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African American Women in New York State Who Overcame Barriers to Become Superintendents of Schools

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African American Women in New York State Who Overcame Barriers to Become Superintendents of Schools

Abstract

African American women educators who possess the leadership characteristics to become superintendents of schools in New York State are not rising to top positions at the same rate as women of other racial and ethnic groups. There is limited research on the barriers and challenges experienced by African American women as well as the strategies that aided in their maintenance of the position. This phenomenological qualitative research study examined the perceptions of African American women who successfully obtained the position of superintendents of schools in New York State at suburban public schools, the barriers and challenges they overcame, and the strategies that made them successful. The findings aimed to highlight the barriers, the challenges, and the strategies as well as to offer recommendations to school boards and educational institutions to aid in increasing the numbers of African American women superintendents of schools in order to ensure a more diverse workforce.

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By

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Supervised by

Dr. Frances Wills

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Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education

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Dedication

“Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”
Proverbs 3:5-6

What a wonderful God that I serve. I trusted Him through the entire process, He directed every step of this dissertation. I love the Lord for He has always delivered me. Thank you, Jesus. I would like to thank my parents, Martin and Theresa Biney-Amisah, for instilling the love of education. A special thank you to my Mom, Theresa Biney-Amisah, for praying for me and sacrificing her dreams and desires to see to it that I realized mine. Thank you for being my biggest cheerleader and supporter. This dissertation is for you.

To my siblings, Anthony, Dominic, Rebecca, Eunice, and Abigail, thank you for standing behind me and supporting me through this journey. I am blessed to have siblings who are always supportive of my dreams, hopes, and decisions.

To my daughter, Hannah: thank you for understanding and allowing me the time to complete this journey. You are the greatest gift that God has bestowed upon me, and I am inspired by you each day. Keep dreaming—believing—reaching and I know that your dreams will come true. Continue to strive for excellence, continue to fail, but get back up and begin again. Continue to pursue God’s will and purpose for your life! I love you.

There are so many more people (too many to name individually) that I would like to thank for their friendship, encouragement and support which you provided as I moved along this journey.

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To my “Certi5able” family: Susan M. Green, Anthony Andrews Jr., and Jacqueline Jeffrey, we began this journey as strangers, sharing the same vision, and along the way, we became family. Thank you for challenging, comforting, motivating, and checking in on me. It has been a pleasure growing with each of you. May God bless you as you progress onto the next leg of the path that the He has set before you.

Biographical Sketch

Augustina West is currently the Assistant Principal of Pupil Personnel Services at Ramapo High School. Ms. West attended the University at Albany - State University of New York from 1986 to 1991 and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1991. She attended Iona College from 1992 to 1994 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 1994. She attended C. W. Post Campus of Long Island University from 1999 to 2001 and graduated with a Master of Science degree in 2001. She came to St. John Fisher College in the summer of 2014 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. West pursued research on African American women in New York State who overcame barriers to become superintendents of schools under the direction of Dr. Frances G. Wills and Dr. Cassandra Hyacinthe and received the Ed.D. degree in 2018.

Abstract

African American women educators who possess the leadership characteristics to become superintendents of schools in New York State are not rising to top positions at the same rate as women of other racial and ethnic groups. There is limited research on the barriers and challenges experienced by African American women as well as the strategies that aided in their maintenance of the position. This phenomenological qualitative research study examined the perceptions of African American women who successfully obtained the position of superintendents of schools in New York State at suburban public schools, the barriers and challenges they overcame, and the strategies that made them successful. The findings aimed to highlight the barriers, the challenges, and the strategies as well as to offer recommendations to school boards and educational institutions to aid in increasing the numbers of African American women superintendents of schools in order to ensure a more diverse workforce.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The superintendent of schools, also known as chief school administrator (CSA), is the highest position within a public school district. At the time of this writing, and in the past few years, there has been growing interest in seeking diversification of candidates ascending to the top position in education, answering the call for greater inclusion of women and people of color (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). This lack of parity for African American women in the superintendency has garnered further attention, highlighted by the number of expected retirements that could further widen the diversity gap in school leadership (Eagly & Chin, 2010). As such, increasing the numbers of African American women in the role of superintendents of schools is a vital factor with respect to the enrollment numbers of racial and ethnic students who attend public schools in the United States (Brown, 2005).

A considerable number of experienced African American women possess the qualifications to become superintendents of schools (Terranova et al., 2016). This is evident in the growing number of African American women who hold doctorate degrees, as well as those who are enrolled in educational leadership programs across New York State.

The leadership characteristics that African American women possess are very different from that of the traditional paradigm, and those leadership characteristics could prove to be beneficial to school boards and school district administrations. Recent research contends that African American women could bring cultural aspects to the

position of superintendent that traditionally have not been found in Caucasian male or female superintendents (Eagly & Chin, 2010). African American women leaders who possess the skill sets to serve in challenging school districts across the United States may aid in effectively reforming schools. In addition, they may also serve as role models for growing numbers of racial/ethnic students. Moreover, the presence of African American women serving in the capacity of superintendents may yield positive benefits for the underrepresented youth in schools across the United States and, in particular, in New York State. Terranova et al. (2016) posited that in New York State, attitudes toward women superintendents are shifting; the same does not hold true for African American women.

Terranova et al. (2016) also stated that, “if African American women are to be represented in leadership in the same proportions as they are in society or schools, the barriers must first be understood, if they are to be addressed” (p. 6). Others have concurred with this assertion, calling for an increase in diversity of superintendents to reflect the racial and ethnic makeup of the students who attend public schools across the United States (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999).

This chapter includes the problem statement, theoretical rationale, purpose of this study, research questions, significance of this study, and definition of key terms. It concludes with a summary of Chapter 1 and a preview of the subsequent chapters.

Problem Statement

Gender and racial inequality persist among superintendents in the New York State superintendency (Katz, 2005; Terranova et al., 2016). The literature states that since 2009, progress in gender and racial representation of school leaders, especially in the

superintendency, has been static (Eagly & Chin, 2010). The role of the school superintendent effectively impacts the achievement of students in schools in Grades PreK-12 (Waters & Marazano, 2006). Gender and cultural bias promulgate the belief that male leaders are more effective than female leaders, and this bias is consistent with school board hiring practices (Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Given the impact that school superintendents have on the academic achievement of students and the growing number of racial and ethnic students in school districts across New York State, the barriers that African American women have experienced while ascending to the position should be explored (Brown, 2014). Additionally, African American women who have successfully fulfilled the responsibilities of superintendent and brought improvement to learning and added value to student's educational repertoire merit an investigation (Alston, 2005).

Theoretical Rationale

This study used Collins's (1986) sociological significance of the Black feminist thought (BFT), which emphasizes the *outsider within* status framework, to gain an understanding of how race, gender, and class have contributed to African American women's experiences when ascending to superintendents of schools in New York State.

BFT has its intellectual roots in Marxism and was founded by Collins (2015), who stated that feminism failed to address the oppression and exclusionary practices that have caused Black women to feel inferior to other groups (Collins, 2015). This theory began with the feminist movement and underwent several waves of transition that resulted in Black women disassociating themselves from their White counterparts and forming the Black feminist movement (Taylor, 1998). The separation was due, in part, to the

realization that the cause of the feminist movement did not encapsulate the Black woman's unique struggle. Collins (2000) stated the feminist movement could not capture the essence of a Black woman's oppression because the standpoint of the feminist movement was from White women's perspective, which was very different from that of Black women. Black women were portrayed as mammies, caregivers, and slaves. This negative portrayal of Black women has affected their political, social, and economic status in life.

The feminist movement was created by White women to protest the oppressive and unjust treatment of White women by White men (Minoo, 2015). Black feminist thought brings to light how domination is formulated and is exhibited in various domains of power. Power cannot be gained by any one entity without oppressing others (Minoo, 2015). The hardships Black women face are not an isolated phenomenon (Collins, 1986; Wiley, Bustamente, Ballenger, & Polnick, 2017). Black feminist thought correlates with sociology's essence and its main theme, which is the correlation between the individual and society or between social structures and human agency (Horsford & Tillman, 2012). According to Collins (1986), oppression is necessary to have power over another group.

Black women's standpoint is very different from that of their White counterparts and Black men (Collins, 1986). The outsider within status allows Black women to "develop a particular way of seeing reality" (Collins, 1986, p. S15), which empowers them to make meaning of oppressive situations. Collins (1986) stated that African American women create knowledge from resistance to domination. She argued that Black women's oppression is coupled with race and being an outsider within the dominant (White) culture. Collins (1986) suggested that although Black women get to

experience and learn the ways of the majority culture's social practices, they are kept from full and equal participation due to lack of opportunity or access.

According to Collins (1990), Black feminist thought reveals Black women's incipient ability as trustees of consciousness. This consciousness empowers the Black woman to navigate race, gender, and class in an oppressive social context. Black feminist thought allows for social change by challenging oppressive beliefs, ideas, and constructs. Black feminist thought elaborates on the idea that Black women's experiences, through their voices, are the impetus for aiding in changing situations. In short, only a Black woman can speak to or express the oppression suffered at the hands of the majority. Collins (1990) stated that, "Placing Black women's experiences at the center of analysis offers fresh insights on the prevailing concepts, paradigms, and epistemologies of this worldview and on its feminist and Afrocentric critiques" (p. vii). In fact, Moore (2013) stated that Black feminists felt that their cause was more inclusive of the oppressions experienced by all women.

African American women have been charged with creating themes of self-definition, self-reliance and independence (Collins, 2000) to clarify the oppressive nature of working conditions created by those in the majority. African American women are considered a part of the collective group of women who are oppressed by the *larger system* and who have suffered unjust treatment in the United States at the hands of the oppressor who is defined as the dominant group (Collins, 2000).

As shown in Figure 1.1, Collins (1986) posited that there are three key themes that encapsulate Black feminist thought: self-definition and self-valuation, the interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Afro-American women's

culture. These themes enable Black women to illuminate their position, which expresses the experiences of Black women as a group (Collins, 1986).

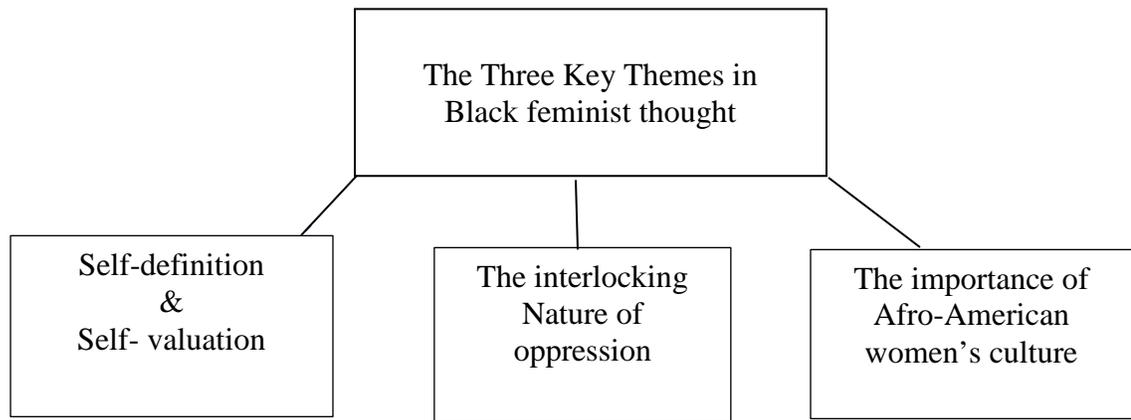


Figure 1.1. Three key themes of Black feminist thought and its significance to social constructs. Adapted from Collins, P. H. (1986). “Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought,” by P. H. Collins, 1986, *Social Problems*, 33(3), pp. S14-S32. Copyright 1986 by Oxford Unity Press.

Self-definition takes negative stereotypical depictions of Black women and replaces them with positive, authentic images (Collins, 1986). The new depiction allows Black women to be in control of, and counteract, dehumanizing treatment (Collins, 1986). Black women control, challenge, and oppose negative self-images by creating definitions for themselves (Collins, 1986). Formulating new definitions of themselves enable women to take back their power over oppression and domination.

Self-valuation supports and enables Black women to create self and community validation. Self-valuation forces Black women to access those parts of their womanhood

that have been stereotyped and to develop strategies of resistance (Collins, 1986). Self-definition and self-valuation, coupled together, empower Black women to face and challenge social constructs that hinder them from achieving equity and help them to regain control over their womanhood (Collins, 1986).

The interlocking nature of oppression focuses on Black women's experiences with race, gender, and class. Unlike White women and Black men who can separate their gender from their race, Black women are viewed in "multiple structures of domination" (Collins, 1986, p. S23). Black women are placed in a group that consists of their race, gender, and class (Collins, 1986). These three factors often exacerbate the oppression Black women endure from the dominate culture. Black feminist thought gives credence to the role and interplay of race, gender, and class in a Black woman's daily life (Collins, 1986). Black women's realities of double consciousness shape every aspect of their lives. Black women are subjected to power struggles because of their gender, race and class. They are subjected to power struggles with men because of their gender, White culture, because of their race, and class because of their Socioeconomic status. These intersectional oppressions make it inherent for Black women to create realities that challenge the *interlocking nature* of their role in society (Collins, 1986).

The importance of the Afro American women's culture is highlighted by the role that family, community, and culture play in shaping and providing an understanding of their oppressive situations (Collins, 1986). Black women's culture is pivotal in shaping their identity and challenging their double consciousness (Collins, 1986). Black women create meaning of themselves and the world around them by using their cultural lens (Collins, 1986). Black women's roles as mother, church member, and active participants

in culture enlightenment show that the hardships they experience are not an isolated phenomenon.

Black feminism is described as a “critical social theory, or as bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing groups of people differently placed in specific political, social and historic contexts characterized by injustice” (Angel, Killackey, & Johnson 2013, p. 276). African American women superintendents of schools faced injustices that plague their daily interactions with in the communities that they serve (Katz, 2012). As a critical social theory, Black feminism is concerned with fighting against economic, political, and social injustices affecting Black women and other oppressed groups (Angel, Killackey, and Johnson 2013).

African American women in leadership are impacted by three interconnected factors: gender, race, and class, which often compromise their positions in leadership (Crenshaw, 2010). These factors, when combined, were coined *intersectionality of oppression* by Crenshaw (2010). Discussions focused on challenging and changing social institutions are central to the advancement and acknowledgement of the economic and political barriers African American women encounter (Brown, 2005; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009).

The lack of diversification in race, gender, and class in education’s senior administrative position has negatively impacted African American women superintendents (Grogan, 1999). The stories of their lived experiences are being excluded from the literature that exists today (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Houston, 2001, Katz, 2012; Taylor & Tillman, 2009). Through the

lens of Black feminist thought, the examination of African American women's leadership characteristics has helped gain an understanding of the obstacles encountered by Black women while illuminating their avenues of success (Alston, 2005). Collins (2013), as cited by Jean-Marie et al. (2009), asserted that it is crucial to study the social construction of the African American women's effectiveness as leaders because "given the social construction of gender, race, and class in the United States, African American females are often susceptible to marginalizing experiences that seek to keep them in their place, excluding them as agents of knowledge" (p. 617).

Research indicates that barriers are keeping African American women educators from ascending to the position of superintendents of schools at the same rate as White women (Terranova et al., 2016). Research posits that school board members, who are predominantly White, believe that African American women are not qualified to do the job of a superintendent, even when they possess the academic and administrative qualifications (Glass, 2000; Taylor & Tillman, 2009). In a quote retrieved from azquotes.com, Collins states, "Challenging power structures from the inside, working the cracks within the system, however, requires learning to speak multiple languages of power convincingly" (Azquotes, n.d.). This ability to navigate the system in order to lead effectively has propelled the success of African American women superintendents of schools (Alston, 2005). The narratives of the lived experiences of African American women superintendents of schools in New York State explicate the barriers and challenges they have encountered. These same narratives also add to the literature that could help in opening pathways for more African American women who are at the start

of their career, and who are considering positions in the higher echelons of public school educational leadership (Terranova et al, 2016).

Statement of Purpose

Many African American women in education serve in leadership capacities as elementary school principals and even fewer as secondary principals; however, the representation of African American women diminishes at the superintendency level (Tillman, 2004). The purpose of this qualitative, phenomenological study was to understand the barriers and challenges experienced by African American women who had successfully ascended to the position of superintendents of schools in New York State. Furthermore, this study explored the strategies employed by the participants to overcome the identified barriers during their tenure.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study:

1. What factors and strategies do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?
2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing and serving in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?
3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?

Potential Significance of the Study

The review of the scholarly literature focused on recruitment practices, barriers, and challenges of African American women superintendents of schools (Wiley,

Bustamente, Ballenger, & Polnick, 2017). This study is important because it adds to the research regarding how more pathways can be created for African American women currently in teacher and administrative positions to increase their numbers in the superintendency in New York State. There is little research regarding African American women in New York State experiencing barriers and challenges while ascending to the position of superintendent of schools.

Definitions of Terms

African American/Black – refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The term Black and African American in this study refers to same group of people.

Intersectionality – race, gender, and class intersecting to create oppression or double consciousness Crenshaw (2010).

Racial/Ethnic Group – refers to Latinos, non-Latino whites, Asian Americans and Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders, African Americans, and Other single or multiple races (Charles, S. A., Ponce, N., Ritley, D., Guendelman, S., Kempster, J., Lewis, J., & Melnikow, J., 2017). A collection of people who are different from the larger group in a country, area, etc., in some way. The term also refers to people of color.

Chapter Summary

The number of African American women who hold, or who have held, the position of superintendent of schools is lower in comparison to the increased number of women from other races who now hold this same position (Brown, 2005; Horsford & Tillman, 2012). African American women account for fewer than 3% of the total superintendents of schools in New York State (Terranova et al., 2016). The disparity

between the increase in numbers of Caucasian women (24.1%) and African American women (5%) as superintendents of schools suggest that there are possible barriers that hinder African American women from reaching parity in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State (Terranova et al., 2016). Many researchers have suggested the importance of increasing diversity in all positions throughout the educational industry, especially in the upper echelons of Grades PreK-12 (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; & Terranova et al., 2016).

Few studies exist that are focused on barriers and challenges encountered by African American women superintendents of schools in New York State. Terranova et al. (2016) posited that in order to increase the numbers of African American women who are superintendents of schools, an understanding of the issues they encounter must be studied. This study focused on African American women superintendents of schools in New York State and how they overcame hindrances to obtain the position.

This work encompasses five chapters. Chapter 2 presents the literature focused on superintendency in New York State, history of American superintendents of schools, history of women and the Superintendency, history of African American women and the Superintendency, pathways to the Superintendency, characteristics of successful superintendents, barriers to the Superintendency and strategies. These texts highlight the development of the highest position in public school education and specifically, African American women's role in the Superintendency. The limited research on African American women superintendents will be discussed. Chapter 3 covers the research design, methodology and the procedures for data collection and analysis. Chapter 4

highlights the examination of the three research questions and the narratives from African American women who served as superintendents in New York State, and Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the implications of the findings, limitations, and recommendations for future study.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Globally, the educational landscape is changing; the service of culturally diverse and responsive school leaders is needed now more than ever (Houston, 2001). A variety of important issues, such as educational reform, teacher accountability, rigorous challenging curriculum and instruction, and the growing numbers of culturally diverse school-aged children, are some of the prevalent issues school districts are encountering (Waters & Marzano, 2006). The lack of significant diversity, coupled with the fact that 60% of the current superintendents in New York State plan to retire between 2019 and the end of 2023, has called for an exploration of the experiences African American superintendents of schools encountered while ascending to their positions (Houston, 2001; Terranova et al., 2016).

When examining the position of superintendent of schools, research demonstrates that this academic position has historically been held by Caucasian men, even though 76% of teachers in the United States are women (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While many classroom teachers and elementary principals are women, this is not the case for the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2011; Snyder & Dillow, 2015; Terranova et al., 2016). The current demographics show that teachers of color represent 17.3% of the total population of educators, with African American women accounting for 19.2% of that subset (Glass, 2000). Women represent 30% of the superintendent positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). African American women, however, represent less than 10% of school

administrators in the United States (Alston, 2005). While this reflects a small percentage difference, more attention has been given to increasing the numbers of women, mainly Caucasian women, into superintendent positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Researchers focusing on the diversification of superintendents have noted that the integration of this senior position to include more people of color is a necessity and an area that warrants further research (Alston, 2005; Angel et al., 2013; Brown, 2014; Harris, Lowery, Hopson, & Marshall, 2004; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Kowalski et al., 2011; Moore, 2013; Tallerico, 2000; Terranova et al. 2016; Wyland, 2016). Gender and cultural bias reinforce the belief that male leaders are more effective than female leaders, and this, in return, is reflected and is consistent with current school board hiring practices (Kowalski et al., 2011).

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) commissioned Kowalski et al. (2011) to conduct decennial study examining the state of the superintendency in the United States. In the Kowalski et al. study, women accounted for 24.1% of superintendents of schools. This marked a dramatic increase from the statistic reported in the 1992 study in which Kowalski et al. (2011) stated that Caucasian women accounted for a little over 6.6% of the superintendents of schools. Although the Kowalski et al. study did not disaggregate for African American women superintendents, collectively, African American males and females accounted for less than 5% of the total participants who responded to the study (Kowalski et al., 2011). The districts with the largest percentage of African American superintendents were in urban settings and largely in extreme poverty, high-need school systems (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Conversely, the Council of the Great City Schools (CGCS, 2010) conducted a study during the fall of 2010 where 56 members of the CGCS completed a survey responding to the demographics, tenure, previous work experience, accountability, salaries, benefits, and bonuses of the superintendents of schools. The study found that in urban school districts across the United States, there was a disparity in the gender and race of the superintendents: 27% were White females, 11% were Black females, and 15% were Hispanic females (CGCS, 2010). The findings from the CGCS (2010) was similar to the AASA (Kowalski et al., 2011) findings, in that there was a decrease in the number of African American women superintendents in urban schools.

Few publications can be found that reflect the numbers of African American, Hispanic, and other racial/ethnic women's ascension to the superintendency. Even fewer empirical studies address the barriers that superintendents of color in New York State encounter. The studies that do exist (Brown, 2014) fail to review and recommend strategic approaches to developing both leadership styles and effective strategies for further success for the superintendents, once their positions have been obtained. This lack of research has allowed the status quo to continue, and it has further contributed to the lack of diversity (Terranova et al., 2016).

Waters and Marazano, in their 2006 meta-analysis research, posited that superintendents who possess an array of leadership skills, such as collaborative goal setting, establishing non-negotiable goals for achievement and instruction, partnering with school boards in supporting district goals, monitoring goals for achievement and instruction, skillful use of resources to support achievement and instructional goals, and who have defined autonomy with relationship to the schools, are the most effective

leaders. Henry et al. (2006) found, in their study of 17 superintendents, that the characteristics of an effective superintendent consist of (a) possessing leadership and vision, (b) being a strategic thinker and problem solver, (c) being good communicator, (d) having good community relations, (e) having well-developed interpersonal skills, and (f) displaying high character and competency. African American women's leadership styles can ensure that children in Grades PreK-12 are well educated and prepared to contribute to society, by the superintendents' ability to develop educational missions, present philosophies for their school districts, and to work collaboratively with both educational personnel and community stakeholders (Alston, 2005; Brown, 2005; Roane & Newcomb, 2013).

Although the number of women teachers, principals, and superintendents of schools has increased nationally since 2009, there is still a vast disparity between the number of Caucasian male superintendents and women (Brunner, 2008; Katz, 2005). Of the 13,728 superintendents serving during the year 2000 in the United States, 84% were men, 14.4% (or 1,978) were women, and fewer than 2% of the women were African American women (Alston, 2005; Glass, 2000).

Similar disparities exist in New York State, and they are reflected in the decrease from 2.9% to 1.0% of African American women superintendents of schools between 1991 and 2012 (Terranova et al., 2012). In New York State, 76.7% of all teachers (Aud et al., 2012) and 30% of all superintendents are women (Terranova et al., 2016). The negatively disproportionate number of African American women in the role of superintendent of schools does not correlate to the growing population of African American students and other racial/ethnic students enrolled in PreK-12 public schools

across the United States (Alston, 2005; Brown, 2005). As a result, this may have a disproportionate and highly negative impact on students as well as school administrations.

The demographic shift in populations of racial and ethnic students entering public schools at an increased rate over their Caucasian classmates gives further credence to the need for the recruitment of leaders and faculty members who have an awareness of students' cultural differences (Gill, Posamentier, & Hill, 2016). Brown (2005) argued that suburban and rural students may relate better to teachers, principals, and superintendents who reflect the diverse population of their communities. Sanchez-Hucles & Davis (2010) noted that studies on the intersectionality of African American women's race, gender, and class will give voice to their experiences, which are missing from the current research. Researchers have suggested that increasing the numbers of African American women superintendents of schools in New York State may benefit the (projected) increased enrollment of minority school-aged children who would benefit from such role models (Aud et al., 2013; Glass, 2000; Houston, 2001; Taylor & Tillman, 2009; Terranova et al., 2012; Terranova et al., 2016; Tirozzi, 2001).

By 2050, the U.S. population is expected to comprise 50% racial and ethnic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010); the numbers of African American, Hispanic, Asian, and other non-White students being educated in schools across the United States is anticipated to double. Eagly & Chin (2010) asserted that the diversification of leaders in the United States will provide a different cultural lens and knowledge base, particularly in the area of education.

There are benefits to students, staff, and community members when African American women are recruited and appointed to the position of superintendent of schools (Alston, 2005). Alston (2005) stated that African American women bring numerous contributions such as, “a strong sense of efficacy, dedicating themselves to the care of children, survival skills, collaboration that is more relational and consensus building” (p. 682). Furthermore, African American women adapt their leadership to address the needs of the specific culture while maintaining allegiance to their own (Foster, 2005). African American women superintendents serve as role models, community advocates, and provide a leadership style and cultural understanding that ensures that all students have equal access to a free and academically rigorous public education (Grogan, 1999).

The leadership characteristics that African American women possess are very different from that of the traditional leadership paradigm. African American women bring cultural aspects to the position of superintendent that traditionally have not been found in Caucasian male or Caucasian female superintendents (Eagly & Chin, 2010). African American women leaders who possess skill sets to serve in challenging school districts across the United States may aid in effectively reforming schools, as well as serving as role models for students (Partelow, Spong, Brown, & Johnson, 2017). The presence of African American women serving in the capacity of superintendent may yield positive benefits to underrepresented youth in schools across the United States. Terranova et al. (2016) posited that in New York State, attitudes toward women are shifting; however, the same is not true for African American women. This is particularly important given that many of the current superintendents are approaching retirement age

(Terranova et al., 2016). In fact, 60% of the current superintendents in New York State plan on retiring between 2019 and 2024 (Terranova et al., 2016; Houston, 2001).

There are many unpublished dissertations that have studied the barriers that women have encountered across various parts of the United States when seeking the superintendency; however, few studies focused on the barriers and strategies that African American women in New York State have experienced while in pursuit of the same position (Angel et al., 2013). This lack of research further exacerbates the current situation, where African American women face both intrinsic and extrinsic barriers when pursuing the position of superintendent of schools (Brown, 2014; Katz, 2005; Terranova et al., 2016). The lived experiences of African American women who ascended to this position can add to the discourse on African American women in the superintendency (Alston, 2005; Angel, Killacky, & Johnson, 2013; Brown, 2014).

Issues related to gender and racial equality of school leaders in PreK-12 public schools continue to dominate the American public education system. A review of the literature indicates that women have made gains in assuming the superintendency over the last decade; however, African American women superintendents of schools are still underrepresented in proportion to their numbers in teaching and leadership roles (Angel et al., 2013; Brown, 2014; Katz, 2012; Terranova et al., 2016).

In 2015, many of the current superintendents in New York State expressed their desire to retire within the next 5 years (Terranova et al., 2016). Their retirement will create vacancies in public schools across New York State (Terranova et al., 2016). Collins (2000) stated that the African American women's intellectual standpoint speaks to the oppression of not being invited to take part in opportunities that are offered to

White men and women. These missed opportunities create marginalized situations in which the African American woman must learn to make meaning of herself in this situation (self-definition and self-valuation), as well as having an inherent understanding of the oppression she faces (Collins, 1986). Strategies are needed to address the problems faced by African American women who are seeking and retaining the superintendent positions (Brown, 2014). Strategies include the development of support from family and friends in order to successfully apply and perform as superintendents of schools (Angel, Killacky, & Johnson, 2013).

Gill et al. (2016) purported that the race of the school leader makes a difference to students in public education. Students may not only benefit from diverse racial and ethnic role models in all educational positions, especially the superintendency, but also from those in leadership positions who reflect the diverse racial and cultural backgrounds that may be more consistent with their own (Alston, 2005; Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007).

A growing body of research has examined the achievement women have made in accessing the superintendency over the course of the last decade; however, African American women superintendents and other women of color are still underrepresented in proportion to their numbers in the teaching field (Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007; Brown, 2014; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Roane & Newcomb, 2013).

Predominantly among White women statistical analysis has demonstrated that the number of women superintendents has increased from 13% to 24.1%. (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). However, there are clear disparities among those belonging to minority groups, which show that African American women make up only 5% of superintendents and Hispanic women make up only 1% of superintendents, while Asians, Native Americans,

and other female ethnic groups make up less than <1% of superintendents (Kowalski et al., 2011). Given that the population of classroom teachers are disproportionately women, there seems to be factors that prohibit them from transitioning into top positions in education (Kim & Brunner, 2009).

This chapter examines the literature regarding the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State. This review is divided into five areas: (a) the history of American superintendents of schools, (b) the history of African American women and the superintendency, (c) the superintendency in New York State, (d) pathways to the superintendency, (e) intrinsic and extrinsic barriers, and (f) strategies African American women have employed to deal with these issues.

Superintendency in New York State

In New York State, there are 733 public school districts that are led by 692 school superintendents, which educate over 2,629,970 students (Data.Nysed.gov, n.d.). The 2017 Data Report (ONE Campaign, 2017) gives the demographics that 44% of students are White, 26.5% of students are Hispanic or Latino, 9.4% are Asian, 7.3% are Black African American, and 2.25% are multiracial students attending New York State schools. Diversity in New York school districts is reflected across various locations in rural, suburban, metropolitan, and urban areas throughout the state.

Considered to be one of the “Big Five” school districts, the New York City Department of Education includes 38 superintendents (32 community school districts, with six governing over high school). The role of these superintendents, however, differs from other schools in New York State because the positions are considered middle

management positions (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). The number of women and African American women superintendents in New York State has not increased since 2010 (Terranova et al., 2016). Many of the African American women superintendents in the state work in largely impoverished urban settings (Terranova et al., 2016), and the state of New York, similar to many other states, continues to work on closing the achievement gap between White and racial ethnic students (Harris, 2018). This task is often left to the superintendents of schools.

The primary responsibility of local state governments, school boards, and superintendents are to oversee the education of millions of culturally and linguistically diverse school-aged children in the United States (Kowalski et al., 2011). Researchers agree that an overhaul of school principal preparation programs, hiring practices, and systems of retention will be required during the coming decades to enhance school board capacity and to identify and secure a qualified and diverse group of principals and superintendents to lead schools (Brauckmann & Pashiardis, 2012; Normore, 2006; Perilla, 2014; Peters, 2012; Ylimaki & Jacobson, 2013).

Tillman and Cochran (2000) noted that the low numbers of African American women superintendents was cause for concern because of the wide disparity between the numbers of racial and ethnic students enrolled in public schools across the United States. The same, though, is not true of the educational leaders to whom their education is entrusted. The researchers posited that the educational leadership should represent the racial and ethnic makeup of students, so that their needs may be adequately addressed. Upon analyzing the hiring, recruitment, and retention practices of school districts, the meta-analysis conducted by Tillman and Cochran (2000) recommended studying factors

that would aid in an increase of African American in administrative positions in education. As proposed by Tillman and Cochran (2000), further study into *racial and gender equity* of the superintendency would garner a better understanding of the experiences of African American women superintendents. Tillman and Cochran (2000) argued in favor of gleaned insights from African American women, individually, rather than as a collective group who shared similar experiences.

History of the American Superintendents of Schools

The position of superintendent of schools was not established in American public education until 1837 (Björk, Browne-Ferrigno, & Kowalski, 2014; Bogotch, 2011). During this time, state governments were charged with the responsibility of overseeing schools. This task proved to be difficult given that school buildings were located far from the state government offices. From 1865 to 1910, superintendents were considered to be *teacher scholars*. Kowalski et al. (2011) indicated that the teacher-leader was a male who was not required to possess any specific qualifications before assuming the role. Furthermore, the school board members' impressions of these superintendents were that they were "subordinate to the board members but superior to principals, teachers, and pupils" (Kowalski et al., 2011, p. 2). The complexity of the position has evolved over the course of 100 years to keep pace with the educational transitions that America has experienced (Kowalski et al., 2011).

As America moved from the Industrial Age to the Age of Information, the corresponding responsibilities and skill sets of superintendents has changed. During the years between 1910 and 1930, school boards required managerial skills from their superintendents and considered them to be business managers of schools (Kowalski et al.,

2011). During the Great Depression, the position of superintendent was considered that of statesman, because the responsibilities required knowledge in policymaking to garner support for the public schools. During the mid-1950s the superintendent was considered an applied social scientist (Kowalski et al., 2011). As a result, the responsibilities and skill requirements changed, once more, to include the superintendent's expertise in analyzing the social and economic issues of the students, as well as the communities they served (Kowalski et al., 2011). After World War II, the skills and added responsibilities of the superintendent became that of communicator. The superintendent was responsible for conveying the mission and vision from the *higher ups* to the constituents (Kowalski et al., 2011). The end of World War II also caused more men to enter the field of education, which was previously predominantly occupied by women. While women held other supervisory positions within the educational system prior to the war, the position of superintendent was held exclusively by men who worked as teacher-leaders.

New York State is credited with establishing the position of superintendent in 1812 (Kowalski et al., 2011). Oliver G. Steele was the first superintendent in the state, and he was appointed to oversee the public schools in Buffalo, NY (Björk et al., 2014; Bogotch, 2011). By the 1900s, the remaining districts and states followed the precedent set by Buffalo by appointing exclusively White and male superintendents of schools in both urban and suburban school districts (Björk et al., 2014).

History of Women and the Superintendency

The literature on women superintendents is extremely limited (Katz, 2012). Katz (2012) posited that the study of women and the superintendency “has been conducted in the last 20 to 30 years” (p. 773). According to Björk (2000), there is limited research

culling notable women superintendents who led school districts in the 1800s. Women, such as Carrie Chapman Catt, Betty Mix Cowles, and Grace Strachan, New York City's first district superintendent (Björk, 2000), are credited with being trailblazers for other women. Kowalski et al. (2011) claimed that women did not assume the role of superintendent until 1910. Other researchers have concurred and note that Ella Flagg Young was the first woman who was promoted to assistant superintendent in 1887 and then to Superintendent of the Chicago School System in 1909 (Bogotch, 2011; Smith, 1976). During her tenure as superintendent, Young proclaimed that women would be responsible for the supervision of school districts in the years to come (Bogotch, 2011). It is apparent that her prediction has yet to be totally realized. The percentage of women superintendents has wavered throughout the decades (Alston, 2005).

Kowalski et al. (2011) maintained that women accounted for 8.9% of the total number of superintendents. From 1910 to 1982, this number gradually decreased, reaching a total of 1.2%. However, the results of their study revealed that women superintendents made up 24.1% of all superintendents—a dramatic increase. This increase is still notably lower than the White male dominance that continues to exist in the superintendency today. Considering White males are being hired at the rate of one woman to every two men, it appears that gender bias still exists in leadership positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Brown (2014) suggested several barriers that impact the successful ascension of women, specifically, African American women, to the role of superintendent. Some researchers have argued that search firms and school boards have contributed to the barriers hindering women from reaching parity with males (Brown, 2014). Despite this

influence, some studies on women in educational administration have served to shatter the myth that males are better equipped to lead school districts than females (Björk, 2000).

The literature suggests that the numbers of women superintendents will continue to rise as a result of the nontraditional pathways that are being created to attract and transport women into the superintendent pipeline (Kowalski et al., 2011; Terranova et al., 2016). Additionally, more women are enrolled in, and are completing doctoral programs in, educational administration, and a type of affirmative action policies have been implemented in schools to encourage the increase in women superintendents (Wyland, 2016).

History of African American Women and the Superintendency

While studies assert that African American women superintendents embody tenacity, servant leadership characteristics, and the desire to see all children succeed (Alston, 2005), there are few studies that reflect the number of women who served as superintendents prior to mid-20th century (Angel et al., 2013; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). The number of African American women superintendents is so small that researchers have accounted for them under the subject heading of women and the superintendency (Angel et al., 2013; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Terranova et al., 2016). The total number of African American women superintendents in any of the United States has never reached 50 (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). African American women have been part of educational institutions from their inception and not on just within the shores of America.

African Americans were brought to America as slaves from Africa where education was highly revered (Murtadha & Watts, 2005). Although educating slaves during the 18th and early 19th century was illegal, some African American women took risks by educating African American children within the schools that they owned (Lyons & Chelsey, 2004). In the late 1800s, African American children attended schools that were owned and run by African American women administrators who lived in their communities (Jean-Marie et al., 2012; Loder, 2005; Moore, 2013; Murtadha & Watts, 2005; Peters, 2012; Reed, 2012; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Wrushen & Sherman, 2008; Tillman, 2009). African American women worked as teachers, principals, and superintendents in segregated schools in the South (Alston, 2005).

African American women worked as quasi-administrators and were known as *Jeanes Teachers*. Their roles and responsibilities were the same as a superintendent (Hoffschwelle, 2015). The Jeanes Teachers served as an ombudsperson between the African American and White communities. These women nurtured students, advocated for resources, and they were responsible for the hiring and firing of teachers. There were 82,000 African Americans working as teachers, principals, and superintendents prior to the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision (Lyons & Chesley, 2004).

Things changed considerably after *Brown v. Board of Education*, which resulted in 38,000 African American men and women losing positions (Alston, 2005). African American school-aged students who attended schools in predominantly the Southern United States were required to attend desegregated schools and, as a result, many African American schools were closed, which caused many African American women to lose their positions (Alston, 2005). Although many African American men and women were

dismissed as teachers, principals, and superintendents during the early part of the 20th century, Velma Dolphin Ashley is credited with being the first African American female superintendent of a school district in Boley, OK, from 1944 until 1956 (Alston, 2005).

In the 21st century, the numbers of Caucasian and African American women in the superintendency have been increasing, however, the increase is not equitable (Kowalski et al., 2011). The number of African American women superintendents has never reached a total of 50 in any one state, in any given year; however, African American women account for 19.3% of the teachers and 10% of the school principals in the United States. (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; NCES, 2011).

Many researchers have asserted that the stories of African American women who are serving or who have served as superintendents are missing from the literature that currently exists, and it is necessary that more studies should be conducted on the added value African American women bring to the position (Alston, 2005; Angel et al., 2013; Brooks & Jean-Marie, 2007; Brown, 2005; Brown, 2014; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Harris et al., 2004; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Katz, 2012). Other researchers have agreed that studies on underrepresented racial groups, such as African American women, should continue to be conducted to understand their uniqueness and to highlight the factors prohibiting the increase in their numbers to reach parity with the students in schools (Kowalski et al., 2011; Moore, 2013; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010; Terranova et al., 2016; Tillman & Cochran, 2000; Wyland, 2016).

Pathways to the Superintendency

Of all of the New York State superintendents, 60% have reported that they plan to retire sometime before 2023 (Terranova et al., 2016). This will generate a tremendous need for the identification of qualified individuals to fill these vacancies (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). To determine who may or may not be able to fulfill this impending gap, it is important to note the traditional pathways to the superintendency for those who have successfully attained this goal (Brown, 2005).

Examination of the literature reveals that the pathway for accessing the highest position in education has not changed in the last five decades. Accessing the superintendency requires moving through one of two pathways: (a) teacher, principal, or coach, then superintendent or (b) teacher, principal, central office administrator, then superintendent (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Additionally, it should be noted that educators who wish to be superintendents must possess a School District Administrator (SDA) or School District Leader (SDL) license or the equivalent.

The number of African American women who possess SDA or SDL licenses, and who have earned doctorate degrees has increased, which indicates that these women are currently holding other positions in education (Horsford & Tillman, 2012). African American women's entry into leadership is primarily in the role of an elementary school principal rather than as a high school principal. According to the NCES, 2011, African American men and women held 10% of the elementary and secondary public school principalships. Kowalski et al. (2011) posited that the direct pipeline to the superintendency is through being a high school assistant principal and/or a school principal appointment. There are more male than female assistant principals, secondary principals, and central office administrators than women in these positions. Positions,

such as assistant principal, principal, coach, and central office administrator, give men the visibility, the connections, and a direct pipeline to the superintendency (Kowalski et al., 2011).

In a study conducted by Kim and Brunner (2009), evidence emerged indicating that, depending on the size of the school district, men and women's entry into the top position was vastly different. In larger school districts with central office administrators, men begin their careers as teachers; then they move up to the principalship; then to central office administrator, such as assistant superintendent of business and finance or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction; and then they assume the superintendency. According to Hodgkinson and Montenegro (1999), the traditional pathway for ascending to the superintendency is through one of two pathways—either from an elementary school principalship (Pathway 1) or from a middle or high school principalship (Pathway 2).

In their most recent study, Terranova et al. (2016) reported that the respondents to their study cited the traditional Pathways 1 or 2 as their way of gaining entry to the superintendency in New York State. Of the 411 respondents in the study, 45% reported gaining entry to the superintendency by moving from a middle or high school principalship, 35.3% reported having worked at a district office, and 11.1% moved from an elementary school principal position. The researchers concluded that, in New York State, ascending to the superintendency is more likely to occur from a secondary principalship rather than from other pathways. Of the Terranova et al. (2016) respondents, 56.4% percent of the women gained entry into the superintendency from a

central office track, compared to 54.7% of the men responding who achieved the position through serving as a school principal.

Normore (2006) conducted an in-depth analysis of recruitment patterns and concluded that more African American women could be attracted to a principalship if (a) a process was in place within school districts for identifying and recruiting promising teachers, (b) superintendents and other educators who were in positions of leadership identified and encouraged teachers early in their careers to pursue administration, (c) school districts offered shadowing and internal opportunities for aspiring leaders within the district to be prepared for a future role in administration, and (d) school district leaders assigned mentors to qualified candidates as role models. These nontraditional pathways to the superintendency would facilitate a strategy allowing African American women to ascend to the highest position in education (Kim & Brunner, 2009; Normore, 2006).

Characteristics of Successful Superintendents

The position of superintendent is a highly political position, and it requires hard and soft skills to maintain the job. Many experts believe that the characteristics of successful superintendents include, but are not limited to, competency, having a vision to move and improve curriculum, organizational support, visibility, flexible, collaborative and good communication skills (Alston, 2005; Angel et al., 2013; Henry et al., 2006; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Henry et al. (2006) interviewed 17 superintendents who had been rated as outstanding by their peers, or recognized on a state or national level. The respondents cited the following characteristics: leadership/vision/strategic thinker/problem solver, communication/community relations, interpersonal skills,

character, and competency-curricular-support, for educators as the top-five characteristics of successful superintendents. Leadership/vision/strategic thinker/problem solver was identified as the most important characteristic by 16 of the 17 participants. Being highly visible, observing, and giving constant feedback to building principals were other successful characteristics highlighted as the traits that make potential candidates appealing (Henry et al., 2006).

Even though the responsibilities of superintendents are continuously evolving, the basic characteristics needed for the job have not changed (Kowalski et al., 2011). Tillman and Cochran (2000) cited a study that was conducted by Revere, in 1989, that explored the successful characteristics that African American women superintendents possess who were successful in leading schools. Revere's (1989) findings were the same as the ones that have been illustrated in recent studies of women superintendents.

Barriers to the Superintendency

The English Oxford Living Dictionaries (2019) defines *barrier* as “a circumstance or obstacle that keeps people or things apart or prevents communication or progress.” Terranova et al. (2016) indicated that barriers are factors that discourage career moves or progression, and these barriers exist in school districts across New York State. The literature mentions that many women speak of barriers that hinder them from either pursuing, or being selected for, the position of superintendent (Brown, 2014).

An increasing number of studies have found that African American women assistant principals, principals, and central office administrators experience intrinsic/extrinsic barriers when pursuing the position of superintendent (Angel et al., 2013; Brown, 2014; Gewertz, 2006; Harris et al., 2004; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Jackson

& O'Callaghan, 2009; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Muñoz, Pankak, Ramalho, Mills, & Simonsson, 2014; Roane & Newcomb, 2013; Wyland, 2016). Recognizing intrinsic and extrinsic barriers that aspiring African American women encounter in their pursuit of superintendent of schools may likely produce a more diverse pool of applicants (Terranova et al., 2016).

Intrinsic barriers. Intrinsic barriers are defined as “an innate feeling of self-determined competence” (Deci, 1975, as cited in Green & Foster, 1986). African American women have preconceived notions about themselves and/or their abilities that hinder them from pursuing the position of superintendent (Alston, 2005). Intrinsic barriers can stem from disinterest in the position because of long work hours, poor pay, and feelings of inadequacy (Angel et al., 2013). Numerous researchers have stated that African American women cite feelings of insecurity, lack of confidence in their abilities to lead (Brown, 2014), low self-esteem (Jackson & O'Callaghan, 2009), career ceiling (Gewertz, 2006), questioning oneself (Jean-Marie et al., 2009), false appearance (Roane & Newcomb, 2013), feelings of isolation (Harris et al., 2004), and stress as intrinsic barriers that prevent them from applying for the position of superintendent. Research has continued to show that these perceived obstacles are present for many young African American women in the teaching field, and the perceived obstacles contribute to their not pursuing more senior-level positions (Moore, 2013).

Extrinsic barriers. Extrinsic barriers can be defined by using the Angel et al. (2013) definition for external barriers, which are challenges (coming from outside forces) that are beyond the control of the African American women. Extrinsic barriers are the obstacles that other people or organizations use to preclude African American women

from gaining access to the superintendency. A significant body of research exists that elucidates extrinsic barriers that impact an African American woman's ascent to the superintendency (Alston, 2005; Brown, 2014; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; & Horsford & Tillman, 2012). Some African American women cite issues of "discriminatory hiring practices, good-ole-boy network, lack of mentorship, [and] no formal or informal methods to identify Black aspirants to administrative positions" (Katz, 2012, p. 774) and biased school boards and search firms. African American women report that gender, race, low expectations, confidence, loss of job security, having school aged children, entering the position later in life, and lack of mentorship are some of the barriers they face while pursuing the position (Kowalski et al., 2011; Terranova et al., 2016; Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

Race. African American women report being viewed as invisible in the superintendent applicant pool. Their invisibility is often the result of preconceived notions that are prejudicially applied to them by school boards and search firms. Researchers have noted that White women who were successful in ascending to the superintendency were often identified by their male superintendents who took an interest in mentoring them (Brown, 2014). Jean-Marie et al. (2009) posited that African Americans experience discriminatory practices that are obstacles to their ascension to the superintendency. In their study, 12 women from their previous study (Jean-Marie et al. (2002) were interviewed to glean their perceptions of how intersectionality impacted their leadership. What Jean-Marie et al. (2009) found was that although the participants were subjected to discrimination due to their race, their concentration on what was best for their students allowed them to overcome harsh treatment while serving as leaders.

Gender. African American women face similar barriers as White women that impact their promotion to leadership (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Admittedly, the superintendency is a male, gender-stratified field (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). More White males occupy the position than women or people of color (Brown, 2014). Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010) purported that African American women are often overlooked for positions in leadership due to the negative stereotypes that exist. The portrayal of African American women in the dominant culture still serves as a barrier, even though discrimination of race and gender is illegal in the United States (Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

African American women do not find themselves in positions of promotion because of preconceived conclusions about their leadership abilities (Alston, 2005; Brown 2014). Tillman and Cochran (2003) stated that African American women must work harder and prove themselves by exceeding the expectations of their White counterparts. According to Sanchez-Hucles and Davis (2010), male applicants tend to be hired for their assertiveness, which is an asset in leadership.

Young & McLeod (2001) conducted a study that explored the factors that deter women from entering administration. Female administrative candidates, practicing principals, central office staff, assistant superintendents, and superintendents participated in the qualitative interviews (Young & McLeod, 2001). Young and McLeod found that women teach, on average, for 10 years before entering administration. In addition, they were more likely to have leadership positions in elementary schools instead of on the secondary level, which hindered them from moving to higher level positions (Young & McLeod). Additionally, women are most likely to obtain a leadership position in the

district in which they are employed. Although women are often more prepared, professionally, than their male counterparts, they are routinely paid less and given fewer opportunities to serve on committees (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). Serving on committees is a crucial way to show one's leadership skills to a wider set of peers (Young & McLeod, 2001). Given these barriers, "many women who do advance to more senior positions end up leaving their positions as a result of feelings of isolation, inadequate mentoring, and dissatisfaction with the institution for whom they work" (Young & McLeod, 2001, p. 464).

Consequently, the findings from the Young and McLeod (2001) study indicate that women make decisions to enter administration because of several factors, such as role models, the leadership style of their mentors, and the support that they receive while in the position. Women who have a positive experience with their school principals and who feel they will be supported by their school district, tend to enter the field of administration (Young & McLeod, 2001).

Hoff and Mitchell (2008) studied male and female administrators' perceptions of barriers that prevented them from entering or advancing in the field of education. Of the 404 participants, 175 women and 229 men took part in a mixed method study that revealed that women were more qualified for administrative positions than their male counterparts. According to the researchers, women do not enter the administrative field until they have completed the requirements for administrative certification, have earned an advanced degree, and their children have completed school (Hoff & Mitchell). Women also waited to be recommended, while men sought positions in administration with or without obtaining a recommendation (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008).

Hoff and Mitchell (2008) noted that men switched positions more often than women, and men were hired for administrative-level positions from outside the district at a higher rate than women. Other barriers, such as having school-aged children, job security, cost of living, and spouse employment issues, are the barriers mentioned in the surveys conducted on women's hesitancy to apply for the position in administration (Alston, 2005; Terranova et al., 2016). Since the barriers have not hindered all African American women from becoming superintendents in New York State, an exploration of the strategies used by successful African American women should be discussed (Terranova et al, 2016).

Although the role of superintendent is not an easy position in which to be employed, it can be very rewarding professionally (Brown, 2014; Terranova et al., 2016). Given that African American women superintendents face barriers while ascending to the position, strategies that enable them to be successful are explored within this work.

Strategies

According to the research, the strategies that African American women employ to successfully maintain their positions continue to be studied (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Terranova et al., 2016; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Research states that having mentors, working collaboratively with others who have students' best interest in mind, perseverance, and maintaining a positive working relationship with both the school board and the community serves to ensure that African American women superintendents are successful once they are in the position (Brown, 2014).

Brown (2014) argued that African American women who ascend to superintendent positions should find avenues that allow them to express their true selves

once they obtain the position, as well, they should continuously refine their interpersonal skills. Also, maintaining good working relations with the school board, acquiring a mentor, and working closely with the teaching staff, are strategies that have proven to be successful for African American women who have taken part in previous studies (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

Brown (2014) conducted a study that explored the strategies used by African American women superintendents who were serving or were retired from the position. Participants of the study discussed the need for a more formal approach to the retention of African American women who succeeded in securing the superintendency (Brown 2014).

Summary

There is significant research to show that women and, in particular, African American women, are underrepresented in the role of school administrators (Angel, Killacky, & Johnson, 2013). Several studies indicate that, over the course of the next few years, more superintendents will be retiring from the field (Terranova et al., 2016). At the same time, there are talented African American women who possess the leadership skills and tenacity to fulfill these vacancies (Wiley, Bustamante, Ballenger, & Polnick, 2017). The number of said vacancies, alone, demonstrates the importance of school districts taking a closer look at creating opportunities of advancement for African American female teachers, principals, and central office administrators (Wiley, Bustamante, Ballenger & Polnick, 2017).

At the time of this writing, many African American women teachers, principals, and central office administrators do not desire to move into the position of superintendent

because of the high demands of the job, as well as the perceived lack of adequate compensation (Harris, Lowery, Hopson, & Marshall, 2004). Yet, history shows that African American women who enter the field of education as teachers, principals, and central office administrators are more than qualified to serve as superintendents (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008).

The paucity of research on the experiences of African American women superintendents continues to highlight the need for more current research, particularly while these African American superintendents are holding the position or are near to retirement. The narrative of the experiences of African American women who overcome the barriers and successfully maintained a superintendency in New York State is limited in the current research. The literature review suggests that research is needed to highlight the barriers African American women in New York State experience as they climb to the top position in education, as well, the strategies that allowed them to achieve success while in the position should also be researched.

Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology that was used to explore the specific barriers that African American women in New York State encountered as they sought to become a superintendent as well as focusing on the strategies they used to achieve and sustain success.

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Chapter 3 encompasses the research context, research participants, data collection, and analysis that were used to gain a better understanding of the barriers experienced and strategies employed by African American women who had served or were serving as superintendents of schools in New York State. This research explored how race and gender influenced African American women's leadership positions in PreK-12 education. The researcher sought to understand the barriers that prevented more African American women from ascending to the position of superintendent of schools and the characteristics of their leadership that enabled them to maintain success while serving in that capacity.

This study applied a qualitative design methodology to allow for a deeper understanding of the participants' experience. Conducting a qualitative research study to understand the experiences of African American women allowed for the voices of the women to be heard. Quantitative researchers rely on instruments (usually in the form of surveys) that are mailed to the participants. The pool is very large from which quantitative researchers cull information. The data collected through a quantitative study design does not lend itself to the interpretation of the meaning that the participants make of their situations. Collins (2000) stated that African American women must make meaning of their lives to challenge the institutions that have kept them oppressed. This qualitative study allowed the researcher to view and collect data from the participants

within their own setting, and it gave the researcher the opportunity to explore the phenomenon.

Creswell (2013) posited that qualitative research is best used when the number of participants is small. As of this writing, in New York State, African American women superintendents represented less than 2% of the total number of superintendents.

A qualitative research design was used to develop a richer understanding of the lived experiences of African American women superintendents of schools, and this design allowed the researcher to understand how the superintendents' experiences impacted the strategies they used (Patton, 2002). Creswell (2013) stated that qualitative research design allows for the collection of information from a participant's "natural" setting. Interviews were used to capture the voices and experiences of barriers experienced in obtaining the position of school superintendent in New York State. Patton (2002) cited the merits of qualitative research as restricting the focus of a study to the observer and the observed, limiting the number of participants due to the researcher solely conducting the interviews.

The definition of phenomenon can best be described as the meaning one makes from his or her individual experiences. The way a person sees the occurrence, explains the circumstances to others, and is self-reflective about what is experienced and observed gives a deeper understanding of the meaning that was made from an experience (Patton, 2002).

African American women's perceptions of the role race and gender played in their pursuit of the superintendency is a phenomenon that can be captured through their shared experiences. Collins (2000) asserted that the experience of African American women in

education can properly shed light on the reasons why more women do not pursue and/or fail to attain the top position in education. Furthermore, their shared experiences seek to challenge the existing power structure. A phenomenological qualitative study was conducted to examine the perceptions of the barriers that African American women encountered and the strategies they utilized in response to those barriers. Creswell (2013) posited that “a phenomenology ends with a descriptive passage that discusses the *essence* of the experience for individuals incorporating ‘what’ they have experienced and ‘how’ they experienced it. The ‘essence’ is the culminating aspect of a phenomenological study” (p. 79).

Roberts (2010) stated that the rationale behind qualitative research design is to understand the true meaning of any phenomenon to gain a better understanding of it. Creswell (2014) added that the researcher interviews participants and tries to make meaning out of their subjective experiences. This experience was explored by using the following research questions to guide this study:

1. What factors and strategies do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?
2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing and serving in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?
3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?

Research Context

This study was conducted in New York State. New York State has 698 school districts and 6,298 public, private, and charter schools under its jurisdiction. The ethnic breakdown of students during the 2014-2015 school year was 18% Black or African-American, 25% Hispanic or Latino, 46% White, 9% Asian or Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 1% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 1% multiracial (Data.NYSED.gov). Economically disadvantaged students accounted for 53% of the student population, and students with disabilities account for another 16%. Those students with limited English proficiency comprised 8% of the school's population. The largest district within New York State is New York City. In 2010, there were 692 superintendents of schools, and 21 of that number were African American (NASBE Directory, 2010). These superintendents were charged with overseeing 210,496 teachers and the education of 2.7 million school-aged children while implementing large school budget. The superintendent's average tenure was 7.6 years (Terranova et al., 2016). The qualifications to become a superintendent of schools is to hold a New York State School District Leader License and to have experience teaching and working as a school principal. Salaries for school superintendents can range from \$190,000 to 280,000 without benefits (Terranova et al., 2016). In New York , most school superintendents are hired by school boards who rely on search firms to vet qualified candidates. Superintendents are supervised and report to school board members, and the average length of their contract is 3 years (NYSSBA, 2017).

The researcher is employed as a school administrator, she is an African American female who works in a school district in the suburbs of New York State, and she interacts

frequently with other administrators from neighboring school districts. The researcher has worked under the supervision of many White male school superintendents, and she has often wondered why there were little to no African American women superintendents in many of the meetings, conferences, or workshops she attended. The researcher has observed, firsthand, that there is an affinity to White male leaders. Faculty, staff, community members, and others appear to respond and respect male leadership more than female leadership. According to Yakushko, Badiee, Mallory, and Wang (2011), the disadvantage to being an insider conducting a study within one's own community is that the community does not always welcome the study. Other African American women may not acknowledge that there is a problem with the low numbers of African American women serving as superintendents in schools. The researcher's own bias, which has been mentioned before, may have hindered the accurate reporting of the facts as they were relayed to her. There was a potential for the researcher's own bias to interfere and/or become a part of this study. The researcher utilized the American Psychological Association (APA) guidelines for reducing bias in this study.

Research Participants

The researcher gathered the names of the existing superintendents who would be interested in taking part in this study from other superintendents who were members of the same professional organizations as the researcher. Once the names and emails were secured, the researcher contacted the potential participants by sending an email to invite them to participate in this study (Appendix A). Five African American women were selected from the email responses. They had worked or were working, at the time of this research, as a school superintendent for 3 or more years in a New York State public

school district, which was selected. Additionally, reliance on social relationships and organizations aided in the selection of participants (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

The participants for this study were five African American women who served as superintendents in a New York State public school district. According to Creswell (2013), the participants were selected because of their familiarity with the phenomenon. The women interviewed had worked as a school superintendent for three or more years. Given the small numbers of African American women who worked or had once worked as superintendents, a purposeful homogeneous sampling was used because the women who participated in this study had knowledge of searching for, interviewing, and obtaining the position of superintendent. Additionally, reliance on social relationships and organizations allowed for selection of the participants (Singleton & Straits, 2005).

The African American women were identified through the snowballing technique, which Creswell (2013) is defined as “cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases information are rich” (p. 158). The participants were asked to recommend other African American women who fit the stated criteria and who they thought would be interested in taking part in this study.

The number of participants allowed the researcher to conduct a thorough, in-depth research of African-American women superintendents and their experiences. Creswell (2012) explained the importance of getting consent from the individuals who would be taking part in this study before beginning it so that the participants were aware of why this study was being conducted and how the information from this study was going to be used. The researcher obtained the necessary permissions (Creswell, 2014) in order to gain access to the sites where the interviews and observations were conducted, especially

in the case of interviewing study participants at their school. The researcher had each participant read and sign the informed consent form (Appendix C) prior to conducting the interviews, observations, and casual conversations.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The instrument used in the data collection was the interviews questions. Each interview began with the researcher explaining the nature of this study and obtaining signatures from the participants on the informed consent form. The participants were asked to complete a demographic questionnaire prior to the interview. Interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location. The researcher and the interviewee were the only participants during the interview. If the participants were not able to meet face to face, an electronic medium (e.g., Skype or FaceTime) or telephone interviews were used to conduct the interview. Each participant was assigned a number to conceal the participant's identity. The date of interview, as well as the beginning and end time of said interview was recorded. Interview questions were asked to identify the barriers and strategies they encountered. The interviews were approximately 60 minutes in length, and they were audio recorded. A series of standard, probing, and follow-up questions were used, and they allowed the conversation to flow during the interview. Semi-structured interview questions, as well as more detailed and probing questions, were used to guide each session.

Data Analysis

In qualitative studies, the data is collected through interviews, and it is then organized (Creswell, 2013). The researcher read over all of the notes and information gathered for clarification. Notes were shared with the participants to ensure the accuracy of the information. Once the interviews were completed and the notes were reviewed by the participants, the transcription of the audio recordings was obtained by the researcher through the services of an outside transcription company. Once the transcriptions were received, the data were organized, reviewed, and properly coded. Line-by-line analysis was used by the researcher to generate codes and themes (Creswell, 2013). Continuous review of the transcripts was performed to glean an understanding of the phenomenon of the perceived barriers and strategies that African American women encountered while pursuing the position of superintendent of schools. Creswell (2013) posited that the next step was interpretation of the data, which required the researcher to identify the larger meaning of the data and relate it to the research. Interpretation of codes and themes allowed for a deeper understanding of the barriers African American women experienced and the effective strategies that enabled them to maintain their professional position.

Finally, information gathered from the coding was used to write the narrative of this study. The narrative was formulated into the stories of the lived experiences of the African American women superintendents of schools in New York State public schools.

All of the information and data from the interviews are kept in a locked storage box in the researcher's home and they will be properly discarded 5 years from the publication of this study. All electronic devices were password protected and kept in a safe, secure storage location in the home of the researcher. The dissertation publication is

made available through the St. John Fisher Library as part of its digital doctoral dissertation holdings. The researcher may use the entirety of aspects of this study for publication in scholarly or professional journals.

Timeline

The proposed timeline for this study was from July through December 2018. Following authorization from the St. John Fisher Institutional Review Board, the researcher secured permission from the districts to conduct the interviews by identifying the participants and by scheduling the interview dates and times, as well as by documenting the data during the months of July and August 2018. Data analysis commenced in September 2018, with coding and the identification of themes established in the month of October 2018.

Written summaries and conclusions were completed by December 2018.

Summary

The lived experiences of five African American women superintendent of schools was the focus of this study that identified barriers to appointment as superintendent of schools and the success strategies they utilized while ascending to the upper echelon of education. A qualitative, phenomenological study using semi-structured interviews was conducted to examine the common themes and differences that emerged from the rich descriptions of their experiences that were provided by the women being interviewed by the researcher.

Chapter 4: Results

This phenomenological, qualitative study examined the barriers experienced by African American women who successfully ascended to the position of superintendents of schools in New York State and the strategies they employed to overcome the identified barriers during their tenure. The research referred to Collins's (1986) Black feminist thought that purports three key themes: (a) self-definition and self-valuation, (b) interlocking nature of oppression, and (c) importance of the Afro-American women's culture to describe the lived experiences of African American women. These themes provided a framework to present the narratives from African American women who, at the time of the investigation, worked or had worked as superintendents in New York State schools. This framework helped to better understand how the perception of the barriers and challenges they faced either aided or hindered them from navigating this traditionally male, gender-stratified position, as well as to investigate what aided or hindered the successful maintenance of their positions. The voices of African American women who had served or were serving as superintendents in New York State public school districts, with 3 or more years of experience, were heard and studied to understand the impact of their experiences.

Given the low number of African American women superintendents of schools in New York State, purposeful homogeneous sampling and snowballing were used to identify women who had knowledge of the process and who had experience in searching, interviewing, and obtaining the position of superintendent of schools. The participants

were identified through newspaper articles, recommendations from women from other race and ethnicities who worked as superintendents of schools, and via the New York State Education Department's database.

This chapter provides a review of the research questions, the data analysis, the major findings, and it identifies the themes drawn from the interviews. Descriptions of the participants serve to illuminate the voices of the women in this study. This chapter concludes with a summary of the responses the women gave to the research questions that emerged from this study.

Emails were sent to 15 African American women across New York State, inviting them to participate in this study. Of the 15 invitees, eight African American women never responded to emails, and three agreed to participate; however, given their work and time constraints, they could not follow through with setting a date and time to be interviewed. Ultimately, five African American women who had served or are currently serving, at the time of the interviews, as superintendents in New York State responded to the emails and accepted the invitation to participate in this study.

Semi-structured, face-to-face, 60-minute interviews were scheduled and conducted at a mutually agreed upon location. Appendix B contains the interview protocol that was followed. Once signatures were obtained from each woman on the informed consent forms (Appendix C), as required by St. John Fisher College IRB, open ended questions (Appendix D) were posed to the participant to enable them to share their experiences.. Follow-up questions were presented to gain clarity and a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. All interviews were recorded with both an MP3 recorder and an iPad to avoid the possibility of a mechanical defect from either device

while capturing the voices of the women. The researcher took notes during each session as well as pictures of awards, newspaper clippings, and other items that one participant received during her tenure as a superintendent.

All audio recordings of the interviews were uploaded into the software of a third-party transcription service named Rev. The transcribed interviews were received by the researcher from Rev, and they checked against the audio recordings for accuracy of transcription.

Validation of data was conducted by using member checking. According to Creswell (2013), member checking allows for research participants to corroborate the transcription of their interviews and clarify any points that might be misunderstood. To ensure accuracy and authenticity, the member checking was completed by each participant who was emailed a copy of her completed transcript. All participants responded with minimal to no changes, and they acknowledged that the transcripts accurately reflected their experiences. The researcher read the transcripts line by line looking for themes, and patterns. Additionally, data triangulation was conducted by two outside raters who reviewed the transcripts and corroborated the validity of the codes that the researcher identified.

Research Questions

The findings of this study were presented by addressing the following research questions.

1. What factors and strategies do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?

2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing and serving in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?
3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?

Quotes from the interviews were selected and used to represent the voices of the participants' answers to the research questions and to provide evidence of the themes.

Research Participants

All the participants were African American women, who ranged in age from 40 years through their late 80s. Two were raised in the South, one was raised in the West, and two were raised in the Northeast. All the participants possessed the required licenses to be employed as a superintendent of schools. Three of the five women began their educational careers within the New York City Board of Education and then in the outlying suburbs of New York State. All five participants served as superintendents of schools for over 3 years. At the time of the interviews, three participants were employed as superintendents of schools in New York State. One participant was retired, and one participant had been a superintendent, but she was working in another sector in K-12 education. All the participants either worked in a small- or moderate-sized New York State suburban public school district. One participant was completing her 7th year as superintendent. Two participants worked in predominantly White districts, while the remaining three participants worked or had worked in diverse districts. Two participants followed a traditional pathway to becoming a superintendent: (a) teacher-assistant to principal, (b) principal to instructional supervisor, (c) district director to assistant

superintendent, and (d) assistant superintendent to superintendent. One participant never worked as a principal, and three of the five participant held doctorate degrees. Table 4.1 provides detailed demographics of each participant.

Table 4.1

Participants' Demographics

Participant	Age	Marital Status	Years as Superintendent	Employment Status	Terminal Degree
1	45-55	Married	7	Working	Doctorate
2	49-55	Never married	4	Working	Doctorate
3	46-56	Divorced	4	Working	Doctorate
4	79-89	Never married	7	Retired	Masters
5	69-79	Divorced	10	Working	Masters

Participant Profile

Participant 1. At the time of her interview, Participant 1 was a 51-year-old African American women, who was married with one son, held a doctoral degree, and was beginning her seventh year as a superintendent in New York State. She began her career in the corporate sector before going back to school to obtain her teaching license. She worked as a teacher, assistant principal, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and finally, superintendent of schools. She worked in a diverse public school district with a student population of 2,049 that had a graduation rate of 96%.

Participant 2. At the time of her interview, Participant was a 49-years-old African American woman, who was never married with one son, held a doctoral degree,

and worked in a diverse public school district with a \$103 million budget. The total student enrollment of her district was 3,400, and the graduation rate was 63%. She had never held a principalship position, and she was completing her 4th year as a superintendent.

Participant 3. At the time of her interview, Participant 3 was a 57-year-old African American woman, who was divorced, held with a doctoral degree, and was completing her 4th year as a superintendent in a predominantly White school district. The total student population was 3,119, and the graduation rate was 94%. She entered education after deciding to leave the corporate sector. She rose to the superintendency by following the traditional pathway: teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, and superintendent of schools.

Participant 4. At the time of her interview, Participant 4 was an 89-year-old African American woman, who was retired, never had been married, and she had no children. She worked as a superintendent of schools for 6 years during her tenure in New York State. She was the only participant in this study that had worked as a superintendent outside of New York State. The population of the diverse public school district that she held within New York State had a population of 3,002. She began her career in education as a teacher in predominantly White school districts, and she ascended to the superintendency through the traditional pathway. She held such positions as assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

Participant 5. At the time of her interview, Participant 5 was a 79-year-old African American woman, who was a divorced with two children, and she had the longest tenure as superintendent of schools of all of this study's participants. She had

worked in several New York State diverse public school districts that encompassed predominantly Black and Hispanic students. The last district in which she served as superintendent of schools had a student population of 2,967, and it had an 85% graduation rate. She served as superintendent of schools for over 10 years before her short retirement. Soon after retirement, and at the time of her interview she was working in another aspect of PreK-12 education.

The commonality among all the participants stems from each one being selected for their position because someone saw something in them and felt that the students in their respective schools would benefit from having the presence of an African American woman at the helm of their district. During the in-depth interviews, each woman shared her perception of the barriers, challenges, and strategies for success.

Data Analysis and Findings

This section of Chapter 4 highlights the themes and categories while focusing on Collins's (1986) Black feminist thought key themes: (a) self-definition/self-valuation, (b) interlocking nature of oppression, and (c) importance of women's culture to explore the barriers, challenges, and strategies African American women superintendent of schools encountered. The five themes that emerged from this study represent the participants' responses from individual interviews, and they provide an explanation for the Black feminist thought as well as the key themes on the barriers, challenges, and strategies as perceived by the African American women superintendents of schools.

Identification of codes and themes. An inductive approach was used by the researcher to analyze and create meaning from the data (Ryan & Russell Bernard, 2003). Groups of themes and patterns emerged. The data was analyzed using a priori, open, in

vivo, and descriptive coding. The transcripts of the interviews was read by the researcher several times, and they were manually coded.

Initially, the transcripts were read line by line utilizing a priori coding. A priori coding enabled the researcher to use a predetermined understanding of the phenomenon being studied. Themes that the participants revealed from previous literature reviews were discovered. Additionally, the researcher utilized the research questions as a guide to extract key statements from the transcripts, then phrases, and words bearing, in mind Collins's (1986) Black feminist thought themes. The key statements were recorded in Microsoft Word and then put into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. A priori themes emerged, which supported the research questions.

The researcher then re-read the transcripts using open coding. According to Khandkar (2009), names are given to ideas and concepts so that their relationship can be determined. Question stems, such as who, what, why, how, and by which, were utilized to discover many emerging themes from analyzing the data line by line. Afterwards, the researcher highlighted the transcripts with different colors, looking for key phrases and words. This process resulted in the discovery of themes related to the barriers, challenges, and strategies encountered by the African American women superintendents. This process also allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the coding process. Table 4.2 provides a list of the themes and the frequency in which they emerged from the transcripts.

Table 4.2

Themes and Frequency

Themes	Frequency
Barriers	39
Being selected	30
Beliefs	40
Challenges	12
Colleagues	25
Discrimination	8
Double consciousness	16
Family	18
Gender	40
Identity	20
Impact on students	20
Leadership potential	25
Microaggressions	50
Mentor	20
Motivation	16
Racial experience	20
Support system	20

In vivo codes were given to words and phrases that captured verbatim statements made by the participants. The voices of the African American women were captured when words, such as *tapped on the shoulder*, *recognized*, *microaggressions*, *token Black*, and *ordained*, were used as codes to capture the barriers, challenges, and strategies that the women shared in their experience as a superintendent of schools.

Microsoft Word was used to record the created categories and identified subthemes. The themes and quotes were then cut and pasted into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and sorted to establish the frequency of the themes. African American

women have long occupied minimal positions in academic settings that caused them to make meaning of their existence in social groups (Collins, 1986). Their perspective of their identity, family, and society's view of them shapes how the power of domination is exhibited in their lives. To gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of barriers and challenges African American women overcame, the transcripts were read a final time using the lens of Collins's (1986) three essential themes of Black feminist thought:

- (a) self-definition and self-valuation, (b) interlocking nature of oppression, and
- (c) importance of the Afro-American women's culture.

Self-definition/self-valuation. The stereotypical images and negative portrayals of African American women continue to plague their existence in political arenas such as in education (Minoo, 2015). Black women speak of their experiences and make meaning of the oppressive assumptions that those who have power over them define as their identity. It is through Black women challenging this thought process and by replacing the preconceived notions that result in the rejection of the dehumanizing systems of domination (Collins, 1986). Some of the dehumanizing systems of domination stem from the belief that Black women's behavior and performance negatively makes them less-qualified to fulfill the position of superintendent. According to Collins (1986), it is then inherent upon the Black woman to define who she is and her capabilities so as to reject the assumptions placed upon them by their oppressors. Black women's continued rejection of the identity given to them by others develops from the definition she creates for herself (Collins, 1986). Black women's rejection of their oppressors' definition of them enables them to push past the barriers and create new realities for themselves and

society (Alston, 2005). The findings in this study reveal that the African American women superintendents of schools reflected on their identity and its impact on their roles.

Interlocking nature of oppression. Race, gender, and class create unique oppressions that White women and Black men do not endure. The duality of consciousness of race and gender result in Black women experiencing multiple structures of oppression. This oppression can be explicit or implied, calling for Black women to exist in separate but equal positions. Collins (1986) referred to African American women's dichotomous role, which requires the creation of systems to ameliorate the problem. The findings from the African American women superintendents of schools interviews support the need to acknowledge their duality and the oppressive conditions that it creates (Wiley et al., 2017). African American women who challenge the status quo are viewed as a threat because their existence shatters the White patriarchal society's idea of femininity. The superintendent of school's position is perceived as a White, male-gender stratified position that has been resistant to change. White women, and even other Black women, help promulgate the belief that the role is designed for White men who can regulate the position more effectively than an African American woman (Alston, 2005; Collins, 1986; Terranova et al., 2016).

The importance of Afro-American women's culture. Black women's culture provides assistance in rejecting the oppressions encountered by their race, class, and gender. Black women's culture shapes their understanding of their oppressive world and creates systems and realities to aid them in overcoming such situations. Black women's reliance on history enables them to reject structures that were created to hinder their success, oppose societal definition of their roles, and shape their understanding of

working in oppressive situations. Collins (1986) expressed the significance of Black women's culture when she stated, Black women make use of all available resources to assist with their daily interactions with the majority culture.

When all three themes of Black feminist thought are combined, Black women make important contributions through activism for change in the political structure that they operate within socially and culturally. The themes of (a) self-definition/self-valuation, (b) interlocking nature of oppression, and (c) the importance of Afro-American women's culture shape the Black women's role as what Collins (1986) called "outsider within" (p. S14), which is a role that creates a standpoint between the Black women's realities of personal and cultural experiences. This new reality allows Black women to continue to work in structures that afford them opportunities to change environments. The three key themes from Black feminist thought were exemplified by the participants' words and they are displayed in Table 4.3.

Major findings. Gender, barriers, microaggressions, beliefs, and support systems were factors that emerged from the data analysis, reinforcing the three themes found in Black feminist thought (Collins, 1986) and the marginalization experienced by the African American women superintendent participants who worked in New York State.

Gender. The African American women superintendents shared their recognition of how they were viewed, their consciousness of their gender and race, and the realization of the meaning of their role as the leader of a school district. The African American women explained the importance of knowing who they were and their willingness to learn from those who had gone before them. The perception of honoring the past and seeing their appointments as a promise fulfilled made the daily task more meaningful. Participant 2

Table 4.3

Black Feminist Thought Themes and Evidence from the Participants

Black Feminist Thought Themes	Evidence from the Participants
Self-Definition/Self-Valuation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • So, I was getting all these mixed messages about my identity, right, my racial identity. (Participant 1) • We're women. We're the minority. (Participant 1) • I became the expert, which I was not the expert. (Participant 1) • When you're African American and you're trying to . . . make advances in your career, in a career path that is dominated by White males (Participant 1) • You have to be smarter and more hardworking, right, and more talented, right? (Participant 1) • I'm the same person who you believed and trusted when I was in the classroom or in another position. Why would I change overnight to become untrustworthy? (Participant 2) • It is a lonely, hard job. (Participant 2) • I am blessed. I'm truly doing God's work. (Participant 2) • And I always say, "regardless of what happens to me, I have a bachelor's, two masters, and a doctorate degree. So I'm going to be okay in some form or fashion." (Participant 2) • I was fortunate enough to know very early on in my 20s what I needed to be engaged in my work environment. (Participant 3) • I knew that I wanted to do something that mattered, that would bring some good or result in good and help others. (Participant 3) • It was just destiny. (Participant 3) • Being able to reflect on your own behavior, your own actions, and the impact of your behavior and actions on others. (Participant 3) • I just had to rely on myself. (Participant 5)
Interlocking Nature of Oppression	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We got to accept that these are not so microaggressions, because that was pretty direct, directly aggressive, and an offensive thing for anybody to say to another human being. (Participant 1) • You can get your foot in the door; it's staying in the room. (Participant 2) • Our White male counterparts do not face the same hurdles that we do. (Participant 2) • People will set you up for failure. (Participant 2) • They see the African American woman who must be the Pied Piper. (Participant 3) • I think that is absolutely not something that a White male superintendent would face, nor would a White female superintendent face, in this community. (Participant 3)

Black Feminist Thought Themes	Evidence from the Participants
Interlocking Nature of Oppression (cont.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Because I never knew whether obstacles were in my way because I was female or because I was Black, or all of the above. I never knew. (Participant 4) • This woman walks up and she says, “Oh, hello. How are you? What district is your husband the superintendent in?” (Participant 4) • The White women that were there were not interested in any camaraderie. (Participant 4) • So, one of the things that we picked up as women was that the expectations are different. (Participant 1) • You are expected to be in different places and to be seen and to, you know, whereas a man can go in the office and close the door. (Participant 4) • You can’t have this Black lady getting a higher rating. And he . . . and he claimed to be a master of wanting to see women successful in administration. (Participant 5) • Women of color, who said to me, “Why do you need 90 grand a year?” (Participant 5) • We get pushed out. (Participant 5) • We’re getting to the ultimate biases in this country, and the bigotry, and the institutional racism. (Participant 5)
Importance of Afro-American Women’s Vulture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • She encouraged me to know that I could be whatever I could be. (Participant 1) • On my worst days, I’ll call my mother. (Participant 2) • There’s no way you can do this by yourself. So, you figure out who are you gonna bring to the table. (Participant 5) • My girlfriends and I have started doing something for ourselves. (Participant 1) • We hire more diverse teachers so that these young people can see Ms. _____ standing before them, right, and say, “Oh! She looks like me. That must mean that this is a job for me too? I can do this job too. I can access this job too.” (Participant 1) • That’s why I said, “my mama said there’ll be days like this.” She conditioned me, and she prepared me, my mother in particular, for what I would face. (Participant 1)

stated, “My parents expected folks to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and not make any excuses and do what needed to be done in regard to paying homage to our ancestry as a strong people.”

The participants explained how the promise of those who had sacrificed their lives to afford them the opportunity to serve in a role shaped their identity. Many times the African American women participants were the only ones in the room who looked like themselves, and they had to make their voices heard. Given that the women were employed in a position that has been traditionally and predominantly White male-gender stratified, a reliance on the knowledge of positionality, values, and beliefs served to keep them focused on their required task. Three of the participants expressed the belief that they were ordained for the position. Their strong belief in God completed their identity and made them aware of the reason they were chosen to fulfill the position. Participant 1 best expressed the issue of gender when she said,

I was very conscious, because my mother taught African American history in our house. I very well knew who Mary McLeod Bethune was and what she did and how she was born a slave. I very well knew that all these American heroes—most of them were born slaves. I know that Malcolm X and Martin Luther King and others had laid their life down for me so that I could have opportunity. This was the talk in my house and that my burden and my responsibility, at the same time, was to honor their sacrifice.

The participants asserted that their gender often caused them to be undervalued, especially when it came to contract negotiations and working conditions. The women

were often asked to accept less than their male counterparts, even though they were completing the same tasks or even more. The factor of gender proved to be a challenge for some of the women while maintaining their positions. The African American women participants confirmed that different expectations were required of them. The women participants understood the importance of working harder and smarter to stay ahead in the position. They felt they had to attend every function, or they needed to over prepare in case decisions, or their actions were scrutinized, or they were watch for not properly handled certain situations. The implication was that the women were being watched under a figurative microscope for their failure, which was par for the course for the participants.

Barriers. All of the participants stated that there were barriers they encountered on a daily basis that propelled, hindered, or made their work challenging. Barriers, such as racism, the color of their skin, being set up for failure, adversarial relationships, and being physically threatened, were some of the hurdles that the African American women participants had to overcome.

Three of the participants explained that, on a daily basis, they were put in situations where they were set up to fail. Whether it is was a business transaction not coded correctly, negotiating their contract, or being questioned about their knowledge of various aspects of the position, the continuous scrutiny proved to be challenging. One of the participants talked about being interviewed five times before being offered the position because one board member felt that a White male should have been given the position over her. The participant was asked, at the final interview, to tell the board something about herself that the previous interviews did not reveal. She later found out

that one board member tried to turn the other board members against her because that board member wanted the assistant superintendent, who was White and male, to get the position because that board member felt that the assistant superintendent possessed the knowledge to better handle the position.

Another participant spoke about contract negotiations that were unfair. Their White, male counterparts were offered more in salary, benefits, and resources than the African American woman performing the same job and leading larger districts.

Participant 2 stated

They try to write contracts that are not equitable in terms of work that you're doing for the size of the district that others are being paid \$10, \$20, \$50,000 more a year. And you just have to eat it if you want to continue serving and being a role model for so many.

The belief behind the unfair and unbalanced contract negotiations exclaimed by the women was that teachers and community members felt they did not need such a high salary. Participant 5 reported, "You can't have this Black lady getting a higher rating. And he . . . and he claimed to be a master of wanting to see women successful in administration. But this was a bit too close to home."

One participant was threatened by a community member at an event thrown in her honor to welcome her to the position and community. "I don't know what you're doing here, but I put your people to bed at night." The other participants expressed the sentiment of Participant 1:

You have to do that, where others don't, and so it's just another ring that you have to be in, if we can do a comparison to the service. It's another ring that you have

to be in all the time, because when you walk into the room, you are not an American; you are an *African American* American, and again, you are a female African American in this particular field. We can't take our skin off, and so that's never going to change.

The participants agreed that they had to learn to manage the barriers and focus on their impact on the children they served.

Microaggressions. Microaggression is yet another construct that the African American women superintendent participants had to navigate in order to be successful. The participants stated that microaggressions were part of their daily experiences. According to the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary* (2019), *microaggression* is a comment or action that subtly and often unconsciously or unintentionally expresses a prejudiced attitude toward a member of a marginalized group (such as a racial minority). The African American women superintendent participants were faced with microaggressions that were a part of their jobs. The participants stated that it was not that they accepted these microaggressions, but they had been conditioned to withstand them. Participant 1 stated

So many microaggressions. "They only hired her because she's a token Black." People said that. People were mean and rude to me because they had been waiting for a principalship, and they thought it was their turn. There were 6-year and 7-year APs who felt that they were more qualified or more deserving of the role, and so they did not try to help me in any way.

Participant 1 shared that microaggressions were used to question the validity of her existence in the position.

That resonated with me, but after you've done this for a while, you become very savvy about some of the questions or issues, why the issues arise, where they're coming from, and how to manage them politically and astutely. So, you're always having to prove and reprove, reaffirm that you are qualified to do this work. That can become grueling. It's exhausting. But when you add the Black and female component, now you'll have to continually prove that you're capable of resolving and problem solving and innovating around any issue that arises in your school community. Because there are people who are hopeful that this is the one. This is the one that's going to stump her. She's not going to be able to work through it. She's going to cause contention in the community. She's going to fail, and we can't wait for her to fail. And if you cannot persist in that kind of environment, and most people can't, and listen, most people don't have to. Most people can't. And I'm not saying this is okay in anyway. See, I should not have to do that, right? But then the microaggressions start. "She's only hiring them because they're Black." Even though it's the board's number one goal, even though I inherited the goal, but all of a sudden, it's my goal.

The current political climate is making it challenging for African American women in the position of school superintendent to function without facing adversarial situations daily. Participant 3 shared the shifts that occurred in her superintendency once the president shifted "and our new president came in. Those opinions bubbled up. The perception was that, somehow, my presence here as an African American woman was attracting more people of color. That became the noise in the background in my second

year.” Many of the participants shared that they were conditioned to rise above these microaggressions and continue working in the positions for which they were appointed.

It was evident from all of the participants that the microaggressions encompassed intersectionality. In some cases, the African American women superintendents were not sure if the treatment or experiences were due to being a woman, being Black, or being both. Microaggressions and intersectionality cull together to support the Collins (1986) theory of existing as an outsider within.

Beliefs. Another common theme that resonated with each participant was their strong belief that they were *ordained by God* for the position. Many of the participants expressed the understanding that they were placed in the position as a calling.

Participant 3 stated

Being superintendent was not on the list. Being superintendent was no more on the list than being a teacher. I was just led. It was just destiny. It was like God meant for me to be in these positions. What came with that employment was not only a salary that I needed to live off of, but . . . How many credits a year? I think about 24 credits as an employee there. That was my message from God [that] I'd chosen the right thing.

These callings often became a sense of protection around their daily activities and interactions with staff, students, community, and board members. Protection that they took very seriously. Participant 4 expressed how faith had assisted her with a situation that was particularly difficult.

In fact, that night, the lawyer called, and I said, “Well you see, I have somebody on board today that y'all didn't have on board.” Because I have a lot of faith, and

I have a great belief that there is Somebody that is greater than me, and I felt that He was on board with me. And I said to them, I said, “I had somebody on board y’all never had before, and that’s why it passed.” Because nobody expected it to pass. It had been up several times. It had been up two or three times while I was in the district. And that time, it was passed.

Reliance on their belief in God sustained the African American women. In the Black feminist thought, Collins (1986) argued that the interlocking nature of oppression experienced by Black women is personal and it emerges through the women’s perspective.

Support systems. The influence of family and friends on the African American women superintendent participants was critical to their success. Relying on their support systems is a theme the African American women participants discussed that kept them grounded in their work. Loneliness, due to the long hours and being the only one of color in a room; being the only one that understood all of the nuances of the position; and being extra careful of people who were waiting for their demise, made the participants rely on insular support groups such as family, close friends, and significant others. The participants described the need to have a network of support among other superintendents who looked like them, however, their supports often came from superintendents of other races. Participant 4 referenced her experience with other African American women superintendents.

They welcomed me as far as when I was appointed. But, as far as calling up and saying, “well, let’s have lunch together, or do you have any problems, or would you like to discuss anything, or is there anything I can do to help you?” Mm-mm

(negative). No. No, no, no, no. Now he and I are still friends, but we were not friends like we were as principals. But, he was president of whatever they called his little organization down there, when I went there as a principal. He brought me my first check, my first paycheck. He came over and hand delivered it to me. It was that kind of camaraderie.

Participant 2 confirmed her supports were in the form of White male mentors who accepted and helped her.

And some of them have been old White men who have been in the game for longer than I have been alive. And they've embraced me. They have been very supportive, and I've gotten support from other Black superintendents. However, they're a little more standoffish. I have one that has been in the superintendency, probably, going on 15 years and is well known in a predominantly White district. This person heads a predominantly White district. So a different perspective. And just talking to different people and going out to different conventions and conferences and reading and learning.

Four of the participants discussed daily conversations with their family members encouraged them when they felt like quitting. Familial influences enabled the women to withstand the difficulties. Seeking mentors was highly recommended by the participants as a necessity in maintaining a successful superintendency.

Summary of Findings for the Research Questions

Each research question sought to address the African American women participants' perception of the experience of ascending to the position of superintendent and the strategies utilized by the superintendents to maintain their position. There were

many commonalities shared by each participant when explaining how they obtained the position, their motivation, and successful characteristics that kept them focused on the job. One resounding theme was the impact that the women had on the education of the children who had been entrusted to them. This section contains the research questions and responses from the African American women superintendent participants that explains the barriers, challenges, and strategies experienced by them and the meaning that the women made of these experiences.

Research question 1. *What factors and strategies do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?*

All five participants attributed their successful attainment of the position to being selected by a supervisor who saw great leadership potential in them and who invited them to apply for the position. Some of the participants credited White males for noticing the potential and elevating them. They also indicated that they did not set out to become a superintendent of schools. The African American woman participants in this study identified a plethora of effective strategies that aided them in obtaining their position. Being prepared for the position, working harder, outworking everyone, taking risks, cultivating relationships with other staff members, and nurturing and influencing student achievement are strategies that afforded the African American women superintendents the recognition needed to be elevated. Participant 1 revealed that her strong work ethic was instrumental in getting her up the career ladder, and her path to attainment of the position, which was fraught with nontraditional means.

They asked me to move up because they had an initiative around inclusive education that they wanted me to help them lead. Then I went to administrative school. I got an administrative job right away as an internship for \$40,000 a year, so I took a tremendous pay cut. So, I really, literally, almost killed myself doing those two jobs. But I opened the school, and in the first year, we doubled our scores. They saw that I had middle school teaching experience. How you have to be smarter, and more hardworking, right, et cetera, and more talented, right? I was recruited there because the equity work I was doing already—that my burden and my responsibility, at the same time, was to honor their sacrifice. She conditioned me, and she prepared me, my mother, in particular, for what I would face. I went back to my work history. Don't waste your time on trying to figure that out. You just go on doing what you do and try for excellence. You have to do that where others don't. Because I'm just going to be who I am. I'm going to do the best I can, because I'm always striving for excellence, because I'm working on behalf of children. To protect their childhood, to make sure they have access to high-quality public education. I say, yes, because I'm standing on the shoulders of people who put me in a position to be offered that opportunity, and how could I ever say no to that? And they know what it takes. They know what it takes. And they're in service. They are servant leaders. All of us, we're all servant leaders. And not just to our school communities. We are serving the greater good. You have to be courageous enough to do the work. You just really have to be very thick skinned.

Participant 2 and Participant 3's experiences suggested that self-definition, self-valuation, and resilience were effective strategies to their attainment of the position. Participant 3 stated,

I was pretty good at being a substitute teacher. There were principals that took notice, and I started to work long-term assignments for teachers out on sick leave or FMLA. I went back to school. I had done a lot of work in the classroom; the superintendent took notice. So, I did a lot of activity bridging my global, international experience and bringing that back into the classroom. I wanted to be an AP [assistant principal]. I became the coordinator of elementary education. Put me over the three elementary schools. I worked with the principals and the curriculum specialists and just guiding.

Participant 2 remembered,

I was offered a position to become director of grants. I had done a lot of work in the classroom; the superintendent took notice. There were no AP [assistant principal] positions available. So, the administrators, including the superintendent, wanted to retain me in the district, so they convinced me in about 2 hours that I wanted to be director of grants, which I knew I [didn't] want to do. So, I became director of grants, and that went well for a year. [The] superintendent didn't feel that was the right fit, so I became the coordinator of elementary education. Put me over the three elementary schools. I worked with the principals and the curriculum specialists and just guiding them through the curriculum. I was a bridge between the assistant sup, principals, and whatnot. They had two principal positions open. They asked me to interview for the two

principal positions, or one of the two. [I] interviewed, then they said, “You know what? We have created a new position.” I keep getting thrown into these newly created positions. Assistant sup over elementary education. I said, “I don’t want to do that. I wanted to be a building principal.” “Well, no. This is where you can influence the principals, and blah blah blah.” So they created that position for me, and I remained there for about 3 and half years, 4 years. I was tenured in that area. I became the interim superintendent, and then I was appointed superintendent.

Participant 3 became empowered to apply for the position once she was encouraged by a board member to do so:

When the posting closed, and the board recognized that I hadn’t applied, the board president came to me and said, “Participant 3, why didn’t you apply? What happened?” I explained it to him. I said, “You know what? Look, no one came to me.” I said, “I didn’t want to presume that I was a shoe in.”

Participant 4 corroborated Participant 3’s experience and stated, “And I had been very successful there. So, when the opening came, I really was recruited. I went through the interview process, and I was a successful candidate.” Participant 5 also stated:

I was fortunate enough to know, very early on in my 20s, what I needed to be engaged in my work environment. I loved the teaching. It was challenging for me, because I didn’t have my master’s. I knew I needed to do that. I also knew I needed to know so much more to be effective, and to really do the best that I could. I was so jazzed up with great ideas and enthusiasm and interest, and I had been exposed to so much. All of that transformed how I viewed life. Everything.

It was just absolutely the point in which I felt I had the greatest clarity about what I wanted to do. I realized the potential for influencing the system at the level that That the work that I was engaged in touched every part of the system.

Participant 5 recalled:

[Name] calls me and says, “There’s a great job over here. And . . . there are only five female superintendents in New York state.” Each time [someone] recommended me for a position. Otherwise, it’s somebody tapping me on the shoulder and saying, “You need to go for this, you need to go for this.” And that was mostly White men. And, so, um Their sense of, “Well, hey, we can say we supported diversity, because we had this one Black lady . . .” And, as I said, the strand has been who has plucked me out, tucked me . . . tapped me on the shoulder and said, “This is what we should do next,” as opposed to my actively looking. I was fortunate enough to know very early on in my 20s what I needed to be engaged in my work environment. I loved the teaching. It was challenging for me, because I didn’t have my master’s. I knew I needed to do that. I also knew I needed to know so much more to be effective, and to really do the best that I could. I was so jazzed up with great ideas and enthusiasm and interest, and I had been exposed to so much. All of that transformed how I viewed life. Everything. It was just absolutely the point in which I felt I had the greatest clarity about what I wanted to do. I realized the potential for influencing the system at the level that . . . that the work that I was engaged in touched every part of the system.

As evidenced by the participants of this study, defining their abilities and creating an image of strong leadership opposed the power struggles that the women faced when

trying to obtain the position (Collins, 1986). Successfully navigating the factors that attributed to attainment of their positions often stemmed from someone in a position of power recognizing that the African American women participants and encouraging them to apply. Many of the recommendations came from White males who saw the need to diversify the school districts.

Research question 2. *What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?*

African American women superintendent of schools are challenged and face barriers constantly. Some of the barriers and challenges encountered by the African American women in New York State stem from women of their own race and belief from board members that they were less than qualified. Collins (1986) asserted that Black feminist thought requires intersectional analysis, and it is used to show the correlation between the structural, symbolic, and everyday facets of domination, specifically, individual and collective hardships in various areas of social life. Participant 1 described having to interview five times before being offered the job. Participant 3 indicated the change in the political climate caused barriers between her and the board members who worked to force her out of the position. Participant 5 shared her rationale for not changing school districts because the challenges of having to prove herself over and over to a new board and community was not worth it to her. Participant 1 stated:

They said, “Oh, Participant 1, this is the fourth and final interview.” And then, a couple weeks went by, and I didn’t hear anything. And then I got a call and there was another interview, to my surprise. I said, “Wow.” And, you know, when you

walk into an interview, and you feel like you've done well? So anyway, I prepared for the fifth interview. They wanted some other presentation; I think a superintendent's entry plan, of you to present that. So, I did that. And then there were two questions at the end. I'll never forget this. One was, "Are you ready? Are you ready to be a superintendent?" And I said, "I believe that I am. I believe that I am. These are the reasons I believe that I am." I went back to my work history. And then they said, "Tell us something about you that, in all these five interviews, you haven't shared with us yet. Something we wouldn't know from reading all these papers and all the discussions we've had over these five interviews." So, I told them my story. Only a part of it, a small part of it, and what it means to me to be able to serve children, and to serve my country in this capacity, and why it's important that I serve. And they hired me, to their credit. In a very racist environment, right? To their credit, they hired me. There's still people who are interviewing you every day to see if you know what you're doing, and I'm in year seven as a superintendent, which is well beyond the time that most superintendents last in the job in New York state, in general. You still have people who don't believe that you are qualified to be sitting in this seat, and it takes on the appearance of so many things. But after you've done this for a while, you become very savvy about where some of the questions or issues, why the issues arise, where they're coming from, and how to manage them politically and astutely. So, you're always having to prove and reprove, reaffirm that you are qualified to do this work. That can become grueling. It's exhausting. You have to do that where others don't, and so it's just another rank that you have to be in,

if we can do a comparison to the circus, it's another ring that you have to be in all the time because when you walk into the room, you are not an American; you are an African American, and again, you are a female African American in this particular field. We can't take our skin off, and so that's never going to change. But when you add the Black and female component, now you'll have to continually prove that you're capable of resolving and problem solving and innovating around any issue that arises in your school community. Because there are people who are hopeful that this is the one. This is the one that's going to stump her. She's not going to be able to work through it. She's going to cause contention in the community. She's going to fail, and we can't wait for her to fail. And if you cannot persist in that kind of environment, and most people can't, and listen, most people don't have to. Most people can't. And I'm not saying this is okay in any way.

Participant 2 stated:

But the barriers would be, you can get your foot in the door, it's staying in the room. And the dynamics change quickly, and you learn who's really with you the first time you have to say, "No." People, "Well we go back. You know me." I'm like, "Ah yeah, I know you." But there are things that I have to follow; rules, regulations. There are procedures and protocols that have to be put into place, and in this seat, no one else in this district does the job that I do. Only one person does this job, so only one person knows what goes into it and all the different constituencies that I have to answer to.

Participant 3 explained:

I was bringing a different set of expectations, a different sense of what we needed to do to become a great system that educated all students well. That ruffled some feathers, because when you've been doing a certain thing a certain way for many years and you have somebody else who comes in and says, "You know what? It needs to be this way." Our new president came in, those opinions bubbled up. The perception was that, somehow, my presence here as an African American woman was attracting more people of color. "Those things that don't hurt you help you. Everything that I've experienced that was painful was helpful. That you don't ever take a job as superintendent if you don't want conflict, if you don't want to be misunderstood, if you don't want You certainly shouldn't take it if you think you're going to have everyone love you. It's not for you if those are the things that are on your mind. It has to be that you are doing this job because this is the point of influence where you can do the most good for children. That's a barrier when you are a person of color or an educator of color, or a superintendent of color in this community.

Participant 4 described her job:

Long days; expectations were different. We were expected to come to back to school at night and all this kind of stuff. Men didn't go to them things, it didn't make any difference. Football games, basketball games, some mornings, I'd leave home in the mornings, didn't get back until 11 or 12 at night going to all the The expectations are different. You are expected to be in different places and to be seen and to, you know, whereas a man can go in the office and close the door. That was one of the things that every woman seemed to have expected.

The long days was a problem for many women because they had a family. It was almost if you accepted the superintendency, then you couldn't be a wife and a mother, because all your time was going to be [as a] superintendent. It's difficult because with that, every time somebody came to do a job for me, oh, you're the superintendent. Oh, well, you know, it was like \$5 or \$10 more because I was the superintendent making all the money.

African American women encounter extrinsic barriers that other races and ethnicities may not encounter. Extrinsic barriers, such as constantly being challenged about decisions that she makes, being blamed for the shifts in the community, constantly having to prove that she can do the job, and living with public scrutiny, can create hindrances that make the position difficult for those in the position. Participant 5 recounted:

But part of the reason why I stayed the 10 years was that I didn't want to go through the battle that women go through of constantly changing jobs and being pushed out. We get pushed out. And I thought, "Nah, I'm secure here. The people respect what I'm doing. It's a culturally diverse community on the" And it was more of a secured . . . It could've made a lot more money, but it was the security of knowing that I wasn't gonna be battling with the sharks for a while.

There are many barriers and challenges encountered by African American women while in pursuit of the position of superintendent of schools. The biggest barriers or challenges are the color of their skin and gender. Many of the participants explained that it was very difficult to define this as a barrier because it was hard to prove if they were

being discriminated against because they were a woman or because of their race.

Participant 3 stated:

Rather than viewing it as an asset, it's viewed as a problem, and therefore, if you look around and you're seeing more people, and you're not reading the paper, and you're not looking around beyond your own community, you might think

They see the African American woman who must be the Pied Piper. She's getting them in. Typically, that would be a good thing. I think that is absolutely not something that a White male superintendent would face, nor would a White female superintendent face, in this community.

Research question 3. *What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?*

Success attributes included a good support system, impacting the education of school-aged students, supporting teachers to move curriculum that affects classroom instruction, relationships with constituents, and using collaboration to influence decisions that affect communities, and they were strategies shared by participants. Participant 3 recalled:

Being in this seat, as superintendent, has shown me over and over how that's done. How to ensure that the system is committed to a high-quality learning and instruction experience for all children, and how working with the leadership team, and how, through my own example of doing, not just saying, but walking the talking, influences others and that it's that message. It's the message of why that's important, and a right for all children. Being able to work with leaders to ensure that they have the tools to be able to go back to their buildings and have

those conversations with teachers and promote the work there. Maintain the focus in everything that they do, to ensure that the goals are met around ensuring that we create a system that honors children and ensures that they're well educated. That there's a sense of equity and excellence. Those are always variables that are essential and to convey that. You have to also show your humanity, and show your passion, and help people to have hope and be connected to why what we do is so important. That it takes time, and that there are things that we do to make sure that we're still on the road. We might stop at a rest stop, but you got to get out of there and get back on the road. Got to recharge and get back on the road. This is what we do, and we're doing it together. We're learning, we're working, we're planning together, and we're a team. Those are the things that I think are really critical and things that I have learned, that it's essential to remember and practice when you're in the seat. I enjoy the problem solving. I enjoy finding solutions and working through difficult situations. I enjoy the collaboration with the administrators. I enjoy being able to walk through the schools and go to classrooms, and talk to children, talk to educators, talk to parents. I certainly enjoy focusing attention on how to make the system better, and seeing, and mobilizing, and organizing, and aligning all the resources to make that happen, and seeing evidence of that happening. That's tremendously gratifying, as well, when you see the efforts, your long days actually making an impact. That really energizes It energizes me, and I think it energizes others who may not have time to stop, and think, and look at, and find evidence of efforts that are underway.

Participant 4 stated:

Once I became superintendent, it was altogether different there. One of the things I was able to establish, and I don't know how I did this, was respect for the job, that they did not expect favors. Nobody came to me asking me to do anything. One principal came at one point. I have a respect for authority and respect for position because I like to be respected. So, I respect you. Fairness. Integrity. Respect for the individual as well as respect for myself. And a great desire to achieve. I wanted to achieve. I wanted to do well. I've always wanted to do well in anything that I do. I don't want to be a failure.

Participant 2 exemplified success strategies when she stated:

So, being honest and being transparent, is who I am, but it also is who I have to be in order to continue. So, I'm just letting you know that, this is not a lot of superintendents that you've dealt with in the past. That I'm here to work and I know the community and we're all on the same team.

Each participant shared that gender and race impacted their performance as superintendent of schools. The women participants encountered the same situations and experiences as White women or White men. The African American women stated there was a desire by some people to see them fail; questions about their knowledge of the position and being able to handle the business aspect of the position impacted their performance. Fortunately, all of the participants were able to impact their school districts positively, and they continued to see it daily.

Participant 1 explained that the intersectionality can impact women negatively, however, her upbringing and conditioning from her parents enabled her to withstand

microaggressions, which impacted her role as superintendent of schools. Participant 1 continued:

But when you add the Black and female component, now you'll have to continually prove that you're capable of resolving and problem solving and innovating around any issue that arises in your school community. Because there are people who are hopeful that this is the one. This is the one that's going to stump her. She's not going to be able to work through it. She's going to cause contention in the community. She's going to fail, and we can't wait for her to fail. And if you cannot persist in that kind of environment, and most people can't, and listen, most people don't have to. Most people can't. And I'm not saying this is okay in any way. See, I should not have to do that, right? Now, people say to me all the time, "Participant 1, this is a very stressful job." And I say, "I hadn't noticed. I hadn't noticed." Because I'm not stressed out. I'm really not! Because I'm just going to be who I am. I'm going to do the best I can because I'm always striving for excellence because I'm working on behalf of children. To protect their childhood, to make sure they have access to high-quality public education, make sure they don't have to travel 4 hours a day to have access to that. It means something to me. We got to accept that these not so microaggressions, because that was pretty direct, directly aggressive and offensive thing for anybody to say to another human being. You kind of always have to just shake it off and regroup immediately, right? We have to do that. Others don't. But, over time, because there's so many times that you have to adjust, right, and regroup, you become quite resilient and expert at it.

Summary of Results

Chapter 4 presented the findings from the narratives collected from interviews of the five participants of this qualitative, phenomenological study. The data were gathered by the researcher by conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with five African American women superintendents of schools in New York State. The participants provided personal, meaningful, and descriptive explanations of their experiences as superintendents of schools in New York State. Common themes were characterized by the researcher into three major categories, which included self-definition/self-valuation, interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of Afro-American women's culture. The three key themes are the basis for the Collins (1986) Black feminist thought. The five African American women superintendents of school in New York State provided detailed insight into the barriers, the challenges, and the strategies for overcoming and successfully maintaining their positions. The African American women superintendents of schools experienced barriers such as gender, racism, feeling that they were set up for failure, adversarial relationships, and physical threats. Their challenges were with microaggressions such as negative, hostile, and prejudicial actions from the staff, the community, and the board members. Family support, mentors, outworking everyone, and faith in God are some of the strategies the women employed to successfully maintain their position.

Chapter 5 provides the implications of findings, limitations, and recommendations for the future.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

This qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted to understand the barriers and challenges that African American women superintendents of schools in New York State public schools experienced while in pursuit of the position, and the strategies they utilized to maintain their positions once they attained the superintendency. The main purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of the factors and attributes that led to successful attainment and maintenance of the position in leading New York State public suburban school districts. The barriers, challenges, and strategies used in attaining and maintaining the positions were investigated to analyze the lived experiences of the African American women superintendents of schools.

A review of literature indicates the underrepresentation of the numbers of African American women in the superintendency (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). The common findings in much of the literature reveal that African American women encounter barriers as school leaders, and an acknowledgment of those barriers must be affirmed to assist in increasing their overall numbers (Terranova et al, 2016). The common belief in the studies conducted regarding increasing the population of African American women superintendents of schools have stated that the gender and cultural bias promulgate the perception, among those who are charged with hiring school superintendents, that males are more effective than females in leadership positions. This conclusion is consistent with school board hiring practices of superintendents of schools in New York State

(Kowalski et al., 2011). Sampson and Gresham (2017) also argued that the effects of embedded institutional oppressions and barriers associated with self-defined and cultural norms deter women from seeking positions such as superintendents of schools, and their low numbers “need to be addressed” (p. 1152). Thus, research provides evidence that African American women face institutional barriers and challenges while pursuing the position (Brown, 2014). Therefore, this study contributes to the research on African American women superintendents of schools in New York States’ suburban public school districts by demonstrating a detailed analysis of the barriers and challenges described in the narratives elicited in five in-depth interviews of female African American superintendents who participated in this qualitative study.

Data for this study were collected using a phenomenological approach. The theoretical framework that guided this study was Collins’s (2000) Black feminist thought theory. In Black feminist thought, Collins (2000) suggested African American women’s experiences may have some commonalities with other races, but the marginalization faced by being Black and a woman can only be experienced by the African American woman. Thus, their voices must be heard in literature. Collins (1986) purported that African American women in education live an existence of an outsider within, which is related to three themes: (a) self-definition and self-valuation, (b) the interlocking nature of oppression, and (c) the importance of Afro-American women’s culture. Chapter 4 presented the findings of the research, focusing on the three key themes that Collins (1986) discussed as her outsider within status.

Semi-structured interview questions were posed to five African American women who had been or were superintendents of schools in New York State, and the answers to

the questions highlighted the literature shared in Chapter 2. The findings and results of this study sought to address the following research questions:

1. What factors and strategies do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?
2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing and serving in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?
3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?

The major findings of this study indicate that gender biases, microaggressions, support systems, and beliefs were voiced by participants and their comments support the Collins (1986) theory, and they provided insight into the African American women's experiences as superintendents of schools. In Chapter 5, the researcher presents a discussion of the implications of the findings and a summary of the research limitations. The chapter concludes with a discussion reviewing the research and recommendations for future study.

Implications of Findings

Prior studies have noted the need to examine African American women who overcame barriers while ascending to the position of superintendent of schools in New York State. Studies have been conducted to expose barriers and challenges experienced by women in other states; however, specific focus on New York is limited. New York State is more progressive than other states, and it is credited with the creation of the position of superintendency. Indeed, other states appointed superintendents shortly

thereafter (Kowalski et al., 2011). The current study found that African American women encountered barriers and challenges, when pursuing the position of superintendent of schools, that White men and White women may not have encountered (Wiley et al., 2017). The findings of this study are similar to those discussed in the existing literature that examined factors and attributes associated with African American women pursuing the position of superintendent of schools in New York State. However, some aspects of the experiences related by the African American women in New York State, who participated in this study, were very different from those reported by African American women in other states.

The data from the interviews were initially analyzed using a priori coding, then open coding, and, finally, in vivo codes. The codes allowed for themes that support Collins's (1986) outsider within key themes of self-definition/self-valuation, interlocking nature of oppression, and the importance of African American women's culture.

Self-definition/self-valuation. The major findings revealed the African American women's need to be confident enough to take a risk and apply for the position. Intrinsically, African American women question their readiness or skills when pursuing the job. Extrinsically, the participants felt that they were being interviewed every day by their subordinates, board of education trustees, and community members. This level of scrutiny motivated them to prove that they were able to perform the job they were hired to do exceedingly and abundantly well.

Research question 1 asked about the factors and strategies that the women attributed to their successful attainment of the position. Participants 1, 2, and 3 spoke about the need for African American women who want to aspire to the position of

superintendent of schools to just apply. The women indicated that it is the applicant's inherent responsibility to develop the stamina to ignore the barriers and apply. The sacrifices of those ancestors who have gone before them support the need for them to apply. The participants indicated learning to be politically astute to withstand the subtle discriminatory practices that could have potentially hindered them from applying and being hired. One participant described a discriminatory practice that involved being asked to interview numerous times for the position when, in fact, the hope was that the woman candidate would perform poorly at one of the interviews and could be denied the position.

The participants corroborate Collins's (1986) position that African American women challenge society's stereotypical definitions of them. The African American women participants reported studying and knowing their constituents so as shatter the misconceptions about them through their actions to defy the poor expectations or long-held beliefs of their lack of ability. Black feminist thought speaks to African American women demystifying the long-held negative beliefs of their intelligence and behavior by operating in ways that were instilled in them from a young age, mainly being authentic and knowing their capabilities (Wiley et al., 2017). Most of the participants commented that relying on the sacrifices of "those who went before them" reminded them of the importance of their presence in the position. According to Collins (2000), no other group other than African American women has a better understanding of the interlocking nature of oppression that deals with the African American woman's race, gender, and class.

The interlocking nature of oppression. This theme, interlocking nature of oppression, has a direct correlation to Black feminist thought in that Black women are the

first to notice signs of oppression as a result of their race, gender, and class. Research Question 2 inquired about the perceived barriers and challenges that the African American women participants encountered when pursuing the position of superintendent of school in New York State. The participants asserted that being Black and women often exposed them to unfair treatment or oppression. For example, the African American women accepted the positions and then were offered salaries that were significantly less than a White male superintendent might have received doing the same job and serving in a much smaller district.

All of the participants shared that they were constantly challenged by board members, community, and staff when the discussion of salary was raised. The participants were very aware of the pay differences between themselves and their White male or White female counterparts who were serving as superintendents in comparable districts. Comments such as, “why would you need so much money?” were often posed to them during negotiations. Participant 2 shared that she was offered a salary that was 30% less than what was customary for her district. At the time of her interview, she was still in negotiations for pay equity.

This oppression of pay inequity dehumanizes and demoralizes African American women; however, the participants remarked that while they fight for pay equality, they remember why they accepted the position: the role they play in educating children. Acceptance of the position with all its intricate barriers allowed the women to ensure that children who resemble them will be treated equitably in classrooms across New York State. All the participants talked about walking the halls of their school buildings and

meeting with students daily to ensure that students of all races were being challenged equally.

This finding further extrapolated Collins (2000) Black feminist thought that states that Black women recognize the duality of their role in society, which is often contradictory and creates situations of opposition. Two of the participants commented that they were unsure if it was their race, gender, or class that caused some of the treatments that they were being subjected to. Consequently, Black feminist thought seeks to advocate against any oppression exhibited upon a group (Collins, 2000). The experiences of African American women superintendents of schools, with challenges and barriers when pursuing the position, offer a perspective on the attitudes of their marginalization—even in salary. However, the African American women superintendents who participated in this study were still able to maintain success while leading school districts across New York State.

The importance of Afro-American women's culture. The Black woman's culture shapes her beliefs, defines who she is, and allows her to overcome oppression due to the sacrifices of those who fought for her to be able to reach the pinnacle of public school education (Collins, 2000). All the participants expressed the importance of having family and friends that supported them. Research Question 3 inquired about the strategies that the African American woman participants in New York State attributed to their success as superintendent of schools. The findings in this present study corroborate the Wiley et al. (2017) findings on African American superintendents in Texas, which revealed that a solid support system was crucial to their attainment and maintenance of the position. All the participants in this study explained that they were raised to believe

that their acceptance of the position of superintendent of schools was a divine calling that was manifested with the support of their families raising them to be prepared for the day they stepped into the position.

Black feminist thought purports that one strategy for overcoming oppression is the reliance on the sisterhood to assist women in dealing with institutions that may not readily accept them. The findings from this study show that some of the women participants were concerned with the lack of communal support from other African American women superintendents when put in forums where they could support one another. The participants expressed their dismay in looking for African American women mentors and not finding them. In fact, White male superintendents offered the mentorship that the participants were pursuing. The strategies that the women used to alleviate the pressure of the job were getting away with their girlfriends and engaging in daily talks with parents, significant others, and friends. Collins (1986) stated that Black women's consciousness of oppression shapes their societal roles. This consciousness becomes the lens for Black women's work. This lens allowed some of the participants to offer themselves to mentor more African American women in education.

Limitations

The limitations of this present study included the sample size of five African American women superintendents of schools in New York State. Research states that African American women comprise 2% of the total population of superintendents of schools. Many participants were not readily available to take part in this study. A few of the African American women superintendents were the first non-White superintendents of schools to serve in their given district. This factor may explain the reluctance of the

women from taking part in this study, even with the promise of confidentiality and security of identification. Although the limited number of participants does not diminish the findings of this study, more participants could potentially have divulged more barriers and challenges that hinder African American women from reaching the top position in PreK-12 education. The participants served in suburban districts with enrollments ranging from a majority of minority students to a limited diversity in their student population. The researcher was unable to locate African American women from urban settings to have their narratives included in this study. Several attempts were made to gain more participants; however, a larger number of the population pool was not achieved.

Another limitation of the research is the absence of voice of African American male superintendents of schools. The research shows a paucity of literature on African American men who lead public school districts. Oppression and marginalization affects all genders; young male students need to see and experience the leadership of other males.

The researcher's bias was a limitation due to the researcher working as an administrator in a suburban public school district in New York State. The researcher has experienced, firsthand, the barriers and challenges African American woman endure when interviewing or aspiring to be superintendents of schools. Female superintendents of schools receive a different treatment than males. This researcher set aside her preconceived bias during this study. The interpretative, phenomenological analysis approach was utilized to minimize researcher bias, however, given the researcher's work, the potential for bias could have still existed (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Future research on African American women superintendents of schools in other states across the United States might extend the explanations of the barriers and challenges to attaining this position. In addition, the findings of this study revealed the need for more African American women to be recruited and supported while they pursue the position of superintendents of schools.

Recommendations

The demographics of school-aged children are changing, and racially diverse ethnic students will be represented in the majority of public school districts across New York State. Nontraditional pathways, diversity, inclusion, salary differentials, and mentorship are areas that need further consideration. Information from this study can aid colleges and universities in reconsidering their preparation of potential leaders.

Support. Early identification and encouragement of African American women who are teachers and possess leadership potential can help increase the number of African American women in the superintendency. Succession plans that are inclusive of leadership academies do not exist in most suburban public school districts in New York State. Research shows the numbers of African American women moving to the suburbs have increased. More suburban school public school districts are hiring African American women teachers, so the creation of a leadership academy within districts can cultivate more home grown educational leaders with the potential to be recognized and moved along the pathway toward the superintendent of schools position.

Nontraditional pathway. Nontraditional pathways can be created to identify African American women who are currently employed as teachers. The participants shared that they were selected for leadership positions throughout their career. Colleges,

school district, and universities could create leadership academies to cultivate the necessary skills to effectively manage and run school districts by these women.

Diversity and inclusion. A concerted effort can be conducted by school districts to review their workplace diversity and inclusion practices. The staff should reflect an equal number of ethnic minorities. The human resources departments in school districts should screen applications with the goal of identifying qualified African American women. Search firms should conduct thorough searches for women of color.

Mentorship. African American women who ascend to the superintendency must be successful in their first position because if they are not, the likelihood of the woman securing another superintendency position is next to impossible. This fact was shared by one of the participants during her interview. In fact, the researcher tried to contact the African American women who had been featured in a publication illuminating their position as superintendents of schools and found that several of them were no longer employed as the superintendent. Once the women left or were let go from the superintendency, they were no longer were working in that capacity.

African American women have the uncanny ability to not be supportive of one another. This further hinders more women from obtaining the position. Factors, such as distrust, jealousy, disregard, and isolation from members of their own racial ethnic group, was mentioned by all of the women participants. Further study into this phenomenon and the creation of a mentoring mechanism could highlight this prevailing problem.

The women participants shared the need for more African American women to mentor other African American women in the field. The women realized that many of them were trailblazers and needed to share their experiences with other prospective

superintendents of schools. Many of the women participants realized the need to create networking opportunities, coupled with mentoring, to grow the numbers of African American women in the superintendency.

Salary. Potentially, increasing the salary for African American women will make the position more attractive and garner more desire to enter the field. Making the salary commensurate with the responsibilities and expectations of the position will generate renewed interest in the position.

Conclusion

The population of ethnic minority students is expected to increase in public schools across New York State. Previous research has acknowledged the need for more studies focused on African American women superintendents of schools in other states Wiley et al. (2017).

The purpose of this study was to examine African American women in New York State who overcame barriers to become superintendents of schools. This qualitative, phenomenological study explored the phenomenon of marginalization by interviewing African American women superintendents of schools who served or had served in suburban schools in New York State. Five African American women who had retired or were employed as superintendents of schools were recruited from public school districts across New York States, which covered suburban areas. Brown (2014) stated,

African American women in the role of public superintendent may not be consciously aware of the activism—or maybe they just do not speak of their leadership and persistence in such a way—but they in fact are the movers and shakers within a society built on oppression. (p. 590)

The researcher used Collins's (2000) Black feminist thought as the theoretical framework for this study, which has three themes: (a) self-definition/self-valuation, (b) interlocking nature of oppression, and (c) importance of Afro-American women's culture. The Collins's (1986) discussion of the outsider within theory was used to understand the narratives of African American women superintendents of schools. Coding and thematic analysis were utilized to analyze the lived experiences narrated by African American women superintendent participants of schools in New York State while serving in the position. The researcher sought to address the following questions:

1. What factors and strategies do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?
2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?
3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?

Through the lens of the three key themes of Black feminist thought, four themes were identified, and the research questions were answered. The five African American women superintendents of schools in New York State public school districts shared their narratives of the barriers and challenges they encountered while ascending to the position, and they detailed the strategies that aided in the successful maintenance of their positions. This study concurs with Wiley et al. (2017) findings that more exposure and mentorship for prospective leaders in the teaching pool can help increase the representation of African American women in the superintendency. Understanding the

barriers and challenges encountered by African American women superintendents of schools provides for more intentional recruitment practices and nontraditional pathways to be created to attract more candidates to the position.

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Appendix A

Letter of Introduction to Participants

Dear Superintendent _____:

I would like to introduce myself and to ask for your assistance. My name is Augustina West. Currently, while serving as an assistant principal in Ramapo High School, I am also pursuing a doctorate at St. John Fisher College in the Ralph C. Wilson Jr. School of Education. My study focuses on the barriers faced by African American women who have ascended to the position of Superintendent of Schools in New York State, and the strategies they have used to achieve success in attaining the position and in navigating their role. I am hoping that you will be willing to participate in a research study that will explore these topics and contribute to findings that could assist others seeking to serve as Superintendent of Schools and contribute to the future success of all children. This research study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College, and the researcher has been granted approval to begin the study.

If you agree to participate in the study, a one hour, tape recorded interview at a mutually agreed upon location will be conducted. An on-line face-to-face interview is also possible. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions regarding your experience as Superintendent of schools. Any information and identifiers that are obtained in connection with this study will remain completely confidential.

Upon your agreement, I will be contacting you to schedule an interview. If you have any questions about this study, please email Augustina West, _____@sjfc.edu or call me at (____) ____-____. Thank you for considering participating in this study. I would also appreciate any contact information you could provide for other African-American Superintendents of Schools in New York State so that I can include them in my study.

Sincerely,

Augustina West

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

A. Secure interview space

- Room/space should be quiet, well ventilated, and adequate for audio recording with no interruptions.
- Audio recording device should be tested for ability to record effectively.

B. Researcher should meet the participant at the appointed time and location.

Introductions should be conducted.

C. Explanation of the study will be provided to participant.

D. Review, read, and have participant sign the Informed Consent Form.

E. Commence interview with initial question.

F. Research Questions to be answered by participant:

1. What factors do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?

1a: What strategies do African American women superintendents of school in New York State identify as effective in successful attainment of their position?

2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?

2a: What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter while serving in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?

3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?
4. How do African American women superintendents of Schools perceive the impact of race and gender on their role and performance as superintendent of schools in New York State?

G. Conclude interview by asking if participant has any questions, comments or concerns.

Appendix C

St. John Fisher College

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: African American Women in New York Who Overcame Barriers to Become Superintendent of Schools

Name of researcher: Augustina West

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Frances Wills

Phone for further information: ____-____-____

Purpose of study: The purpose of this study, which will fulfill the requirements of a doctoral dissertation, is to examine the barriers encountered by African American women who have served or are currently serving as a superintendent of schools in New York State. The findings from this study will be used to gain insight into the barriers African American Women encountered while pursuing the position of superintendent of schools in New York State, and to recommend strategies that may lessen the obstacles and support greater recruiting, supporting, and retention of African American women school superintendents.

Place of study: A location mutually agreed upon by researcher and participants, to be conducted in the early fall of 2018.

Length of participation: One interview lasting approximately 1 Hour

Methods of data collection: Audio-recorded interviews conducted by researcher.

Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below: The interview questions posed about the participant's experiences should not pose a risk. Involvement in the study is purely voluntary and participants can withdraw from the study at any time. Participants do not have to answer all questions; questions can be skipped or declined an answer at any time. Any information from a participant who wishes not to continue the study will be destroyed. The benefits of this research study may assist school boards and colleges/universities with the recruitment and retention of African American women to the position of superintendent. The results of this study may contribute to the exploration of additional pathways for African American women to gain access to the Superintendency.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of subjects: Each participant will be assigned a number to maintain confidentiality. The assigned number will be used to identify the participant during the duration of the study. There will be no identifying names or other information used during the interview.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy of data collected: All information and data from interviews will be kept in a locked storage box in the researcher's home and properly discarded five years from the date of the study. All electronic devices will be password protected and kept in a safe, secure storage location in the home of the researcher.

Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to:

1. Know the purpose of the study, and to have the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you before you choose to participate.
2. Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
3. Refuse to answer a particular question(s) without penalty.
4. Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, consent to be audio recorded and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

Participant's Name (Print) Signature Date

Investigator's Name (Print) Signature Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher(s) listed above. If you experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact your personal health care provider or Yeager Health Center at (____) ____-____.

The Institutional Review Board of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any concerns regarding this study/or if you feel that your rights as a participant (or the rights of another participant) have been violated or caused you undue distress (physical or emotional distress), please contact Jill Rathbun by phone during normal business hours at (____) ____-____ or irb@sjfc.edu. She will contact a supervisory IRB official to assist you.

All digital audio recordings and transcriptions of interviews will be maintained using a private, locked, and password-protected file and password-protected computer stored securely in the private home of the principal researcher. Electronic files will include assigned identity codes and pseudonyms; they will not include actual names or any information that could personally identify or connect participants to this study. Other materials, including notes or paper files related to data collection and analysis, will be stored securely in unmarked boxes, locked inside a cabinet in the private home of the principal researcher. Only the researcher will have access to electronic or paper records. The digitally recorded audio data will be kept by this researcher for a period of five years following publication of the dissertation. Signed informed consent documents will be kept for five years after publication. All paper records will be cross-cut shredded and professionally delivered for incineration. Electronic records will be cleared, purged, and destroyed from the hard drive and all devices such that restoring data is not possible.

Appendix D

Interview and Research Questions

Interview Questions

1. Please tell me a little about yourself. Education? Background?
2. Who inspired you to become an educator?
3. Why were you interested in becoming a superintendent?
4. Describe your career path. What educational route did you take before acquiring the position as superintendent of schools in your current district? Ex. Teacher, assistant principal, principal, central office, assistant superintendent, etc.
5. What barriers were you faced with in securing the job of superintendent?
6. Were there hurdles you were not able to clear? If so, describe the hurdles?
7. What barriers are you presently facing as a superintendent? What barriers are you currently facing in the position that superintendents of other genders, race, nationalities are not facing?
8. What strengths do you have that helped you prevail?
9. Describe the strategies you utilized to overcome the barriers you encountered as a public-school superintendent?
10. What aspects of your position as superintendent do you enjoy? Why?
11. How do you know you have made it? Are there any successes for you in the superintendent position? If so, what are they?
12. What advice would you give other African American women educators who are aspiring to become a superintendent in New York?

Research Questions

1. What factors do African American women superintendents of schools in New York State attribute to successful attainment of their position?
 - 1a: What strategies do African American women superintendents of school in New York State identify as effective in successful attainment of their position.
2. What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter when pursuing the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?

2a: What are the perceived barriers and challenges that African American women encounter while serving in the position of superintendent of schools in New York State?

3. What strategies do African American women in New York State attribute to their success as superintendent of schools?
4. How do African American women superintendents of Schools perceive the impact of race and gender on their role and performance as superintendent of schools in New York State?