insider construct and principle-centered leadership focused on the rural educational setting. Both the insider construct and principle-centered leadership attributes bond leaders with rural communities demonstrating active participation in their successes and struggles. Additionally, instructional leadership skills align with transformational leadership through committed efforts enlisting all team members' help. Educational preparation programs must address rural school leadership because women make up most of the participants in these programs and are more likely than men to serve in rural school districts during their careers (Allred et al., 2017). Particularly, Allred et al. 0singled out White women who dominate rural school superintendency to contribute their voices and perspectives bringing clarity and depth of understanding to rural school leadership. Regardless of the community type, African American school district leaders are clearly underrepresented in school districts across the nation (Holsey et al., 2020). Traditionally, research begins with a historical view of a phenomenon. To this end, Black women will have to draw from the White female perspective in rural leader attributes research.

Barriers Impacting the Attainment of Superintendent Roles for African American Women

The barriers impacting the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women are significant, considering that the universal voice not subjected to racial or gendered objectivity is the White male leader (Crenshaw, 1989). Barriers to leadership opportunities are a global phenomenon against women, but even more so for African American women (Parker & Ogilvie, 1996). To illustrate, African American

women rank last in leadership to all races and genders. Beckwith et al. (2016) added scholarly discussion that societal norms channeled through workplace practice contributed to the glass ceiling effect in educational leadership. In the workplace, the difference between women's and men's leadership styles is based on stereotypes (Samuel & Mokoaleli, 2017). The lack of leadership diversity exposes our nation's cultural intelligence level, which serves as a barrier to our competitive edge in the educational field (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Racial Inequity

Of all the intersectional constructs, racism is the leading barrier to leadership opportunities (Fields et al., 2019). The cycle of oppression derives from slavery and Jim Crow laws. Slavery describes African people's condition as property for labor, entertainment, and pleasure primarily for White male owners. Slaves were intimidated and were often subjected to various forms of abuse to condition them to conform. Although slavery was abolished on December 18, 1865, many of the conditions continued for Black people. After slavery, systemic oppression was initiated through Jim Crow laws in the south from 1870-1965. These laws outlined ethnic discrimination of Black people by legal enforcement or traditional sanctions. Jim Crow laws' most popular efforts involved segregation between White and Black people and Black people's disenfranchisement. Tactics used to disenfranchise Black people included literacy tests, poll taxes, stuffing ballot boxes, intimidation, and violence. In response to Jim Crow laws, the Civil Rights Movement was born in the 1950s through the 1960s. The Civil Rights Movement was an organized social movement designed to help Black people gain

equal rights under the law. The most current movement is both a political and social movement coined the Black Lives Matter Movement. Their organization was motivated by the modern-day Jim Crow behavior involving police brutality and political racism against Black people. The Black Lives Matter Movement began in 2013 but gained great traction after the death of several Black men and women captured in real-time on video by bystanders. Cohen (2020) reported 164 Black people were killed by police in the first eight months of 2020, catapulting the Black Lives Matter Movement into a movement to combat racial inequity spanning more than a decade.

Racial inequity unmistakably materializes as organizational, cultural, economic, and policy barriers that shape African American women's choices and leadership opportunities (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2016). Organizationally, the *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka* created a critical race disconnect between educators of color and their communities (Parker & Villalpando, 2007). Racial issues are humanly constructed to establish a social structure that, when manipulated, can be either a barrier or rights of passage to organizational social change (Osler & Webb, 2014). Culturally, appearance is used to make a quick judgment about African American women (Osler & Webb, 2014). Osler and Webb named the following as barriers experienced by African American women in their pursuit of leadership roles based on their physical appearance that leads to overt racial inequity:

- Skin tone: darker tones were considered more offensive
- Hair type: natural hair was discouraged, and long, straightened hair was preferred

- avoiding an ethnic look

- Facial features: the size and shape of the nose and lips were distinctive; albeit

- other races of people modify their bodies to obtain certain ethnic facial

  features, but people of color were not expected to accentuate them

- Physical features: natural features contradict society's view of beauty, and the

  dominance of a physical feature on the body (i.e., large hips, etc.) was seen as

  a distasteful attribute

Economically, the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women does

not yield a financial benefit equal to others serving in the same role. The salary gap

between women and men in the field is great, but the gap is even greater between African

American women and other women in superintendent roles (Beckwith et al., 2016). Many

policies are adopted from a collaboration between education associations and other

stakeholders that impact the field. To this end, policy barriers restrict racial equity. Given

these points, it is important that education associations become more inclusive and

expand their membership to include underrepresented African American educators who

are systematically excluded from the policymaking process (Fields et al., 2019).

Hoyt and Murphy (2016) reported a barrier to the attainment of superintendent

roles for African American women was the biased perception of "lack of fit" because

elite leadership was associated with White males. African American women in leadership

roles fulfill a promise of equal opportunity and more representation in the educational

field (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016). The strategy to combat racial inequity in education, where

society and the demographics of students and teachers are changing more rapidly than

educational leadership, may invoke racial inequity or aggressive affirmative action until the representation is more aligned. Inciting racial inequity to combat racial inequity removes the barrier to attaining positions for racial minorities that organizations, culture, the economy, and current policies have failed to do.

Gender Bias

Although the teacher workforce is primarily made up of women, the educational leadership workforce is male dominated (Osler & Webb, 2014). This phenomenon is best expressed as the glass ceiling effect describing the symbolic wall women hit at mid-management levels affecting their ability to attain top-level leadership positions (AAUW, 2016). The glass ceiling effect has caused many female educational leaders to leave jobs to escape local norms involving gender bias barring them from promotion beyond mid-management levels (Maranto et al., 2019). Gammill and Vaughn (2011) concluded contemporary females who attained support roles struggled with cultural and personal views of womanhood. Women who are qualified for superintendent roles find it difficult to accept the superintendency responsibilities when it conflicts with their family dynamics (Bernal et al., 2017). When issues of illness arise at home with their kids or immediate family members, women are expected to make professional sacrifices for the home. According to AAUW, this idea fell in line with cultural and economic constructs because the higher-paid spouse, who is often the male, was expected to go on to work while the lower-paid spouse was expected to take care of the immediate needs of the household to minimize the cultural stigma and financial loss in the home. The organizational structure of educational leadership impacts the self-confidence gap of

women who see themselves and others through the gender biases inflicted upon them

(AAUW, 2016). Women reject the nurturer's characteristic because it holds a negative

connotation in education, stretching its meaning to believe women would leave work

early or show up late to care for their children instead of assuming their leadership roles

(Osler & Webb, 2014).

Gender refers to the way people behave or think that aligns with others'

expectations for what they consider to be male or female (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020).

Men are either unaware of their gender bias or preconditioned to their biased mindset

based on societal constructs. Koch et al. (2015) administered a meta-analysis of field

studies assessing gender differences. They found that men were more likely than women

to see women as incompatible leaders in male-dominated fields or masculine roles.

Females, on the other hand, exhibited minimal gender bias. In a different meta-analysis of

95 organizations, AAUW (2016) determined male-dominated organizations rated

themselves much higher than women rated themselves in leader effectiveness (Paustian-

Underdahl et al., 2014). The glass ceiling effect can show up on top-level leadership job

applications as some organizations advertise for positions with a preference for

candidates (AAUW, 2016). Gender preference in job advertisements is an example of

gender bias. For aspiring superintendents, the career path for men has been through the

high school principalship, which is perceived as the position from which the best

superintendent candidates arise due to their experience with finances that are more

embedded in their daily duties (Maranto et al., 2019). Sampson and Gresham (2017)

argued that school boards and search firms magnified gender bias in schools because they

did not view women as financial. Unlike men, women have limited financial management experience, which attributes to the low number who attain leadership roles (Sampson & Gresham, 2017).

The gender biases bestowed upon female superintendents can categorically be tied to gender, as the analysis of the biases when assessed to men is typically inapplicable. For example, hostile work environments are commonly enacted by men in the form of sexual harassment, which depresses women's autonomy (AAUW, 2016). Rarely are women known to create hostile work environments in educational leadership. Sampson and Gresham (2017) alleged that gender bias was the blame for women's decision being challenged and negatively discussed by the community and their school boards. Men's decision making is rarely challenged as they often express the sentiments of school boards and search firms who put them in place. In conjunction with that, Sampson and Gresham claimed gender bias in school boards' discrepancies and search firms' hiring practices.

There is no case for male leaders of inequitable hiring practices as they represent about 20% of the teaching positions and 75% of the leadership positions. In a narrative inquiry of female superintendents by Gammill and Vaughn (2011), an entanglement of politics, gender, and the superintendency ensued. More specifically, a long-standing female assistant superintendent skilled as an instructional leader was selected by her school board for the superintendent's position after they feared she would leave the district. Conversely, school boards do not promote men for fear of losing them but by their career path. It is important to note that gender intersected with other constructs such

as race and age are also subjected to inequities characterized by stereotypes or biases (AAUW, 2016). Unlike women, men do not experience barriers from biases based on race and age in the attainment of superintendent roles. Along with these biases, implicit bias rejects stereotypes but unconsciously makes an evaluation based on group favoritism, as observed with women who prefer to have male bosses (AAUW, 2016). Men more likely observe the good ol' boy system that does not include the female gender. Another gender bias or stereotype observed with women involves questioning their sexuality if they are unmarried and without children. In contrast, researchers report unmarried men's sexuality is not questioned; instead, being single without children means they worked to attain financial stability before marrying and having a family (Blount & Guanci, 2020).

Once a bias or stereotype has been adopted, it is retained even if personal experience contradicts the bias or stereotype (AAUW, 2016). The solution to gender bias in educational leadership is to enact gender bias in educational leadership, known as gender quotas. AAUW revealed that some major corporations have adopted diversity goals and released private data on diversity. This mentality is much needed in the educational field for female leaders and, more specifically, African American female leaders. Researchers are unsure of the exact number of female superintendents and even more unsure of all female superintendents' racial makeup. If educators hope to dispel female educational leaders' biases and stereotypes, the number of women in top leadership positions must increase (AAUW, 2016).

Isolation of African American Women in Leadership

The isolation of African American women in education began due to laws that forbade enslaved Africans' education (Peters, 2019). Years later, the isolation of African American women in education was attributed to *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka.* The case called for integrating schools that left Black educators competing with White educators for consolidated teaching and leadership positions (Peters, 2019). 93% of Black educators were displaced following *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka.* Overcoming displacement was and continues to be difficult for African American women who face dual biases due to gender and race. For instance, the glass ceiling effect affects women's ability to ascend to positions because gender is a barrier. The concrete ceiling effect affects African American women who are plagued with the intersection of gender and race that co-exist in the workplace (Beckwith et al., 2016). The isolation of African American women in education has left students of color in White teachers' hands who may be out of touch with Black culture and way of life. It was not until 1968, in the case of *Green vs. County School Board of New Kent County,* that school desegregation compliance aligned with *Brown vs. the Board of Education of Topeka*. The case held that the integration of the student body, faculty and staff, extracurricular activities, transportation, and facilities were not a matter of choice (Peters, 2019). Since the case, social change in society and educational leadership for African American women has been slow. Often, attainment of top-level leadership positions for African American women reveals they are one of few or the organization's only racial minority. Too often, African American women's attainment of top-level leadership roles

categorizes them as the "first African American woman" to attain the position.

A survey revealed the glass ceiling effect differs from the concrete ceiling effect. The concrete ceiling is almost unbreakable and adds an additional complexity to African American females' upward mobility (Beckwith et al., 2016). AAUW (2016) revealed race was perceived like gender in which being Black was considered a masculine trait. Gender and race, when viewed as characteristics susceptible to bias, expresses the degree to which race and another construct adds complexity to biases in educational leadership. As an example, African American women may face isolation due to perceptions about their race and gender. Isolation in any organization can reduce visibility and even promotional opportunities (Beckwith et al., 2016). Beckwith et al. maintained that poor visibility in the field was another complexity in the concrete ceiling ideology that did not line up with the networking and collaboration needed for African American women to have the same opportunities as other leaders.

Stereotypes Experienced by African American Women

The stereotypes experienced by African American women explain how racial categories can be recognized without acknowledging racial inequity. For African American women, gender and racial stereotypes overlap (AAUW, 2016). Koch et al. (2015) defined stereotypes as category-based or attributes that were often applied to a group of people because of accepted beliefs about the group members (Agars, 2004). Osler and Webb (2014) chronicled the history of women of color in American history as slaves, housemaids, caretakers, and rape victims. Stereotypes formed from these long-standing positions in history shape how African American women are viewed in society.

Consequently, stereotypes and perceptions can hinder attainment of top-level positions for African American women in the workplace (Beckwith et al., 2016). McDowell and Francique (2017) pointed out that African American women were perceived as incapable. Furthermore, a display of passion and conviction by African American women in leadership roles could be viewed as having a bad attitude, loud, being bossy, in need of direction, complex, or unprofessional (Golden, 2004). These attributes in male leaders and White female leaders were not considered stereotypical characteristics but assertive leadership attributes. For this reason, situational instances that African American women may find themselves may be viewed as a negative stereotype of a race of people even if the situation was an isolated incident rather than a normal occurrence (Hoyt & Murphy, 2016).

African American women aspiring to be superintendents must be aware that stereotypes influence how they are promoted and how successful they are in superintendent roles (Beckwith et al., 2016). There is added pressure in attaining leadership roles as African American women's performance speaks for themselves and their race and gender due to the underrepresentation in leadership roles (Beckwith et al., 2016). Furthermore, Beckwith et al. stated African American women must work harder and outperform their counterparts though they were often excluded from social networks. Women usually have a curriculum background, while men have coaching backgrounds (Maranto et al., 2019). Because African American women's gender is viewed as both race and gender, attainment of positions most often will comply with traditional female perception but viewed in a masculine way. Maranto et al. (2019) believed high school

principals were traditionally males responsible for leading and managing adults, while women's roles included building relationships with young children. African American women stereotyped in both male and female roles can overcome shortfalls by embracing both leadership mindsets. Since isolation in the workplace of African American female superintendents is based on dual biases, they must alleviate stereotypes associated with race and gender (Beckwith et al., 2016). Strategically, African American women with financial background training and experience may help dispel the myth of stereotypes placed on women based on this gendered perspective. Furthermore, African American women may dispel negative stereotypes by avoiding aggressive behavior and undesirable communication at all costs (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Current Social Landscape

Women of color are projected to make up almost all women by 2060, which implies they will become the majority in the United States workforce (Pace, 2018). Historically, women lacked influence on policy changes and education decisions that impacted them more than men (Wyland, 2016). Beckwith et al. (2016) found that despite some current legislation on diversity intervention programs and affirmative action, there was a noticeable lack of African American women in senior leadership positions. The educational field's inequality is advanced by men who write the workplace policies causing the glass ceiling for women (Beckwith et al., 2016). In 2014, the EEOC tracked claims under Title VII, a component of the *Civil Rights Act of 1964,* and found discrimination of employment based on race accounted for 35% of all charges totaling $75 million in paid claims (Beckwith et al., 2016). Title VII is responsible for many of

the statements included on job applications and organizations' advertisements that they do not discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It is apparent that the catchphrase or statement has not been realized in the workplace is nothing more than a staple on job applications due to the underrepresentation of African American people in top-level executive positions. However, school boards and search firms should know that African American female leaders are equipped for educational leadership because they are unusually courageous and committed women as demonstrated in their experiences in dealing with inequity and social injustice in their schools every day (Lomotey, 2019).

Additional research is needed to explain how women show advantages in leadership skills through preparation but are disadvantaged in securing leadership roles (Beckwith et al., 2016). Not only is there a need to investigate why successful women are presumed to possess more masculine traits than feminine ones or are required to act more masculine to prove themselves, but an investigation is needed to determine why more is expected and required of African American women to exceed in comparison to their same-sex or same-race peers (Beckwith et al., 2016). Pace (2018) disclosed that organizations with the most ethnically diverse executive leadership teams were 33% more successful and 21% more successful with gender-diverse executive leadership teams. The positive social change includes equal opportunity in the form of increased representation of African American women in leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Self-Imposed Barriers

Gender and race are constructs that oppress women and serve as self-imposed barriers that deter African American women from seeking leadership roles (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). Barriers based on gender and race intersections lead to the poor psychological well-being of African American female leaders known as the Imposter Phenomenon (*IP*). *IP* describes an individual's persistent perception of incompetency despite contrary evidence to the same (Lige et al., 2017). The phrase *individual's persistent perception* suggests *IP* is not only self-imposed but long-lasting over an extended or permanent period. Another self-imposed barrier of African American leaders is the lack of participation in quantitative and qualitative research due to untrustworthy research practices. Distrust of researchers is based on historic occurrences involving unethical practices, like the Tuskegee Syphilis study, which has minimized the impact of qualitative studies that allow researchers to descriptively understand the unique experiences of African American female leaders (Hughes et al., 2017). Hughes et al. proposed recruitment strategies of African American female leaders in research that included overcoming feelings of fear, mistrust, and a lack of information.

Racial identity and high self-esteem may determine the impact of *IP* (Lige et al., 2017). Hence, researchers must help break down barriers related to research by convincing African American female leaders of the direct benefits to them and their communities (Hughes et al., 2017). Otherwise, African American female leaders may be left with survival guilt, the psychological occurrence because of achieved access to educational leadership opportunities unavailable to others (Lige et al., 2017). Hughes et

al. agreed researchers must approach potential study participants with strategies to overcome knowledge deficits and long-standing fears.

Additional self-imposed barriers include family commitments, immobility, and balancing work and home life (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). African American women seeking to attain leadership positions may work to acclimate their families to their work in a proactive attempt to dispel the *IP* to balance work and home. To add, school boards and search firms aware of African American women's inferiority based on societal constructs must intervene to obtain the best talent for their organization where immobility serves as a barrier. The strategy to serve the underrepresented racial minority is to put systems in place to remove the barriers that impede their progress. Educational preparation programs can evoke positive social change for African American women leaders facing *IP* barriers, racial identification, and self-esteem barriers.

Even more discerning in addressing the underrepresentation of superintendent role attainment as a result of self-imposed barriers is knowing the powerful impact of a financial background on attaining roles for African American women. Sampson and Gresham (2017) claimed school board members and search firms did not view women as good financial managers. For this reason, African American women must ensure they obtain and prove they have financial management skills when seeking leadership positions. A lack of preparation or experience in finance is a self-imposed barrier that African American women can remove for themselves. Considering this fact, African American women in education are well versed in curriculum and instruction but lack the primary strength of male leaders, financial experience.

Supports Impacting the Attainment of Superintendent Roles for African American Women

Scholarly discussion on supports is needed for aspiring African American females as evident in their representation of 1% attainment of superintendent roles. Like the creation of Black feminist thought stemming from the Civil Rights Movement and intersectionality from the identification of multiple oppressions, rampant subordination in the attainment of superintendent roles prompts African American women to articulate their positionalities relating to supports in research studies (Harris & Patton, 2019). Mentors supply educational leaders with personal and professional support. Likewise, African American women support themselves, demonstrating resilient behavior. As well as resilient behavior, African American women implement coping strategies to deal with the barriers they face due to multiple oppressions that impact leadership role attainment. Networking and external supports also classify as supports for African American women in the attainment of superintendent roles.

Mentors

There is a congruence between the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency, the underrepresentation of women with mentors, and women serving as mentors (Calderone et al., 2020). Beckwith et al. (2016) maintained few mentors are available for women of any gender, but there was an abundance of male mentors who mentored men. Overall, women prefer female mentors to have a model for their distinctive experiences (Howard et al., 2017). In a multi-generational study of aspiring African American female superintendents, participants from older generations believed

White male mentors more than anyone else could break racial and gendered barriers involving mentorship (Allen & Hughes, 2017). Calderone et al. (2020) proposed that effective mentors called upon their professional experiences, professional networks, and depth of understanding to support their mentee's growth and development. Effective mentors are needed to break the glass ceiling and concrete ceiling in educational leadership for African American female leaders. Mentorship also aligns with leadership theory. Howard et al. employed a qualitative approach using a phenomenological narrative of ten female superintendents. The study revealed mentorship experiences contributed to female superintendents' development as transformational leaders, which was beneficial information for aspiring superintendents' educational preparation programs (Howard et al., 2017). All in all, the purpose of educator development is for mentors to assist mentees with career development moving from apprentice to networking opportunities (Howard et al., 2017).

The prevailing view of mentors is that they advise, direct, protect, help network, and connect mentees with job opportunities (Howard et al., 2017). Mentors can impart knowledge to mentees of not only what to do but equally important understanding of what not to do in specific situations (Howard et al., 2017). In doing so, mentors bridge the gap between theory learned in educational administrator preparation programs and practice as school district leaders. Howard et al. believed this strategy fosters emotional support to mentees that built a relationship filled with acceptance, trust, counseling, and friendship. As support, mentorship shatters the glass ceiling barrier experienced by women and, more directly, breaks the concrete ceiling experienced by African American

women. As the dominant leader in the field, White males have the authority to provide

reciprocal learning opportunities for themselves and African American females. To

explain, White males as mentors reach beyond their scope as professional leaders,

embracing their supportive side as leaders to diverse people enacting positive social

change, and African American females aspiring to attain roles are supported in their

efforts (Howard et al., 2017).

Resilience of African Americans

Klocko et al. (2019) identified resiliency as the major contributor to

superintendents' tenacity when faced with the challenges of school leadership. Because

of their low representation in the field, African American women consider their career

aspirations' gendered and racial dimensions (Maranto et al., 2019). Resiliency is a

mindset adopted by many African American female leaders from others' attitudes and

societal stereotypes that have shaped and motivated their reaction to barriers in their

personal and professional lives (Osler & Webb, 2014). High self-esteem is another

demonstration of resiliency by African American females (Lige et al., 2017). People with

high self-efficacy design a more problem-focused strategy in school leadership, boosting

self-confidence and performance (Beckwith et al., 2016).

In a narrative of three African American superintendents raised in poverty, they

reported the barriers they faced in attaining their superintendent roles shaped them as

leaders (Johnson, 2018). Much like African American females' backgrounds, their

professional lives mirrored their personal lives that involved, balancing scrutiny to co-

exist in society. African Americans learn skills like crafting their professional identities

to align with others' expectations who they know may scrutinize their appearance, style, and character (Smith et al., 2018). African American female leaders' resiliency is in their ability not to lose themselves but to reinvent themselves to adjust to any situation. This concept means owning the "outsider" mentality by viewing issues from different frames of reference to understand a comprehensive analysis of challenges. Because African American women operate from an outsider's point of view, they inhibit resiliency because they offer insight and advantages to school district challenges that serve as a support often missed by someone inside of the organization (Beckwith et al., 2016).

Coping Strategies

African American females cope in environments where they are underrepresented by identifying how organizations' internal politics operate and develop strategies to decipher the organization's bureaucracy (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). The glass ceiling and concrete ceiling effects impact coping strategies. To co-exist in educational leadership after attainment of leadership roles, African American women cope by downplaying their effectiveness at times, maintaining their distance when they believe their involvement in the organization is too intrusive, using appropriate and professional humor when possible to eliminate uncomfortable moments, and exercising careful use of their positions in society (Kubu, 2018). Davis and Maldonado deducted outsiders must understand organizational structure, which meant they must know the differences in how the most represented leaders operated and how they should maneuver it if they wanted to be included as an insider. Furthermore, self-efficacy is a necessary trait for African American women facing workplace challenges. (Beckwith et al., 2016). To cope or deal

with stereotypes, African Americans are taught a colloquialism in the Black community that says, "it is not what people call you; it is what you answer to that defines you." These words are used to reject scrutiny from stereotypes.

Networking

Research supports the argument that social networking could be the single most important tool one can have as they try to ascend to top-level leadership positions (Beckwith et al., 2016). However, Kubu (2018) ascertained that women typically had weaker networks because they naturally attached themselves to other women they believed they could identify. Networking as a form of support does not describe a gendered or racial perspective rather a strategic perspective. As a reminder, women leaning on other women's experience must be aware of the career path impacting women's networking versus the career path impacting men's networking. Likewise, African American women must be aware of the location or place they are attempting to attain a position. As an example, rural school districts have minimal supports to mitigate isolation based on location. In rural school leadership, White women are the most represented educational leaders in rural school districts; therefore, they must be targets of social networks. Whether formal or informal, networking also occurs between administrators, professional organizations, and connectivity with search firms from which top-level leadership positions are known by word of mouth (Fields et al., 2019).

External Support

Johnson (2018) found African American female superintendents supported by family, positive relationships with key adults, and religion were deciding factors that

impacted the attainment of leadership roles. Certain qualities exhibited by African American may derive from their upbringing (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). In the Black family, African American girls' personality is developed, identity is formed, status is assigned, and fundamental values and norms are learned to help them exist in a society where they are placed last in social class (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Key adults are supportive throughout African American women's lives, and religion is viewed as the foundation to help them remain focused on goals (Johnson, 2018). The support provided by family members is of the insider construct. The relationship with key adults can be assessed by the outsider construct that propels African American female leaders to higher heights in terms of progress toward attaining leadership roles. Religion, on the other hand, is designated as spiritual support of an internal nature. Family, key adults, and religion are significant supports for African American female leaders because these constructs are external that cannot be manipulated within the organization.

In a study exploring the intersectionality of race and gender for African American women of how they developed as leaders, the women expressed that family members' strong support enabled their success, integrity, confidence, and resiliency (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Apart from family, sponsors serving as key adults at some point put their political capital into play to support or promote African American female leaders (Kubu, 2018). Davis and Maldonado reported most African American women received sponsorship from White men who were well-equipped to support them based on the following attributes: they were White males who were the decision-makers in organizations because they held positions of authority, by predominance and access to

senior leaders and senior-level positions, and their experiences based on their career paths.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter outlined issues of African American women's pathway to the superintendent role. The findings from the review support five main topics in relation to the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women in rural school districts: (a) history of superintendent roles, (b) African American female leadership, (c) leadership in rural school districts, (d) barriers impacting attainment of superintendent roles for African American women, and (e) supports impacting attainment of superintendent roles for African American women. Each of the five themes were supported by several subthemes to fully reflect the complexity of the findings in the literature review.

A recurring finding that emerged from the literature was the low percentage rate of African American superintendents, demonstrating the difficulty African American females experienced in attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts. African American women have prepared themselves to assume superintendent roles as evident in their doctoral degree attainment, teaching experience, and administration preparation (Allred et al., 2017). Because preparation did not always equate to the attainment of positions for African American women, it was important to analyze career paths as a strategy toward attaining superintendent roles (Robinson et al., 2017). Another finding in the literature was that aspiring African American female leaders must be aware of the perception of their racial and gendered social identity. Additionally, Fields et al. (2019)

found leader engagement in rural school districts was important to the educational field because it was indicative of the level of inclusiveness in public school education. Due to the unique challenges of rural school district leadership, the representation of African American female superintendents in rural school districts was as significant as it would be in urban and suburban school districts based on their low representation of 1% nationwide (AASA, 2015). Exploration of the barriers and supports experienced by African American female superintendents in their attainment of superintendent roles is a step in the right direction in creating positive social change in educational leadership.

Chapter 3 presents a case study design built on multiple cases using one data source. The goal of this study was to explore how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of the superintendency in rural school districts in a southern state in the U.S. Included in Chapter 3 are the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, methodology, participant selection, instrumentation, procedures for the study, data analysis plan, trustworthiness, and ethical procedures.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem addressed in this study was the underrepresentation in the attainment of roles for African American female superintendents in rural U.S. school districts. The purpose of this study was to explore how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. Chapter 3 includes a description of this study's research design, rationale for employing the design, and the role of the researcher. Additionally, the methodology section includes participant selection, instrumentation, recruitment procedures, procedures for participation, procedures for data collection, and the data analysis plan. Finally, trustworthiness and ethical procedures are discussed.

Research Design and Rationale

The following RQs served as guides for this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?

RQ2: How did African American female superintendents overcome barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts?

RQ3: What types of support do African American female superintendents perceive as beneficial in helping them attain superintendent roles in rural school districts?

I explored how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of superintendent roles in rural U.S. school districts. The phenomenon of interest for this study was the attainment of superintendent roles as perceived by African American women in rural school districts. The research design for this study was the

qualitative case study approach because it was conducive to studying a single case or multiple cases. Qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of participants (Patten, 2010). Because qualitative researchers use techniques that include semistructured interviews, Patten (2010) noted that the qualitative data do not lend themselves to easy quantification; rather, researchers report on the saturation of the data to arrive at themes and trends using words instead of statistics. The conceptual frameworks that ground the current study were Collin's (2000) Black feminist thought and Crenshaw's (1989) intersectionality. These frameworks aligned with the purpose of the current study addressing marginalized people from multiple overlapping oppressions.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) maintained that qualitative research is an inductive process whereby researchers gather data to build concepts or theories, unlike the deductive nature of quantitative research to test hypotheses. Qualitative research was a good fit for the current study because I explored a new area of research in which social and behavioral scientists had little previous knowledge, and therefore in-depth information was needed (see Patten, 2010). Moreover, qualitative methods are concerned with how meaning is constructed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Qualitative researchers are focused on "understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 5). Congruent to qualitative methods, the case study approach aims to uncover and interpret meanings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As the researcher, I explored participants' experiences following the qualitative approach's conventions.

Like all qualitative research approaches, the case study approach is interpretive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Case study research involves studying a phenomenon in its real-life context (Gall et al., 2007). Case study research also sheds light on a particular instance of a particular type and is bounded by the participants' shared experiences (Gall et al., 2007).

Role of the Researcher

During this study, I served as the interviewer, recorder, note taker, and coder of the data collected. My role was to plan a qualitative case study focused on African American female superintendents' attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts. Following data collection through interviews, I analyzed the data to identify themes related to the phenomenon that was the focus of this study. To gain greater insight into the participants' experiences, I asked the interviewees questions addressing how they were supported and the barriers they faced in attaining their roles as superintendents in rural school districts. The results from the interviews would reveal the participants' experiences and provide insight into how they overcame barriers and how they were supported in attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts.

At the time of this study, I served as an assistant superintendent in a rural school district. As an assistant superintendent, I did not hold a supervisory role or power over the participants, nor did I have a relationship with any of the participants. I was familiar with participants by name based on the advertisement of their new assignment to the superintendency or some form of district or state involvement. Professionally, my relationship with the participants was limited to attendance at a meeting to gather

information in the absence of my superintendent or alongside my superintendent, dialogue at a conference, or organizational affiliation or membership.

Qualitative researchers shape research to reflect their values and assumptions about the world (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Babbie (2017) indicated that qualitative researchers avoid bias through awareness of their values and preferences, adhering to established processes for data collection and data analysis, and making the participants' privacy a top priority. As an aspiring superintendent who is an African American female, I was aware that exploring the topic of my study was deeply personal as much as it was scholarly research that would contribute to the field. My plan to address this ethical issue was to exercise research reflexivity through a continuous, ongoing assessment of my identity, positionality, and subjectivity in constructing meaning and interpreting the data (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Methodology

A qualitative case study is used to focus attention on instances of a social phenomenon (Babbie, 2017). Babbie (2017) asserted that the chief purpose of a case study is to be descriptive. The participants in the current study, African American women who were underrepresented in role attainment, described the barriers and supports that they experienced in the attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts.

Participant Selection

Participant selection for this study came from the population of African American female superintendents from rural public schools in a southern U.S. state. Purposeful sampling was used for this study based on the following criteria: (a) participants held

superintendent roles, (b) participants were African American women, and (c) participants were superintendents in rural school districts in the southern U.S. state that was the context of this study. Participants were identified using the state's publicly available directories that included superintendents' names, photographs, district names, district addresses, email addresses, phone numbers, and fax numbers. After Walden University's Institutional Review Board (10-13-21-10271157) approval, participants were contacted and recruited using email communication that included the informed consent. Potential participants who consented via email were also asked to provide the method (face-to-face virtual using teleconferencing software, or cellular phone) and the day and time they would be available to be interviewed. All interviews were conducted using virtual conferencing programs or cellular phone. Prospective participants were called 1 week after the initial email was sent. After 2 weeks, an additional email was sent to recruit more participants. The target number of African American female superintendents for this study was between eight and 10, which was approximately 50% of the total population of those eligible to participate in the study. Of the 11 consenting participants, eight followed through with the interview process. The individuals who responded that they did not want to participate in the study and those who did not follow through with the interview after agreeing to participate were sent an email thanking them for their consideration.

Instrumentation

The study's data collection tool was a researcher-developed interview protocol consisting of 10 main questions and associated probing questions. According to Roberts

(2020), it is important that interview questions be designed to elicit detailed answers to the research questions based on the content of the study. During qualitative interviews, the value of the data collected is dependent on the strength of the interview questions. To establish content validity yielding valuable data, I followed Yeong et al.'s (2018) four stages of the interview protocol refinement framework (IPR) to strengthen my study.

Stage 1 of Yeong et al.'s (2018) IPR focuses on the alignment between the interview questions and the research questions based on the content of the study. Except for the introductory and background questions, interview questions were derived from Black feminist thought and intersectionality. Specifically, interview questions addressed racial and gendered perspectives that originated from the concepts of Black feminist thought. The concept of intersectionality that describes other biases in conjunction with race and gender informed the additional interview questions. Stage 2 involves constructing inquiry-based interview questions. Open-ended questions were developed from the conceptual frameworks and the review of the literature. During Stage 3 of the IPR, feedback is received on interview questions. For the current study, my committee chair and second committee member suggested I revise the wording of some of the questions and include probes to explore events experienced by the participants. In the fourth and final stage of the IPR, the interview questions are pilot tested or peer reviewed. In the current study, content validity of the interview protocol was established through peer review by two African American female administrators aspiring to become superintendents. One of the peer reviewers demonstrated preparedness for the superintendent role by completing a state's Superintendent Leadership Academy and the

other through doctoral degree attainment in educational leadership. The peer reviewers

recommended I add additional background questions and indicate or match the interview

questions with the three research questions to show alignment between the two. Changes

were made to the interview questions based on my committee chair, second chair, and the

peer reviewers' suggestions. After an additional review, all reviewers were satisfied that

the interview questions aligned with the research questions and content of the study (see

Appendix A).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Upon receiving Walden's IRB approval, I recruited participants by contacting

them using publicly available directory information to gather the names, school districts,

and contact information to identify participants who met the study's inclusion criteria.

Potential participants were contacted via email. The email communication contained my

email, phone number, a brief background of the study, and the informed consent form.

Participant eligibility was verified to ensure participants: (a) held superintendent roles,

(b) were African American women, and (c) were superintendents in rural school districts

in a southern U.S. state.

After confirming potential participants' eligibility to participate in the study, I

requested and verified that the participants responded with "I consent" via email to the

informed consent form that described the purpose, nature of the study, process for

collecting and analyzing data, and information related to how I planned to maintain their

privacy and confidentiality using pseudonyms instead of their actual names. Participants

were given 1 week to email their responses. If the target number of participants was not

achieved in the first attempt, potential participants were contacted using phone calls

followed by a repeat of the email communication. Interviews took place at the

participants' convenience; they had the autonomy to choose the meeting method, day,

and time. If the participants did not have a preference, suggestions were for a virtual

meeting or over the cellular phone because the COVID-19 pandemic negatively impacted

the ability to meet safely face-to-face. Participants were asked to consent to the recording

of the interviews via the informed consent forms and verbally, and they were told they

could opt out of the interviewing process at any time. The interviews ranged from 20 to

40 minutes in length. After each interview, participants were reminded that their

responses would remain confidential, that they could contact me later should additional

questions arise, and that I would reach out to them for a review of the information they

provided during the interview (member checking). Lastly, I extended my gratitude by

thanking them for participating in this study.

Data Analysis Plan

I interviewed and transcribed the participants' responses verbatim from the audio

recordings and handwritten notes. This process allowed me to analyze and interpret the

data continuously to identify codes and arrive at categories and themes that revealed the

larger meaning of the findings (see Creswell, 2008). The data analysis strategy involved

the following five steps: (a) documentation of the data and the process of data collection;

(b) organization and categorization of the data into concepts; (c) examination of potential

relationships to show how one concept may influence another; (d) authentication of

conclusions by evaluating alternative explanations, disconfirming evidence, and

searching for negative cases; and (e) reflexivity (Check & Schutt, 2012). Had discrepant cases been revealed in the process, the data would have remained in the analysis. The lack of discrepant cases signifies to the researcher that adequate time has been spent collecting data and the data have become saturated (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data gathered in the current study were analyzed using two levels of coding. The first level was open coding, the logical starting point for qualitative analysis (see Babbie, 2017). During open coding, I reviewed the interview data, the audio recordings, and transcripts to gather coding categories. The second level of coding, axial coding, involved regrouping the data from the first level of coding to determine final analytic concepts (see Babbie, 2017). Axial coding moved the focus of analysis from the development of categories to the establishment of themes. First level of coding was conducted using a coding software program, Dedoose, and second level coding was conducted by hand to synthesize findings that could be tied to the phenomenon of interest and the research questions relating to the conceptual framework and the literature review. Reflection of the process resulted in the achievement of data saturation in which no new information emerged from the coding arriving at common themes (see Saldaña, 2016).

Trustworthiness

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), trustworthiness includes the processes and approaches used to assess qualitative studies' rigor and quality. Trustworthiness is viewed from multiple perspectives, including the researcher, the participants, and other people interested in the phenomenon of interest (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this section, credibility. transferability, dependability, and confirmability are described as methods to

ensure trustworthiness.

Credibility

Korstjens and Moser (2018) defined credibility as the confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings. Research findings are credible when they capture the authenticity of the participants' views and measure what the researcher thinks they are measuring (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). One strategy that I implemented in this study to ensure credibility was member checking. The other strategy was clarification probes.

Member Checking

A credibility data strategy related to the quality of data involves member checking. Member checking is the process of feeding back data to the participants who provided the data to gather the accuracy of the interpretation by the researcher (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), member checking strengthens the data because it considers the view of the researcher and the participant in the data analysis process. After conducting the coding process moving from prior codes to preliminary codes to categories to themes, the data was shared with the participants of the study for feedback. The responses from the member check would have been applied to ensure credibility of the study had there been any.

Clarification Probes

A clarification probe is a technique in interviewing to solicit a more complete answer to a question (Babbie, 2017). Researchers who conduct clarification probes ensure that participants clarify their responses to avoid implications that could lead to a

misunderstanding of the meaning of the phenomenon of interest (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). According to Babbie (2017), clarification probes are non-directive and are commonly applied in eliciting responses to open-ended questions. The questions posed in this study were primarily open-ended. However, clarification probes were employed when responses required participants to provide more in-depth responses revealing more credible data from the interviews.

Transferability

Transferability entails a highly descriptive and detailed presentation of the setting, participants, and qualitative study findings that can be transferred to other contexts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Accordingly, qualitative studies are transferable to a broader context while maintaining their application to the phenomenon of the original study (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Thick description was employed to gain the deepest understanding possible relating to this study (Babbie, 2017). The point of providing a thick description of the participants and the research process was for others to make a judgment about whether this study's findings were transferable to their own setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). This study was constructed for rural school leaders. However, transferability applies to urban or suburban settings using the study's processes.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the stability of the data (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Moreover, Korsten's and Moser (2018) reported the data analysis process must align with the standards for the study's design. For this case study design, dependability was ensured

through the ongoing reflection on the audio recordings, notes taken, and data analysis

using coding and thematic analysis from the semi-structured interviews to describe the

participants' real-life experiences. These steps were necessary and exemplify

dependability of the study that included the same process for each individual case

involving the phenomenon of interest.

Korstjens and Moser (2018) indicated that dependability in a study was gained

through an audit trail describing the research steps from the initial stages of a study to the

final stage in which the findings were reported. Like an auditor who authenticates

accounts in a business, readers of a study may authentic the findings of a study following

a researcher's processes or trail (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I used thick description to

achieve an audit trail suitable for replication by other researchers.

Confirmability

Confirmability addresses the researcher's biases and prejudices in their data

interpretation (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To ensure confirmability, I maintained the audio

recordings, notes, and coded data for continuous review during the research process.

Additionally, I performed clarification probes to establish confirmability. Clarification

probes require researchers to repeat or summarize participants' conversations during

interviews for clarity to confirm the data that will be later categorized for themes (Rubin

& Rubin, 2012). This act provided me with greater confidence as I continued ongoing

reflexivity.

To ensure confirmability, researcher reflexivity was implemented. Reflexivity is

the process of reflecting upon one's assumptions, preconceptions, values, and decisions

throughout the study (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Because reflexivity is a continuous process of the qualitative researcher's ongoing influence on the research, it is important to be self-aware and reflexive about collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I practiced reflexivity by self-checking my personal biases and preconceived notions in the reflections documented in my notes and transcripts used in first-level coding arriving at categories to second level coding leading to common themes.

Ethical Procedures

After I received Walden University's IRB approval, publicly available directories were used to determine the study's potential participants' names, school districts, and contact information. Invitation to participate in the study were limited to emails and phone calls. The phone call as an alternative method of communication took into consideration that the participants responded after one or more forms of contact. Along with the invitations, the informed consent form was emailed to verify their agreement to participate in the study. Participants were reminded that their participation in the study was voluntary and that they could elect to discontinue at any time. At the same time, they were informed that their participation in the study had the potential to affect positive social change, leading to changes for disadvantaged students of color, promoting diversity and inclusion in education, improving equal opportunity leading to increased representation, and enhancing educational preparation programs.

Ethical considerations for participants were extended to ensure no physical, emotional, or mental harm took place during the study. Furthermore, participants'

identities were placed with pseudonyms during their interviews and coding of responses.

Discussion relating to the study was limited to my research committee and Walden

University's IRB only. Moreover, the confidentiality of the data was kept using a

fireproof cabinet with a lock and key and by a personal computer protected by a

password. These items will be maintained by the researchers for five years as required by

Walden University.

Summary

Chapter 3 included a description of the research method that explored how

African American female superintendents describe their attainment of the

superintendency in rural school districts in a southern state in the U.S. As the researcher

conducting a qualitative case study, I was the only collection instrument responsible for

interviewing 8 African American women currently serving in rural school districts in a

southern state in the U.S.

The study's methodology involved a purposive sample comprised of African

American female superintendents serving in rural school districts. The method used to

collect data was semi-structured interviews. Data from audio recording, notes, and coding

were analyzed at two coding levels. The first level revealed categories. The second level

revealed themes from the data aligned to the phenomenon of interest and the research

questions aligned to the conceptual framework and the literature review. Credible,

transferable, dependable, and confirmable methods were strategies used to build this

qualitative study's trustworthiness. To add to that, reflexivity was observed by the

researcher who understood how the research process affected the researcher as an

aspiring superintendent.

Chapter 4 contains the results of this qualitative case study research. The alignment of the study is demonstrated in relation to the phenomenon of interest, the central research question, the subsequent research questions, the conceptual framework, and the literature review. The specific components in the next chapter covers the setting, data collection, data analysis, results, and evidence of this qualitative case study research's trustworthiness.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. Three RQs guided this study:

RQ1: What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?

RQ2: How did African American female superintendents overcome barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts?

RQ3: What types of support do African American female superintendents perceive as beneficial in helping them attain superintendent roles in rural school districts?

Chapter 4 is organized into five major sections. The first section includes the setting, which contains background information about the participants in the study. The next two sections contain the procedures for data collection and data analysis. The fourth section covers the results from which seven major themes emerged from the three research questions. The last section discusses evidence of the trustworthiness of the study.

Setting

The participants in this qualitative case study included eight African American female superintendents. All participants held a superintendent role at the time of this study, were African American women, and were superintendents in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. Securing eight participants was difficult because it meant recruiting more than half of the total available population of African American female

superintendents in the state. Two participants responded to my request to participate in the study after the first email. All other participants were engaged via email and phone communications. In most cases, several emails were sent to arrange interviews that best fit the schedules of the participants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, seven participants opted to interview via video conferencing programs or cellular phone. It was apparent that video conferencing and cellular phone communication was commonplace for them as they demonstrated a high level of comfort during the interviews. However, one participant opted for an alternative to video conferencing programs and cellular phone interview. Due to the nature of the study addressing her experience in attaining the role she held, one interviewee agreed to participate in the study via transcription of answers to the interview questions electing not to have her voice or face recorded. Her responses were accepted without prejudice because they contributed to the scholarly discussion sought for this study.

Questions centered around the participants' background revealed that half of the African American female superintendents attained the role of superintendent in a diverse or a majority White school district and half attained the superintendent role in a predominantly African American school district. Additionally, the range of experience of the participants was between 2.5 and 10 years. Five African American female superintendents had 1–3 years of experience in their role, two had 4–6 years of experience, and one had 7 or more years of experience. Only one participant held a role as superintendent in more than one district. All participants had extensive experiences in education, all held doctoral degrees except for one participant, and all but two

participants were affiliated with a Superintendent Leadership Academy. Attendance at

the Superintendent Leadership Academy was noted with two participants at the local

level, four at the state level, and two at the national level (see Table 1).

Table 1

Background Information

Participant	Experience/number of districts	Career path leading to the superintendency
P1	4–6 years, 1 district	Teacher, assistant principal, principal, curriculum director
P2	4–6 years, 2 districts	Teacher, instructional coach, principal, curriculum director, accountability director, consultant
P3	1–3 years, 1 district	Teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent
P4	1–3 years, 1 district	Teacher, assistant principal, principal, nonprofit education reform administrator
P5	7+ years, 1 district	Teacher, federal programs, state level administration, assistant superintendent, deputy superintendent
P6	1–3 years, 1 district	Teacher, athletic coach, assistant principal, principal, assistant dean, assistant superintendent
P7	1–3 years, 1 district	Teacher, athletic coach, school counselor, principal, assistant superintendent
P8	1–3 years, 1 district	Teacher assistant, secretary, curriculum director, food service, federal programs, teacher, instructional coach, assistant principal, assistant superintendent

Data Collection

I collected data through interviews with eight African American female

superintendents in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. According to Merriam

and Tisdell (2016), semistructured interviews include a set of questions and issues to be explored. One-on-one semistructured interviews were used to explore how African American female superintendents describe the attainment of their roles. Seven interviews were conducted via video conferencing programs or cellular phone, and one was conducted via email. Each participant was interviewed using the same interview protocol. Interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Some of the participants reported they were busy and were fitting me into their busy schedules. For other participants, the study proved to be a challenging subject. It is likely that due to the challenging nature of the study, many of the participants answered the interview questions relatively quickly. In fact, some participants were apprehensive about answering in complete sentences when they were asked probing questions. Although the interviews were recorded, I took handwritten notes throughout each interview.

Interviews conducted via video conferencing programs were video and audio recorded. The audio from the video conferencing programs interviews was subsequently imported into a web-based software called Otter.ai that transcribed speech to text and converted it to Word. Similarly, the cellular phone interviews were audio-recorded using the Voice Memos on my iPhone and imported into Otter.ai. The written responses received via email were also analyzed. The audio recordings, the transcribed interviews, and the written responses were continuously reviewed and compared to my handwritten notes for accuracy. This process revealed the discovery of additional information I had not originally captured in my notes that allowed me to color code the data I collected.

Data Analysis

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) reported that analyzing data in case studies involves conveying an understanding of the case and understanding the importance of managing the data. Compared to other forms of qualitative research, case studies report greater descriptions of the data that extend to the presentation of categories and themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As outlined in Chapter 3, Check and Schutt's (2012) five-step process for analyzing the data included the following:

- documenting of the data and the process of data collection

- organizing/categorizing the data into concepts

- examining relationships to show how one concept may influence another

- authenticating conclusions by evaluating alternative explanations, disconfirming evidence, and searching for negative cases

- reflexivity

The data were gathered from interviews virtually using video conferencing programs and via cellular phone. The audio from the interviews was imported into a web-based software called Otter.ai that transcribed speech to text. The output from the transcription software was imported into Word. After that, the text from the interviews was analyzed using two levels of coding. During the first level of coding (open coding), I created a set of predetermined a priori codes that were aligned to the literature review and the research questions. The second level coding (axial coding), was used to identify categories and move to themes from the related intersectional constructs embedded in the research questions aligned to the study. Second level coding is an advanced way of

reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through the first level coding (Saldaña, 2016).

Ravitch and Carl (2016) asserted that open coding involves multiple rounds and readings of the data. Dedoose, a coding software program, was used to conduct the first round of coding to highlight words and phrases that stood out. The second round of the open coding process focused on my colored-coded handwritten notes that addressed aspects of my research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The first level of coding entailed the use of a worksheet I developed to establish priori codes and subsequently highlighting the transcribed text to obtain preliminary codes (see Table 2).

Table 2

Initial Codes

Code	Data example
Professional background	P1: "We have to show up to the position already equipped." P5: "If you are going to lead instruction, I think it is important to have deep enough wells from which to draw on your experiences." P6: "I understand the role of education and pedagogy well enough to authentically be able to talk and create systems and implement systems well."
Race	P1: "During the interview process at a predominately White school district, I met with parents who announced that 'all of the children in this school district go to school together. The parents did not want me to believe the school district was segregated based on the attendance of the people at the meeting." P7: "I have always served in a high minority district."
Gender	P2: "The vision many school districts have is for a male leader." P3: "If you are a female superintendent, it is not by chance. You earned your position."
Rural/cultural context	P4: "After the appointment of a previous leadership role, I was met by a teacher at a school board meeting yielding three balloons and a dozen of pink roses who said she had done her research on my success as a leader."
Social class	P4: "When I went to college, I knew I was academically behind my peers who had opportunities and experiences I did not have coming from a small, rural city. That made me want to do more in education."
Barriers	P5: There is so much scrutiny experienced as a Black female. "It takes a certain level of maturity to get to the point where you understand that you don't have to check all of the boxes." P7: "Race and gender are my constant. At the end of the day, the most important thing that I need to do is be myself."
Support	P8: "The professional judgement and support from the previous superintendent and the person promoted into my previous position leading to fluid continuity and transition of leadership in the district."

After the first level of coding revealed alignment of the a priori codes with the preliminary codes, axial coding was employed. Axial coding is used to regroup the categories that arose from open coding into themes (Babbie, 2017). I reread and cross-referenced, by hand, the interview transcripts aligned to the a priori codes, the words or phrases that led to the preliminary codes, and my notes. I developed a synthesis of the findings identifying categories tied to the phenomenon of interest and the research questions relating to the conceptual framework and the literature review. There were no discrepant cases, signifying the saturation of data. I practiced reflexivity in my capacity as the researcher who collected and analyzed the data. Specifically, I continuously reviewed the transcripts and compared them with my notes to ensure that my interpretation of the data reflected the participants' perspectives. Accuracy of the reflections were verified by the participants through member checking. The results from interviewing the participants, transcribing the audio from all recordings, and coding the transcripts resulted in themes that emerged from a priori coding, preliminary coding, and categories. Tables 3, 4, and 5 show a progression of coding beginning with a priori codes and leading to themes. Table 3 addresses the first research question related to the perspectives of African American female superintendents about the attainment of their superintendent roles in rural school districts. Table 4 addresses the second research question related to how African American female superintendents overcame barriers to attain their roles. Table 5 addresses the last research question related to the types of support African American female superintendents perceive as beneficial in helping them attain their roles.

Table 3

Priori Codes, Preliminary Codes, Categories, and Themes

	RQ1 Perspectives about experiences		
Priori code	Preliminary code	Category	Theme
Professional background	Association with superintendent leadership, experience interviewing, administrative experience, educational background, improving student achievement, applying for positions, civic leadership, central office experience	Educational preparation, success in the field, show interest, denounce group thinking	High educational and professional qualifications
Race	Accustomed to tokenism, dominant race, glass ceiling, know the key players, success over everything, unspoken and hard to prove	Identify demographics of district, know the predecessor, gain support control emotions, evidence of success, stoic demeanor	Apparent or nonapparent racial inequity
Gender	First Black and first female, treated differently, attainment questioned, challenged, short time to prove oneself, subtly disrespected	Double racial minority, addressed differently, decisions questioned, higher expectations, called emotional, careful with assertiveness	Inequity: gender bias
Culture	Males considered leaders, positive school culture, politics evident, public vs. private institutions	Male dominated, winning mentality, political, community support for private institutions	Cultural lens: conservative rural concept
Social class	Burden of representation, multi-level experiences, must build reputation, application process	Responsible representation, breath of experiences, orient oneself, rounds of interviews	The structural lens as a trailblazer

Table 4

Priori Codes, Preliminary Codes, Categories, and Themes

RQ2 Overcome barriers to attainment			
Priori code	Preliminary code	Category	Theme
Barriers	Only African American female, challenges to showing strength, lack of financial background, getting out of one's own way, singled out to apply, avoid/fear applying for positions	Isolation, stereotypes, obtaining approval, self-imposed barriers, pay disparities	Resiliency to overcome isolation and self-imposed barriers

Table 5

Priori Codes, Preliminary Codes, Categories, and Themes

RQ3 Types of support to attainment			
Priori code	Preliminary code	Category	Theme
Support	Reference from mentor, other female superintendents, family, school board support, partnerships, leadership, review of literature, inner circle, outgoing superintendent, teachers	Mentor, peers, family, school board, partners, literature, teachers/staff	Support from mentors, family, members of school community

Results

I explored how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of the superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state using three research questions.

RQ1: What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?

Theme 1: High Educational and Professional Qualifications

The first of the five themes relating to the participants' perspectives was the prevailing theme that the prerequisite for superintendent role attainment for African American female superintendents in rural school districts was *high educational and professional qualifications*. The perspectives of the African American female superintendents revealed it was important to obtain a doctoral degree, gain a wealth of educational and professional experiences, and demonstrate a proven track record of success.

Seven of the eight participants held doctoral degrees at the time this study was conducted. The participants who held doctoral degrees believed African American females must obtain doctoral degrees to attain superintendent roles to demonstrate they are educationally equipped with the most advanced degree available. From their perspectives, communication from educational leaders with doctoral degrees is more accepted and respected by members of the school community. Participant 5 was adamant that superintendent role attainment for her, as a superintendent characterized in the 1% percentage of those underrepresented in educational leadership, meant that her qualifications had to be greater than those who highly represent educational leadership. She stated, "I think having a doctoral degree makes a difference. People pay attention when a Dr. is talking".

The participants perceived African American female leaders should gain a wealth of educational and professional experiences While all participants held several instructional leadership positions, five of the eight participants indicated that "all of their

experiences" helped in their attainment of the superintendent role. The participants acknowledged that among them, African American female superintendents, it would be wise to know what sets them apart from their peers. Participant 4 discussed her diverse background in both public and nonprofit education in high racial minority and predominately White schools but noted her experience with nonprofit education set her apart from other African American female superintendents. Participant 6 shared that her experience as a nontraditional teacher with a business background distinguished her as a problem-solver able to address fiscal issues, facilities, accounts payables, accounts receivables, and other areas that are not commonly taught in traditional educational programs. In addition to traditional educational programs, six participants attended Superintendent Leadership Academies, and several described their affiliation with civic organizations.

The most prevailing sentiment of the African American female superintendents was their track record of academic success as instructional leaders. Outside of doctoral degree attainment, they perceived academic success as an undeniable accomplishment that aided in their ability to attain their superintendent roles. Participant 1 made it clear that "if you are going to lead instruction, you need to know something about instruction". As a testament to the pipeline academic success may have to the attainment of superintendent roles for African American females, Participant 3 stated, "my qualifications included my ability to move a failing school to one of the most successful schools in the state".

Theme 2: Apparent or Nonapparent Racial Inequity

From the perspective of race, the participants in the study acknowledged either *apparent or nonapparent racial inequity* in their experiences with the attainment of their role as superintendent. Their experiences represented the varied possibilities concerning racial inequity among African American female superintendents in rural school districts. All participants leading White school districts declared they had experiences with apparent racial inequity. The participants leading African American school districts reported nonapparent racial inequity.

Apparent Racial Inequity

Some participants admitted that they faced racial inequity concerning their role as superintendent but not necessarily in the attainment of their current roles as superintendent. An example of racial inequity was noted by Participant 8 who described the mental processes she observes when she believes racism is expressed towards her:

> You know, racial issues are kind of unspoken. A lot of times, you can't quite put your finger on it. You get pushback from people who have been in the district longer than you. You don't address it you just watch it. Sometimes people are blatantly disrespectful because they have been doing what they have wanted to do for so long. But then you have to say, these types of things I take notice of without directly addressing it unless I have unequivocal proof that the disrespectful is racially motivated.

Most of the participants described their experiences with apparent racial inequity but explained how they dealt with it. Some of the strategies reported were the ability to adapt to their environment, using code-switch as a coping mechanism, or ignoring

apparent racial issues. Participant 1 stated she grew up in a predominately white

neighborhood and was one of a handful of African American students in my class:

> I was accustomed to being the only African American person in the room
>
> sometimes. So, when I decided to interview to be a superintendent, I felt like I
>
> would do so in a district where I would be the first African American female or
>
> the first African American person to attain the role.

Although Participant 4 was the first African American female to attain the superintendent

role in her school district, she revealed she had no experiences with overt racism. She did,

however, describe her educational background in parochial education as a child and as a

college student attending a predominately White university that she credits with

equipping her to become adept at code-switching as a coping mechanism to deal with

racism. Similarly, Participant 6 believes apparent racism is a part of what African

American females face throughout their lives stating that, "I've been a little black girl.

Now, I'm a big black girl. And you just learn early on how to cope and move forward and

persevere through it all".

Nonapparent Racial Inequity

For some of the African American female superintendents, racial inequity was

nonapparent. Three of the participants revealed racial inequity was nonapparent because

they held superintendent roles in predominately African American school districts.

Participant 3 added that the proverbial racial glass ceiling had been shattered prior to her

role attainment but took notice that affiliations in organizations and superintendent

conferences are comprised of predominately White males. Based on their reported

experiences in African American school districts, racial issues come after role attainment based on preconceived notions and high expectations of African American female educational leaders. Furthermore, the participants reported nonapparent racial inequity was experienced in organizations and conferences that did not directly impact their ability to run their school districts.

Theme 3: Inequity as It Relates to Gender Bias

The most common theme that emerged in the data from the participants' perspective was *inequity as it related to gender bias*. Gender bias was more prevalent than all other constructs for every participant in the study. As an example, Participant 2 communicated that during the attainment of her position as superintendent, questions by school board members were posed that were designed specifically for male candidates. These questions indicated the school board members had preconceived notions about who they taught the superintendent should be. Participant 3 added gender bias is a bit overt. She was called 'girl', asked how she ended up as a superintendent, and asked who she knew to get the position. Participant 5 expressed that staff members often questions her about why they must do certain things pertaining to the job. She credits their line of questioning to her gender and believes those same questions would not be asked of a White superintendent or a Black male superintendent.

The participants perceived gender inequity to be worse than race. Participant 6 cautions that there are three main reasons gender inequity is worse than race. For one, expectations are higher for women than they are for men. Secondly, the pressure is greater for women because women have a shorter time to prove themselves in leadership

positions. Lastly, the stereotype that women are emotional when upset calls into question their ability to discipline staff when holding superintendent roles. Participant 7 discussed her initial experience with gender inequity began after the attainment of her role following the tenure of a White male superintendent. She disclosed that the gender inequity came from staff members, board members, and community members who questioned her authority often.

Theme 4: Cultural Lens of the Conservative Rural Concept

As specified by the participants, the *cultural lens of the conservative rural concept* must be understood to lead rural school districts. There are ways in which things are done in rural school districts from a cultural perspective that must be adopted by superintendents. Several participants mentioned that support in their role as superintendents was contingent upon their response and respect for the community's values.

As an example of the cultural lens of the conservative rural concept Participant 2 reflected:

> The community has the mindset that males are leaders. Females are often viewed as support to male leaders. Different communities react differently toward male superintendents than female superintendents. Men do not seem to share the same experiences as women when we talk about our experiences with each other. Men are respected and their directives are not challenged as much. This especially holds true with school boards.

Participant 3 noted how her work and reputation spoke to the cultural lens of the

conservative rural concept: "my school community was very supportive. I am homegrown. Additionally, my work, as opposed to my race or gender, speaks for me". Most of the participants reported concerted efforts to embrace the culture of the conservative rural concept because it leads to the community's support. Participant 4 finds it important to honor the students in the school district and to protect the school district from negative outside influences. Participant 5 hosts several events inviting the community into her school and is "intentional about attending community events like the city council meetings, board of supervisors' meetings, and other annual events".

Admittedly, gaining and maintaining community support is an additional duty African American female superintendents must concede. Participant 6 expressed that the superintendent role in rural school districts is a political role structured like a family characterized by times of love as well as disdain. She further expressed that supportive community members should be valued as great assets in school districts.

Public school isolation is not an option for African American female superintendents in rural school districts. African American female superintendents must be aware of the cultural lens of the whole community to include the private sector to gain the respect and support of all members in the community. Participant 8 voiced:

> I get a lot of community support. I do have to remember I am the first African
> American, image in the superintendent's seat in this district. It is my personal
> belief that all community members to include private academies play a big role in
> our community. If you don't sell yourself, nobody's going to support you. We've
> asked the community to support us and they do. We just have to ask for support.

Theme 5: The Structural Lens as Trailblazers

The last theme relating to participants' perspectives surrounded the uniqueness of their experiences in the attainment of their role as superintendent was *the structural lens as trailblazers*. Specifically, they realized that they were, in most cases, pioneers in the field and well accomplished in educational leadership. Participant 1 asserted in the last 20 years, more and more females have attained the superintendency: "So, when we get in the role, and we demonstrate that we can do the work then that opens the door for someone else". Participant 2 stated that female CEOs have gone through the trenches and have matriculated through the different educational levels and positions. Moreover, she communicated that male superintendents skip a lot of the educational positions and are more likely to move from the principalship to the superintendency. As trailblazers, African American female superintendents should know the tenure of the superintendent role, inherit differences that may exist between them and their predecessor, and prepare to undergo many interviews before acquiring superintendent role attainment.

One of the chief complaints in educational leadership is the short tenure of superintendents that threaten the stability in school districts. The goal for African American female superintendents is role attainment but the prize is maintaining the role. Participant 4 communicated that the average tenure of a superintendent is three years:

> That's about the time the honeymoon period ends, and you have to start making some decisions that are going to upset people. And very early on I tried to make sure that I had people in my superintendent's cabinet who didn't always think like me, because I think that it is really important that we don't groupthink.

The underrepresentation of African American females in superintendent roles results in structural, inherit differences between African American female superintendents and their predecessors. Participant 5 affirmed African American females are trailblazers in the attainment of superintendent roles. Racially, African American females do not have a legacy from which to draw from in the superintendency. Additionally, the prerequisite of the doctoral degree is trailblazing for most of the participants because the doctoral degree, like the attainment of their position as superintendent, may be the first and only degree attained in their family.

What is also trailblazing in educational leadership is the multiple interviews that African American female superintendents may have to attain superintendent roles. One participant recalled undergoing five interviews that included three agency interviews, a school board interview, and a community interview. During the time this study was conducted, several of the African American female superintendents experienced multiple interviews to attain the superintendent role they currently held.

RQ 2. How did African American female superintendents overcome barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts?

Theme 6: Resiliency to Overcome Isolation and Self-Imposed Barriers

The major theme from the barriers experienced by the participants was their *resiliency to overcome isolation and the self-imposed barriers* inflicted upon them by others or imposed upon themselves. Sampson and Gresham (2017) found a similar theme of African American women buying into oppressive constructs about race and gender placing self-imposed barriers on themselves that they must overcome. These findings

solidify resiliency as a formidable theme.

African American superintendents leading predominately White school districts and high racial minority school districts experience isolation in educational leadership. While admitting the conversation was uncomfortable, Participant 1 described comfort in knowing how to deal with isolation in the professional workplace that stems from experiences she had as a child that mirrors the experiences of adulthood adapting to working in spaces by herself. Participant 1 revealed that it is not uncommon to be 1 of 100 people in a professional meeting and notice she is the only African American in the room. She was taught resiliency by walking with her head up and shoulders squared off to make sure she looks like she is supposed to be in the room even if she doesn't feel like she is supposed to be in the room."

Resiliency for some of the participants means comforting themselves when experiencing isolation while others view resiliency as actively protesting isolation. Participant 8 expressed her disdain with her school board who wanted her to advance from the role of assistant superintendent to superintendent without an increase in pay. Although she stood her ground on the issue and received a small pay raise, she felt isolated in her efforts. "You are kind of alone because it is difficult for the highest paid person in the district to complain about the pay".

Resiliency to overcome isolation is motivated by barriers that are inflicted upon individuals. However, resiliency to overcome self-imposed barriers is motivated by self-inflicted barriers. Participant 4 described the skill of resiliency for individuals who face experience multiple oppressions:

I think getting out of my own way is an issue. It takes a level of maturity to get to

the point where you understand that you don't have to check all the boxes. For a

long time, I felt like I could not do certain things unless I was fully equipped in

every way. But that's not the case. I do think you have to be professionally

prepared. I also believe in a lesson my dad taught me which is people in public

service must have clean hands and keep clean hands to be respected.

Participant 7 recalled a similar experience where she names herself as the greatest barrier

calling for resilient strategies. When faced with the opportunity to apply for the

superintendent role in a thriving district nearby, Participant 7 convinced herself that she

was not ready. She questioned her experience and gave herself angst over every question

on the application to included one that asked for the names of publications written.

Although she had a reputation of academic success as an instructional leader, she

questioned her experience because she had not written any publications.

RQ 3. What types of support do African American female superintendents

perceive as beneficial in helping them attain superintendent roles in rural school districts?

Theme 7: Support from Mentors, Family, and the School Community

The last theme under the third research question noted by all participants was the

types of support they experienced in their role attainment as superintendents. Six

participants recounted experiences characterized by *support from mentors, family, and*

the school community. Support may come from those you are in close contact with or

from others outside of your inner circle.

Participant 3 ranked the support from those categorized by close contact. First,

family was noted as the greatest support. Secondly, the people that surround her on the job helps to get her through tough times. Next, Participant 3 listed her school board who believes in her and stands with her in solidarity when she makes tough decisions. Lastly, a network of current and past superintendents completes her circle of close contact support. Similarly, Participant 2 divulged her greatest support was her family, school board, and a network of current and past African American female superintendents. Support from networks may influence role attainment for African American female educational leaders. As Participant 1 explained, "it is important to have a good reference. A good reference from an accomplished mentor will encourage the decision-maker to do what is right."

It is important that African American female leaders expand their inner circle to the larger school community and reaching back to former leadership. Participant 5 said, "We have been blessed to have great support locally, and even nationally". Participant 5 uses social media to promote the positive things happening in her district, consequently expanding her support. Participant 8 recalled having the support of the outgoing superintendent as her biggest supporter and advocate in dealing with her school board.

To conclude, the findings from this study revealed seven major themes: five themes derived from the perspectives of 8 African American female superintendents about their experiences in the attainment of their roles, one theme described the barriers they had to overcome, and one theme described the types of support they perceive as beneficial. The themes were (1) *high educational and professional qualifications*, (2) *apparent or nonapparent racial inequity*, (3) *inequity as it relates to gender bias*, (4)

cultural lens of the conservative rural concept, (5) *the structural lens as trailblazers*, (6) *resiliency to overcome isolation and self-imposed barriers*, and (7) *support from mentors, family, and the school community*.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

When the findings from qualitative research are trusted, the study achieves trustworthiness (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As the researcher, I ensured trustworthiness in my approach to collecting and analyzing data by applying the following strategies: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Korstjens and Moser (2018) indicated that credibility was the faith that could be placed in the accuracy of research findings. To ensure credibility of the study, several strategies were employed to show that the findings were plausible. During the collection of data via video conferencing programs, cellular phones, and transcription, clarification probes were used as a strategy to obtain more coherent answers to the research questions to ensure credibility. The various methods of data collection (video conferencing programs, cellular phones, and transcription) demonstrated that I was amenable to providing the participants with the opportunity to select an interview method they were most comfort with that would yield the greatest results during their participation to gain their perspectives of their experiences. An additional strategy to ensure credibility occurred during data analysis in which a continuous analysis of the data involved first and second level coding. Following the collection and analysis of data, member checking was a strategy used to ensure credibility of the data collected. Transcripts and one-page

summary that included the themes were emailed to each participant for review and feedback as indicated in the consent form that requested participation in the study. Seven of the participants reviewed the transcripts of their interviews as well as the themes that served as a summary of the findings ensuring the accuracy of the participants' intent. Because one of the participants provided written responses to the interview questions, she was only provided a summary of the themes. Participants were asked to provide clarity and suggest any changes to the summary of the findings; however, no clarity or changes were suggested affirming the data from the interviews that led to the themes found in the study.

Transferability

A thick description of the setting, participants, and findings of the study was achieved. From the participants' context, the circumstance that forms the setting for this study is the underrepresentation of African American female superintendents in rural school districts. Additionally, participation in this study included criteria that was threefold: (a) participants held superintendent roles, (b) participants were African American women, and (c) participants were superintendents in rural school districts in the southern state in the U.S. Further, a thick description was achieved through an interpretation of participants' experiences in the attainment of their superintendent roles via common themes. From this thick description of the setting, participants, and findings, a replication of the study would benefit African American female superintendents in urban and suburban school districts. Targeting all school communities (rural, urban, and suburban) in other regions in a southern state in the U.S. would provide a greater

representation of the role attainment of African American female superintendents. The findings from the study further support transferability in that the data from rural school districts in a southern state may apply to rural school districts in urban and suburban school districts in a southern state.

Dependability

I maintained an audit trail documenting the implementation of the study as designed from the initial to the end stages while sustaining alignment with the content of the study and the research questions. Data was collected from each participant using the same interview questions. Dependability was increased in the study through the collection of data from multiple participants sharing superintendent role attainment. Because the participants' experiences were similarly based on the rural context, their perspectives were unique to their background and the culture of their local school districts. I analyzed the data from the interviews of the participants to determine themes describing the attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern state in the U.S.

Confirmability

To demonstrate confirmability, I used clarification probes during the interviews to deepen my level of understanding of responses focused on the research questions. Furthermore, I achieved reflexivity by first establishing priori codes to structure the collection of data. Then I conducted multiple reviews of the data using color codes in my notes with the text from transcribed video and audio recordings that began with the use of a coding software program, *Dedoose,* to a more tedious, manual approach by hand.

Continued review of the data developed into preliminary codes, then categories, and finally themes resuming alignment with the content of the study and research questions that could be confirmed by other researchers through an audit trail.

Summary

Seven major themes arose from the analysis of data of three research questions. The themes identified were (1) *high educational and professional qualifications*; (2) *apparent or nonapparent racial inequity*; (3) *inequity as it relates to gender bias*; (4) *cultural lens of the conservative rural concept*; (5) *the structural lens as trailblazers*; (6) *resiliency to overcome isolation and self-imposed barriers*; and (7) *support from mentors, family, and the school community*. In Chapter 5, I interpret the findings of this study, present the limitations of the study, make recommendations for further research, and impart implications for potential impact for positive social change at various levels.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of the superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. This study was imperative to address the underrepresentation in the attainment of roles for African American female superintendents in rural school districts. Evidence indicated that the disparity between the population of African American female educators compared to the student population, population of teachers, and principals' pool pale in comparison to the disproportion in the role attainment of African American female superintendents.

The findings from this qualitative case study contributed to the scholarly discussion of how African American female superintendents in rural school districts attained their superintendent roles. Data analysis revealed seven themes from the interviews of eight participants aligned with the three research questions. Five of the seven themes aligned with RQ1, one theme aligned with RQ2, and one theme aligned with RQ3. The first five themes addressed the perspectives of the participants' experiences in the attainment of their roles as superintendents, the sixth theme derived from the barriers they had to overcome, and the last theme identified the supports they thought were beneficial in helping them attain their roles.

Interpretation of the Findings

The themes from the study corroborate the scholarly discussion related to the literature and conceptual frameworks in Chapter 2. The first theme, high educational and professional qualifications, supported Allred et al.'s (2017) stance that African American

women interested in attaining the role of superintendent do so through preparation. All participants in the current study reported they had terminal degrees except for one. Even more significant was six of the eight participants attended a leadership or superintendent's academy in addition to acquiring terminal degrees demonstrating the priority they gave to preparation.

Robinson et al. (2017) suggested that individuals aspiring to attain certain roles should strategically analyze their career path because preparation alone does not guarantee role attainment. Although all participants noted that their experiences helped in the attainment of their role as superintendent, Participant 8 reported that central office administrative experience with school law, purchasing, curriculum, and many other areas were experiences needed for the position. Similar to what was reported in the literature by Maranto et al. (2019) and Sperandio and Devadas (2015), the participants in the current study reported an extensive background in curriculum and instruction. Because of their instructional focus, their experiences included academic success. Like the multiple oppressions that stem from the development of the empowering conceptual framework, Black feminist thought, the participants' doctoral degree attainment and experiences in curriculum and instruction cannot be separated from their perspectives about their academic successes as instructional leaders and subsequent role attainment as superintendents. In alignment with Agosto and Roland's (2018) description of intersectional analysis, the first finding in the current study that African American female superintendents possess a high educational and professional qualifications seemed appropriate.

Apparent or nonapparent racial inequity was the second theme that emerged from the participants' responses regarding their experiences in the attainment of their roles as superintendents. Results were consistent with Fields et al.'s (2019) study of six African American superintendents in Texas citing race as the leading barrier for African American female superintendents. In congruence with Holsey et al. (2020), five of the current participants perceived racial inequity as a barrier, and three participants perceived racial inequity was nonapparent in their role attainment. AAUW (2016) described how racial inequity was masked as organizational, cultural, economic, or policy barriers. The current participants reported dealing with this oppressive construct in many ways: adapting to their environment, code-switching as a coping mechanism, or ignoring apparent racial issues.

Participants reported apparent racial inequity experiences and nonapparent racial inequity experiences. Similar to Holsey et al.'s (2020) finding that role attainment may be higher in communities familiar to aspiring superintendents, findings from the current study revealed that role attainment for the participants mirrored the communities they knew intimately to include White and African American communities. For some African American women, racial inequity is nonapparent because they denounce it as a barrier or factor. The idea that racial inequity for African American women is nonapparent aligns with Brown (2014) that the lack of acknowledgment of racial issues in the attainment of superintendent roles does not mean that racial issues do not exist. Additionally, Davis and Maldonaldo (2015) found that African American girls are reared to adopt a strong sense of self to exist in society. These ideas embody Black feminist thought designed to

empower African American women who may find themselves in situations in which resiliency is needed to exist in unknown or uncomfortable environments where it would be easy for African American female superintendents to feel invisible, isolated, or excluded. African American women who are defined by "first," "one of the few," or the "only African American woman" (Collins, 2000, p. vi) in the workplace deal with racial issues.

Inequity as it relates to gender bias was the third and most common theme from the study. Osler and Webb (2014) suggested that blatant gender inequity can be attributed to the fact that the representation of female superintendents in education is severely disproportionate to the gender makeup represented in the field. The current study included more than half of the African American superintendents in a state. From a racial and gendered perspective, the constructs describing African American female superintendents, when viewed separately or together, indicated the inequity of the participants related to gender bias. During the interviews, several of the participants did not perceive that male superintendents dealt with the issues female superintendents dealt with. The participants did not believe male superintendents' decisions were questioned or challenged as often as female superintendents'. Based on the experiences reported by the participants, inequity related to gender bias is heightened by additional constructs like race for African American women who represent only 1% of all superintendents.

The cultural lens of the conservative rural concept was the fourth theme that emerged in this study. Women attain superintendent roles in rural school districts at a higher proportion than in any other region (Allred et al., 2017; Kowalski et al., 2011).

The results of the current study revealed the many leadership experiences of the superintendents were consistent with Davidson and Butcher's (2019) and Klocko and Justis's (2019) assessment that resiliency is required of superintendents in rural school districts who are often assigned multiple tasks and roles. Participant 5 stated that one of the most important duties of the superintendent is marketing the district.

A prerequisite for rural superintendents is the ability to engage the whole community crossing class and political lines (Davidson & Butcher, 2019). As noted by Participant 6, the role of the superintendent is probably the most political role in a community. Furthermore, the conceptual framework supported the findings of this study and validated McHenry-Sorber and Budge's (2018) assertion that superintendents who are aware of and operate from the insider construct embody the community's interest. In addition, current findings align with research from Gammill and Vaughn (2011) who that found female superintendents must understand the cultural lens of the conservative rural concept related to the views of womanhood as an insider who embodies the community's interest. As explained by Participant 2, conservatives view men as leaders and women as support to male leaders. The findings from the current study suggest that African American female superintendents have a greater challenge to attain the superintendency in rural school districts. Moreover, African American female superintendents should draw from their many experiences and operate under the auspices of the cultural lens of the conservative rural concept.

The structural lens as trailblazers was the fifth theme addressing the first research question focused on the perspectives of the participants regarding their experiences

attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts. Klocko et al. (2019) expressed that resiliency was a major factor in helping African American women overcome challenges in educational leadership. Results from the current study revealed that four participants were the first African Americans and the first women to attain their roles as superintendents succeeding White male superintendents. Additionally, two participants reported they were either the first African American or the first female superintendent. From a racial or gendered perspective, the participants' input extends the knowledge about the structural lens of African American superintendents as trailblazers. Graham and Nevarez (2017) defined transformational leaders as people who demonstrate resiliency by participating in groundbreaking change concerned with inequities demonstrating trailblazing in educational leadership. Although all current participants were able to recount experiences illustrating resiliency leading to their roles as superintendents, Participant 6 experienced five interviews with multiple community stakeholders to attain her role as superintendent in her school district. As a condition of their existence, the participants shared common experiences exhibiting resiliency that can be applied to the challenges experienced in rural school districts propelling them into being trailblazers in educational leadership.

Resiliency to overcome isolation and self-imposed barriers was a common theme in the literature and among the current participants and reflected how they overcame barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts. Beckwith et al. (2016) explored barriers that prevented African American women's ascension to executive leadership positions. Occurrences of isolation manifested in the current participants'

experiences when one participant lacked the backing from others in the field, when one was falsely accused, and when one had to get approval before making financial decisions. Although the experiences of this study's participants differed, the commonality between them was their race and gender. Moorosi et al. (2018) suggested the success of African American female leaders was based on their ability to overcome barriers related to intersectionality. Results from a narrative study by Johnson (2018) revealed the barriers three African American superintendents faced were instrumental in shaping them as leaders. Four current participants reported that the barriers they had to overcome were self-imposed, which was consistent with Sampson and Gresham's (2017) content analysis of 43 dissertations on gender research. In accord with Lige et al.'s (2017) IP, participants in the current study reported experiences that showed they had adopted biases and standards as demonstrated in their self-imposed barriers of incompetency although their success in the field contradicted this belief. The underrepresentation of women in executive leadership positions affirms gender equity issues for women (Seo et al., 2017).

Support from mentors, family, and the school community was the seventh theme of this study and was aligned with the third research question. Research on African American female superintendents indicated that external support outside of the workplace was most beneficial in their success. The most prominent support in the literature was the benefit of mentorship describing the African American female superintendent experience (Howard et al., 2017). Findings from the current study revealed that the reference from a mentor was the deciding factor in one participant's role attainment as superintendent. Similarly, one participant stated that she had a team of present and past superintendents

as mentors. Three participants embraced the external support concept as they were mentored by other female superintendents, partnerships, and others outside of education. Another participant stated that her predecessor was her mentor and helped with the continuity of success in the district. Lastly, two participants named their family and faith as being more prevalent in helping them in their endeavors.

This study's findings confirmed the conceptual frameworks of Black feminist thought and intersectionality. This study was grounded in the gendered and racial perspectives of Black feminist thought but extends the literature with additional constructs to better describe intersectionality. According to Wiley et al. (2017), Black feminist thought posits that race and gender as multiple oppressions cannot be separated, and this brings about unique challenges to attainment in educational leadership. Agosto and Roland (2018) noted a link between the inequality in the attainment of African American female superintendents and the oppressions of intersectionality. Sanchez-Peña et al. (2016) postulated that compounded biases related to cultural factors along with race, gender, and class described intersectionality. The findings of the current study are consistent with Allred et al. (2017) that women, including African American female superintendents, represented in educational leadership are highly qualified. Although they may or may not have experiences with the glass ceiling characterized as racial inequity, they will have experiences with the concrete ceiling characterized as gender inequity. Participant 1 acknowledged that she could not discern a difference between the glass ceiling or the concrete ceiling as a double minority. However, Participant 5 avowed the superintendency in an African American school district poses the greatest challenge with

the concrete ceiling characterized by gender." She reported one of her female school board members admitted that they were actively seeking a male superintendent but was thankful they had chosen her after getting to know her better. African American superintendents leading rural school districts must be aware of the rural culture and embrace transformative leadership as trailblazers in educational leadership. The conceptual frameworks presented in this study served as a support in the form of empowerment propelling African American female superintendents to be resilient in addressing barriers and embracing support.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations of this study indicated potential weaknesses in the research. In Chapter 1, the first limitation listed was recruiting eight participants from the small population available to participate in this study. Securing the targeted sample size in this study meant recruiting more than half of the total population. The second limitation was my bias as both the collector and analyst of the data. To limit my biases, I employed member checking to ensure credibility of the data used in the analysis to arrive at common themes. Also, a thick description was provided to enable transferability of this study. In addition to a thick description, an audit trail was conducted to ensure the dependability of this study. Moreover, clarification probes demonstrated confirmability of this study. The last limitation presented in Chapter 1 was discerning whether the participants were honest in their responses to the research questions that may show their district in a negative light. Some of the participants answered the interview questions quickly and responded with short answers. It was difficult to tell whether they were being

direct or concealing information. The participants were reassured through every communication that their identities would not be revealed in this study. During the collection of the data in November 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused participants to be reluctant to interview face-to-face. As a result, participants were given the option to meet face-to-face, virtually, or by telephone. One participant chose to write her responses. No one elected to have a face-to-face interview. Trustworthiness of this study was achieved as all interviews except one were audio-recorded and transcribed, and participants reviewed their transcripts and a one-page summary of the findings for accuracy.

Recommendations

The findings of this study contribute to a greater understanding of the gap in practice of how African American female superintendents in rural school districts attained their roles. Recommendations from the results of this research may benefit the educational leadership field, African American female administrators, and hiring agents. For this reason, recommendations have been provided for educational preparation programs, aspiring African American female superintendents, and school boards and search firms who hire superintendents.

Educational Preparation Programs

Department heads at colleges and universities responsible for andragogy in educational preparation programs for administrators should consider the inclusion of Black feminist thought and intersectionality in the conceptual frameworks taught. In doing so, educational preparation programs bring awareness to all students of the

experiences that African American women may have in the educational leadership field. Without greater awareness, it may be difficult to achieve representational changes that may lead to an increase of African American women in superintendent roles in rural school districts.

Aspiring African American Female Superintendents

Aspiring African American female superintendents should know what African American female leadership entails. That includes knowledge of the characteristics, background, and qualifications of those who have attained the position from research and their educational preparation programs. Moreover, aspiring African American women should know how resiliency has been used to understand and cope with issues relating to race, gender, and culture. Being astute of racial, gendered, and cultural issues could alleviate isolation and self-imposed barriers African American women place on themselves. This can be accomplished through skills training around how to deal with biases and developing resiliency. Also, African American women aspiring to be superintendents should concern themselves with skills training to interpret and work with the cultural elements of a community, especially small rural ones.

School Districts and Search Firms

School districts and search firms responsible for interviewing and hiring superintendents can be more equitable to African American female superintendent candidates. This study equips school districts and search firms with knowledge of the barriers and supports experienced by African American female administrators. With such knowledge, school districts may intervene to remove barriers and increase supports to

attain transformative leaders qualified through their experiences with intersectional constructs to lead rural school districts.

Based on the results of this study, a change in the curriculum by educational preparation programs, knowledge about African American female leadership by aspiring African American female superintendents, and equitable practices among school districts and search firms who hire superintendents support the following themes: (1) *high educational and professional qualifications*; (2) *apparent or nonapparent racial inequity*; (3) *inequity as it relates to gender bias*; (4) *cultural lens of the conservative rural concept*; (5) *the structural lens as trailblazers*; (6) *isolation and self-imposed barriers*; and (7) *support from mentors, family, and the school community*.

Future Research

This study recruited eight African American female superintendents serving in rural school districts which accounted for more than half of the total population available in a southern U.S. state. Future researchers may want to conduct an audit trail using the data collection and data analysis methods from this study to replicate this study using suburban or urban school districts as the context for their study. This study could also be replicated in other southern states to compare different regions. Due to the small population available, the results of this study are not generalizable to all African American female superintendents in rural school districts. To increase generalizability, future researchers could extend this study to participants who meet the criteria of this in all southern U.S. states.

Implications

This study has the potential to impact positive social change toward addressing the issue of a lack of representation due to superintendent role attainment of African American women. A positive social change could lead to an increase in the representation of individuals who are African American women. For disadvantaged students of color, an increase in the representation of African American female superintendents proves the role is attainable as they can see themselves in educational leaders.

Organizationally, school districts project the sentiment of the community in the acceptance of African American female superintendents. As the demographics of students of color and women of color increase in society, there should also be an increase in the attainment of superintendent roles for African American women who increasingly prepare themselves to do so. Equity in hiring, especially in school districts highly represented by students of color, demonstrates a shift in educational leadership that promotes diversity and inclusion in hiring practices.

As societal constructs change, positive social change encouraging more equitable role attainment for women who dominate the educational field will show a shift in leadership focused on educational experience and background as opposed to perceptions of leadership traits motivated by gender. Educational preparation programs that respond to these societal changes evolve with the times. Current and past mentors, especially White male superintendents, have more knowledge about the superintendent role and what it entails. Furthermore, they possess the ability to change the trajectory in leadership increasing the representation of African American female superintendents through their

influence as mentors.

Conclusion

African American women disproportionately hold only 1% of superintendent roles in a field in which 27% of superintendents are females and 8.6% of superintendents are African American. When viewed from a gendered or racial perspective, the statistics show great underrepresentation of African American female superintendents. Although African American female educational leaders have prepared for the role by obtaining terminal degrees, teaching experience, and administrative preparation and experience, preparation has not yielded equitable superintendent role attainment.

This qualitative case study aimed to explore how African American female superintendents describe their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts in a southern U.S. state. The participants confirmed the following five themes from their perspectives about their experiences attaining their superintendent roles: (1) *high educational and professional qualifications*; (2) *apparent or nonapparent racial inequity*; (3) *inequity as it relates to gender bias*; (4) *cultural lens of the conservative rural concept*; (5) *the structural lens as trailblazers*; one theme describing how (6) *resiliency* helped them *to overcome isolation and self-imposed barriers*; and one theme describing (7) *support from mentors, family, and the school community.*

African American female superintendents who defy the odds by overcoming multiple oppressions through various constructs to attain their roles, show other African American educators and students of color a reflection of themselves in a meaningful way. African American female superintendents' description of their experiences, the barriers

they overcame, and the types of support beneficial in helping them attain their roles in rural school districts increases understanding in educational leadership. Even more, African American female superintendents, as the most underrepresented group as measured by percentage in the field and social class, can equally dwell and represent as educational leaders in predominately White and predominately Black school districts.

References

Agars, M. D. (2004). Reconsidering the impact of gender stereotypes on the advancement of women in organizations. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, *28*, 103–111. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2004.00127.x

Agosto, V., & Roland, E. (2018). Intersectionality and educational leadership: A critical review. *Review of Research in Education*, *42*(2), 255–285. https://journal.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.3102/0091732X18762433

Allen, P. L., & Hughes, J. D. (2017). A multi-generational study of aspiring African American female superintendents in Texas. *Contemporary Issues in Educational Leadership*, *2*(3), 1–13. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=ciel

Allred, P. D., Maxwell, G. M., & Skrla, L. (2017). What women know: Perceptions of seven female superintendents. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *37*, 1–11. https://scholarlycommons.pacific.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1092&context=ed-facarticles

Alston, J. A. (2000). Missing from action where are the Black female school superintendents? *Urban Education*, *35*(5), 525–531. https://journal.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0042085900355003

Alston, J. A. (2005). Tempered radicals and servant leaders: Black females persevering in the superintendency. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *41*, 675–688. https://doi.10.1177 /0013161X04274275

American Association of School Administrators. (2010). *10-Year study on the American*

school superintendent. https://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=17280

American Association of School Administrators. (2015). *AASA releases 5-year study on the American school superintendent.*

https://www.aasa.org/content.aspx?id=38583

American Association of University Women. (2016). Barriers and bias the status of women in leadership. https://www.ncgs.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Barriers-and-Bias-The-Status-of-Women-in-Leadership.pdf

Anderson, M. (2017). Transformational leadership in education: A review of existing literature. *International Social Science Review*, *93*(1), 1–13.

https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1213&context=issr

Babbie, E. (2017). *Basics of social research* (7th ed.). Cengage Learning.

Beckwith, A. L., Carter, D. R., & Peters, T. (2016). The underrepresentation of African American women in executive leadership: What's getting in the way? *Journal of Business Studies Quarterly*, *7*(4), 115–134.

https://www.icos.umich.edu/sites/default/files/lecturereadinglists/Undererpesentsation%20of%20Black%20Women%20in%20Executive%20Leadership.pdf

Bell, E. L. (1990). The bicultural life experience of career-oriented black women. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *11*, 459–477.

Bernal, C., Monosov, N., Stencler, A., Lajoie, A., Raigoza, A., & Akhavan, N. (2017). Gender bias within the superintendency: A comparative study. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, *2*(1), 42–52.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1158072.pdf

Björk, L. G., Browne-Ferrigno, T., & Kowalski, T. J. (2018). Superintendent roles as

    CEO and team leader. *Research in Educational Administration & Leadership*,

    3(2), 179–205. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1207460.pdf

Björk, L. G., Browne-Ferrigno, T., & Potterton, A. U. (2019). Educational reform in the

    USA: Superintendent's role in promoting social justice through organizational

    justice. *Handbook on Promoting Social Justice in Education*, 1–26.

Blad, E. (2019, November). Nearly one in five U.S. students attend rural schools. Here's

    what you should know about them. *Education Week.*

    https://www.edweek.org/education/nearly-one-in-five-u-s-students-attend-rural-

    schools-heres-what-you-should-know-about-them/2019/11#:~:text=Here's%20W

    hat%20You%20Should%20Know%20About%20Them,-By%20Evie%20Blad&te

    xt=More%20than%209.3%20million%20U.S.,districts%2C%20a%20new%20rep

    ort%20finds.

Bloom, C. M., & Erlandson, D. A. (2003). African American women principals in urban

    schools: Realities, (re)constructions, and resolutions. *Educational Administration*

    Quarterly, *39*, 339–369.

    https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.11770013161X03253413

Blount, J. M., & Guanci, S. (2020). Convergence of gender and sexuality in the history of

    educational leadership. *Handbook on Promoting Social Justice in Education*,

    1729–1758.

Bonney, M. A. (1981). Going to school in Iowa. *The Goldfinch*, *2*(4), 1-15.

https://ir.uiowa.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=goldfinch

Brown, A. R. (2014). The recruitment and retention of African American women as

public school superintendents. *Journal of Black Studies*, *45*(6), 573-593.

https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0021934714542157

Calderone, S. M., McDonald, T., Hill, G., & Derrington, M. L. (2020). Life course and

gender: Unpacking women's thoughts about access to the superintendency.

Frontiers in Education, *5*(124), 1-18. https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2020.00124

Campbell, A. F. (2015). Do students of color need leaders who look like them?

https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/06/do-students-of-color-need-

leaders-who-look-like-them/432219/

Capper, C. A., & Young, M. D. (2014). Ironies and limitations of educational leadership

for social justice: A call to social justice educators. *Theory Into Practice*, *53*, 158-

164. http:// dm.education.wisc.edu/cacapper/intellcont/TheoryintoPractice2014-

1.pdf

Carli, L., & Eagly, A. (2001). Gender, hierarchy, and leadership: An introduction.

Journal of Social Issues, *57*(1), 629-636. https://doi.org/10.1111/0022-

4537.00232

Check, J., & Schutt, R. K. (2012). *Research methods in education.* SAGE Publications,

Incorporated.

Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought* (2nd ed.)*.* Routledge.

Collins, P. H., & Bilge, S. (2016). *Intersectionality (Key Concepts)*. Polity.

Cohen, L. (2020). Police in the U.S. killed 164 Black people in the first 8 months of

2020. These are their names. *CBS News.*

https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/black-people-killed-by-police-in-the-u-s-in-

2020/

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist

critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics.

University of Chicago Legal Forum, *1*(8), 139-167.

https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1052&context=

uclf

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating*

quantitative and qualitative research (3rd ed.). Pearson Prentice Hall.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research inquiry and research design: Choosing among five*

approaches (3rd ed.). Sage.

Council of Graduate Schools. (2020). Graduate enrollment and degrees.

https://cgsnet.org/graduate-enrollment-and-degrees

Davidson, S., & Butcher, J. (2019). Rural superintendents' experiences with

empowerment and alignment to vision in the application of principle-centered

leadership. *The Rural Educator, Journal of the National Rural Education*

Association, *40*(1), 63-72. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1225162.pdf

Davis, S., & Brown, K. (2017). Automatically discounted: Using Black feminist theory to

critically analyze the experiences of Black female faculty. *NCPEA International*

Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation, *12*(1), 1-8.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1145466.pdf

Davis, D. R., & Maldonado, C. (2015). Shattering the glass ceiling: The leadership

    development of African American women in higher education. *Advancing Women*

    in Leadership, *35*, 50-66.

    http://advancingwomen.com/awl/Vol35_2015/Davis_Shattering_the_Glass_Ceili

    ng.pdf

DeFeo, D. J., & Tran, T. C. (2019). Recruiting, hiring, and training Alaska's rural

    teachers: How superintendents practice place-conscious leadership. *Journal of*

    Research in Rural Education, *35*(2), 1-17.

    https://jrre.psu.edu/sites/default//files/2019-06/35-2.pdf

DiCanio, D., Schilling, L., Ferrantino, A., & Rodney, G. C. (2016). The glass maze and

    predictors for successful navigation to the top seat to the superintendency. *AASA*

    Journal of Scholarship and Practice, *12*(4), 66-85.

    https://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/JSPwinter_FINAL.v10Jan16.v3.

    pdf#page=66

Dillard, C. (2000). The substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen:

    Examining an endarkened feminist epistemology in education research and

    leadership. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, *13*(6), 661-

    681. https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050211565

Farahnak, L. R., Ehrhart, M. G., Torres, E. M., & Aarons, G. A. (2020). The influence of

    transformational leadership and leader attributes on subordinate attitudes and

    implementation success. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, *27*(1),

    98-111. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1548051818824529

Fields, M. R., Jones, D., & Korelich, K. (2019). Experiences of African American superintendents in Texas. *Research in Higher Education Journal*, *37*, 1-17. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1233114.pdf

Frankenberg, E., & Ayscue, J. B. (2013). New faces in suburban spaces. *School Administrator*, *11*(70), 22-27. https://aasa.org/content.aspx?id=30824

Gall, M. D., Gall, J. P., & Borg, W. R. (2007). *Educational research an introduction* (8th ed.). Pearson Education, Incorporated.

Gammill, S., & Vaughn, C. (2011). Lessons for a rural female superintendent: Gender, leadership, and politics. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *31*, 113-123. http://www.advan cingwomen.com/awl/Vol31_2011/Vaughn_final_13_5_16.pdf

Glass, T. (2000). The shrinking applicant pool. *Education Week*, 20(10), 49-51. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-the-shrinking-applicant-pool/2000/1 1

Glass, T. E. (1992). *The 1992 Study of the American School Superintendency: America's Education Leaders in a Time of Reform.* American Association of School Administrators. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED370229

Golden, M. (2004). *Don't play in the sun: One women's journey through the color complex.* New York, NY: Double Day.

Graham, S., & Nevarez, C. (2017). Transformative leadership: A multicultural platform for advancing African American male student success. *Journal of African American Males in Education*, *8*(2), 69-81. https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=10&sid=6595e96a-

f557-482b-8f06-cd802a3ea0a7%40redis

Gullo, G. L., & Sperandio, J. (2020). Gender and the superintendency: The power of

career paths. *Frontiers in Education*, *5*(68), 1-15.

https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fe /duc.2020.00068/full

Harris, J. C., & Patton, L. D. (2019). Un/doing intersectionality through higher education

research. *The Journal of Higher Education*, *90*(3), 347-372.

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1213389

Holsey, L. R., Tookes, G. S., & Avant, I. M. (2020). Career experiences for homegrown

Black female administrators in a resource-deficient, rural K-12 school district in

Northeastern Florida. *The International Journal of Adult, Community, and*

Professional Learning, *27*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.18848/2328-

6318/CGP/v27i01/1-15

Horsford, S. D. (2010). Black superintendents on educating black students in separate and

unequal contexts. *Urban Review*, *42*, 58-79. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-009-

0119-0

Howard, E., Msengi, C., & Harris, S. (2017). Influence of mentorship experiences in the

development of women superintendents in Texas as transformational leaders.

Educational Leadership Review, *18*(1), 67-80. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1162582

Hoyt, C. L., & Murphy, S. E. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat,

women, and leadership. *The Leadership Quarterly*, *27*, 387-399. https://www/505

0foundation.edu.au/ assets/reports/documents/2016-Managing-to-Clear-the-Air-

Stereotype-Threat-Women-and-Leadership.pdf

Hughes, T. B., Varma, V. R., Pettigrew, C., & Albert, M. S. (2017). African American

    and clinical research: Evidence concerning barriers and facilitators to

    participation and recruitment recommendations. *The Gerontologist*, *57*(2), 348-

    358. https://doi:10.1093/geront/gnv118

Johnson, S. (2018). Up from poverty: A narrative non-fiction study of three female

    superintendents from poverty. *School Leadership Review*, *13*(1), 77-80.

    https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1269715.pdf

Koch, A. J., D'Mello, S. D., & Sackett, P. R. (2015). A meta-analysis of gender

    stereotypes and bias in experimental simulations of employment decision making.

    Journal of Applied Psychology, *100*(1), 128-161.

    https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036734

Klocko, B., & Justis, R. J. (2019). Leadership challenges of the rural school principal.

    The Rural Educator, *Journal of the National Rural Education Association*, *40*(3),

    23-34. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1237556.pdf

Klocko, B. A., Justis, R. J., & Kirby, E. A. (2019). Leadership tenacity and public- school

    superintendents. *Journal of Leadership Education*, 1-13.

    https://journalofleadershiped.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/0863justis.pdf

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part

    4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1),

    120-124.

    https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092?needAcc

    ess=true

Kowalski, T., McCord, R., Peterson, G., Young, P., & Ellerson, N. (2011). *The American school superintendent: 2015 decennial study*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED515115

Kubu, C. S. (2018). Who does she think she is? Women, leadership and the 'b'(ias) word. *The Clinical Neuropsychologist*, *32*(2), 235-251. https://doi.org/10.1080/13854046.2017.1418022

Lavalley, M. (2018). Out of the loop rural schools are largely left out of research and policy discussions, exacerbating poverty, inequity, and isolation. *Center for Public Education*, 1-13. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED608842.pdf

Liang, J., & Peters-Hawkins, A. L. (2017). "I am more than what I look alike": Asian American women in public school administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *53*(1), 40-69. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X16652219

Lige, Q. M., Peteet, B. J., & Brown, C. M. (2017). Racial identity, self-esteem, and the imposter phenomenon among African American college students. *Journal of Black Psychology*, *43*(4), 345-357. https://doi.org/10.1177/0095798416648787

Lomotey, K. (2019). Research on the leadership of Black women principals: Implications for Black students. *Educational Researcher*, *48*(6), 336-348. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0013189X19858619

Maranto, R., Teodoro, M. P., Carroll, K., & Cheng, A. (2019). Gendered ambition: Men's and women's career advancement in public administration. *American Review of Public Administration*, *49*(4), 469-481. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0275074018804564

Marshall, S. A. (1986). Women reach for the top spot. *School Administrator*, *43*(10), 10-

13. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ342579

Masumoto, M., & Brown-Welty, S. (2009). Case study of leadership practices and

school-community interrelationships in high-performing, high-poverty, rural

California high schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *24*(1), 1-18.

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ829131

McCluney, C. L., & Rabelo, V. C. (2019). Conditions of visibility: An intersectional

examination of Black women's belongingness and distinctiveness at work.

Journal of Vocational Behavior, *113*, 143-152.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2018.09.008

McDowell, J., & Carter-Francique, A. (2017). An intersectional analysis of the workplace

experiences of African American female athletic directors. *Sex Roles*, *77*, 393-

408. https://eds.s.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=80c41b40-

f6bc-419e-bb06-632164a767a3%40redis

McHenry-Sorber, E., & Budge, K. (2018). Revisiting the rural superintendency:

Rethinking guiding theories for contemporary practice. *Journal of Research in*

Rural Education, *33*(3), 1-15. https://jrre.psu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-08/33-

3.pdf

Meier, K. J., O'Toole, L. J., & Goerdel, H. T. (2006). Management activity and program

performance: Gender as management capital. Public Administration Review, 66

(1), 24-36.

https://eds.p.ebscohost.com/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=ec0b250a-fc2b-

4691-96d1-406039887ba5%40redis

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey Bass.

Marshall, S.A. (1986). Women reach for the top spot. *School Administrator*, *43*(10), 10-13. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ342579

Masumoto, M., & Brown-Welty, S. (2009). Case study of leadership practices and school-community interrelationships in high-performing, high-poverty, rural California high schools. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *24*(1), 1-18. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ829131

Meyerson, D. E., & Fletcher, J. (2000). A modest manifesto for shattering the glass ceiling. *Harvard Business Review*, *78*(1), 127-136. https://hbr.org/2000/01/a-modest-manifesto-for-shattering-the-glass-ceiling

Miller, A. (2008). Rural schools struggle to attract highly qualified teachers. *Public Interest Law Reporter*, *13*(2), 186-193. https://lawecommons.luc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=https://search.yahoo.com/&httpsredir=1&article=1238&context=pilr

Molefe, A., Proger, A., & Burke, M. R. (2017). Postsecondary education expectations and attainment of rural and nonrural students. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED573039

Moorosi, P., Fuller, K., & Reilly, E. (2018). Leadership and intersectionality: Constructions of successful leadership among Black women school principals in three different contexts. *Management in Education*, *32*(4), 152-159. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0892020618791006

National Center for Education Statistics. (2016). Characteristics of public elementary and

secondary school principals in the United States: Results from the 2015-2016

National Teacher and Principal Survey.

https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017070.pdf

National Center for Education Statistics. (2019). Doctor's degrees conferred by

postsecondary institutions, by race/ethnicity and sex of student: Selected years,

1976-77 through 2017-18.

https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d19/tables/dt19_324.20.asp

Osler, J. E., & Webb, R. L. (2014). An in-depth qualitative and quantitative analysis to

determine the factors that affect the existence of African American women

superintendents in the North Carolina K-12 public school system. *Journal on

School Educational Technology*, *10*(2), 17-40.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1097666.pdf

Pace, C. (2018). How women of color get to senior management. *Harvard Business

Review*, 1-15. https://hbr.org/2018/08/how-women-of-color-get-to-senior-

management

Palladino, J. M., Haar, J. M., Grady, M., & Perry, K. (2007). A efficacious theoretical

perspective of rural female school superintendents' self-sustainability. *Journal of

Ethnographic and Qualitative Research*, *1*, 40-49.

https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1005&context=cehse

dadfacpub

Parker, P. S., & Ogilvie, D. (1996). Gender, culture, and leadership: Toward a culturally

distinct model of African American women executives' leadership strategies.

Leadership Quarterly, *7*(2), 189-214.

Parker, L., & Villalpando, O. (2007). A Race(cialized) perspective on education leadership: Critical race theory in educational administration. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *43*(5), 519–524. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X07307795

Patten, M. L. (2010). *Proposing empirical research: A guide to the fundamentals* (4th ed.). Pyrczak Publishing.

Peters, A. L. (2019). Desegregation and the (dis)integration of Black school leaders: Reflections on the impact of *Brown v. Board of Education* on Black education. *Peabody Journal of Education*, *94*(5), 521-534. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1241529

Paustian-Underdahl, S. C., Walker, L. S., & Woehr, D. J. (2014). Gender and perceptions of leadership effectiveness: A meta-analysis of contextual moderators. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *99*, 1129-1145. http://homepages.se.edu/cvonbergen/files/2015/01/Gender-Perceptions-of-Leadership-Effectiveness_A-Meta-Analysis-of-Contextual-Moderators.pdf

Preston, J. P., Jakubiec, B. A. E., & Kooymans, R. (2013). Common challenges faced by rural principals: A review of the literature. The Rural Educator, 35(1). https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1022612.pdf

Rankin-Wright, A. J., Hylton, K., & Norman, L. (2020). Critical race theory and black insights into "race" and gender equality. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *43*(7), 1111-1129. https://doi.org/10.1080/01419870.2019.1640374

Ravitch, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). *Qualitative research: The art of hearing data* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Riser-Kositsky, M. (2019). Education statistics: Facts about American school. *Education Week.* https://www.edweek.org/leadership/education-statistics-facts-about-americanschools/2019/01

Roberts, R. E. (2020). Qualitative interview questions: Guidance for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, *25*(9), 3185-3203.

https://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4640&context=tqr

Robinson, K., Shakeshaft, C., Grogan, M., & Newcomb, W. S. (2017). Necessary but not sufficient: The continuing inequity between men and women in educational leadership, findings from the American association of school administrators mid-decade survey.

https://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Equity/AASAMidDecadeStudyFindingsReport.pdf

Rodriguez, S. (2019). The unfamiliar superintendent. *School Administration*, *Multicultural Education*, *& Inclusion*, 53-56.

https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1250195.pdf

Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, I. S. (2012). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data.* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications, Incorporated.

Samuel, O. M., & Mokoaleli, I. (2017). Analysis of gender and leadership role

competencies, perceptions, and stereotypes in an organizational context. *South African Journal of Business Management*, *48*(2), 55-66. https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/0bb7/39c63ed8bc16668f37505f39e8b102b43c19. pdf?_ga=2.108602114.146319771.16138773547868780.1603073792

Sanchez, J. E., & Thornton, B. (2010). Gender issues in K-12 educational leadership. *Advancing Women in Leadership Journal*, *30*(13), 1-15. https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.or g/awl/index.php/awl/article/view/303

Sanchez-Peña, M., Main, J., Sambamurthy, N., Cox, M., & McGee, E. (2016). The factors affecting the persistence of Latina faculty: A literature review using the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. *IEEE Frontiers in Education Conference (FIE)*, 1-9.

Sampson, P., & Gresham, G. (2017). The US school superintendent gender research gap continues: Content analysis of 2014-2016 dissertations. *International Journal of Technology and Inclusive Education*, *6*(2), 1-9. https://infonomics-society.org/wp-content/uploads/ijtie/published-papers/volume-6-2017/The-US-School-Superintendent-Gender-Research-Gap-Continues.pdf

Seo, W., Huang, W., & Han, S. C. (2017). Conceptual review of underrepresentation of women in senior leadership positions from a perspective of gendered social status in the workplace: Implication for HRD research and practice. *Human Resource Development Review*, *16*(1), 35-59. https://doi.org/10.1177/1534484317690063

Showalter, D., Hartman, S. L., Johnson, J., & Klein, B. (2019). Why rural matters 2018-2019 the time is now. *The Rural School and Community Trust and Our Partners:*

College Board and the School Superintendents Associations (AASA).

http://www.ruraleduedu.org/WhyRuralMatters.pdf

Sklra, L. (2000). The social construction of gender in the superintendency. *Journal of*

Education Policy, *15*(3), 293-316. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED425501.pdf

Smith, A. N., Watkins, M. B., Ladge, J. J., & Carlton, P. (2018). Interviews with 59

Black female executives explore intersectional invisibility and strategies to

overcome it. *Harvard Business Review*, 1-9. https://hbr.org/2018/05/interviews-

with-59-black-female-executives-explore-intersectional-invisibility-and-

strategies-to-overcome-it

Sperandio, J., & Devdas, L. (2015). Staying close to home: Women's life-choices and the

superintendency. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *53*(3), 335–353.

https://doi.org/10. 1108/JEA-08-2013-0088

Sugg, S. (2016). Place-based education and authentic student achievement. Green

Schools National Network. Madison, WI: Green Schools National Network.

https://greenschoolsnationalnetwork.org/place-based-education-authentic-student-

achievement/

Superville, D. R. (2017). Few women run the nation's school districts. why? *Education*

Week, 14-19. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/few-women-run-the-nations-

school-districts-why/2016/11

Tate, E. (2019). #Superitnendents so white: Three takeaways from the annual survey of

school leaders. *EdSurge*. https://www.edsurge.com/new/2019-02-19-

superintendentsssowhite-three-takeaways-from-the-annual-survey-of-school-

leaders

Tefera, A. A., Powers, J. M., & Fischman, G. E. (2018). Intersectionality in education: A

conceptual aspiration and research imperative. *Review of Research in Education*,

42, vii-xvii. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.3102/0091732X18768504

Theofanidis, D., & Fountouki, A. (2019). Limitations and delimitations in the research

process. *Perioperative Nursing*, *7*(3), 155-162.

https://www.spnj.gr/articlefiles/volume7_issue3/pn_sep_73_155_162b.pdf

Turner, E. O. (2015). Districts' responses to demographic change: Making sense of race,

class, and immigration in political and organizational context. *American*

Educational Research Journal, *52*(1), 4-39.

https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831214561469

U.S. Department of Agriculture. (2017). "Rural Education at a Glance, 2017 Edition."

Economic Information Bulletin 171.

https://www.ers.usda.gov/webdocs/publications/83078/eib-171.pdf?v=0

White House Rural Council. (2011). Jobs and Economic Security for Rural America.

https://education.wsu.edu/documents/2018/12/centerpublic-education-rural-

schools-report.pdf/

Wiley, K., Bustamante, R., Ballenger, J., & Polnick, B. (2017). African American women

superintendents in Texas: An exploration of challenges and supports. *Journal of*

School Administration Research and Development, *2*(1), 18-23.

https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ115815

Wolgemuth, J. R., Hicks, T., & Agosto, V. (2017). Unpacking assumptions in research

synthesis: A critical construct synthesis approach. *Educational Researcher*, *46*(3),

131-139. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.3102/0013189X17703946

Wyland, C. (2016). Underrepresentation of females in the superintendency in Minnesota.

Planning and Changing, *47*(1/2), 47-62. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1145470

Yeong, M. L., Ismail, R., Isamil, N. H., Hamzah, M. I. (2018). Interview protocol

refinement: Fine-Tuning qualitative research interview questions for multi-racial

populations in Malaysia. *The Qualitative Report*, *23*(11), 2700-2713.

https://www.proquest.com/openview/374a8865172d4621745312cef4dac488/1?pq

-origsite=gscholar&cbl=55152

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:
Time:
Interviewee Code #:
Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions
Introduction	Hi, my name is Likisha Coleman. Thank you for participating in this interview. As you know, the purpose of this interview is to explore how African American females describe their attainment of superintendent roles in rural school districts. This interview should last between 30 to 60 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers for data analysis purposes. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. Also, I need to let you know that this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?
Background	Question 1: How many years of experience do you have as a superintendent?
Background	Question 2: Please describe your background in education and your career path leading to your current role as superintendent. Probing questions: What is educational level? What career path would you recommend for aspiring African American women seeking the superintendency?
Background	Question 3: What formal leadership training (i.e. superintendent's academy, military training, etc.) outside of traditional education preparation programs do you have that may have attributed to the attainment of your current role as superintendent?

RQ 1. What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 4: What experiences have you had that you believe helped you in the attainment of your current role as superintendent?
RQ 1. What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 5: What has been your experience with race, blatant or unconscious, in the attainment of your role as an African American female superintendent?
RQ 1. What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 6: What has been your experience with gender, blatant or unconscious, in the attainment of your role as an African American female superintendent?
RQ 1. What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 7: How has the culture of your local school community been a barrier or support in your attainment of your role as superintendent?
RQ 1. What are the perspectives of African American female superintendents about their experiences attaining superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 8: Describe how you believe your experience in the attainment of the superintendent role has been different from other women?

RQ 2. How did African American female superintendents overcome barriers to attain their superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 9: What type of barriers have you had to overcome to attain your role as superintendent?
RQ 3. What types of support do African American female superintendents perceive as beneficial in helping them attain superintendent roles in rural school districts?	Question 10: What types of support have you experienced in attaining your role as superintendent?
Close	Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you would like to share? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time. Goodbye.