

BLACK WOMEN SPEAK: HOW EXECUTIVE-LEVEL ASPIRANTS PERCEIVE
THEIR PLIGHTS TO THE TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department Educational Leadership

Sam Houston State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

by

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December, 2021

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandfather, Reverend Dr. Leroy Cleaver, Jr., as a promise kept. In the moments before his expiration, he had me to promise to him that I would earn a doctorate degree. I, of course, made the promise. He wrote it down and put the paper in his shirt pocket. Within the hour, he passed, surrounded by family and with promises from various present family members documented. This dissertation, a fulfilled promise, is for my PawPaw, who always spoke life and success into and over me.

ABSTRACT

Locke Simmons, Tia N., *Black women speak: How executive executive-level aspirants perceive their plights to the Texas public school superintendency*. Doctor of Education (Educational Leadership), December, 2021, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, Texas.

“The most disrespected person in America is the Black woman. The most unprotected person in America is the Black woman. The most neglected person in America is the Black woman.”—Malcolm X

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts. Specifically, this study investigated how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceive the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency.

The justification of this study was grounded in the disproportionate number of African American women superintendents in Texas. Because this study was delimited to African American women, men and women of ethnic backgrounds other than African American were not included. Participants were limited to African American women currently serving in executive leadership roles (or previously served as superintendent for at least two years).

A narrative inquiry approach allowed for the documenting of the stories about the disproportionality of African American female superintendents in Texas grounded in the perceptions and experiences of African American female superintendents and executive school leaders in Texas.

The intention was to discover if the participants perceived anti-Black woman mythology (encounters with race, gender, class, and socio-economic effects that are promoted by the repetition of derogatory, historical images of Black women, such as Sapphire, Jezebel, angry Black women) to be a major hinderance to their plights. Indeed, anti-Black woman mythology does impact the plight of Black women who seek executive-level positions in Texas schools. Many Black women and women of color have concluded that because they cannot rid the system of such images as described by the design of Sapphire, a reversal of the images might uncover internal strengths of Black women.

As practitioners read this body of work, it is my hope that it will serve to truly inform practices that impact the trajectory of equity in preparation programs, hiring practices and socialization, and workplace civility.

KEY WORDS: African American, African American women, Aspirants, Colorism, Double Whammy Effect, Educational leadership, Executive-level public school leaders, Jeanes Supervisors, Leadership, Mammy, Networking, Role strain, Sapphire, Superintendent, Workplace incivility

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being careful to give all praises to God, I thank Him for His blessings of strength and focus to bring this labor of love to fruition. I am thankful to my friends and family who cheered me along the way. Words of encouragement from my Sam Houston State University Educational Leadership Cohort have been greatly appreciated. To my sorors of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated who pushed me and served as accountability partners, I say “all of my love”. My work family support must be noted as priceless. Their support was phenomenal! Thank you all for the expectation and support. Thank you to Dr. Stacey L. Edmonson for notes of encouragement. This work would not have been possible without the guidance and support of my committee, Dr. Ricardo Montelongo (Dr. Ric), Dr. Lautrice Nickson, and Dr. Benita Brooks. Dr. Julie P. Combs, who served as my chair, was invaluable to the process. Thank you for your continuous support, encouragement, patience, and push. By the way, I secretly call you *Big Sister Bearkat*.

The unbreakable bond with my brother and sister strengthened, as if possible. Alexander Simmons, Jr. and Mari L. Sifo, I love you to life times infinity! I must give a special thank you to my parental village of support, Alexander Simmons, Sr., Dr. Juanita Cleaver Simmons, Marvin Locke, and Reba Locke. Your support, love, and belief sustained me. Mommie, thank you for quiet but strong expectation and for reading my paper a million times when all the words began to blur in my sight.

Lastly, I want to thank my co-authors. These two were with me every step of the way with my research, late night writing, and early morning readings. Saleen, my pretty girl, is my one-year-old miniature Schnauzer. Shelby, my special girl, is my 14-year-old

miniature Schnauzer, who died of cancer the night of this final submission. I thank her for seeing me through. I share this accomplishment with Shelby and Saleen.

PREFACE

Nearing the hopeful completion of this dissertation journey, I can now reflect on this work from an introspective and retrospective, trimorphic lens. This three-part lived experience that chronicles my own personal and professional life helped to breathe life into this study for three major reasons. First, the work has been a lifesaving gift from God. It provided a platform of spiritual, emotional, and psychological reprieve that helped me to make meaning of my own experiences. Admittedly, I am another African American woman whose two-plus decades of painstaking work, as an urban school district teacher, campus administrator, and executive-level professional, has received repeated encounters with political, racialized, and gendered restraints that served as gatekeepers to my advancement. Without the first-hand stories of these women, I might have sunk into the abyss of self-doubt to my own professional worthiness, imposter syndrome behavior, and *diluted competence* (see also in Discussion section of this study). Rather, narrative accounts of these women so directly mirrored my own experiences, that I found solace and sisterhood in knowing that my experiences were not unique to me. The identification of barriers and gatekeepers helped me to better understand the lingering traditional and historic practices that remain embedded in the infrastructure of U.S. public schools. These barriers, that especially impeded the advancement of women of color, include same-sex bias, same-race discrimination, individual and systemic racism, and other hurtful acts, including micro-aggressions, micro-messaging, implicit bias, chilly climate, etc. Second, the study helped me to better understand the importance of relationships, especially in the midst of oppressive experiences. The healing power of relationships extends beyond race, class, and gender, and cannot be restricted by true,

caring relationships, that might (or might not) include mentoring, mothering, sponsoring, or just pure caring and offering personhood. I have found the power of relationships through the lives of these women, the nurturing of the advisor to this study, Dr. Combs and my wonderful committee members. Each of them went beyond expectation to add life and breath to this work and to enhance the discourse on women of color in education. Third, this work was done in the midst of Covid-19. Much of the last year's work was done in isolation and limitation to critical resources that had previously been taken for granted. The experience of being isolated with this research provoked reflection time. But that reflection time was almost enigmatic, as that fork in the road presented the options of reflecting on my professional experiences with despair or reflecting from the hopeful perspective of knowing that others have witnessed this same phenomenon of race, gender, and stereotyped constraints. This work rescued me.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

“It is right that I, a woman Black, should speak . . .” Beah Richards, 1951

In 1951, Beah Richards, American author and Black feminist, wrote about the historical experiences of the African woman in America. In the poem, *Black Woman Speaks*, Richards adds to previously written and spoken documents that predate contemporary Black feminist theory (Collins, 1989). Richards, as did other earlier Black female activists, illuminated the lived experiences of Black women, how U.S. historical images and perceptions impede the progress and flourishing opportunities for Black women. In contemporary times, early voices for African American women activism such as Sojourner Truth, Harriet Tubman, Ida B. Wells, Mary McLeod Bethune, Septima Clark, Anna Julia Cooper, Amy Ashwood Garvey, Claudia Jones, Pauli Murray, Maria Stewart (to name a few) might be considered critical feminists. Or, Collins (1989) might theorize the works of Richards and earlier Black female activists as that of Black feminist, or *critical* Black feminist theory.

There is a nascent body of literature in mainstream research that highlights the impact and power that racial mythology holds over the plight of Black women in the workplace. Black feminist researchers agree that only Black women can tell their own stories (Collins, 1989) as they are the only ones who can give authentic voice to the day-to-day encounters that they experience. It is assumed that many of their experiences result from the whiplash and aftermath of socio-historical myths about Black women, including such anti-Black woman folklore as the “angry black woman,” stereotypical mental caricatures, and other demeaning images. It is presumed that these images and other

socially constructed descriptors of African American women have helped to create lasting mental models about these women. Moreover, these derogatory images are believed to continuously impede Black women's ascension and retention to top leadership positions in the workplace.

Background of the Study

This study provided a platform for executive-level African American women who aspire to become public school superintendents in Texas to share their perceptions and experiences on their respective journeys to ascend to the superintendency. I sought to understand whether or not racialized and gendered mythology created barriers for their ascension, and to learn if their daily experiences involve stereotypical images and myths that are often experienced by African American women, expressly the “angry black woman” concept.

Studies in other professions have shown that advancement opportunities for African American women were thwarted by historical anti-Black woman mythology in the legal profession (Smith, 1998), higher education (Simmons, 2005), film media (Terry, 2018), and sports (Prasad, 2018). Limited work has been conducted that solely focuses on anti-Black woman myths as a direct “deterrent to African American women” (Kingsberry, 2015, p. 26) who aspire to become superintendents. Limited also in mainstream educational research are studies that specifically center on the relational defects that the “angry black woman” myth holds on African American women in leadership.

A noted disparity of African American women in the superintendency of public schools exists that yields the lack of inquiry about African American women's leadership

experiences in the field of education (Alston, 2005; Coffin, 1972; Fultz, 2004; Horsford, 2007, 2009b; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Kingsberry, 2015; Sizemore, 1986; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b). In the 1971 seminal research, Moody documented the first known examination of African Americans and the superintendency. Although three decades apart, Dawkins (2004) and Moody (1971) had parallel findings about the number of African American superintendents being limited. When African Americans were serving as superintendents, the student population was predominantly African American. In the 1980 study of African American public-school superintendents, Scott noted that, in opposition of White counterparts, African Americans were usually hired or appointed to the superintendency in troubled districts. Similarly, Venable (1995) reported that African American women who successfully accessed the public-school superintendency were appointed to inner-city school districts or school districts with a vast amount of challenges, nonetheless, breaking glass ceilings. The glass ceiling has been noted in the research canon as a descriptor of women accessing the superintendency (Alston, 1999; Banks, 1995; Galloway, 2006; Ortiz, 2000; Reid, 2004).

Researchers repeatedly noted stark underrepresentation of African American women in the superintendency (Alston, 2000; Bell & Chase, 1994; Brunner, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, et al., 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Jackson, 1999; Kingsberry, 2015; Kowalski et al., 2011; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 2000). This underrepresentation of women in the superintendency was so profound that Jackson's (1999) research yielded the recommendation to detail a comprehensive historical record of African American superintendents. In a similar realization about the absence of research and data on African American women in educational leadership,

Tyack and Hansot (1982) articulated that a “conspiracy of silence could hardly have been unintentional” (p. 13). Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) used the term “ordinary racism” (p. 12) to note the commonplace absence of African American applicants for the superintendency and the hiring committees who acted as gatekeepers who did not “question the lack of minority applicants or see this absence as unusual or worthy of thought” (p. 12), even with the knowledge of many qualified and certified African American women.

Although research supports the assumption that a disparity exists between the number of African American women who aspire to the superintendency and those who reach the superintendency, it is in stark contrast. Lomotey (1995) and Jackson (1999), nearly a decade apart, both reported that African American women who were pursuing educational leadership roles had to remain in constant thought regarding their lens for action and reaction, as it had to be attuned to a two-world lens—that of the African American lens and the lens of the White American. Both are defined by different perceptions of societal norms. Specifically, African American women in pursuit of roles in educational leadership experienced interactions and workplace engagement grounded in perceptions of White male standards (Jackson, 1999; Lomotey, 1995).

The profession of education is by far one of the most imbalanced, with regard to gender. The research canon on gender inequality details historical perspectives and data on the underrepresentation of women in school administration as a prominent factor of institutional biases (Streitmatter, 1994). According to a study conducted for the American Association for School Administrators (AASA), the U.S. educator workforce is comprised of 76% women, 52% principals, and 78% central-office administrators

(Superville, 2016). Yet, according to Brunner and Grogan (2007), only 20% of U.S. public school districts were led by women serving as the superintendent. Although women dominate the public education workforce demographics, central office leadership positions are dominated by men (Superville, 2016). Moreover, Superville (2016) noted that historically, internal superintendent searches within a given district's talent pool were focused on secondary school principals and yielded fewer opportunities for women, as women were more likely to serve as elementary principals than their male counterparts. "The origins of power readily align with the construction of social norms that have restricted women from leadership roles in fields considered to be masculinized" (Rodriguez, 2019, p. 53).

Previous researchers (Blount, 1998; Brunner & Schumaker, 1998; Dana & Brourisaw, 2006; Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Guajardo, 2015; Grogan, 2005; Riehl & Byrd, 1997; Skrla, 2000; Tallerico & Blount, 2004) explored the phenomena of gender imbalances in the K-12 public school superintendency. With data indicating a majority presence of women in the field of education, the phenomena of the shortage of women's presence in executive leadership positions in school districts remains prominent (Guajardo, 2015). Blount (2003) noted the gender disparity between educational workforce presence of men and women in teaching roles and attributed the disparity to familial commitments, stereotypes associated with certain professional positions, networks primarily accessed by males, gatekeeping, the absence or lack of female networks and mentoring, and limitations on work-related experiences that are key elements to professional ascension. "As with many feminized professions, females face[d] restrictions in leadership opportunities" (Alston, 2012, p. 127). Tallerico (2000)

stated that mentors, role models, and networks serve a very important function for aspiring school administrators. Moreover, women face challenges with accessing organizational networks. For this reality, mentors are needed who support the networks necessary for access, encouragement, supervision, and promotion. Interestingly, in a profession historically and currently dominated by women, women have still yet to reach the highest executive leadership position in the majority of public schools in the United States (Odum, 2010). According to Superville (2016), “females often face scrutiny men don’t” (p. 50). The scrutiny referenced by Superville (2016) surrounded perceived responses from superiors and peers in the workplace on facial expression, appearance, and certain reactions to women asserting authority. Skrla (1999) described feminine traits as empathetic, supportive, dependable, passive, and nurturing, and masculine traits as self-sufficient, risk-taking, competitive, and stoic. Given these findings, African American women are challenged with the responsibility and expectations to balance masculine and feminine characteristics of leadership in contrast to the workplace expectations of their White counterparts.

Statement of the Problem

“Although females actively seek advancement and constitute the majority of teachers in American public schools, they do not occupy many of the decision-making, administrative, or superintendency positions in education” (Odum, 2010, p. i). In the United States, African Americans represent 10% of teachers, 12% of school principals, and 2% of superintendents, yet there has been limited research about the challenges of African American women superintendents since 1987 (Brown, 2014). A lack of gender and racial diversification in executive-level school administration has historically and

negatively impacted African American women (Grogan, 1999). The stories of African American executive-level administrator disparities remain absent in the literature (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Houston, 2001, Katz, 2012; Taylor & Tillman, 2009). The number of women in top educational leadership positions simply does not align with the number of women in the educational workforce (Ramsay, 2013).

African American women comprise a significantly smaller percentage of those in the role of superintendent (Brunner & Payton-Caire, 2000). The majority of superintendents are White males (Ramsay, 2013). After so many years, the low number of African American female superintendents warrants the necessity to investigate perceptions regarding what factors contribute to this disparity (Olser & Webb, 2014). The lack of female presence in school districts, specifically the public-school superintendency, equates to missing feminine influence on “policy changes, decisions, and practice in the field” (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 486). Further, the aforementioned research supports the identified need for African American women school leaders to serve as a voice of focus for practices relative to the recruiting and the retention of African American women for executive school leadership positions (Glass & Franceschini, 2007; Munoz et al., 2014; Olser & Webb, 2014). Rodriguez (2014) reported that of the “1114 superintendents in Texas, 911 were men and 233 were women; of the 233 female superintendents, only 14 were Mexican American” (p. 12), and fewer than 14 were African American. The representation discrepancy exists although African American women are equally talented and possess the requisite leadership skills and tenacity to ascend to the role of superintendent (Wiley et al., 2017).

Fields' (2016) study of African American superintendents' experiences in Texas asserted that limited literature was available on the skills of African American superintendents. Angel, Killacky, and Johnson (2013) argued that not only were gender disparities in the superintendent position of concern, but they also noted a lack of African American women. In essence, not only was gender a notable disparity, but race was an even bigger one. Racial imbalance in executive-level educational positions is a definite cause for concern to the extent that Rodriguez (2014) noted race and ethnicity were contributing factors to unspoken biases in the process of hiring superintendents.

Studies on barriers for women accessing the superintendency highlights the importance of investigating the disparity from the lens of attribution, particularly focusing on African American women. The disproportionately low number of African American women in Texas public school districts is disconcerting. Collins (1989) gave voice to the challenges and barriers faced by African American women. Collins (1989) noted "as members of a subordinate group, Black women cannot afford to be fools of any type, for their devalued status denies them the protections that white skin, maleness, and wealth confer" (p.759).

In a 2010 study, Sampson and Davenport reported that 77% of teachers in Texas were women whereas only 16% of superintendents in Texas that same year were women. Additional details revealed that in 1995, the Texas public school superintendents were 7.4% women, and by 2002, female representation in the Texas public school superintendency had only increased to 15%. By 2003, the reported percent decreased to 13.5%. Of the Texas public school superintendents who were women in 2010, 90.2%

were White. Of the respondents in Sampson and Davenport's (2010) study, 62.2% had never worked for a female superintendent.

In a review of three studies in New York, Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) noted that women comprised 72% of the teacher population but only 13% in the superintendent position. In addition, the researchers asserted that the studies "articulate[d] challenges and dilemmas that confront African American...aspiring superintendents" (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003, p. 3). These data, combined with Rodriguez's (2014) similar study in Texas, warrant investigation of the continued disparity of public-school superintendent appointments of African American women—a disparity that remains although researchers' findings reflect concerns that at some point in time there will not be enough candidates to fill superintendent positions (Cooper et al, 2000; Esparo & Rader, 2001; Riede, 2003; Robinson, 2013).

In a 1999 study of the applicant pool for the superintendency conducted by Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003), data reflected that of the 550-person applicant pool, 1.2% of applicants interviewed were African American women in contrast to 70.9% White men. In the same study, data reflected African American and White women were hired for 8.3% of vacancies respectively, whereas White men were hired for 83.3% of the vacancies. The researchers noted that African American applicants had fewer choices for seeking the superintendency, as all participants "applied for positions in minority school districts" (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003, p. 10). In stark contrast, of the 33% of the African Americans who applied to White school districts, 0% were offered the superintendency versus 78% of the 85% of White

applicants who applied to White school districts receiving offers to the superintendency.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts. Specifically, this study investigated how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceive the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. This study contributed to the research by documenting how perceptions of lived experiences influence the leadership platform progression of African American women in executive-level administration in Texas public schools.

Research Question

There was no definitive hypothesis for this study, as “qualitative researchers look at the essential character or nature of something, not the quantity (how much, how many)” (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). Described in this research is how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceived the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. I sought answers in this qualitative research study to the following research question (and sub-questions) based on the perceptions of lived experiences of executive-level African American women in Texas public schools, seated or aspiring to the superintendency: What are the perceived barriers and factors that contribute to or inhibit African American women’s aspiration to and attainment of the superintendency?

- a. What are the professional experiences of African American executive-level administrators prior to the superintendency?
- b. What workplace systems or structures exist that hinder successful ascension to the superintendency for African American women?
- c. How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the participants as African American women in pursuit and/or attainment of the superintendency?
- d. How has mentoring and networking affected the African American women participants in their pursuits and/or attainments of the superintendency?

Significance of Study

Until the 1970s, there were no documented studies regarding the African American superintendent (Fields, 2016; Taylor & Tillman, 2009). A review of the literature yielded various studies regarding the absence of women in the role of the public-school superintendency. Specifically, “African American women’ leadership experiences and herstories are absent from the leadership canon” (Alston, 2012, p. 13). African American women have “made unselfish contributions . . . yet they continue to struggle in having their voices heard. This void makes it hard to obtain a clear picture outlining their preparation, career paths, experiences, and perceptions of challenges and barriers” (Jones, 2013, p. 1). There remains a deficit in research with a focus on the African American woman in the superintendency (Angel et al., 2013). By triangulating the history of the educational superintendency, women’s presence in the superintendency, and the African American woman’s presence in the superintendency with a centralized focus on the perceptions of African American women aspiring for the superintendency in Texas, the findings were a contribution to the body of research that is inexplicably void

of the African American woman's voice and experience. The findings will fill a gap in the literature by documenting the stories of African American women, seated and aspiring to the superintendency, both from the respondents' and the researcher's stance (Collins, 2019), that is as African American women giving organic intellect to this disparity.

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office for Federal Contract Compliance Programs have long enforced federal laws. Specifically, the Equal Opportunity Employment Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act were enacted to prevent employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, gender, age, nationality, or disability. Despite making these forms of discrimination illegal (Mortensen, 2019), the gap between male and female superintendent employment remains exponential. At the time of this study, the gender difference of all superintendents in Texas was 45.86%, with males being 72.93% (Texas Education Agency, 2021). When viewing the 1,021 superintendents of independent school districts in Texas in 2021, the gap between men and women was 54.55%, with men representing 77.28% (789 men). In analysis of demographic data of the 1,021 superintendents in Texas independent school districts in 2021, 232 were women. Of the 232 female superintendents of Texas independent school districts, four (1.72%) were African American compared to 83.19% of the women being White. From a different perspective of the analysis, it is noted that African American women comprise 0.39% of superintendents in Texas independent school districts. Table 1 reflects demographic representation of gender and ethnicity of women superintendents of Texas independent school districts in May 2021.

Table 1*Demographics of Women Texas School Superintendents in 2021*

Ethnicity	Count	Total Women	Percent
American Indian	1	232	0.43%
Asian	1	232	0.43%
Black	4	232	1.72%
Hispanic	33	232	14.22%
White	193	232	83.19%

Note. Texas Education Agency, 2021.

The significance of my study was grounded in informing, hiring, recruiting, and retention experiences with the goal of implementing superintendent preparation program practices regarding strategic mentoring and informative opportunities for career-related trajectory of African American women aspiring to the role of superintendent. As Ferguson (2020) emphasized, “the ascension of women into the superintendency in a school district is affected by gender bias” (p. iv). Fields (2016) and Fenwich (1998) found that gender-specific research on the perspectives of African American women was needed to document experiences and perceptions of African Americans regarding the superintendency. Gender-specific investigations grounded in the leadership experiences of African Americans in the superintendency are limited (Fields 2016; Gossetti & Rusch, 1995). This study was necessary to close the gap in related research, resulting in culturally- sensitive perspectives (Tillman, 2002), including the superintendency in Texas.

Although the research canon is limited regarding the perceptions of African American women seated or aspiring to the superintendency in Texas, it remains a concern that very little research has been conducted with a focus on the African American women seated or seeking the superintendency (Angel et al., 2013). In a workforce dominated by

women, what factors contribute to the inequitable representation of women in superintendent positions in the same workforce? Although the statistics on the number of women recently advancing to the superintendency has increased, the gender gap remains. Specifically, the disproportionate few African American women serving in the capacity of superintendent in Texas underscores the need for further examination. “One area of leadership that continues to lag behind is the advancement of women into key leadership positions at the helm of school leadership” (Ferguson, 2020, p. iv).

The findings of this research might be of great benefit for superintendent preparation programs in ways that provide the practices and supports for ethnic minority women. This study offered strategic approaches to school boards regarding their recruitment methods for the superintendent role and provided relevant details for recruitment firms. One end goal of this research was to promote the dialogue necessary to effectively address the disparities currently existing in the appointments of African American women as Texas public school superintendents. Furthermore, the findings of this research contributed to African American women’s understanding of and impact their ability to successfully prepare for and access superintendency interviews in Texas public schools. Finally, the findings offered “practical implications for [African American] females seeking superintendent positions and for the mentors who support them” (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 60).

Definition of Terms

For this study, the following terms and definitions were utilized:

African American. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2020), Black or African American “refers to a person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa” (para 3), or African Diaspora.

African Diaspora. “The African Diaspora is the voluntary and involuntary movement of Africans and their descendants to various parts of the world during modern and pre-modern periods (Defining Diaspora, DePaul University).

Anti-Black Woman Mythology. Encounters with race, gender, class, and socio-economic effects that are promoted by the repetition of derogatory, historical images of Black women, i.e., Sapphire, Jezebel, angry Black women.

Aspirants. African American women serving in executive-level public school administration who are seeking advancement or appointment to the Texas public school superintendency will be referred to as aspirants in this study.

Colorism. “Colorism refers to a discriminatory economic social system that values lighter over darker skin tones” (West, 2018, p. 146).

Double Whammy Effect. The Double Whammy Effect is the term synonymous with adverse stereotypes based on gender and race that cause workplace strain for women of color, specifically in relations to promotion and advancement (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995).

Executive-Level Public School Leaders. Persons serving in the capacity of superintendent, associate superintendent, assistant superintendent, area superintendent, or deputy superintendent in a Texas public school district will be identified as executive-level public school leaders.

Incompetent. “Not having or showing the necessary skills to do something successfully” (Oxford Languages).

Intersectionality. Term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how “race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics intersect with one another and overlap” (Coaston, 2019, para. 3).

Invisibility Syndrome. Term used in reference to the effects of racism on “the adaptive behavior and psychological well-being of African Americans” being “affected by prejudice and discrimination” (Franklin, A. J. & Boyd-Franklin, N., 2000, p.33).

Jeanes Supervisors. Jeanes Supervisors were a group of African American, college-educated women deployed to work in southern rural schools under the supervision of a county superintendent (Alston, 1999) in the United States between 1908 and 1968.

Mammy. The term Mammy describes “a role and a person within the [Slavery] plantation household who served as a baby nurse, cook and general domestic worker” (West, 2018, p.141).

Networking. A network is described as a “support system and a means of connection to others” that can help a person (Wilmer, 2006, p. 243).

Role Strain. Role strain is defined as the process African American women navigate to find equilibrium of responsibilities and concerns with acceptance of physical attributes such as skin color and hair texture (West, 2018).

Sapphire. The word *sapphire* references the term angry Black woman used as a “social control mechanism...employed to punish Black females who violate societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, nonthreatening, and unseen” (Pilgrim, 2015, p. 121).

Superintendent. An “individual who has, at least, a master’s degree from an accredited university and holds a valid superintendent certification from the Texas State Board of Education meets hiring criteria for the superintendency. A seated superintendent is an individual chosen by a school board or designated body for the position of superintendent” (Guajardo, 2015, p. 6).

Workplace Incivility. Workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000; Rayner, 1997), psychological aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1996), interpersonal aggression (Glomb & Liao, 2003), and harassment (Bowling & Beehr, 2006) define workplace incivility.

Conceptual Framework

To determine the perceptions of how race impedes or propels African American females aspiring to the superintendency, this study was grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT) and Black Feminist Thought (BFT). CRT “reveals how race and racism work to maintain hierarchies, allocate resources, and distribute power” (Horsford, 2009a, p. 62). CRT affirms the belief that realities are socially created at the cross-section of oppression (Simmons, 2005) and individual and group actions and interactions (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995). Critical race theorists assert that prejudice is the norm in

society and a potentially indispensable factor of society (Harris, 2012). CRT, at its core, affirms the belief that realities are socially created at the cross-section of oppression and individual and group actions and interactions (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

Because critical race theorists seek to analyze how inequity is developed and maintained, it was appropriate for use in this study to understand how African American females internalize and perceive their delineated career paths and experiences while aspiring to and obtaining the public-school superintendency in Texas. CRT embodies the acknowledgement that at the core of American social norms rests race and racism (Delgado & Stefanicic, 2012). This research was grounded in CRT and added to the body of research to support decision-making and practices that impact the increased freedom from racial inequalities by formally documenting “experiential knowledge of people of color [as] legitimate and critical to understanding racial subordination” (Parker & Villalpando, 2007, p. 520).

Terranova et al. (2016) 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). By demystifying, deconstructing, and analyzing socially constructed realities, the perceptions and pathways of executive-level African American women seated at or aspiring to the highest leadership position in a White-male dominated profession, clarification is provided to those striving to minimize factors perceived as inhibitors for the increase of African American women representation in the superintendency in Texas. Thereby, CRT provided the necessary framework to successfully address the socially constructed realities and perceptions of these African American women respondents and will aid in

them acquiring purpose and intention on their path to navigate, define, and affirm personal and professional interpretations of experiences leading to the superintendency.

Because critical race theorists seek to analyze how inequity is developed and maintained, it was appropriate for use in this study to understand how African American women internalize their career paths to the public-school superintendency in Texas, barriers to the public-school superintendency in Texas, and their lived experiences as seated or aspirants to the public school superintendency in Texas.

Black feminism has withstood the test of time and continues to be an impressive political paradigm (Taylor, 1998, p 251). “Black feminist thought fosters a fundamental paradigmatic shift in how we think about oppression” (Collins, 1990, p. 221). Black feminist theorist assert that experiences of penalty and privilege lead the development of knowledge and knowledge emboldens people to resist oppression and domination. (Collins, 1990). Black Feminist Thought, as a critical social theory, supports the elevation of self and situational awareness to develop and strengthen the will and skill to overcome “intersecting oppressions” (Black Feminisms, 2021, para. 1). Black Feminist Thought theorist assert that Black women have specialized knowledge with which their stories are shared through a lens for coalitions that build standpoints for all marginalized people because their belief is that “the empowerment of Black women leads to the empowerment of all people because Black women’s struggles are human struggles” (Black Feminisms, 2021, para. 15). Collins (1990) uses standpoint to describe a source of group knowledge. Narratives provide an opportunity to give voice to experiences, stories, and the daily occurrences of living as a Black woman. Further, Collins (1990) inserts Black Feminist Thought into epistemological debates as a means of “assessing truth” (p. 221).

From the specifics from oppression and moving toward emancipation, giving voice to lived experiences in the context of historical structure, instructional hierarchy, race, and gender; it was necessary to analyze the research question through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought.

Limitations

This study investigated how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceived the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. This study contributed to the research by documenting how perceptions of lived experiences influence the leadership platform progression of African American women in executive-level administration in Texas public schools. As an African American woman aspiring to the superintendency in Texas and analyzing the perceptions of other African American women, I as the researcher, in my attempt to maintain objectivity, had to be mindful of my potential to become a limitation.

This research was an inquiry of the perceptions of executive-level African American women in Texas public schools through questionnaires and interviews, based on emerging trends of the questionnaires. Qualitative studies have contributed to the research knowledge base in social science fields. This qualitative inquiry-based research approach lent itself to subjectivity as the researcher interpreted interview responses and analyzed emerging trends. Additionally, being an African American woman in the field of education and aspiring to the superintendency, the unintentional bias and assumption of potentially similar experiences could have also manifested as a limitation. Although I worked to remain unbiased in collection and analysis of data, potentially similar

experiences and perceptions weighed heavily as a factor regarding assumptions during the interpretation of participant responses.

In pursuit of an increased understanding of the perceptions and ascension experiences of executive-level African American women serving or seeking to serve as a superintendent of public schools in Texas, I explored participants' experiences through interviews. It was my assumption that the participants were forthcoming and shared information that was true to the best of their knowledge.

Delimitations

Although the justification of this study was grounded in the disproportionate number of African American women superintendents in Texas, that small population served as a delimiter regarding the participant sample size. Because this study was delimited to African American women, men and women of ethnic backgrounds other than African American were not included. This research focused only on selected Texas public schools; thus, populations from other states were not included. Participants were limited to African American women currently serving in executive leadership roles (or previously served as superintendent for at least two years); thus, African American women serving outside of the ranks of superintendent, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, or deputy superintendent are not included.

Assumptions

In conducting qualitative research, Merriam (1998) describes assumptions of qualitative research as: (a) descriptions, (b) fieldwork, (c) a concern for processes versus products, (d) details that necessitate the evolution or revision to abstractions, concepts, hypothesis, or theories, (e) the "research is the primary instrument for data collection and

analysis” (p. 19), and (f) the research’s primary focus is “interest in meaning - how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world” (p. 19).

My assumptions as the researcher were as follows:

1. Participants would respond openly, honestly, and without bias to questions asked during data collection.
2. Participants would have had knowledge of their roles, experiences, barriers, and contributing factors to their career trajectory.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized in five chapters. Chapter I includes an introduction, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, theoretical framework, and research question. Also included in Chapter I are the limitations, delimitations, assumptions of this research study.

Chapter II is a review of literature. This review will incorporate historical context, related literature, research on the African American woman in the role of superintendent, practical significance, and will include theoretical, personal, and expert options.

Chapter III will describe research methods and the rationale supporting the use of a qualitative research design and theoretical perspective. Included in Chapter III will be the context of the research, descriptions of participants, and ethical considerations for research with human participants, as well as instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis methods.

Chapter IV will describe the procedures and methods that were employed during the coding, analysis, and interpretation of interviews conducted with women who serve as African American executive-level school leaders in Texas public school districts.

Descriptive reporting of narratives and interview responses will be presented in the chapter.

Chapter V will describe the findings based on the research question. Implications for practitioners and recommendations for future research will be provided in Chapter V. Additionally, recommendations for policy and academic institutional changes will be reported in this chapter.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

The review of literature is grounded in the exploration of the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts. Specifically, this study investigated how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceive the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. This study contributed the research by documenting how perceptions of lived experiences influence the leadership platform progression of African American women in executive-level administration in Texas public schools.

This literature review was conducted to support and help frame the investigation of the lack of representation of African American women as superintendents in Texas independent school districts. The structure of this chapter will support the research focus and discuss the following topics: Historical Context of the Public-School Superintendency, Women and the Superintendency, African American Women and the Superintendency, Barriers for Women and the Superintendency, Familial Influence on Women in the Superintendency, and Mentoring and Women in the Superintendency.

Historical Context of the Public-School Superintendency

Since its inception, the role of the superintendent has remained the most gender stratified role in U.S. education (Skrla, 2000). According to de Santa Ana (2008), for many years the role of superintendent was held by 100% White males. The presence of women in executive leadership roles in education is well documented (Garrett-Staib &

Burkman, 2015). Although women hold the majority presence in the field of education, men have consistently served in greater number in the role of superintendent (Guajardo, 2015). The percentage of women in the superintendency has increased in recent years; however, in comparison to their male counterparts their presence remains in great disparity (Silverman, 2004). Despite a statistical incline, Derrington and Sharratt (2009) predicted that it would be 2035 before gender parity in the superintendency is reached.

In Blount's (1998) research, the emergence of male leadership in a female-dominated profession was noted with the practice of "paid male administrators [assigned to] monitor female teachers and keep them from getting out of line" (p. 26). The earliest documented superintendency was in the 19th century (Odum, 2010). The earliest role of superintendent was that of a teacher-scholar and was prevalent from 1865-1910 (Fields, 2016; Smothers, 2012). To differentiate themselves, professors at Teachers College, Columbia University leveraged the opportunity to increase their educational repertoire when courses became available that would elevate them above standard teaching (Callahan, 1962). According to Cuban (1976), in the 1890 superintendents' report, the documented duties of the superintendent were to develop and inspire teachers with high expectations, proactively adjust the course of action when improvement was possible and develop systems for increased student achievement. Further, it is noted that the superintendent was expected to be politically savvy enough to garner support for education and the school system (Howlett, 1993).

Prior to 1910, there were no specified courses of study or degrees for educational administration (Cubberley, 1924; Fields, 2016). No identified state or national competencies had been developed. The role of superintendent was largely

reserved for men (Fields, 2016; Kowalski, 2006) and the position was distinguished as a business managerial role (Fields 2016). Superintendents were appointed based on perceived managerial skill sets, instinct, or birth right as men (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993). In further research, Tallerico and Blount (2004) found that the stereotypical characteristics of competition and authority, normally associated as masculine tendencies, were the foundational expectations of educational leadership.

Currently, the role of the superintendent remains broad, as the superintendent is responsible for the operational, managerial, and instructional aspects of the school district. According to Meador (2019), “much of what a superintendent does involves working directly with others. School superintendents must be effective leaders, work well with other people, and understand the value of building relationships” (para. 2).

A superintendent must be adept at establishing working relationships with many interest groups within the school district as well as among the community to maximize stakeholder support for educational effectiveness. Building a strong rapport with the constituents in the district makes fulfilling the required roles of a school superintendent less complicated. (Meador, 2019, para. 2).

Table 2 provides my conceptualization of the spectrum of baseline knowledge and skills that encompass the superintendent role in the review of literature.

Table 2*Superintendent Role Conceptualization*

Role	Baseline Knowledge and Skills
Educator	Educational pedagogy, philosophy, psychology, curriculum, instruction, assessment
Leader	Political, community liaison, collaborative influence
Manager	Personnel management, facilities management, finance/budgeting, contract development and negotiations, legal/ethical considerations
Communicator	Public speaker, media representative, district spokesperson
Scholar	Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methodology researcher
Visionary	Organizational change and development, leadership theory, technology innovator, diversity/multiculturalism influencer, motivational influencer

The male-dominated position of educational administration had become a recognized field of practice in the female-dominated field of teaching (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). Guajardo (2015) noted that administrative positions were developed to provide oversight for several schools simultaneously once as an increasing number of schools were opened in areas with sparse populations. As the profession of education became an attractive option for men, the administrative position became the justification for the inequitable pay differences between men and women (Blount, 1998). As the male presence in education increased in administrative roles, the role of actual teaching was left to women (Blount, 2003). “Educational administration is a profession in which the concerns of women superintendents about discriminatory treatment and sexism were not addressed nor even heard” (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000, p. 64).

By the mid-20th century, claims arose that men were better suited to serve in the capacity of superintendent by virtue of their natural mannerisms that aligned with authoritative leadership styles, yet the aforementioned mannerisms had little to no regard for input or collaborative practices (Eakle, 1995; Montgomery & Growe, 2003; Odum, 2010). Central to the theme of research on the superintendency were four studies: the 1933 investigation about the impact of public education on economics and societal changes after the Great Depression, the 1952 study on urban superintendents, the 1960 study on superintendent preparedness, and the 1971 study of the attributes of the superintendency (Fields, 2016).

From a national perspective, research is limited (Grogan & Brunner, 2005) about women and the public-school superintendency. Further, a greater limitation of research exists with all ethnic minority women and the superintendency (Grogan & Brunner, 2005, p. 227). The body of research on the superintendency and ethnic minority women is profoundly limited to few researchers who have added to previous studies on the subject (e.g., Alston, 1999, 2000, 2005; Simmons, 2005). What is clear in the research about African American women is that their representation in the upper echelon of school administration, namely the position of superintendent, is limited (Allen et al., 1995). The underrepresentation of African American superintendents is starkly misaligned with the representation of student populations in public schools. Further, the representation of African American female superintendents is even more misaligned in comparison to the number of women in the educational field (Fields, 2016). The pathway to executive-level school district positions is ripe with opportunities, yet African American candidates are consistently overlooked. It is essential to explore their perceptions regarding their lived

experiences to identify strategies to break barriers for this group of qualified educational professionals. According to Make a Future (2014), there are several opportunities for teachers to advance to a superintendent position. The typical path is from principal or vice principal to roles in human resources, director of instruction, assistant superintendent, and superintendent.

National Statistics of Superintendent Representation. Odum (2010) noted that “in 1978, there were only five African American female superintendents in the United States” (p. 47). In 1982, after a four-year time span, the number of African American female superintendents had increased to 11. By the year 1984, there were 29 in total. A year later in 1985, the national number of African American female superintendents had decreased to 25 (Arnez, 1981; Odum, 2010; Revere, 1987). In 1993 there were 1,960 White female superintendents as compared to 20 African American female superintendents (Alston, 1996). The inclusion of African American females in scholarship and research has somewhat evolved in the past 20 years (Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Brunner, 2005. Nationally, public school superintendent positions are occupied by a majority of males (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; George, 2013). However, the national representation still reflects a disparity relative to the percentage of African American female superintendents.

Texas Regional Statistics of Superintendent Representation. Texas has more than 1,000 public school districts, yet superintendent representation is consistently male dominated. The four requirements in Texas for superintendent certification are stringent, yet attainable, according to one university website:

1. Master's degree from a university that is accredited by an agency recognized by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board.
2. Attain principal certificate or an equivalent issued by the Texas Education Agency or complete the superintendent certificate application with TEA-approved managerial experience to substitute for a principal certification.
3. Complete an approved superintendent educator preparation program.
4. Pass the as exam based on the Texas Standards Required for the Superintendent Certificate. (University of Texas-Arlington, 2019, para. 9)

Many females have completed the requirements, yet the position of superintendent has remained out of reach. In review of Niche's 2021 Best Schools report, I compiled information for Table 3 to provide a list of superintendents in the 20 largest school districts in Texas, by race and gender (Niche, 2021). Education positions are dominated by women, yet this table highlights White-male domination in the highest-ranking district position. Of the 20 districts shown, there are only four women superintendents. The disparity necessitates exploration of possible barriers that prevent females from ascension to the superintendency.

Table 3

Largest Texas School Districts and Superintendents by Race & Gender 2021

District	Race	Gender
Houston ISD	Black	Female
Dallas ISD	Hispanic	Male
Cy-Fair ISD	White	Male
Northside ISD	White	Male
Fort Worth ISD	Hispanic	Male
Austin ISD	Hispanic	Female
Katy ISD	White	Male
Fort Bend ISD	Black	Male
Aldine ISD	Black	Female

North East ISD	White	Male
Conroe ISD	White	Male
Frisco ISD	White	Male
Arlington ISD	Hispanic	Male
El Paso ISD	Black	Male
Garland ISD	Hispanic	Male
Klein ISD	White	Female
Pasadena ISD	White	Female
Plano ISD	White	Female
Lewisville ISD	White	Male
Round Rock ISD	White	Male

The Applicant Pool. Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) examined one applicant pool for superintendent candidates in New York in 1998-1999. Of the 550-person applicant pool, 1.2% of applicants interviewed were African American women in contrast to 70.9% White men. In the same study, data reflected African American and White women were hired for 8.3% of vacancies respectively, whereas White men were hired for 83.3% of the vacancies (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). The researchers noted that African American applicants had fewer choices for seeking the superintendency, as all participants “applied for positions in minority school districts” (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003, p. 10). In stark contrast, of the 33% of the African Americans who applied to White school districts, 0% was offered the superintendency, versus 78% of the 85% of White applicants who applied to White school districts receiving offers to the superintendency.

Women and the Superintendency

To give perspective to perceived barriers, Severns and Combs (2013) conducted a meta-analysis and analyzed three pivotal studies about external barriers, barriers affiliated with job search processes, and self-imposed barriers. Key findings in the researchers’ analyses of these studies were summarized to direct the necessity for closing the knowledge and action gap relative to women achieving the superintendency.

Allred, Maxwell, and Skrla (2017) noted that “sometimes concepts of gender equity in educational leadership are obscured in the limited research literature available” (p. 2). The phenomenon of leadership in research is ubiquitous, yet research relevant to gender and leadership is absent from the body of research in the 1970s (Hoyt, 2007). Hoyt (2007) documents “methodological hindrances, a predominance of male researchers largely uninterested in the topic, and an academic assumption of gender equality in leadership” as the primary contributing factor to the absence of gender-related research (p. 265). Although the superintendency has a documented history as a male-dominated position, review of related literature notes several women who successfully navigated and accessed the role of superintendent. In public school education, the pinnacle role is the superintendency. African American women in the public-school pinnacle role remain few (Olser & Webb, 2014). Although teaching has been broadly lauded as a female-dominated profession, this gender imbalance has not always been existent. Alston (2000) indicated that “until the late 18th century, all teaching was done by men” (p. 527).

With the exception of teaching positions, a review of the literature yielded consistent disparities in the ratio of women in educational leadership as compared to that of men, dating as far back as 1905 (Shakeshaft, 1989). Men have a likelihood of advancing to the superintendency at a rate 40 times greater than women (Skrla, 1999). In studies that focus on women accessing educational leadership roles that may lead to the superintendency, Pallandino et al. (2007) identified four stages of women school leadership research as Stage 1, the early 1970s and the collection and analysis of descriptive information; Stage 2, the mid-1970s yielded the acknowledgment of noteworthy women in school leadership; Stage 3, the 1980s yielded barriers and

discriminatory practices the impeded women's access to leadership roles; and Stage 4, the 1990s, identified the empowerment of women who began researching their perspectives as a targeted strategy to study the collective experiences of women as school leaders.

During the past half century, the presence of women in educational executive leadership roles has increased (Stephens, 2009). Although women's access to the superintendency has improved, this increase is minimal and remains disproportionate for them. For example, in 2011, only 24.1% of superintendents were women (Kowalski et al., 2011), which is indicative of only a 22.5% increase of female superintendents across a span of 83 years (Shakeshaft, 1989).

"Once in administrative positions that have been defined and institutionalized as men's work, ...barriers become pointedly overt to most who experience them" (Brunner & Grogan, 2005, p. 39). Women's access to the superintendency is regulated by headhunters, school boards, or other hiring entities who define the profile of a successful candidate for said position. The successful candidate's profile is usually inclusive of indicators such as being married and being a White man (Derrington & Sharratt, 2008; Grogan, 2005; Tallerico, 2000). The accessibility of the superintendency for women seems to have barriers not presented for other executive leadership roles. These aforementioned barriers may be grounded in the preconceived beliefs about the type of person who should be the actual superintendent (Tallerico, 2000). Recruitment entities often include female candidates for consideration for the outward appearance of diversity in the applicant pool (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006a; Riehl & Byrd, 1997).

Many recruitment firms select candidates for superintendent based on criteria grounded in personal values, without giving consideration to non-traditional professional pathways and experiences. This practice inherently limits opportunities for female candidates to successfully attain the superintendency. With a focus on hiring in the field of education, Ellis, Skidmore, and Combs (2017) investigated implications of hiring practices relative to “person-organization (P-O) fit, and person-job (P-J) fit” (p. 448). In conventional interviewing and hiring processes, the hiring entity develops a rubric for a candidate’s fit for a position grounded in an analysis of professional experiences, expertise, and knowledge base relative to the sought-after position (Ellis et al., 2017; Farr & Christophersen, 1992). In many cases these rubrics are not developed with assurances that eliminate subjectivity. This practice creates a bias that influences hiring decisions. And as a result, diversity diminishes at each level of ascension on the path to the superintendency.

Kim and Brunner (2009) investigated women’s career paths to the superintendency and differences between the paths of men and women. Findings from the study indicated that 65.3% of the female superintendents had secondary teaching experience, whereas 63% had experience at both the elementary and secondary levels. Interestingly, Kim and Brunner (2009) reported that men accessed the superintendency five to six years earlier than their female counterparts. As recently as 2008, Pascopella reported that 40% of women gained access to the superintendency from executive leadership positions, whereas men gained access from secondary principal positions 53% of the time. In multiple studies (Brunner et al., 2003; Gewertz, 2006; James, 2001; Kowalski, et al., 2011; Marshall & Kasten, 1994; Sharp et al., 2000; Skrla, 2000; Skrla, et

al., 2000), researchers reported that the majority of superintendents' career trajectories ascended through the high school principalship and central office administrative roles associated with finance or personnel (James, 2001). Interestingly, in the 2017 inquiry on south Texas female superintendents' perceptions "regarding their aspirations, motivations, challenges, and successes in their roles as superintendents" (Allred et al., 2017, p. 3), only four of the seven female participants reportedly aspired to become a superintendent.

African American Women and the Superintendency

A noted disparity of African American women in the superintendency at public schools exists, yet there is significant lack of inquiry about African American women's leadership experiences in the field of education (Alston, 2005; Coffin, 1972; Fultz, 2004; Horsford, 2007, 2009b; Horsford & McKenzie, 2008; Kingsberry, 2015; Sizemore, 1986; Tillman, 2004a, 2004b). Moody's (1971) seminal research documented the first known examination of African Americans and the superintendency. Although three decades apart, Dawkins (2004) and Moody (1971) had parallel findings regarding limitations in the number of African American superintendents. When African Americans were serving as superintendents, the student population was predominantly African American. Similarly, Venable (1995) reported that African American women who successfully accessed the public-school superintendency were appointed in inner-city school districts or school districts with a vast amount of academic and disciplinary challenges.

Previous researchers repeatedly noted stark underrepresentation of African American women in the superintendency (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000; Brunner, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Glass, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Kingsberry,

2015; Kowalski et al., 2011; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Sharp et al., 2004). This underrepresentation of women in the superintendency was so profound that Jackson's (1999) research yielded the recommendation to detail a comprehensive historical record of African American superintendents. In a similar realization about the absence of research and data on African American women in educational leadership, Tyack and Hansot (1982) articulated that a "conspiracy of silence could hardly have been unintentional" (p. 13).

Some of the earliest research findings on African American superintendents came with the proceedings of *Brown vs the Board of Education* (revised 2004). Following the 1954 *Brown vs the Board of Education* ruling, many African American public-school administrators were displaced from employment (Kingsberry, 2015). Previous studies yielded comparable findings, indicated a significantly limited amount of African American superintendents. Since ascension to the role of superintendent was identified as problematic, this practice may have contributed to the inadequate research focus given to African Americans (Fields, 2016; Jackson, 1995, 1999; Simmons, 2005; Tillman, 2004a), especially African American women in Texas. Corresponding to the findings regarding the difficult ascension to the superintendency, Powell (2012) and Chalmers (2012) conducted studies that confirmed, in comparison to other groups, fewer African Americans apply for the superintendency. Conversely, Powell (2012) argued against the prominent belief that African Americans did not apply for the superintendency. Rather, it was argued that African Americans did not experience equity in access to superintendent hiring firms.

Though federal policy impeded the early emergence of African American women in school leadership, Simmons (2005) reported findings of records indicative that African American women in school leadership, consistent with that of the role of superintendent, existed in the mid-1800s, as Deveaux, an African American woman school organizer operated in that capacity. Due to laws that impeded the education of slaves and the societal follow up of Jim Crow laws, African Americans were prohibited from attending White public educational institutions (Simmons, 2005). Thus, a lack of fully documented early history of African Americans' education and roles in school leadership remains lacking until approximately 1930. Simmons (2005) further noted,

The history of the emergence of superintendents of color is a phenomenon that exists outside the realm of traditional superintendent preparation programs. In that early superintendents of color were excluded from the traditional preparation programs, they emerged in a separate and distinctly different context from that of their White counterparts. (pp. 251-252)

In a 2000 review of literature, Alston reported African American women in school administration were limited above the role of school principal before 1956. Revere (1987) discovered an anomaly in Velma Dolphin Ashely, the 1944-1956 documented head of the Boley, Oklahoma schools. As noted in previous inquiries, the number of African American women in the role of the superintendent in the United States ranged from 16 in 1983 to 25 in 1985 (Alston 2000; Arnez, 1981).

The 19th century saw an era of African American women leading schools. According to Gales-Johnson (2013), Grogan (2000), and Shakeshaft (1989), the educational workforce employed more African American women than White women in

the 1920s. Specifically, they noted that teaching as a profession was second only to domestic work. During this period, it was a common practice for African American women to open their own schools and simultaneously serve as teacher and administrator (Gales-Johnson, 2013). In the 19th century an exception made in the role of women in educational leadership was that of allowing African American college-educated women to serve in primarily southern states as a Jeanes Supervisor with a defined role for monitoring and improving instructional services (Alston, 1999; Alston & Jones, 2002; & Angel et al. 2013). These women served in similar capacities as superintendents but were supervised by White men. *Brown vs the Board of Education* rendered a decision that ultimately led to the decline and the eventual cease of employing Jeanes Supervisors and African American teachers (Tillman, 2004b).

Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) and Shakeshaft et al. (2007) refer to the disparity of women in public school executive leadership positions as *persistent*. In previous research by Grogan and Henry (1995) and Brunner (1999), gender is one of the prominent causes of women not being proportionately represented in the superintendency. Collins (1989), a feminist theorist, argued that the disparity in the representation of the African American women in the superintendency is due to other factors than gender, the disparity also involves race and class. African American women seeking the role of superintendent in public school are often stifled by “concrete ceilings” (Alston, 1999, p. 6) and navigating stereotypical perceptions widely held regarding the African American woman (Grogan, 1999). Experiences associated with being stifled and navigating perceptions were referred to as the “phenomena of race and gender concerns for African American females - the double-whammy effect” (Andrews & Simpson-

Taylor, 1995, p. 595). Further, Andrews and Simpson-Taylor (1995) described the double-whammy concept as adverse stereotypes based on gender and race that cause strain in the workplace for women of color, specifically in relation to promotion and advancement.

Similarly, other researchers recognized synonymous limits as formal and informal barriers (Angel et al., 2013; Newton 2006) that impede the advancement of women. Specifically, four impediments were identified: (a) minimal opportunities for salary increase and promotions (Angel et al. 2013; Cotter et al. 2001); (b) tolerance and acceptance of social and cultural stereotypes regarding African American women (Angel et al., 2013; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Newton, 2006); (c) limited knowledge of facilitating career paths and preparation programs (Angel et al., 2013); and (d) limited access to mentoring, networking, and the implications of both (Angel et al., 2013).

The reality of “concrete ceilings” (Alston, 1999, p. 6) is shielded by the expectation that hiring and selection practices are fully governed in the acknowledgement that it is illegal for personnel functioning in a hiring capacity not to consider women for the superintendency based on their gender and/or race. Skrla (2000) noted that once a woman is hired “it may be in her best interest to behave like a man” (p. 9). This unspoken understanding and perception was materialized according to research findings that indicated barriers that impede women from reaching the superintendency included school board comfort levels with women’s leadership, university preparation programs, the lack of promotion of skilled women, and the lack of female candidates experienced with finance, management, and facilities (Munoz, Ramalho, & Siminsson, 2014). Specifically, researchers found that being a woman significantly decreased the likelihood of reaching

the pinnacle of educational leadership (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Munoz et al., 2014; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). In following with these hiring trends, the impact on African American women led to the unfortunate yet common practice of adjusting physical appearances and social interactions to demonstrate power worthiness of the esteemed position of superintendent (Olser & Webb, 2014). Once accepted into the ranks of the superintendency, African American women utilized a practice of “shifting”, as evidenced as efforts to demonstrate conformity with the majority (Jones & Shorter-Gooden, 2003; Olser & Webb, 2014). Another impetus for shifting is in response to misrepresentations of African American women, which causes African American women to “change or alter various parts of themselves such as their speech or dress, in order to placate both mainstream society and their own communities of color” (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 15).

Although research supports the assumption that a disparity exists between the number of African American women who aspire to the superintendency and those who reach the superintendency; it is in stark contrast. Cooper et al. (2000) cited a declining interest in the number of administrators willing to pursue the superintendency. African Americans have continued to face challenges in seeking and gaining employment as the superintendent in school districts (Carpenter & Diem, 2014).

Lomotey (1995) and Jackson (1999), nearly a decade apart, both reported that African American women who were pursuing educational leadership roles had to remain in constant thought regarding their lens for action and reaction, as it had to be attuned to two worlds—the lens of the African American and the lens of the White American, both of which are defined by perceptions of societal norms. Specifically, African American

women in pursuit of roles in educational leadership experienced interactions and workplace engagement grounded in perceptions of White male standards (Jackson, 1999; Lomotey, 1995).

The CROWN Act. Covert acts of discrimination have long impacted and influenced hiring practices, promotions, and executive appointments. Specifically, the natural state of African American men and women's hair has been subjectively scrutinized and leveraged as a subconscious bias and impact on employment decisions such that the response has become new legislation. CROWN is an acronym for "The Create a Respectful and Open Workplace for Natural Hair". This legislation was introduced in 2019 by California Senator Mitchell. According to Trinidad (2020), the legislation "seeks to protect both employees and students from discrimination based on their natural hair and hairstyles associated with their race" (para. 8). Trinidad (2020) claimed that African American and Hispanic employees are sometimes treated unfairly at work or school because of their hairstyles and African Americans are "disproportionately burdened by policies and practices in public places, including the workplace, that target, profile, or single them out for natural hairstyles – referring to the texture of hair that is not permed, dyed, relaxed, or chemically altered" (para. 12).

The mere notion that legislation of this kind had to be introduced is indicative of a need for statutory protections for natural hair textures in the workplace and schools. In fact, recent cases of discrimination in public schools related to natural hair styles such as dreadlocks, braids, twists, and knots have made national headlines. Discrimination in hiring decisions made based on age, race, gender, and disability are federally protected; this type of discrimination has existed, yet, has been unprotected, for many years.

Barriers for Women and the Superintendency

From Kowalski and Stouder's (1999) study with 13 participants in Indiana, gender was presented as a barrier to the superintendency. Although gender was identified as a barrier, it was difficult to quantify due to the covert acts in the workplace. Definitions for two types of barriers are shown in Table 4. Severns and Combs (2013) noted the following as research conclusions from Kowalski and Stouder's (1999) study:

1. Gender barriers, although perceived, were not determinants of success limitations to the participants. Rather, "hard work, dedication to the profession, and a positive performance record contributes reach the position of superintendent" (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 61).
2. Although Kowalski and Stouder (1999) concluded that the 13 participants achieved appointments to the superintendency based on their own professional merit and performance, respondents' responses indicated that one of the most important supports for gaining access to the superintendency was the support of influential people. "Having a strong mentor who support, encourages, and protects female leaders from gender barriers that can impede their appointments to the top leadership positions is advantageous" (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 61).
3. Kowalski and Stouder (1999) identified internal and external factors perceived as attributes to females achieving the superintendency. Among those factors were discrimination; specifically, gender and ethnic/race discrimination. These discriminations presented obstacles with quantifying the experiences. However, participants were able quantify "personal

characteristics such as confidence, tenacity, planning, and organizational skills [as] attribute[s] to the success of female superintendents” (Severn & Combs, 2013, p. 61).

Table 4

Barriers to the Superintendency

Barrier	Barrier Description
Internal	Personal beliefs and attitudes, motivation, and self-image (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993)
External	Discrimination, family responsibilities, limited mobility, and lack of mentors (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993)

Barriers Affiliated with Job Search Process. With participants in New York and employing case studies, Tallerico (2000) investigated superintendent search practices relative to women and people of color. Tallerico interviewed 75 participants (68 were White, 7 were African American) including 25 board members, 25 members of search firms, and 25 recent candidates for the superintendency. Tallerico noted that most of the 38 regional superintendents were men (95%) and 37 were White. Data consisted of anecdotal data from board meetings and documents analysis. Supporting the need for the research, “36 of the 38 regional superintendents (about 95%) were male, 2 (about 5%) were female, 37 were White, and 1 was Hispanic...just four people of color and six female consultants were found to operate on a regular basis in New York” (Tallerico, 2000). In the analyses of the Tallerico (2000) study, Severns and Combs (2013) suggested the following as applications of the research:

1. “School boards should receive training to raise their awareness of factors that can limit selection of minority candidates” (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 62).
2. Many districts seek the support of search firms, head-hunters, and consultants when the superintendency is vacant. School districts, school boards, and hiring entities must position themselves to require certain information from external entities with whom they partner for the superintendent search. For example, “demographics about the candidate they recruit and the methods they use to advertise the positions” should be a part of a data-sharing agreement between school district hiring entities and the external support system for superintendent searches (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 62).
3. Although females have historically and successfully managed family and career obligations, those “wanting to be superintendents need to establish support systems to help them with responsibilities in their homes and with their children” (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 63).
4. The superintendency is demanding and requires balance – both personal and professional. Sources of balance may be found through the support of “a life coach, exercising, and setting aside time for friends and family” (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 63).

Self-Imposed Barriers. Derrington and Sharrat (2009) examined barriers for women and the superintendency in their 1993 Washington-based study where key barriers identified were sex discrimination and stereotyping. In a replication of the study

in 2007, the gender disparity in the role of the superintendent still existed; however, perceptions of barriers altered. In the years between 1993 and 2007, in the same geographic location of the United States, perceived barriers had evolved to self-imposed barriers relative to familial obligations and relocation reservations. To validate the study, Derrington and Sharrat (2009) analyzed similar investigations in other geographic areas of the United States including California, Illinois, Indiana, Texas, Chicago, and Iowa, all of which reported similar findings.

External Barriers. Many researchers have explored gender workplace inequities. As it relates to the district superintendency and the disparities presented, there are a variety of considerations to explore. In research conducted by Glass (2019) for the School Superintendents Association (AASA), reasons were presented as to why women have not been selected for superintendent positions. One reason is school boards have been reluctant to hire women superintendents. Approximately 82% of the women superintendents in the 10-year AASA study indicated school board members perceived them as having strong managerial skills; however, they believed that they were not perceived as competent with financial decisions for the district (Glass, 2019). Regarding the existence of a glass ceiling, 61% of the women in the study believed in this ceiling and believed they had fewer career opportunities as compared to men. About 43% of the male superintendents indicated that they shared the belief that school boards, as hiring agents, maintained a perception that women did not demonstrate the capacity to manage school districts (Glass, 2019).

Another reason given by Glass (2019) was that women tend to have a less-established mentoring system as compared to men. This finding is an important factor

since mentors often embrace the role of liaison between superintendent candidates and boards of education, who hire them. In many cases, mentors also provide in-district advancement opportunities for women aspiring to the superintendency. In addition, women seek out the field of education for different reasons than men and elementary school teaching traditionally has been more attractive to women. Although women may not initially enter education with a goal of executive-level leadership, they develop an interest in over time (Wallace, 2014).

Making the Superintendency More Attractive for Women. If school boards are genuinely interested in attracting qualified female applicants for vacant superintendencies, they need to start by changing the nature of the superintendency. The pressures of work and time constraints may discourage many qualified applicants from moving into an executive-level leadership track. School boards are met with increasing difficulty attracting females for the superintendency (Wallace, 2014). Also, school boards should investigate ways to allow female superintendents to excel in what they like to do. This action would attract female candidates by allowing them to spend time utilizing the skills in which they gain the most satisfaction. One way to accomplish this goal would be to ask candidates during the interview process about what they enjoy doing instead of giving them a prescribed list of expectations. School boards often emphasize the need for budgeting and fiscal management, but these duties can easily be delegated to an assistant superintendent, especially if the superintendent candidate's expertise is related to other roles such as community involvement, curriculum and instruction, and mentoring.

Workplace Incivility and Role Strain as Barriers. Although noticeable progress has been made toward females' equality in the workplace, barriers of significant impact remain (Hailey, 2018). In the 2014 national survey conducted by the Workplace Bullying Institute, findings were that adult Americans had experienced firsthand workplace bullying at a rate of 27%. Additionally, it was noted that 1% of adult Americans had witnessed workplace bullying. Of the incidents reported in the survey, 60% of the targets were females (Namie, 2014). Further, Linvill (2018) asserted that empirical research evidence suggested that workplace incivility contributed to factors inclusive of organizational identity disconnection, intentions to exit the organization, and organization turnover.

Acknowledging societal representations of African American females is to critically analyze stereotypes and the influences commonly activated in social situations (West, 2018). When individuals internalize stereotypes about others, that internalization can influence the way in which he or she interacts with the stereotyped group, specifically African American females (Donovan, 2011).

West (2018) purported that African American females were categorized as Mammies, Sapphires, and Jezebels, stereotypes that translated into "corresponding contemporary images that serve a similar function, including that of the Strong Black Woman, the Angry Black Woman, and the Video Vixen" (p. 140). Further, West describes "role strain" (p. 140) as the process African American females navigate to find equilibrium of responsibilities, and concerns with acceptance of physical attributes such as skin color and hair texture. "Hair discrimination is the least spoken about injustice, yet we know it exists" (Trinidad, 2020, para. 11). In the review of literature relative to

African American females in the workplace, Mammy and Sapphire are central to analyzing possible root causes of workplace incivility.

Mammy and Aunt were both terms of endearment used in Southern antebellum fiction. These terms largely described plantation household roles; specifically, roles of servitude as baby nurses, cooks, and domestic workers (Parks, 2010; West, 2018). This image continues to resonate in the experiences of African American females by “eras[ing] the economic and occupational inequalities that Black females face in the workplace by popularizing and normalizing the notion that Black females were naturally suited to be in perpetual servitude” (West, 2018, p. 142). Moreover, West asserted that African American females in the workplace described environments in which they were expected to be strong enough to assume multi-layered roles above their actual professional roles. Nearly a quarter of a century after the 1980 Scott study on African Americans and the superintendency, Jackson and Shakeshaft (2003) observed “it is still these no-win opportunities that are primarily available to qualified and highly credentialed African American superintendents” (p. 3). The increased representation of African American public-school superintendents will be noted in school districts that present problems White superintendents might not want to address and in those districts where affirmative action is not used to justify the hiring of an African American superintendent (Scott, 1980).

With an expectation of displays of strength, African American females also navigate colorism in the workplace. West (2018) defines colorism as “a discriminatory economic social system that values lighter over darker skin tones” (p. 146) and notes the deep historic roots. Different from slavery references noting light-skinned slaves

receiving better treatment, housing, food, and sometimes education, “old forms of colorism have been replaced with more subtle manifestations appearing through casual name-calling, subtle comments, and carefully hidden stereotypes” (Wilder, 2016, p. 203). In the 2015 study, Wilder reported a participant’s perception of light-skinned versus dark-skin in the statement “If I go into an interview and there is a dark-skinned girl next to me, I feel as though I have a better chance than her just because I have a lighter skin complexion” (Wilder, 2016, p. 199). Perceptions about race strongly influence decisions of African Americans seeking public school superintendencies, whether those perceptions are relative to the beliefs of those making the hiring decisions or the beliefs of the applicants regarding which superintendent vacancies are available to an African American (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003). “While there is ample evidence that people hire people with similar values and backgrounds, skin color trumps all other characteristics including social class and amount of education” (Jackson & Shakeshaft, 2003, p. 6).

African American women who wear their hair in its natural curly state, “may be perceived as militant or angry” (West, 2018, p. 147). Their hair’s natural state was referred to as “dirty, unkempt, and unattractive” (West, 2018, p. 147). In a different study of African American college women, one participant cut her dreadlocks and received remarks from her advisor relative to her hair now looking professional. The participant perceived the remark as micro-aggression because the remark suggested that her hair in its natural state of dreadlocks was not professional (Lewis et al., 2016). A study about beauty images with Black graduate students as participants yielded the admittance that “having to compete with those images can be really exhausting sometimes” (Watson et al., 2012, p. 465).

Although the African American woman is expected to display qualities of strength, she must also navigate a balance of not being perceived as the aggressive Black woman, or Sapphire (West, 2018). Pilgrim (2015) gives reference to the term *Sapphire*, or angry Black females being terms used as “social control mechanism[s] that [are] employed to punish black females who violate societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, nonthreatening, and unseen” (p. 121). In agreement, West (2018) and Harris-Perry (2011) asserted that African American women’s passion and righteous indignation can be used to silence and shame those who choose to challenge social inequalities, stand firm and be vocal in disagreement with their circumstances, or communicate expectations for fair and equal treatment, which becomes a threat to normed social order.

Challenges faced by African American women in the workplace have been categorized by experiences of the double whammy effect—being a woman and African American (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995, p. 595). In full transparency, African American women are expected to silently navigate through major social barriers not experienced by White female counterparts. These aforementioned barriers, discussed as the double-whammy effect (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995, p. 595), are better suited to be recognized with the additional weights, again not experienced by White female counterparts.

Familial Influence on Women in the Superintendency

In review of existing literature on women and the superintendency it was noted that although there is a preponderance of research on the superintendency in general, literature remains inadequate with regard to African American female superintendents,

their lived experiences, and perceived barriers (Alston, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2005; Bell & Chase, 1994; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Gewertz, 2006; Kingsberry, 2015; Peyton-Caire, Simms & Brunner, 2000; Pigford & Tomsen, 1993; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999; Tillman, 2004a; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). In 2009, Derrington and Sharratt reported that women with children under the age of 20 years old accounted for the least number of female superintendents. On the other hand, those having children between the ages of 1-19 represented the smallest percentage of superintendents compared to female superintendents without children or whose children were adults. Based on this research, women with children under the age of 20 years old were less likely to seek the role of superintendent until later in their careers. Regarding familial commitments, a significant percent of female superintendents, specifically between 72% and 75%, were mothers (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Brunner & Grogan, 2007; James, 2001). This fact affirms previous investigations about the career path of women ascending to the superintendency. In an earlier inquiry germane to women seeking the superintendency and familial obligations, Brunner et al. (2003) found that about 7% of superintendents had children under the age of 5 years old whereas about 9% had children ranging 6-10 years old. Of these superintendents, about 16% had children between the ages of 11-15 years old and nearly 23% of superintendents had children 16 years of age or older. According to these findings, the majority of superintendents with children had children who were self-sufficient (Brunner et al., 2003). This fact is reflective of the research-based findings for women seeking the superintendency later in their careers.

In an additional research study, Derrington and Sharratt (2009) described a participant who reported her career pathway was clear from teacher leader to campus

administration to the superintendency. Further, the same participant shared the realization that “she faced a choice she hadn’t anticipated – a choice between her career and her family” (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009, p. 19). Chalmers (2012), Fields (2016), and Powell (2012) agreed that African Americans demonstrated a disinclination toward residential relocation for available superintendency positions and lacked confidence in their ability to successfully meet the expectations of the superintendency. Brunner et al. (2003) added to the canon of research regarding women, familial obligations, and personal relationships by reporting that 30% of women seeking the superintendency delayed children and families, 18% reported that their spouse would have had to change employment, and 20% resorted to long-distance commuter marriages.

Bynum (2015) contributed to the research on the power of information mentoring by including family mentors as an attribution to successful leaders. Family support is a central element for career success (Gurvitch, Carson, & Beale, 2008). Similarly, researchers found that female superintendents articulated immediate or other family members as informal mentors who supported them in career advancements (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010; Wallace, 2014).

Familial influences strongly impact priorities and decisions that may impact the home or expectations of the home. African American women are expected to be strong Black women and studies show that African American women internalize the strong Black woman image (Abrams, Maxwell, Pope, & Belgrave, 2014; Nelson, Cardemil, & Adeoye, 2016; West, 2018). Although the internalization of strength potentially provides psychological protection against discriminatory stressful events, it also can be the impetus for the development of guilt associated with the self-sacrificing experiences

(West, 2018) of putting choices for self before those of family or community expectations. Brunner and Grogan (2007) reported in survey responses that 88% of respondents in their study indicated relocating their families was a barrier to the superintendency.

Mentoring and Women in the Superintendency

Previous researchers suggest a variance of positive outcomes of mentorship, including employment satisfaction (Eby, Allen, Evans, Ng, & DuBoise, 2008) and increased opportunities (Bynum, 2015). The review of the literature offered clarity about the significance, leveragability, and overall importance as influential factors for ascension to the superintendency (Brunner, 2008; Brunner & Kim, 2010; DeAngelis & O'Connor, 2012; Kim & Brunner, 2009; Short, 2015; Tallerico, 2000). Educational administration is a White male-dominated profession (Lomotey, 1995; Ramsay, 2013; Shakeshaft, 1989; Skrla, 2000). As such, researchers previously noted that women in educational administration were characterized with stereotypical masculine behaviors (Lomotey, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989). Specifically, Shakeshaft (1987) posited that women seeking to enter educational administration were coached to demonstrate behaviors thought to be those of men. Coursen et al. (1999) reported that educational administrators typically select mentees who resemble themselves. Because educational administration has been a predominately White male profession, African American women must face the “double-whammy effect” (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995, p. 595) of being a woman and African American, thus limiting opportunities to be selected for mentorships by seated educational administrators. Lomotey (1995) and Shakeshaft (1987) agreed that mentorships are critical to the success of persons seeking leadership positions in

educational administration. In the absence of purposeful mentoring, African American women most often find themselves in quasi-administrative roles that do not lead to their ultimate professional goal (Lomotey, 1995; Valverde & Brown, 1988).

In 2000, Ortiz conducted a meta-analysis to understand how the superintendency was obtained. Three routes were identified as follows: (a) the traditional route, (b) mentored access to the superintendency, and (c) personal contacts. Guajardo (2015) noted that “there is limited research that addresses the last two career pathways for women,” (p. 18) and “without adequate representation in higher levels of leadership, females are not likely to emerge as superintendents through mentorships or networking contacts” (p. 18). Mentorship is a foundation that many African Americans aspiring to the superintendency do not have equitable access to on their career paths. For example, Bandura (1996), using social cognitive theory, posited that one’s success is influenced by self-directed patterns aligned to behaviors of successful people. Without modeling from familiar sources, success may be hampered (Campbell, 2015) and women benefit from the experience of observing a woman in a leadership role typically occupied by a man (Brunner et al., 2003; James, 2001). The absence of this role modeling established barriers for women seeking the superintendency (Gardiner et al., 2000; Gupton & Slick, 1996). People seeking to professionally advance identify with others like themselves who are serving in the capacities that they aspire to professionally.

Both African Americans and women are underrepresented in the school superintendency, which yields itself to African American women being less likely to identify with those in the superintendency (Wolverton & McDonald, 2001). Similarly, Brunner et al. (2003) reported that 74% of superintendents were mentored or supported

by a seated or retired superintendent. With efforts to seek the support of leaders who identified as the same gender and ethnicity, negative competition was noted as an additional barrier when research participants shared that they had been mentored by men due to lack of women in the superintendency or due to competition for advancement for women (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; James, 2001; Patterson, 2007).

Agencies, and those in positions of hiring authority for the superintendency, strongly consider the applicant's ability to network. In James' 2001 investigation, it was noted that "females often lacked the relationships, connections, and endorsements of those in influential leadership positions, thereby negatively affecting their ability...to advance" (p. 24). Seventy-four percent of women in one study affirmed the existence of a good old boy system, whereas only 46% of men affirmed the same existence (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). Whereas numerous researchers report the significance of being mentored into the superintendency, Evans (2003) asserted that in order to advance, women must have networked and gotten their names into many influential circles for identification and community recognition on their own. Although dated, Schneider's (1991) study yielded the following findings about mentoring and differences between women and men:

- To develop assurances and capacity, women required mentoring.
- Women required modeling, follow-up, and reinforcement from mentors more frequently than male counterparts did.
- Women needed more contact initiated by the mentor as compared to men.
- Female mentor relationships tended to last longer than male counterparts.
- Women remained in a readiness phase for longer periods than men did.

- Women perceived extended preparation necessary for the roles they desired.
- Female mentees spent more time in each phase of mentorship than did men.
- Female mentees with male mentors expected the mentor to readily accept personal and family events that arose (Schneider, 1991).

Grogan (1996), Shakeshaft (1989), and Tallerico (2000) found that women who successfully accessed the superintendency were active in multiple professional networks. In qualitative data collected from surveys, Brunner and Grogan (2007) reported a respondent's thoughts as the identification of mentoring and support systems as critical to the success of women. One woman shared, "It sure is a visible job — definitely the eye of the hurricane on many days. We need more support as we start out in the field instead of trial by fire, especially females" (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 49).

Summary

This literature review provided a detailed, historical perspective of women, including African American women, and their experiences in educational roles since the 18th century. This review also points out the limited literature available on African American women serving in executive-level educational roles. Statistics on national and state were included to introduce the narrative for this research study. Barriers to the superintendency, as well as making the superintendency attractive for women, familial influences, and the benefits of mentoring and other networks and support systems were examined in the chapter. Chapter III will address the research methodology that was used to conduct this study.

CHAPTER III

Method

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts. Specifically, this study investigated how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceived the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. This study contributed to the literature by documenting how perceptions of lived experiences influence the leadership platform progression of African American women in executive-level administration in Texas public schools.

Research Question

There is no definitive hypothesis for this study, as “qualitative researchers look at the essential character or nature of something, not the quantity (how much, how many)” (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). Described in this research was how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceived the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. I sought answers in this qualitative research study to the following research question (and sub-questions) based on the perceptions of lived experiences of executive-level African American women in Texas public schools, seated or aspiring to the superintendency:

What are the perceived barriers and factors that contribute to or inhibit African American women’s aspiration to and attainment of the superintendency?

- a. What are the professional experiences of African American executive-level administrators prior to the superintendency?

- b. What workplace systems or structures exist that hinder successful ascension to the superintendency for African American women?
- c. How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the participants as African American women in pursuit and/or attainment of the superintendency?
- d. How has mentoring and networking affected the African American women participants in their pursuits and/or attainments of the superintendency?

Research Design

With a focus on Critical Race Theory, this research design was grounded in the in-depth methodological design, Critical Counter-Narrative. Miller et al. (2020) asserted that “one important tenet of CRT is recognizing and valuing the experiences and voices of people of color” (Miller et al., 2020, p. 272). Counter-narratives are situated in the study of “narrative inquiry, life history, and autoethnography” (Miller et al., 2020, p. 269). Critical Counter-Narrative was proposed for educational equity with three key tenets: (a) “CRT as a model of inquiry”, (b) critical reflection and generativity as a model of praxis that unify the use of counter-narratives for both research and pedagogy”, and (c) transformative action for the fundamental goal of educational equity for people of color” (Miller et al., p. 292). Critical counter-narrative rests in the expectation for researchers to move beyond the realm of storytelling and into the call to action as change agents.

The narrative method of qualitative research yields an in-depth knowledge and understanding of lived experiences. Rossman and Rallis (2012) noted that the researchers “seek to understand the deep meaning of a person’s experiences and how he articulate[s] these experiences” (p. 96). According to Creswell (2007), narrative research is a “product and a model” (p. 243). Further, Pinnegar and Daynes (2006) asserted that narrative

research is the analysis of descriptive human experiences and events, sometimes in a sequence. Through the use of semi-structured interview questions, I explored the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts.

A narrative inquiry approach allowed me to report of the stories about the disproportionality of African American female superintendents in Texas grounded in the perceptions and experiences of African American female superintendents and executive school leaders in Texas. Murray Thomas (2003) noted that “experience narratives are stories about influential incidents in a person’s own life” (p. 38) and “narratives have the potential for demonstrating both the uniqueness of individuals’ lives and the similarities among lives that are lived under different circumstances” (Murray Thomas, 2003, p. 39). This research allowed me to report an interpretive analysis of common experiences of African American female superintendents and those who are aspiring superintendents in Texas. The research experience also allowed me to add documentation to the research cannon a voice of African American women who will aspire to gain access to the superintendency or executive school leadership positions in Texas.

Conceptual Framework

To determine the perceptions of how race impedes or propels African American females aspiring to the superintendency, this study was grounded in Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT “reveals how race and racism work to maintain hierarchies, allocate resources, and distribute power” (Horsford, 2009b, p. 62). CRT, at its core affirms the

belief that realities are socially created at the cross-section of oppression and individual and group actions and interactions (Crenshaw et al., 1995).

By demystifying, deconstructing, and analyzing socially-constructed realities and lived experiences of African American women aspiring for the highest leadership position in a White, male-dominated profession, added clarity can be provided to those striving to minimize perceived barriers that may inhibit the increase of African American women representation in the superintendency in Texas, thereby allowing aspiring African American women superintendents to find value and purpose on their path to navigate, define, and affirm personal and professional interpretations of experiences leading to the superintendency, as related to the disparity of the African American woman public school superintendent in Texas.

Because critical race theorists seek to analyze how inequity is developed and maintained, it is appropriate for use in this study to understand how African American women internalize and perceive their delineated career paths and experiences while aspiring to and obtaining the public-school superintendency in Texas. CRT embodies the acknowledgement that at the core of American social norms is race and racism (Delgado & Stefanic, 2012). This research was grounded in CRT and added to the body of research to support decision-making and practices that impact the increased freedom from racial inequalities by formally documenting “experiential knowledge of people of color [as] legitimate and critical to understanding racial subordination” (Parker & Villalpando, 2007, p. 520).

Selection of Participants and Sampling Strategies

I initiated the participant selection process by accessing and reviewing the roster of current Texas superintendents and executive school leaders from the Texas Education Agency website, the American Association of School Superintendents, Texas Council of Women School Executives, and Texas Association Black School Educators. The identified pool was deliberately minimized to focus on school districts in the Region IV Education Service Center's geographic area. I eliminated superintendents and executive school leaders in institutions other than independent school districts.

Criterion sampling was used for this study. Participants met the following criteria: (a) identify as an African American woman serving as Texas public school executive-level administrators and aspires to become a superintendent, or (b) identify as an African American woman who is a seated Texas public school superintendent, or (c) has served in executive-level leadership or the superintendency for two or more years. I identified women as potential participants for this study; men were excluded as the focus of the study is on women's experiences. Candidates who have never applied for a superintendent position nor intend to apply for a superintendent position were not included in this study.

Creswell (2007) noted that a general frame of reference for qualitative research "is not only to study a few sites or individuals but also to collect extensive detail about each site or individual studies" (p. 126). Because of the extensive details that were collected in study and the desire to reach saturation, I selected four participants and continued to collect data until data saturation was achieved.

I contacted participants by telephone and email and invited them to participate in this study. I gained permission and consent from the participants. Through semi-structured interviews, information relative to participants' experiences was collected and stored electronically and protected by password.

Instruments

Creswell (2007) noted various forms for the collection of data in narrative studies. For the purpose of this study, I employed the use of interviews. Throughout Chapter IV, I documented the responses of specific members of the group with respect to their shared beliefs. These data were collected via a semi-structured interview protocol I developed. When people serve as the information source as in the case in my study, Murray Thomas (2003) noted that interviews are the appropriate data-gathering methods. The interview questions can be found in Appendix A.

Interview protocol. The questions for the interview protocol are grounded in my desire to align the interviews with the review of literature and the research question. The interview questions were developed to solicit responses from participants regarding their perceptions and experiences relevant to the review of literature, perceived barriers, job search processes, workplace incivility, familial influences, and mentoring. The interview questions are located in Appendix A. To address the quality of these questions, I revised these with my dissertation committee. In addition, I piloted these questions with two individuals who were not a part of this study.

Narrative questions. The decision to collect narrative data was grounded in my desire to increase understanding of the phenomena that maintains the historic marginalization of African American women and their ascension to the superintendency in Texas. Through the narrative questioning process, demographic information was authentically shared.

Role of the researcher. As an African American woman currently employed in school leadership and who aspires to the superintendency in a Texas Independent School District, I was cognizant of my stance. “At stake is the fulfillment of both academic requirements to produce scientific knowledge and society’s requirements for tackling wicked problems by taking relevant actions” (Hazard et al., 2020, p. 3). In my 22 years in the field of education, I have observed and experienced micro-aggressions, institutional racism, and sexism in the workplace. As the researcher, I was attentive to the constructs of positivism due to my personal belief regarding workplace behaviors that contribute to the increasingly minimized number of African American women in the highest educational position in Texas Independent School Districts.

Procedures

Before proceeding with participant contact, I gained permission from the university IRB committee (see Appendix B). Following permission, I identified participants and contacted them to request their consent to serve as a participant in this study. Once consent was verified, I contacted them via email or telephone and scheduled interviews. I facilitated interviews via Zoom using my Sam Houston State University account. This allowed me to record the interviews and maintain security of the information collected.

Interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol (see Appendix A). I allowed participants to initiate topics about their perceptions regarding career paths and access in the educational workplace. The question format was consistent, yet organic, to allow me to obtain similar information from each participant, while also allowing exploration of their perspectives (Newman & Benz, 1998). The approach was grounded in a conversational nature with a focus on participants' perspectives (Guajardo & Guajardo, 2007). Interviews were conducted via Zoom, recorded and last approximately 45-90 minutes. Software was employed to transcribe each interview.

To ensure the security and privacy of the participants and data, and in accordance with security agreements expressed in the informed consent, all digital files were stored in One Drive in my university account, which requires a password and is secure. No recording of personal information on digital files occurred. Data were encrypted.

Trustworthiness

Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) developed The Qualitative Legitimation Model and noted opportunities for minimizing concerns in research and strengthening trustworthiness. In this study, I noted the ascension of threats to the internal credibility of the research. Specifically, I monitored for researcher bias, population generalizability, and reactivity.

Researcher Bias. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) assert that “researcher bias occurs when the researcher has personal biases...he/she is unable to bracket. This bias may be subconsciously transferred to the participants in such a way that their behaviors, attitudes, or experiences are affected” (p. 236). I have described some of these biases in

the section titled Role of the Researcher and employed the strategies of checking for researcher effects.

Population Generalizability. Population generalizability “is the tendency to generalize findings rather than to utilize the qualitative data to obtain insights into particular underlying processes and practices that prevail within a specific location” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 238). The findings of this study might not generalize to other women in leadership roles or apply to women in other regions of the United States.

Reactivity. “Reactivity involves changes in persons’ responses that result from being cognizant of the fact that one is participating in a research investigation” (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007, p. 239). Simply stated, members might act differently knowing they are being studied. To strengthen the trustworthiness of this research, I employed the strategies of checking for researcher effects to counter researcher bias, population generalizability, and reactivity.

Checking for Researcher Effects. Checking for researcher effects can be managed and minimized in several ways as noted by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007). For this research, I employed the methods of maintaining a firm grasp of the research question and monitoring for informant bias. I was cognizant of my experiences as an African American female in public school leadership and monitored for possible influence on participants.

Data Analysis

Murray Thomas (2007) describes narrative research coding as having a story as the starting point. The story, in nature, will be based in chronology, a plot of a three-dimensional space (Murray Thomas, 2007). The chronology will reveal epiphanies and

events. The plot will follow a story line inclusive of characters, settings, problems, actions, and resolutions. The three-dimensional space will include interaction, continuity, and situation. “The researcher will not know what approach to use until he or she actually starts the data analysis process” (Murray Thomas, 2007, p. 171). Regarding the analysis and representation of narrative research, Murray Thomas (2007) suggested that “data collected in a narrative study need to be analyzed for the story they have to tell, a chronology of unfolding events, and turning points or epiphanies” (p. 155).

In addition, I analyzed the data for themes. To accomplish this analysis, I used codes and assigned codes in various cycles of the transcripts. In *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, Saldana (2016) explains qualitative research coding involves “a short word or phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 5). Data were presented in stories as told by the participants. A table was used to summarize themes common to the participants.

Summary

Creswell (2013) posited that qualitative research design allows the researcher to collect information and learn perspectives in the participants’ natural settings. In an effort to solicit participant responses that will yield data about career-related perceptions, I employed a narrative inquiry approach. In this chapter, I articulated the research design and the conceptual framework. I shared information relative to the processes for identifying participants and obtaining informed consent for participation in the study. Additionally, I examined the role of the researcher, threats to the study’s trustworthiness,

and strategies to strengthen the trustworthiness. Finally, I explained how I will analyze the data.

CHAPTER IV

Presentation and Analysis of Data

Overview

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts. Specifically, this study investigated how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceive the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency. This study contributed to the research by documenting how perceptions of lived experiences influence the leadership platform progression of African American women in executive-level administration in Texas public schools. In this chapter, I share the stories of the four participants along with an analysis of themes emerging from the data. The stories in this chapter have been edited, and some details have been removed to protect the identity of the participants.

The purpose of this study was to focus on the perceptions and narratives about the experiences encountered by Black women executive-level public school administrators during their career plights. Although feminist theories hold that all women are oppressed, Black (of African descent) women experience a different oppression because of the dual effects of race and gender (Collins, 2019 Grogan, 2000). In that this study focus led to an analysis of race, gender, socialization and stereotyping of Black women, it directly aligned with Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought as frameworks to illuminate Black women's experiences surrounding access and success during their professional plights. The overarching goal of this study was to aid these women in

revealing their stories as narrative accounts of their lived experiences. Black Feminist Thought enriches the analysis of the participants' accounts, by providing the framework needed to acknowledge the unique richness of their experiences as identified in Collins' (1990) four themes of Black Feminist Thought: creation of self-definitions and self-valuation; the confrontation and dismantling of intersectionality domination of race, class, and gender; interconnectedness of intellectual thought and political engagement; and the inheritance of a legacy of discriminatory resistance and transformation.

Similarly, Critical Race Theory is a compounded layer leading to the emancipation of those oppressed by the structural work of racism "to maintain hierarchies, allocate resources, and distribute power" (Horsford, 2009a, p. 62). It was a noted impossibility to document the voices of the participants without the combined lenses of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought.

Introduction of Participants

It was interesting to note that all participants earned a doctorate degree in keeping with data that indicate that Black women are the most educated demographic of people "although Black women only represent up 12.7% of the female population . . . they consistently make up over 50% of the number of Black people receiving degrees" (Katz, 2021, para. 5) and earn advanced degrees at a higher pace than all other females, racially and ethnically (Katz, 2021). One of the participants advised me as the researcher to make "sure that you get your doctorate because you're going to need all the bells and whistles." Despite these data, these women's voices still require documentation, explanation, and justification.

Four African American women, each fitting the provided definition for this study of an executive-level administrator in a Texas public school district, shared extensive narratives and nurturing advice to me as the researcher, surrounding their perceptions of their lived experiences and their respective plights to the Texas public school superintendency. I named the participants Denise Davis, Jasmine James, Leena Lawrence, and Monica Michaels and will share their stories in this chapter.

Denise Davis

Denise Davis, an educator of more than two decades, is married with children and the first in her family to graduate from high school. She began her career as a three-year teacher and moved into educational leadership. Prior to executive-level administrative responsibilities, Denise served as a campus principal. All of Denise's experiences were in the state of Texas. Her career trajectory to executive-level administration is self-described as less traditional than most educators. Denise spoke with a calm self-assurance that could even silently articulate confidence; clear about who she had been, who she is, and who she will not be again.

Jasmine James

Jasmine James, an educator of nearly three decades, is married with children. She shared various teaching experiences in several states and countries, including Texas. With nearly two decades of teaching experiences, she moved into her first role in educational leadership. She described her career trajectory in a predictable manner from the classroom to the executive-level leadership. Jasmine spoke with clarity about knowing what community is and is not, the importance of preserving personal integrity, and about knowing when to gracefully exit a community.

Leena Lawrence

Leena Lawrence, an educator of nearly three decades, is married with children. Her career trajectory was not an unusual path from the classroom to executive-level leadership. Leena's entire career has been in Texas. She spoke with a matter-of-factness that communicated such a high-level of self-awareness and a clear freedom that comes from the expectation of respect and forward movement regardless of circumstance and situation.

Monica Michaels

Monica Michaels, a three-decade veteran of education, is married with children. Monica's career trajectory, apart from the multitude of teaching grade levels and certifications, followed a traditional path from the classroom to the executive-level educational leadership. All her experiences were in Texas. Monica spoke with a tone and measure of self-reflection parallel to experiences relative to the research question. She is certain of her abilities, her capacity, her leadership skills, and how those factors interact in her professional engagements.

Intersectionality

Checking for researcher effects (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007) became a critical experience for me as the researcher, as an African American female in public school leadership with a personal stance (Collins, 2019) on the experiences being shared by the participants. Maintaining a firm grasp of the research question and monitoring for informant bias remained priority for me as the intersectionality of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought revealed themselves in participants' stories and experiences

relative to race, gender, and stereotypes of Black women. The framing of their stories was grounded in the spirit of seminal theorists, Collins, Crenshaw, bell hooks, and Bell.

Intersectionality of Gender and Aspirants to the Superintendency

“The emotional, sexual, and psychological stereotyping of females begins when the doctor says: “It’s a girl.” — Shirley Chisholm

Kowalski and Stouder (1999) identified gender discrimination as an external barrier to attaining the superintendency. Through the coding process, *family, marriage, children, geographic boundaries, traditional roles in the home, and perceived institutional differences* emerged as six categorical themes relative to gender. These themes are shown in Table 5.

Table 5

Themes for Intersectionality of Gender Roles and Responsibilities

Theme	Definition	Significant Statement Example
Family	Immediate family consisting of parents, in-laws, spouse, children, and grandchildren.	“he quickly became my partner”
Marriage	Legal unification of two consenting adults.	She had to go “where and when [her] husband was willing to go. I couldn’t only be focused on where I wanted to be. I had to also think about him.”
Children	Youth the participants are responsible for in the home, whether birthed or adopted.	Monica is considering looking outside of Texas or making a lateral move once she and her husband become empty nesters.
Geographic Boundaries	Allowable areas to seek employment based on family and marriage agreements.	“When you are a superintendent and you’re female you have to know your geographic boundaries.”

Traditional Roles in Home	Tradition of women cooking, cleaning, and caring for the home.	“I think the barrier would be those the roles that historically make up a household, including being respectful of the male role and not overstepping it.”
Perceived Institutional Differences	Workplace incivility perceived to be grounded in gender differences or microaggressions grounded in gender differences.	“There are some positions that “you just will not get because you are female and there are some positions that you will not get because you are African American.”

Family. Kowalski and Reitzug (1993) noted family responsibilities as an external barrier to the superintendency. As referenced in Chapter II, the superintendency is demanding and requires balance – both personal and professional. Sources of balance may be found through the support of “a life coach, exercising, and setting aside time for friends and family” (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 63).

Each of the women shared the importance of family as a source of balance, support, and priority. All four women were in mature marriages that extended the spans of their educational careers. Each participant married her high school or college sweetheart and described strong support from their husbands, in and out of the home. Jasmine described her husband being initially shocked by the experience of her pursuit of executive-level positions. Although the nature of that level of pursuit was shocking to him, Jasmine affirmed that “he quickly became my partner” in the process.

In agreement with Gurvitch et al. (2008), collectively, the participants shared experiences that verified that family support is a central element for career success. Although research may position family as a barrier to the superintendency, each participant identified experiences that positioned family as a contributing factor, all describing their husbands and families as supportive and their cheerleaders.

Marriage. Brunner et al. (2003) posited that regarding personal relationships, 30% of women seeking the superintendency delayed children and families, 18% reported that their spouse would have had to change employment, and 20% resorted to long-distance commuter marriages; this study's participants had slightly different experiences. Being married was, in some instances, identified as a barrier. Denise referred to being married as a barrier simply because she could not relocate at her own will. She had to go "where and when [her] husband was willing to go. I couldn't only be focused on where I wanted to be. I had to also think about him."

Also, in contrast to the Brunner et al.'s (2003) study, none of the participants reported an expectation to delay child-bearing. Further, none of the participants reported long-distance commuter marriages. Interestingly, each participant recalled partnerships in relocation decisions, whether the decision was to move their family or remain until all the children were "grown and gone."

Children. Although women have historically and successfully managed family and career obligations, those "wanting to be superintendents need to establish support systems to help them with responsibilities in their homes and with their children" (Severns & Combs, 2013, p. 63). The subject of children emerged with each participant. Obviously, their children were paramount factors in the decision-making process to pursue executive-level positions and a determining factor in interactions as an executive-level educational administrator. As Denise best explained, "you are always concerned, as a woman and mother, working to make everything right for so many other peoples' children. It is my hope that I got it right with my own." Jasmine echoed a sentiment for protecting family and children when she stated:

I wanted to make sure that I had my family together, where my children were grown and gone. I have grandchildren, but you know I could still have relationships with them. So, I made sure that when I became a superintendent that I could devote as much attention to it as possible, because it takes a lot to do that.

For Jasmine and her husband, the agreement was to raise their family in a stable location and remain stationary until the last one graduated and left home. Similarly, Monica is considering looking outside of Texas or making a lateral move once she and her husband become empty nesters.

Geographic Boundaries. Confirming the Chapter II reference to relocation reservations as identified by Derrington and Sharrat (2009) as a barrier to the superintendency, Monica disclosed that she is considering a search outside of Texas after all of her children have graduated high school. Denise recalled not being able to apply for jobs in certain regions of the state because her husband would not move to said regions. She further confirmed Derrington and Sharrat's (2009) finding by sharing "when you are a superintendent and you're female you have to know your geographic boundaries." Monica intently asserted, "you have to decide if you will sacrifice." When discussing geographic boundaries from a familial perspective, it was interesting that Jasmine had an experience with the school board making geographic determinations on her behalf. Monica told me a story about applying for a job, having full knowledge of the geographic location, having resolved relocation with her husband; however,

I was in the top candidate in the beginning. Once in person, I didn't even get a second interview. Because, you know, they determined that I wouldn't want to move. Why would apply for and arrive to an interview for a job in a city I wasn't

willing to move to? The historical mindset and framework are that White women largely get positions in communities they were raised in, taught in, and served as principal in. They have built in support systems. That is not typically the case for African American women. We have to move our families in order to move up.

Traditional Roles in the Home. Each of the participants expressed gratitude for the type of supportive husband they had and also acknowledged that, to some measure, traditional roles in the home remain intact. Although, traditional roles in the home were discussed, each participant discussed a husband who willingly took on non-traditional roles of the husband, such as cooking, cleaning, activities with the children, and “taking care of me while I took care of everyone else.”

Denise shared, “when you’re a female superintendent, you don’t have a wife who’s going to be doing the cooking and cleaning.” She further offered that:

I laugh at my male colleagues sometimes because they have a wife. You know while you’re working when you’re a wife and when you’re superintendent it is still the same . . . all those duties. And I have an amazing husband. Don’t get me wrong. But I think that when you have a man who you are married to, and you have to consider him and have to consider, to some degree, to me, I think the barrier would be those the roles that historically make up a household, including being respectful of the male role and not overstepping it.

Perceived Institutional Differences. There is a nascent body of literature in mainstream research that highlights the impact and power that racial mythology holds over the plight of Black women in the workplace. The *Double Whammy Effect* (e.g., being a woman and African American; Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995) is the term

synonymous with adverse stereotypes based on gender and race that cause workplace strain for women of color, specifically in relations to promotion and advancement. With a focus on the gender pillar of The Double Whammy, Denise cautioned that she advises all women, Black, White, Hispanic, but specifically African American, that “we are judged so harshly, and people are looking for a reason to not hire us.” Comparably, all participants shared the sentiment that women are judged differently. Specifically, Denise outlined an experience of being in a meeting, making a statement, and being ignored. She extended the comments with adding that a White man then made the exact statement and was met with “oh, that is a great idea!” Early in executive-leadership, Denise admitted that she would remain quiet in these instances. That admission was quickly silenced with the assertion, “now, I intercede! I don't care what they think but they will know.” She emphasized recognizing the risk of being judged for being abrasive.

In addition to workplace incivility perceived to be grounded in gender differences, participants all shared accounts of microaggressions grounded in gender differences. These experiences were explained as someone openly informing them that they would not get the job “because they don't want a woman.” Jasmine warned me, in a nurturing manner, that there are some positions that “you just will not get because you are female and there are some positions that you will not get because you are African American.” She confirmed the warning with experiences of her resume being in place and acknowledged without receiving an invitation to interview. More explicitly, she described an interview that was granted; however, the board president put his head down on the table during her interview. Jasmine described this as uncomfortable. She framed that

experience as walking into an icy room and not being able to “un-ice” it. Before transitioning, she submitted, “let's put it this way. . . I wasn't their cup of tea.”

Each participant spoke of recognizing signs that they were not wanted. Leena was unambiguously told “we're not looking for a woman.” Interestingly, another woman made that statement to her. Leena recalled that the moment was “pretty telling” and “eye opening” as a different type of barrier that is sometimes hidden. Leena’s nurturing came as encouragement to “be prepared so that the board knows you are not just a woman; you're a woman leader and understand the finances, more than ever” because a lot of men have that advantage over women. Although each participant communicated threads of district and board preferences for men, Monica directly shared her perceptions that “for whatever reason, districts have more confidence in males than they do in females.” Jasmine was clear about her perceptions on race and gender. More importantly, her perceptions support my prior reference to the educational levels of African American women in executive-level positions:

I have an associate degree, two master’s degrees, certifications, a doctorate, and varying experiences at the executive level, and have not been appointed to positions that were given to White men with only a superintendent certification. When interviewing for superintendent positions, it did not feel as though my knowledge was valued as much [as men].

Intersectionality of Race and Aspirants to the Superintendency

“A white woman has only one handicap to overcome - that of sex. I have two both sex and race. ... Colored men have only one - that of race. Colored women are the only group in this country who have two heavy handicaps to overcome, that of race as well as that of sex.” - Mary Church Terrell

The Double Whammy Effect is the term synonymous with adverse stereotypes based on gender and race that cause workplace strain for women of color, specifically in relations to promotion and advancement (Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995). In this section, I analyzed participants’ responses and experiences from the lens of the race pillar. As closely aligned as are Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, so is the connectivity of my analysis of race and that of Black woman mythology or stereotypes. In this section, I analyzed the data, still focused on Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, some common themes that emerged were institutional/structural racism, implicit bias, and the presumption of incompetence and invisibility.

Institutional/Structural Racism and Aspirants to the Superintendency. The infrastructure of the American educational systems seems not to have been designed for the leadership of women or minorities.

The history of the emergence of superintendents of color is a phenomenon that exists outside of the realm of traditional superintendent-preparation programs. Because early superintendents of color were excluded from the traditional preparation programs, they emerged in a separate and distinctly different context from that of their White counterparts. (Simmons, 2005, pp. 251-252)

In the 19th century an exception made in the role of women in educational leadership was that of allowing African American college-educated women to serve in primarily southern states as a Jeanes Supervisor with a defined role for monitoring and improving instructional services (Alston, 1999; Alston & Jones, 2002; Angel et al. 2013). These women served in similar capacities as superintendents but were supervised by White men. Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) and Shakeshaft et al. (2007) refer to the disparity of women in public school executive leadership positions as *persistent*. Such persistence is evidenced by the May 2021 data for the 1,021 Texas superintendents of independent school districts in Texas in 2021. In this report, the gap between men and women was 54.55%, with men representing 77.28% (789 men). In analysis of demographic data of the 1,021 superintendents in Texas independent school districts in 2021, 232 were women. Of the 232 female superintendents of Texas independent school districts, four (1.72%) were African American women compared to 83.19% of the women being White. From a different perspective of the analysis, it is noted that African American women comprise 0.39% of superintendents in Texas independent school districts (Texas Education Agency, 2021). Collins (1989), a feminist theorist, argued that the disparity in the representation of the African American women in the superintendency is due to other factors than gender, the disparity also involves race and class. I found that these women in this study were not only competing with challenges and tasks of their assigned positions. They were battling with traditional and historical constraints they inherited from a system whose infrastructure was never designed to include their leadership.

In the plight to the Texas public school superintendency, Denise served in various executive-level positions and experienced multiple times of being the first African American to serve in those positions. Her perception was that “we are expected to do everything.” A collective perception among participants was that everything they did had to be performed at levels of excellence greater than that of their White counterparts.

Denise explained:

It is important not to give anyone a reason to X us out . . . so when I prepare for an interview, I go all in for a week studying the district because we have to do things that others don't have to do to become superintendent.

Jasmine shared similar perceptions when I inquired about institutional experiences that may have been impacted by her race. She advised me of what I came to connect to common institutional hiring practices that shaped some of her application and interviewing experiences. Jasmine shared:

You may be very qualified for the position, but that does not mean that you are going to get an interview for it. And then, when you do get an interview for the position, and you go in and interview as an African American and that's all that's talked about . . . because they can tell immediately that I am African American; you know it is not the job for you. So, I take it as I'm interviewing them, just like they're interviewing me.

Denise's shared experiences and career trajectory were not closely aligned to the perceived experiences and career trajectory of the other participants. As a figurative nod to my earlier reference to glass ceilings, Denise not only shattered glass ceilings, but she also shattered the constraints of the glass walls that sustained those glass ceilings. She

described her experiences as being “more similar to what a White male goes through. They are able to not worry about a set of experiences and just really focus on opportunity.” Her perception of this experience aligns with previous researchers who revealed the role of superintendent was largely reserved for men (Fields, 2016; Kowalski, 2006) and the position was distinguished as a business managerial role (Fields, 2016). Superintendents were appointed based on perceived managerial skill sets, instinct, or birth right as men (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993) versus knowledge related to teaching and learning.

Monica also shared experiences where institutional practices were impacted by race. She shared a story that involved search firms as barriers to the superintendency for African Americans, in general, and not just women. Monica shared,

Race matters in every community when you apply for superintendent. I've learned that it doesn't necessarily matter about the student population. What matters about who the power players are and what their tolerance is for race. And I believe that to be true. I've also found that that matters in search firms. African American applicants aren't being brought before boards and it's amazing how many times I have been made aware, “you know your application wasn't even brought to the board”. And there's a search firm that specifically, very rarely even presents any African American applicants. I try not to put myself in a situation where I know that race is going to matter, but I know it matters. It's also not just being Black but it's being a female. They will take someone from a smaller district that may have had 1,000 kids when I oversee 80,000 kids. And they'll take someone from that small district as the appointed superintendent.

It was interesting that Monica perceived institutional racism in her experiences of not receiving jobs over someone with less professional experiences when her professional experiences include leading upwards of 80, 000 students. This experience was interesting to me because, again, national standards support the idea that, given her experiences and record, she was more qualified. Although Monica spoke about job titles bearing weight on promotions, I left the conversation feeling that race and gender certainly had a greater impact on the hiring practices she described.

Implicit Bias and Aspirants to the Superintendency. According to Banaji and Greenwald (2013), implicit biases are involuntary and present themselves in human behaviors without awareness or predominated control. Perceptions manifest as behaviors based on implicit beliefs held by individuals and social or professional groups. In accordance with this definition of implicit bias, the participants explained experiences where unacceptable, questionable, and unprofessional behaviors were demonstrated toward them and seemed to be accepted in the professional group as an acceptable norm. One such demonstration of implicit bias being acceptable and not redirected within a professional group occurred during an interview described by Jasmine:

Well, when you have a board member that falls asleep on your interview, you kind of know that you're not a fit for them. Or they put their head down on the desk because they really don't want to have a conversation, and they pull themselves out and they don't even ask the questions. I've had that experience. I was one of the top candidates and then something happened upon my arrival. The board president had to leave because of a sickness and before it was all over, I was not even in the top anymore, and I didn't even get a second interview. The

board president and vice president basically control the energy of the interview because if they feel like they can't work with you, you're not going to move forward, and if you do, you won't be long.

Leena, as a new leader, was warned not to go to certain geographic locations in her newly assigned community because of her race. The experience shared aligned with that of implicit biases in social groups. Clearly, the behaviors described were an acceptable norm in the community. With a student facing an emergency that required him to go home and no one at home having transportation, Leena decided to take the student home and was then casually warned,

to never go to certain parts of town because, as a Black woman, I may not return or ever be seen again. I was chased from one such location by a truck full of White men. It was a scary adventure. Going in, it was alright, I remember. Going in it was alright. Coming out was the scary part. There was a truck full of White men, and this was like a scene from a movie in which you think there's this old truck with people with guns, you know, or whatever. We didn't see any guns, but the truck was just slowly driving behind us and I thought, "Father get us out alive and I won't do it again!"

One of Monica's experiences with White colleagues, as a new leader, caused me to seek vocabulary support from Merriam-Webster for the word *shanties*. According to Merriam-Webster, a shanty, in the 1820 meaning, is, among other things, a shack. In Monica's perception, the word was used as an analogy for row houses that are typically associated with the poor living conditions of Black people. Monica, after explaining to me what a shanty was went on to explain,

I was introducing myself and sharing my plans [with the community and other leaders] about how I was going to turn this around. I remember the board president saying to me how many more of those shanties are you going to have? And, I was like shanties? The board president was referring to the portable buildings being used as classroom space in an area whose demographics were predominantly African American. "How many more of those shacks are you going to have on that campus?" And she was talking about the portables. And that's when I learned how horribly they felt about the [Black] kids and that they didn't know the kids.

I found it a bit concerning that although this board member was appointed to represent minority constituents, her subtle descriptions revealed her true feelings about them. Monica went on to share more about her encounters with this board member, "I remember, she would say to me that your kids are skipping school and they're walking across my lawn."

This board member's statement about the lawns apparently sparked additional responses from fellow board members, who obviously took stake in spewing statements that were laced with kernels of implicit bias. Monica further elaborated,

I remember, she would say to me that your kids are skipping school and they're walking across my lawn. One board member at that meeting said to me they need to be careful, because I have a shotgun. And I thought, wow these people really do not like these kids. So, I do a lot of homework. I've been told I'm just not sure that our community is ready for you. I've been told that about the power players and what they are ready to accept.

These repeated experiences guarded Monica to the extent that she appeared to have established processes to reduce the pain of these hurtful experiences of implicit bias. She explained:

I usually find someone that I know that's kind of close to the community and close to the board. And I usually ask the question do you think they will be receptive to not only a female but an African American female? I also feel like, for whatever reason, districts have more confidence in males than they do and females. This is my opinion. I don't have data and the evidence I have is, if you look at the number of males who are chosen, even when it comes to race, they will choose an African American male over an African American female and that data speaks to itself.

The Presumption of Incompetence, Invisibility and Aspiring to the Superintendency. The *invisibility syndrome* is a term coined by psychologist Anderson J. Franklin and is used in reference to the effects of racism. Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) noted that “the adaptive behavior and psychological well-being of African Americans can be affected by prejudice and discrimination (p. 33).” Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) further elaborated that “encountering repeated racial slights can create psychological invisibility (p. 33).” As an additional lens with Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, the *invisibility syndrome* assists in “understanding the inner evaluative processes and adaptive behavior of African Americans in managing experiences of racism” (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000, p. 33). There is a large literature on the physiological and psychological effect of racism on Blacks (Wing, 2020, p. 227). Considering explicit and implicit biases that impact workplace interactions and career trajectories, a common trend among participants was that of being presumed

incompetent before the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge or skill level. The collective perception of the participants, regarding their experiences, was that as African American women, they were automatically presumed incompetent or disregarded or ignored. An example of this was explained by Denise:

There were times when I made statements in meetings and got ignored. Then, a White male would make the same statement and get the “Oh! That’s a great idea!” I have been at some tables at which I did not speak up for a situation and that will never happen again.

Denise has professionally matured since her early administrative years. She navigates relationships and communication with a level of poise and professionalism that communicates confidence and competence. However, her declaration from this experience, combined with her now professional maturity, aligned directly with Patton’s (2020) thoughts on clapping back, or responding to such acts:

I believe that clapping back is an act of self-care and a way to build a buffer between myself and the hate from racist and sexist trolls who want to silence Women of Color and keep us living in fear or chronically on the defense. When I clap back, it allows me to recast myself from victim to an empowered woman who is not to be fucked with (p. 332).

Denise continued with an experience of being ignored by other women, specifically White women, while attending a women’s conference:

When I attended the conference for the first time, like the women were not open . . . many of those were all White females without superintendent certifications. Naturally, the few other African American women and I gravitated toward one

another. We continued to attend the conference because we understood the power of numbers and women being together. We leaned on one another to successfully navigate the organizations.

Just as Denise's experiences with being ignored, treated as invisible, and handled with presumed incompetence, Jasmine also perceived similar experiences. In the area of presumed incompetence, Jasmine shared her recollections of having to prove her competence at levels higher than that of her White female counterparts:

Non-ethnic women do not have to have all the bells and whistles. I have seen it happen! They don't have to have all the bells and whistles if they are working on it. Whereas, we have to have it all to possibly even be considered. I don't think [search firms] even look at us if we don't have all the bells and whistles.

Leena describes being ignored and presumed incompetent in experiences with students' parents and district employees who felt comfortable enough with district-acceptable norms and biases to make explicit expressions. Leena shared:

A parent called me requesting an appointment because she was not used to dealing with "those people." When asked who those people were, the parent said, "Black people." I agreed to a meeting and shared that I would invite the counselor to ensure all was well for the child. When the parent arrived, she addressed the White counselor, thinking the White woman was me. The counselor corrected the parent and advised the parent, pointing to me, 'she is the boss.'

These experiences of presumed incompetence also might border into acts of uncivil, explicit bias behavior. In essence, some might argue that the fine line between racism and gender bias has an indistinguishable line in the Double Whammy Effect (e.g.,

being a woman and African American; Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995) when encountered by women of color in leadership or authoritative positions. For example, Leena went on to share that “on another occasion, an incident happened when a White community member intentionally knocked my name plate off my desk and shouted, ‘you’re not a doctor!’” Leena’s earned doctorate degree and title of doctor before her name served as what should have been a confirmation of her competence and success. However, the community member attempted to demean and minimize the status by throwing the name plate to the ground. Leena added to this experience,

I have seen and talked to non-minorities and what I believe, what I’ve always believed, is that minorities have to work 10 times harder and prove that you can. I think we come with the view of “I wonder if she can do it” as people’s belief in African American female abilities. We have to be the racial representative. If the person who left it in good standing, [then] a minority is good to go in an interview. If the person who left was a Black female and she left it in disarray, you just messed it up for the rest of us. They’re not hiring an African American female. They’re not hiring an African American at all.

Intersectionality of Socialization and Aspiring to the Superintendency

Previous researchers recognized formal and informal barriers (Angel et al., 2013; Newton 2006) that impede the advancement of women. Specifically, researchers noted barriers to be limited access to mentoring, networking, and the implications of both (Angel et al., 2013). Ortiz (2000) posited “without adequate representation in higher levels of leadership, females are not likely to emerge as superintendents through mentorships or networking contacts” (p. 18). Clearly, the lack of African American

female superintendents in Texas (1.72%) creates a gap in mentorship for women of color who desire to reach the level of superintendency. Mentorship is a foundation that many African Americans aspiring to the superintendency do not have on their career paths. For example, Bandura (1996), using social cognitive theory, posited that one's success is influenced by self-directed patterns aligned to behaviors of successful people. Without modeling from familiar sources, success may be hampered (Campbell, 2015) and women benefit from the experience of observing a woman in a leadership role typically occupied by a man (Brunner et al., 2003; James, 2001). The absence of this role modeling established barriers for women seeking the superintendency (Gardiner et al., 2000; Gupton & Slick, 1996). People seeking to professionally advance identify with others like themselves who are serving in the capacities that they aspire to professionally.

Often, mentoring opportunities are provided through such socialization activities as casual conversations during male-oriented activities. Denise's personal experiences confirmed this assumption about the lack of access and connectivity. She offered, "I think mentoring and networking is so important because, historically, you've heard about decisions being made at the golf course by males."

Denise's added comments compounded mentoring absences with that of class-oriented activities that also create another gap in the mentor chasm. For this omission, she suggested the importance of networking and race-neutral alliances:

Even if you weren't first generation, your parents did not have seats at those tables. It is so important that we provide a network. I think it is absolutely necessary to network whether its African American affiliate organizations, female affiliate organizations, and so forth. It's been a priority for me because I recognize

everyone did not have what I had. Your circle is important for exposure along with being at the right place at the right time, having the right information, so you can make connections and be introduced to different gatekeepers in search firms. I know I would not have gotten the job, had I not had mentors – White male mentors.

Similarly, Jasmine shared experiences with mentoring, gate keeping, and ascension:

It is important to have someone talking you up to get the job. It took a lot of time getting information from different people and attending different conferences. I went to all the conferences and the aspiring superintendent academies and all the things they had available, to learn everything possible. I went to conferences for about five years before I felt that I was ready to start applying for superintendent jobs after building relationships and attending conferences. Well, as far as mentoring and networking is concerned, that was very difficult for me. It was difficult for me to step out and ask for help.

It was interesting to me to discover that Jasmine's efforts to increase her professional networking opportunities still left her feeling insecure in other areas. I attributed this insecurity to areas previously identified from the repetition of omissions and acts of presumption of incompetence. With that in mind, Jasmine shared,

It was difficult because, you know you get that mentality that you should have a John Wayne effect, that you should be able to get out there and just get it. But that's not reality. I learned that early on. For every executive position pretty much that I've had I've been rubber-stamped by somebody who knew me, and the

superintendent or assistant superintendent called and asked about me. Regarding mentoring, you have to ask for it. You have to search for it. You have to basically build those relationships and throughout my career, I have done that and try to do that for others.

With similar experiences regarding limited access to mentoring, networking, and the implications of both (Angel et al., 2013), Leena spoke about the necessity for African American women to be intentional about mentoring one another:

We have to be very careful, even of ourselves, and I know we've gotten better just from the people that I've worked with. The African American female principals and superintendents that I've worked with, and I have tried our best to reach back and help others.

Mentoring and gate keeping often are initiated through university professor mentorships. Like Denise, Leena gained access to the principalship because a “university professor, in my principal preparation program, told me to apply for principal job but I had to seek out that mentoring.” In keeping with the dialogue about mentoring and networking being an act that usually occurs among people of similar attributes, Monica posited, “promotions are due to relationships and trust in the district and community. African American superintendents have poured into and invested in me because they, and I, believe that I am capable.”

Networking opportunities that were established through university preparation programs was an area that surfaced with a couple of the participants. This area of networking and mentorship was not considered prior to the participants' sharing. However, Monica added, “university networking is critical, and some universities have

stronger traditions of networking than others. I got a promotion immediately after being accepted in principal preparation program due to a strong tradition and networking.”

Intersectionality of Black Woman Mythology and Aspirants to the Superintendency

“Women of Color who challenge White, patriarchal norms and defy race and gender stereotypes are often depicted as angry, ungrateful, and threatening” (Neiman et al., 2020, p.8).

There is a nascent body of literature in mainstream research that highlights the impact and power that racial mythology holds over the plight of Black women in the workplace. As stated in Chapter II, it is assumed that many of Black women’s experiences result from the whiplash and aftermath of socio-historical myths about Black women, including such anti-Black woman folklore as the “angry black woman,” stereotypical mental caricatures, and other demeaning images. It is presumed that these images and other socially constructed descriptors of African American women have helped to create lasting mental models about these women. Moreover, these derogatory images are believed to continuously impede Black women’s ascension and retention to top leadership positions in the workplace.

As previously stated in the review of literature, West (2018) purported that African American females were categorized as Mammies, Sapphires, and Jezebels, stereotypes that translated into “corresponding contemporary images that serve a similar function, including that of the Strong Black Woman, the Angry Black Woman, and the Video Vixen” (p. 140). Further, West described “role strain” (p. 140) as the process African American females navigate to find equilibrium of responsibilities, and concerns with acceptance of physical attributes such as skin color and hair texture. “Hair

discrimination is the least spoken about injustice, yet we know it exists” (Trinidad, 2020, para. 11).

The term Mammy describes “a role and a person within the [Slavery] plantation household who served as a baby nurse, cook and general domestic worker” (West, 2018, p. 141). The word *sapphire* references the term angry Black woman used as a “social control mechanism . . . employed to punish Black females who violate societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, nonthreatening, and unseen” (Pilgrim, 2015, p. 121). In the review of literature relative to African American females in the workplace, Mammy and Sapphire were central to analyzing possible root causes of workplace incivility and restricted promotions and/or ascension into the superintendency.

With a clear understanding of the risk of being considered Sapphire or the Angry Black Woman, Denise shared,

I intercede. I don't care what they think but they will know [what I think] although I recognize the risk of being judged for being abrasive. I am most embarrassed about the times I should have spoken up about a situation and did not, when you have been the only [Black] person and being able to maintain my integrity and a sense of pride.

This statement came into full alignment with Wing (2020) about recasting oneself from “victim to an empowered woman” (p. 332). Jasmine shared experiences that aligned with African American female leaders being interacted with as Mammies and being expected to do it all when she explained that the expectation is that “you're moving to another community where no one knows you and you know they're dependent on you to fix everything within two weeks.”

Also having direct experiences with stereotyping or Black Woman Mythology, Monica explained comments made about her while interviewing: “The comments that got me most was a White female saying ‘she reminds us of so-and-so. She is going to be tough. She's not going to be easy to deal with. She's going to be hard on people.’” In contrast to that inappropriate and demeaning description, Monica explained,

anyone who knows me would probably say that I am the most friendly and warmest person. During that time, there was a series about American First Ladies. And I remember looking at how they were working with Michelle Obama and how smart she was. But if you've watched the series, they play back her speaking engagements and her speaking to people. They shared with her though her intention is I’m being, and having, an intelligent conversation with you. But they share it with her as if “you don't smile and make yourself personal.” People take you as that straightforward, mean, tough African American female. So, I learned from that I have to smile more, and I bring a lot more about my family in.

Unfortunately, Monica was placed in a position with feelings that necessitated minimizing herself. This minimization was the sacrifice she made in hopes of avoiding the whip of Angry Black Woman Mythology. She expressed her self-imposed acquiescence was seemingly used a tool for professional survival:

And I smile and I’m energetic and I don't sound like I know everything. So, I’ve had to also alter who I am to appeal to others. And I always bring my family to show myself as human. I work to weave in “yes, I’m confident and I know what I’m doing” but I also weave in that personal side because too much of the confident and I know what I’m doing, if you're an African American female,

comes across as that Angry Black Woman. I wish people could see us for who we are and not be judged.

With perceptions of such high-level judgement and casting of stereotypes, the participants shared strong perceptions about harnessing themselves, their true selves, for interview purposes. Denise shared:

On the day of an interview, I am hyper-conservative. I wear braids everywhere else, but for interviews, my hair will be bone straight. I wear a suit with a coat, but it's a dress suit. I wear pantyhose with closed toe shoes and a single strand of pearls. I don't give them a reason to say anything other than to expand on my responses and what I bring to the table and not how I look.

With a similar experience, Leena shared:

In my principal preparation program, during the summer, I asked classmate about an open position in her district. My hair was braided, and I had on shorts. And she said these words, after she looked me up and down, "we're not looking for a woman."

The concept of Sapphire includes an expectation for African American women to be "passive, servile, nonthreatening, and unseen" (Pilgrim, 2015, p. 121). This is commonly interpreted by non-Black counterparts as the tone and passion with which African American women speak. With like experiences, Denise shared:

Because we are passionate, people love to hear us speak but they don't like to hear us. [When we speak], people will be inspired because they love inspiration. Because we were raised in the church, we've been speaking, inspiring, and motivating the church for generations. But when you say something that goes

against the fiber of what they believe is good for our students or have a rebuttal ... then all of a sudden, “she has a huge chip on her shoulder!”

These stereotypes and attributes-turned-negative might cause African American women to navigate workplaces and certain social arenas and organizations with caution to ensure something as natural as hair texture and voice tone will not cause discomfort for others. Slocum (2020) described this phenomenon as a “need to protect our ability to obtain a job...as...one of the many ways others in the system have power over us” (p. 313). In keeping with Slocum’s thoughts and Denise’s shared perceptions, Jasmine shared:

being an African American woman, there are preconceived notions about you, that may not be true, but you're still dealing with what someone or what a community may feel. And so, for me, it was all about showing who I was and communicating with people on a level where they didn't feel threatened - where they didn't feel like I was in a position that was there to hurt, but there to support. It took a lot of communication. It took a lot of time, whereas maybe a non-ethnic person would not have to deal with building that framework. So, you have to spend time doing that type of groundwork before you can get the work done.

Monica’s interview was strongly laced with instructional foci, leadership, and management. When discussing her experiences with stereotypes, her tone softened. She even leaned in and modeled the types of behaviors necessary to ensure others are not offended or threatened by what she deemed as intelligent work-related conversation. She shared about having to minimize herself:

You are in hopes that they can see who you really are. I don't interview in braids.

I make sure my hair looks more conservative. Don't wear a bunch of jewelry.

Monitor how you have your nails done or that will be a distraction. You know you have to, unfortunately, change who you are. I wish people would see past my skin color and past their own biases and stereotypes...it feels like a handcuff.

Research Question Findings

There was no definitive hypothesis for this study, as “qualitative researchers look at the essential character or nature of something, not the quantity (how much, how many)” (Roberts, 2010, p. 143). Described in this research was how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceived the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency.

The following are the research questions that governed this study: What are the perceived barriers and factors that contributed to or inhibited African American women's aspiration to and attainment of the superintendency?

- a. What are the professional experiences of African American executive-level administrators prior to the superintendency?
- b. What workplace systems or structures exist that hinder successful ascension to the superintendency for African American women?
- c. How have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the participants as African American women in pursuit and/or attainment of the superintendency?
- d. How has mentoring and networking affected the African American women participants in their pursuits and/or attainments of the superintendency?

For the overarching research question, what are the perceived barriers and factors that contributed to or inhibited African American women's aspiration to and attainment of the superintendency, each of the women provided rich, thick, and extensive narratives regarding their workplace experiences. The descriptions of their collective lived experiences yielded data categorized into four categories of barriers and/or contributing factors: gender, race, socialization, and stereotypes or Black woman mythology. In this study, I found expressions of repeated confrontations with race, bias, stereotypical barriers, and beliefs that remain social strongholds and continue to be demonstrated as norms in the workplace. These experiences are documented in detail in this chapter.

For the first sub question, what are the professional experiences of African American female executive-level administrators prior to the superintendency, each of the participants have served as classroom teachers and building principals. Each of the participants is serving or has served as an executive level public school administrator in roles with responsibilities of the superintendent, associate superintendent, assistant superintendent, area superintendent, or deputy superintendent in a Texas public school district.

For the second sub question, what workplace systems or structures exist that hinder successful ascension to the superintendency for African American women, the participants described incidents ranging from board relationships and practices that are inherent in U.S. public school system. As stated in this chapter, these findings clearly illuminated deficits in the infrastructure in U.S. public schools. As stated in the literature review, the institution of U.S. public schools was not designed for the leadership of African American or minority women. The infrastructure of U.S. public schools

perpetuates lingering deficits. None of the women spoke about districts implementing processes for (a) systems of accountability for gender and race bias of professionals; (b) sensitivity training for school boards, superintendents, or executive-level staff; (c) recruitment instruments, or (d) increasing the representation of women and minorities in recruitment efforts. Rather, the findings reflected not only the existence of the status quo, but a strengthened-by-acceptance-and-oppression status quo that continues to operate in efforts to silence the oppressed.

For the third sub question, how have race, ethnicity, and gender affected the participants as African American women in pursuit and/or attainment of the superintendency, I found that race and gender did affect the participants and their plights to executive leadership in Texas public school districts. Of the four women, the largest percentage of their oppressive encounters were perceived as based on race and gender. Numerous accounts in their narratives reveal that racial and gender biases were distractors that impeded the progression of healthy professional relationships and sometimes delayed a focus on the roles and responsibilities they were hired to lead.

For the fourth sub question, how has mentoring and networking affected the African American women participants in their pursuits and/or attainments of the superintendency, each of the women expressed the importance of mentoring and networking. Consistent among them was the perception that they had to intentionally seek mentorships. In isolated instances, being mentored and supported by White males and university professors was reported as a support that opened opportunities, exposure, and access.

Summary

In this chapter, I documented the lived experiences of four African American women who are serving or have served as Texas public school executive-level administrators. During the interview process, much of the conversation was an open and honest dialog. I believe I had a trust level with the participants that was necessary to receive the rich and robust responses I received. Regarding the nature and sensitivity of the interview questions, understandably, some of the participants were initially reserved. For example, with one participant, we were 37 minutes into the interview before I felt the release of trust with her. Bearing that in mind and as stated earlier, I have shared their narrative accounts, introductions, and professional experiences with some measure of masking to protect their identities, due to the extreme state-wide lack of presence of African American executive-level women administrators.

I reiterated the purpose of this study as the exploration of the lived experiences of African American women serving as executive-level administrators (assistant, associate, deputy superintendents and/or superintendents) in Texas public school districts. Specifically, this chapter documented the investigation of how executive-level African American women in Texas public schools perceive the barriers and contributing factors related to their lack of representation and presence in the superintendency and how those barriers and contributing factors influenced their respective leadership platforms and professional progression. Through the investigation and analysis of data, four major themes emerged as barriers and contributing factors: gender, race, socialization, and stereotypes in the form of Black woman mythology. Spirituality emerged as a subtle but consistent thread that connected each of the identified and discussed themes. The

spirituality of Black women emerged as common in the coping mechanisms of each of the participants. Throughout the analysis of the data, spirituality appeared as a natural source of reprieve, recovery, and retrospect. These women's stories serve as major avenues for opportunities to eradicate the absence of African American in executive-level leadership in Texas public school districts.

CHAPTER V

Discussion, Implications, and Recommendations

Overview

In this chapter, I present an interpretation of the findings, implications of the findings, and recommendations for research. Using the voices of Black women who shared their experiences in seeking executive-level positions in Texas public school districts, I originally sought to discover if the participants perceived anti-Black woman mythology (encounters with race, gender, class, and socio-economic effects that are promoted by the repetition of derogatory, historical images of Black women, such as Sapphire, Jezebel, angry Black women) to be a major hinderance to their plights.

Although the participants clearly identified anti-Black woman images (whether promoted by the media, engrained in American historical mythology, and/or confirmed as bias in the workplace), I made a couple of interesting observations surrounding anti-Black woman mythology from the study: Indeed, anti-Black woman mythology does impact the plight of Black women who seek executive-level positions in Texas schools. However, many Black women and women of color have concluded that because they cannot rid the system of such images as described by the design of Sapphire, a reversal of the images might uncover internal strengths of Black women. To be specific, in explaining the second observation, Austin (1995) questioned this anti-Black woman myth of Sapphire, the “stereotypical *Black Bitch* – tough, domineering, emasculating, strident, and shrill” (p. 426).

Discussion

Austin (1995), in agreement with bell hooks (1981), asks “should we renounce her, rehabilitate her, or embrace her and proclaim her our own?” (p. 426). I choose to embrace her and proclaim her my own. These women’s stories are very much my own story as an African American woman serving as an educational leader in Texas public schools and aspiring to the superintendency. Like each of these women, I served as a classroom teacher and ascended into leadership on a fairly traditional path. I had mentors who guided me and supported me along who were a mixture of White, Hispanic, and African American. Both men and women helped to shape my learning and growth and development as an educational leader. As I reflect on the mentors and influences, personal and professional, throughout my life’s journey and the intersection of those thoughts in comparison to the findings of this study, I organized this discussion in alignment with trimorphic focus from my preface: life-saving experience, relationships, and reflections.

Life Saving Experience

My professional experiences have been laced with enthusiasm, support, encouragement, bias, and betrayal. The absence of African American female leadership prevails in my personal awareness, as I reflect on a conversation with a teacher who previously served on a campus I led. She asked, “how much longer will there still be firsts for African American women?” She had not been in a position to give great thought to race and racism as a White woman. She thought it was interesting that in the 21st century, I was the first African American associate principal of curriculum and instruction at Klein High School, the first African American principal at Spring High

School (after more than 150 years as a Texas school district), and first female to serve as principal at Duncanville High School (after more than 80 years as a Texas public district). The entire conversation rested in her seeking to understand why it would take a century to find a qualified educator who happened to be a minority, to lead.

Of course, finally reaching this chapter of my dissertation has been lifesaving. The experiences on the journey to this space in my educational and university matriculation did not differ greatly from the experiences described by these women in their professional careers. There were, of course, district leaders who encouraged me to earn a doctorate degree. There were also university professors who encouraged and supported me through this process. I would venture to say that Dr. Combs advocated for me in ways I may never come to know. In full transparency, there were also times that I needed to step away from this process because navigating barriers professionally and educationally became suffocating. The opportunity to specifically name and give meaning of those experiences was liberating and lifesaving. As Wing (2020) pointedly shared, “even though Women of Color may change jobs, get promotions, or even disconnect as much as possible from toxic environments, spirit injuries they have ignored or even addressed will continue to eat into their souls” (p. 226). The opportunity to not only speak, but to infinitely document my words and those of the women who graciously shared their hearts and spirits in the form of our own words has been healing. In agreement with Slocum (2020), “healing is speaking” (p. 313).

Relationships

According to Meador (2019), “much of what a superintendent does involves working directly with others. School superintendents must be effective leaders, work well with other people, and understand the value of building relationships” (para. 2). In James’ (2001) investigation, it was noted that “females often lacked the relationships, connections, and endorsements of those in influential leadership positions, thereby negatively affecting their ability...to advance” (p. 24). During the analysis of this study’s data, *relationships* or socialization was one of the themes that emerged as critical to the African American woman’s ascension to the superintendency in Texas public schools. Beyond the literature review, interviews, and analysis, I found my personal observation.

During the course of this investigation and my personal interactions with other African American women in education, I found that most of us know each other or are operating with two or less degrees of separation, which spoke volumes to me! I attributed the level of connectivity to not only the lack of our presence in educational leadership, but to the significance and power of relationships. I have always called my circle small. In this process, I learned that my circle is large and sometimes unspoken yet understood. There is a silent but strong understanding, in most instances, that our relationship exists to support one another and assist, however possible, with the required navigation of barriers that remain and should have never existed.

As I interviewed these women, intertwined in their responses were leadership nuggets and advice about successfully balancing my life and career as an African American woman with family responsibilities, aspirations of my own, and the “handcuff”, as Monica defined it, of my gender, skin tone, passionate communication

style, hair, and other physical attributes. As scholarly as the conversations were, it was like talking with my aunties who were happy to share their wisdom and proud to see how I was absorbing every word of what they offered.

It is often said that it is lonely at the top. I believed it, embraced it, and lived it. I remember being a brand-new principal eager to change the lives of my students, teachers, and community only to have the word “nigger” written in permanent marker on my desk. I remember wondering who let the person into my locked office after hours. I also remember openly communicating that I had been called nigger to my face and was not affected, so, cowardly writing nigger on my desk would not deter my focus. I accepted that experience as distraction and kept my focus on the work ahead of me because, as the first African American and first female in the position, I could not fail. It resonated with me when Leena described the failure of African American women as educational leaders, as being a closed door for the other African American women waiting at the door of opportunity for educational leadership positions. The opportunity to experience such authentic and open articulation of experiences shaped the knowledge that I was never alone. Relationships matter and must be cultivated.

Reflections

I was raised in a home with parents who are both preacher’s kids. It is important to know that although I was raised in the church, it was the margins of the intersections of racialized and gender biases, politics, Black woman mythology, and minimized opportunities for mentoring that solidified my own spiritual health. My spiritual health and balance became, and remains, a necessity for navigating common place barriers.

Through the review of literature and participants' narratives regarding stereotypes such as Mammy and Sapphire, Austin's (1995) publication "Sapphire Bound" became relevant in my synthesis. A noted significant barrier was the expected submission of African American women through stereotypes such as Mammy and Sapphire. The term Mammy describes "a role and a person within the [slavery] plantation household who served as a baby nurse, cook and general domestic worker" (West, 2018, p. 141). The word *Sapphire* references the term angry Black woman used as a "social control mechanism...employed to punish Black females who violate societal norms that encourage them to be passive, servile, nonthreatening, and unseen" (Pilgrim, 2015, p. 121).

The historic, unacceptable, yet prevailing societal expectation for African American women to operate from a perspective of *Mammy* – subservient and loving, regardless of how treated, and one who should do it all or be responded to as a *Sapphire* – an angry Black woman stigma used to force African American women back into *Mammy* position, is the core of Austin's (1995) "Sapphire Bound" Austin (1995) explained that "we really cannot function effectively without coming to terms with Sapphire" (p. 426). In my internal search to make meaning of how to embrace Sapphire and ensure her right to "testify on her own behalf, in writing, complete with footnotes" (Austin, 1995, p. 427), I recognized an internal wrestle between testifying and diluting my own competence in concern for my future. This work is my testimony, the testimony of the women in this study, the testimony of my mother and grandmother, and catharsis and confrontation with the appropriate use of the powers of Sapphire.

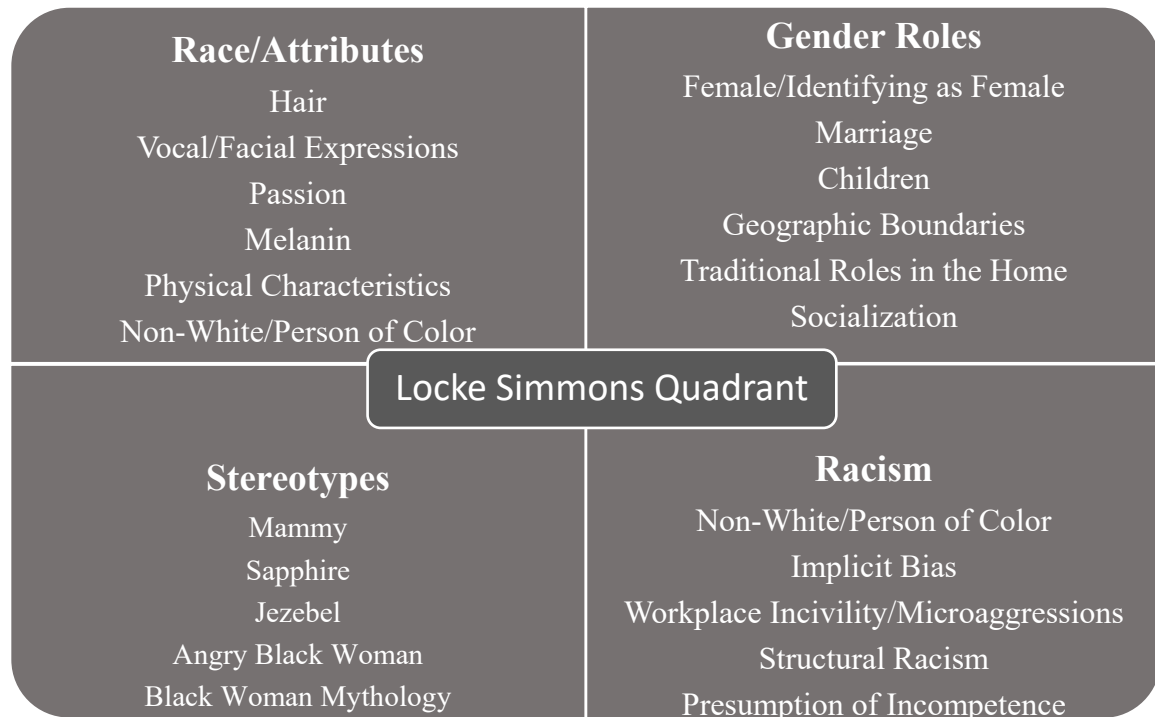
Furthermore, I reflected on Creswell's (2014) work that indicated that in qualitative narrative, there exists a need to "explore and describe the phenomena and develop theory" (p. 110). My internal search for meaning and an extension of Austin's (1995) "Sapphire Bound" resulted in my development and conceptual contribution as a measure to unbound *Sapphire*. Unbounding *Sapphire* requires the recognition of the negative balance of power African American women are forced to navigate between working under the presumption of incompetence and diluted competence (the act of minimizing oneself, one's knowledge, or one's power to acquiesce to an oppressor), for the comfort of others. My concept, *Sapphire Unbound* at its core is the African American woman's understanding of her complex, high-level intelligence and ability and the freedom to nurture and demonstrate it **unapologetically** without shrinking from that which she knows, affirms, and believes to be best in her personal and professional experiences without diluting her competence.

As I continued to reflect and analyze the data through the lens of Critical Race Theory and Black Feminist Thought, with The Double Whammy Effect (e.g., being a woman and African American; Andrews & Simpson-Taylor, 1995) and participants' responses undergirding my focus, I expanded the Double Whammy Effect into what I have coined as an additional theoretical contribution the *Locke Simmons Quadrant*. As shown in Figure 1, the *Locke Simmons Quadrant* is the lens that allows the experiences of African American women to be fully examined beyond race and gender. Being an African American woman is one of the highest beings of intersectionality and thus required a robust analysis. The quadrant analyzes their experiences through the lenses of

not only gender and race, but adds socialization (mentoring and networking), and stereotypes of Black woman mythology.

Figure 1

Locke Simmons Quadrant



The Locke Simmons Quadrant provides a structured lens for the analysis of the high intersectionality of African American womanhood through the quadrants of Race and Attributes, Gender Roles, Stereotypes, and Racism, all of which are contributing factors to the experiences of African American women while navigating professional and personal relationships and interactions. Quadrant 1 outlines physical and vocal characteristics that include being non-White or a person of color, hair texture, hair color, and hair style; vocal and facial expressions, the passion with which African American women speak, the melanin of their skin that is sometimes used to weaponize them, and physical characteristics such as broad noses and thick lips.

Quadrant 2 outlines those gender roles found to be, through this research, of primary concern and sacrifice for African American women. The Gender Roles quadrant specifies the roles and sacrificial concerns as being, or identifying as, female; being married and/or a parent. Further, geographic boundaries and traditional roles in the home are included due to women, sometimes with families, not being able to readily relocate or transition due to family or marriage obligations. Additionally, traditional roles in the home are factors consistently present in the navigation of ascension. This research also noted that socialization and networking are more accessible to men; thereby bringing the socialization and networking, including mentoring, into the analysis view beyond race and gender.

Quadrant 3 outlines racism as experiences with implicit biases, workplace incivility and microaggressions, structural racism, and the presumption of incompetence. This research found that African American women experience racism, as an everyday norm in American society, and as acceptable behaviors in the workplace, in interviews, and in professional organizations. Additionally, African American women experience invisibility, in reference to the effects of racism on “the adaptive behavior and psychological well-being of African Americans” and as being “affected by prejudice and discrimination” (Franklin, A. J. & Boyd-Franklin, N., 2000, p.33).

Quadrant 4 outlines the stereotypes associated with the African American woman’s experiences such as Mammy (The term Mammy describes “a role and a person within the [Slavery] plantation household who served as a baby nurse, cook and general domestic worker” (West, 2018, p.141)), Sapphire (term used as “social control mechanism[s] that [are] employed to punish black females who violate societal norms

that encourage them to be passive, servile, nonthreatening, and unseen” (West, 2018, p. 121), Jezebel, and Angry Black Woman, and Anti-Black Woman Mythology (encounters with race, gender, class, and socio-economic effects that are promoted by the repetition of derogatory, historical images of Black women).

Together, these factors described in the Locke Simmons Quadrant are the manifestation of pillars of stereotypes and societal roles that extend beyond race and gender. Each of these power barriers serve as psychological and physical deterrents to healthy and flourishing lives deserved by all humans, and specifically African American women.

Implications

Personal Implications

At the time of this study, the United States of America was in a battle of intellect and educators were losing their jobs due a governmental desire to further silence the authentic history – the full story – and one of the very theories in which this study was grounded in, Critical Race Theory. Although my dissertation committee applauded my continued focus and forward movement despite the media attention surrounding Critical Race Theory, I wrote in a cloud of wondering the political and professional implications for myself. As with most of my personal concerns as an African American female educational leader, Leena, one of the participants, shared an experience that I filed in my heart and mind as a personal implication, again, for myself. Leena shared an experience of having her own dissertation on African American women in leadership used to weaponize her leadership and label her as a racist. In the words of Audrey Lorde (1978),

“when we speak, we are afraid our words will not be heard or welcomed. But when we are silent, we are still afraid. So, it is better to speak”.

Practitioner Implications

As practitioners read this body of work, it is my hope that it will serve to truly inform practices that impact the trajectory of equity in preparation programs, hiring practices and socialization, and workplace civility. Recommendations for practice are offered in this section.

Equity in Preparation Programs. Preparation programs, principal and superintendent, delivered varying experiences for the participants. Some programs had direct interactions with school boards and search firms. Other programs operated with strong networks accessible with admission to the university. It is important for preparation programs to collaborate and operate under guidelines that rest in objectivity and less subjectivity – subjectivity to who knows whom, who looks like whom, and who has social capital. Preparation programs and school districts will benefit from better prepared graduates whose programs systemically, not socially, consistently offer structured school board interactions, search firm interactions, and national and state organization interactions as a part of the program requirements with required university guidance.

Hiring Practices and Socialization. Having personally experienced a nod of disregard from a search firm and understanding the experiences of search firm disregard from the participants, it is imperative that African American women have absolute access to opportunities based on credentials, prior success, and proven track records, rather the successful navigation of stereotypes. Just as there are alliances and associations that are

historically European, the same is true of Hispanic and African American organizations. There must be the emergence of a respected and trusted African American search firm.

Participants shared extreme efforts they had to take relative to seeking equity and information about the hiring process. Denise and Monica made efforts to connect with community members in school districts (or neighboring communities) to which they applied as a means of networking. A practical recommendation is for school districts and school boards to require search firms to provide evidence of an annual equity audit where they evaluate their practices of recruitment and selection. The equity audit should report applicants by gender, race, and ethnicity.

Workplace Civility. At no time during this study did a participant discuss the redirection of those who were responsible for racist and/or bias experiences, and there were not any systems of accountability instituted to eradicate the behaviors discussed. There must be accountability systems implemented with fidelity and monitored. When discrimination exists and is accepted at a level that requires a law (CROWN Act; Trinidad, 2020) to protect the natural and biological way African American's hair grows, one might admit that civility is necessary to be addressed with measures of accountability. Recently, I spoke with a student-cheerleader, who explained to me that she is not allowed to wear her natural hair while in uniform. Clearly, institutions must write policies for the protection of ethnic/racial minorities in terms of dress and hair. In addition, accountability for policies is needed for employees who demonstrate biased behaviors. Further, there should be bi-annual sensitivity trainings to include topics such as implicit bias and confirmation bias for employees and school board members (the

tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's personal beliefs about a person or group of people),

Recommendations for Future Research

In keeping with the call to action beyond storytelling received in the work of Miller et al. (2020), I developed recommendations for change based on the participants' stories and my own lived experiences. Each of the participants spoke about the physical, emotional, and psychological demands of educational executive-level leadership. Research exists and confirms a psychological effect of prejudice and discrimination and the invisibility syndrome (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). Each of the participants spoke about the strength of their marriages and how supportive their husbands were with attending events, reversing traditional roles in the home, and providing an emotional and spiritual balance. Of interest might be how women without families or partners survive. Future research should be conducted on the psychological effect of the invisibility syndrome for single African American women in educational leadership.

“Racism and ethnicity can be another defining lens – or orientation – for qualitative inquiry in research and evaluation” (Patton, 2002, p. 130). The participants' stories regarding resumes and applications verified as not being shared with districts in the search process left me wondering about the accountability systems for search firms. What are the checks and balances of the communication processes between applicants, search firms, and school districts? To what extent are the processes and systems objective? What type of training do search firms receive in regard to systemic bias? There is a need for future research regarding the impact of institutional racism in search firms and the impact of the continued absence of the African American woman superintendent.

Summary

There is a nascent body of literature in mainstream research that highlights the impact and power that racial mythology holds over the plight of Black women in the workplace. Black feminist researchers agree that only Black women can tell their own stories (Collins, 1989) as they are the only ones who can give authentic voice to the day-to-day encounters that they experience. The participants' lived experiences, shared as narratives, confirm that many of their experiences result from the whiplash and aftermath of socio-historical myths about Black women, including such anti-Black woman folklore as the "angry black woman," stereotypical mental caricatures, and other demeaning images. The belief that these derogatory images continuously impede Black women's ascension and retention to top leadership positions is confirmed by the data reflecting a 1.72% (Texas Education Agency, 2021) representation of African American women in the Texas public school superintendency.

Collins (1990) reminds us of bell hooks thoughts, "Black feminist thought cannot challenge race, gender, and class oppression without empowering African American women. Oppressed people resist by identifying themselves as subject, by defining their reality, shaping their new identity, naming their history, telling their story" (p. 34). The women in this study are of high moral character, highly intelligent, effective communicators, and strong leaders; yet their absence in Texas educational leadership persists due to socially constructed descriptors of African American women that have created lasting mental models about these women and silenced the telling of their stories.

I would like to end this chapter with a quote from Mary Church Terrell (1898):

And so, lifting as we climb, onward and upward we go, struggling and striving, and hoping that the buds and blossoms of our desires will burst into glorious fruition ere long. With courage, born of success achieved in the past, with a keen sense of the responsibility which we shall continue to assume, we look forward to a future large with promise and hope. Seeking no favors because of our color, nor patronage because of our needs, we knock at the bar of justice, asking an equal chance.

“It is right that I, a woman Black, should speak . . .” Beah Richards, 1951

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APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. Please share your career trajectory with me starting with your first teaching assignment through your current role.
2. Please describe barrier you encountered on your career path when seeking promotions.
3. Please describe supports and factors that contributed to successfully obtaining promotions on your career path.
4. How do you believe these contributing factors and barriers differ for non-ethnic minority females? From men?
5. Describe your experiences with applying for and interviewing for superintendent positions.
6. What are your thoughts on race, ethnicity, and gender as they relate to securing executive level positions in education?
7. What are your thoughts on race, ethnicity, and gender as they relate to networking and mentoring in the field of education?
8. Describe your mentoring and networking experiences upon receipt of your superintendent certification.
9. Tell me how your experiences, as an African American woman, have impacted your ability to secure positions or be denied positions.
10. Tell me about the balance of personal relationships and career during your trajectory in education.

APPENDIX B**IRB Approval**

Date: Jul 22, 2021 9:47:51 AM CDT

TO: Tia Locke-Simmons Julie Combs

FROM: SHSU IRB

PROJECT TITLE: Black Women Speak: How Executive-Level Aspirants Perceive their
Plights to the Texas Public School Superintendency

PROTOCOL #: IRB-2021-239

SUBMISSION TYPE: Initial

ACTION: Exempt - Limited IRB

DECISION DATE: July 22, 2021

EXEMPT REVIEW CATEGORIES: Category 2. (iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

VITA

Tia N. Locke-Simmons

Educational History

Doctorate of Educational Leadership

Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX

Dissertation: Black Women Speak: How Executive-Level Aspirants Perceive Their Plights to the Texas Public School Superintendency

Certificate - National Institute for Urban School Leaders

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Certificate of Higher Education Teaching and Learning

Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

Master of Education in Educational Leadership

Stephen F. Austin State University, Nacogdoches, TX

Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

Our Lady of the Lake University, San Antonio, TX

Professional Experience

Houston ISD, Curriculum Director of Gifted and Talented Education

Duncanville ISD, Executive Principal of Duncanville High School

Spring ISD, Principal of Spring High School

Spring ISD, Director of Accountability and Assessment

Klein ISD, Associate Principal and Summer School Principal of Klein High School

Klein ISD, Assistant Principal of Klein High School

Cypress-Fairbanks ISD, Behavior Support Specialist

Cypress Fairbanks ISD, Teacher – Jersey Village High School

Professional Certifications

Texas Superintendent Certification

Texas Administrator Certification

Texas Generic Special Education (K-12)

*Publications**A Joyful Heart**More Precious Than Gems: She Knows Her Worth**Heal Her: A 15 Day from Pain to Promise**Organizational Affiliations*

Texas Association of Secondary School Principals

Texas Council of Women School Executives

Texas Association of School Administrators

Texas Association for the Gifted and Talented

Houston Alliance of Black School Educators

Texas Alliance of Black School Educators

National Association of Secondary Principals

National Association for the Advancement of Colored People

National Council of Negro Women

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated