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Where are all the African-American Women Superintendents in California, Oregon, and Washington State?

Toniesha D. Webb
University of the Pacific

WHERE ARE ALL THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS IN CALIFORNIA, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON STATE?

By

Toniesha D. Webb

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APPROVED BY:

Dissertation Advisor: Laura Hallberg, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Delores McNair, Ed.D.

Committee Member: Rachelle Rogers-Ard, Ed.D.

Senior Associate Dean of Benerd College: Linda Webster, Ph.D.

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Toniesha D. Webb

DEDICATION

      I am dedicating this work to two people who sacrificed greatly so that I could achieve. I dedicate this work to my parents, Anthony and Carolyn Webb. This work is for you. The two of you sacrificed your dreams and goals so that I could achieve mine. It is my hope that this journey has made you proud. I have gone all the way and done all of the things. Thank you so much!

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WHERE ARE ALL THE AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN SUPERINTENDENTS IN CALIFORNIA, OREGON, AND WASHINGTON STATE?

Abstract

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There are many African American women in leadership positions such as Assistant Superintendents, Network Superintendents, Directors, Principals, Assistant Principals, and Coaches. There is a disconnect for African American women in leadership and the highest position of authority in a school district. This leads to the question, what are the barriers, if any, that are limiting the amount of African American Women in the far western states to transition into Superintendent positions? In the reverse, what supports did the women who are superintendents have in their leadership ascension? Finally, what structures need to be developed and formalized in order to facilitate the transition of African American Women into Superintendent positions? This research engages with six the current African American Women superintendents to obtain their stories and develop structures that school districts that are interested can use to develop supports that will directly support African American Women who are interested in obtaining the Superintendent positions in far western states schools. The purpose of this study is to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems. The findings of this study may be used to increase the number of female African-American superintendents in the region. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What systemic barriers hinder African American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts?

2. What strategies do African American women superintendents use to overcome these barriers?

3. In what ways, if any, do African American women superintendents perceive the influence of race and gender on their path to the superintendency?

4. What systemic reforms are needed to increase the diversity of superintendents in the western United States?

This study is significant because it explains how African American Women in the far western states have experienced the journey into the superintendency, both good and bad. This research can serve as support for other African American Women who are interested in the journey/position. School districts that are looking to dismantle and recreate systems that are supportive of African American Women and their desire to become superintendents can use this research to create said programs. More important, it will add the voices of underrepresented participants to the body of scholarship.

This study is a basic qualitative study student with underpinnings of Patricia Hill Collings Black Feminist Thought, which explains that Black women are the most adequate source to explain their journey and offer solutions to the representation shortage. The research data was collected through two one on one (virtual) interviews.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Since the mid-19th century, education in the United States has been a female-dominated profession (Wiley et al., 2017). According to the U.S. Census (2020) and the 2017-2018 data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2020), women represent 50.8% of the total population, 76% of the nation's teachers, 54% of principals, and 27% of K-12 school districts' superintendents. A closer look at teacher demographics reveals that teacher demographics do not reflect the demographics of the students and communities they serve. Minority communities in the United States represent 42% of the total population. Yet, only 22% of all teachers identify as persons of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020). This disparity implies educational leaders may be socially and culturally disconnected from the student populations they serve.

Since 1860, women in public education have moved from the classroom and into leadership positions such as principalship, director positions, associate and deputy superintendent positions, to name a few (Tillman, 2004). However, until recently, district-level positions in U.S. public schools have been dominated by white males (The School Superintendents Association, 2021). While white women are moving into the superintendency, African-American women have not obtained the position consistent with their white male and female counterparts, specifically in the western United States (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Demographics

In California, Oregon, Washington, where this study is located, the student, teacher, and administrator demographics vary. Table 1.1 illustrates the differences between the

administrators in California, Oregon, and Washington, while also highlighting the uneven

demographics between students and educational leaders (administrators).

Table 1.1
Far Western United States Populations

State	Total Population	Communities of Color Population	White Community Population
California	39,512, 223	67%	33%
Oregon	4,217,737	13.3%	86.7%
Washington	7,614,893	21.5%	78.5%

Cherng and Halpin (2016) explained why representation amongst administrators is

important for minority students specifically. Minority students comprise the vast majority of

students in the United States' public schools, with less than 20% percent of teachers being

minorities causing a demographic divide (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). This divide is important

because research has demonstrated "teachers have higher expectations of White and Asian

American students and lower expectations of Latino and Black students" (Cherng & Halpin,

2016, p. 408).   These perceptions become harmful to students of color because perceptions

become apparent in the development of relationships with students. If students do not have

teachers who believe they are capable, actions aligned to these beliefs follow. Representation is

important because students need teachers who look like them and believe they can achieve

success. Cherng and Halpin (2016) also explained that students who are matched with own-race

teachers have increased academic achievement. Because representation matters, it is vital that

the educational systems and their leadership are proportionate to their population. Tables 1.2,

1.3, and 1.4 show numerical representations of students, teachers, and administrators across

California, Oregon, and Washington from the 2019-2020 school year (California Department of

Education, n.d.).

Table 1.2
Far Western States' African American Student Population

State	Total Student Population	African American Student Population
California	6,163,001	324,496 (5.30%)
Oregon	582,661	13,176 (2.2%)
Washington	1,078,119	48,641 (4.5%)

Table 1.3
Far Western States' Administrator Data

Total Administrators	Total African-American Administrators	Total African-American Women Administrators
36, 026	2,277 (6.3%)	1,543 (4.2%)

Table 1.4
Far Western States' Superintendents

Total Superintendents	Total African-American Superintendents	Total African-American women Superintendents
1,141	41 (3.5%)	19 (1.6%)

Representation at every level of the education system matters; as students see themselves

reflected in education, the percentage of college enrollment increases. Representation directly

affects the future success of students academically, socially, and emotionally. When students

can see themselves reflected in authority positions, they can see themselves potentially obtaining

the same positions. Because representation matters concerning students, these same students

transition into the workforce, meaning, representation has to matter in the superintendency as

well (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). Getting Smart (2018) reported, "If a black student has just one black teacher by third grade, that student is 13% more likely to enroll in college-those who have two black teachers were 32% percent more likely" (para. 1). With research showing representation is important for students, it is likely to assume that representation can hold some importance for African American women educators as well. If representation matters, the historical impact of why African-American women make up such a small percentage should be further examined. Once women's historical experiences are discussed, the effects of both race and femininity on the superintendency can better be understood.

Before continuing, it is essential to clarify the use of the term African-American in this study. The use of this term is purposeful. In this study, the term African-American is used because it focuses on women born in the United States who are of African descent. The term African-American has been used to identify American citizenship with African ancestry. As immigration in the United States and across the world expands, the term is not inclusive of every African descent person in America (Sigelman, 2005). The term "Black" is a more inclusive term of the African diaspora, which includes an array of different cultural experiences. While all of these experiences are important, this study's focus is solely on the experiences of African-American women.

Personal Connection

When I became an educator, I believed I would be a teacher indefinitely. As I matured in my practice, learned other teaching strategies, tried coaching, and joined committees, I realized I would not be able to impact education in my community in my role as a teacher. Although people appreciate teachers and their work, teachers are not heard as they should be as it pertains to changing and creating systems because of their professional positions. Early in my career, I

understood that I would need to join committees and task forces, and attend board meetings to affect change within education. After six and a half years as a teacher, I transitioned into an administrative role.

After three years as an administrator, I set my sights on seeking a district superintendent position. In my then limited understanding of the role, I thought of the changes I could make as a district superintendent, including how much work and support I could give the communities I served. What initially led me to think about this role was seeing other women work in this role. These women cared about children and the greater community; I saw dedication in them. Then I saw an African American woman superintendent, a woman who looked like me, and I saw myself. While she did not do anything differently than other superintendents per se, her energy and aura were different. I identified with her, and I understood innately why she did certain things. I understood her mannerisms, her passions, and her commitment to the community of students we served. We were from the same city, and while our experiences were not identical, there were elements of her story and journey that I saw in myself. There was a communal connection that truly allowed me to see that not only could my dream be achieved, but an African American girl from my city was successful at it. I needed to know more about why and how.

While I was drawn to this role, I still did not fully comprehend it. I learned that a District Superintendent interacts primarily with the school board members and the assistant superintendents. The District Superintendent also guides broad decisions but typically does not affect day-to-day decisions related to curriculum and instruction. These kinds of decisions are often determined by an Assistant or Associate Superintendent within a district. Also, as I learned more about the District Superintendent's role, I became keenly aware of the demands and

requirements of the role and the sacrifices I perceived I would need to make, specifically around family. Lastly, like any good educator, I began to research the statistics of superintendents I could identify with. In my preliminary inquiry, I was intrigued by the lack of African-American women who held the position in California, Oregon, Washington. I wondered where the African-American women superintendents were and why there were so few.

Superintendents' Qualifications

Superintendents' minimum qualifications vary from district to district and state to state, as demonstrated in Table 1.5. This study focused on the states of California, Oregon, and Washington state to expand the sample size and protect the privacy of participants.

Table 1.5
Superintendents' Minimum Qualifications

California	Oregon	Washington
Clear Administrative Services Credential Master's degree At least two to five years administrative experience as either a site administrator or other district administrator	Master's Degree Completion of TSPC-approved advanced program in administrative competencies, which must include 18 semester hours of graduate credit Pass a test on knowledge of the U.S. and Oregon civil rights Pass Oregon educator licensure Assessment for Administrators Three years of school administration experience under an administrative license.	Master's Degree Completion of a state-approved superintendent preparation program Three years of full-time experience A valid regular teaching, ESA principal, or program administrator certification

As displayed in Table 1.5, the basic qualifications for the position include the possession of a master's degree, an administrative credential, and administrative experience. These are the minimum requirements unless a school district requires additional qualifications.

African-American women are obtaining superintendent positions; however, the number of African-American women obtaining superintendent positions is not reflective of the African-American education student population. Nor does the African-American women's growth match the growth rate of their white counterparts, whether male or female (Kowalski and Brunner, 2011). If African-American women are in positions that lead to the superintendency, such as principalships, director positions, and associate or assistant superintendencies, the trajectory has not yet been made clear or effortless for African-American women to transition rapidly and consistently. While African-American women have reached the superintendent position, the transition has been so infrequent that other African-American women who are qualified and may be interested, have no immediate point of reference for achieving the position.

Background

In 1896, the United States law dictated separate was equal, stemming from the *Plessy v. Ferguson* Supreme Court ruling. In 1954, the Supreme Court of the United States issued the historic *Brown et al. v. Board of Education Topeka Kansas* (*Brown*) decision. In overturning *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), *Brown* challenged the long-standing view that separate but equal educational settings were equitable. Both cases are important to the African-American community's educational experiences and will be further discussed in the next chapter. The *Brown* ruling intended to create equitable educational experiences for African-American students. Despite this good intention, other long-term effects had negative implications on African-American educators and African-American students.

In 2004, Milner and Howard authored *Black Teachers, Black Students, Black Community, and Brown: Perspectives and Insights from Experts, On the Fiftieth Anniversary of The Ruling*. Three main issues led to the study:

1. With the passage of *Brown*, the Black teaching force has seen a significant decline due to integration efforts, which included but were not limited to the release of black teachers, school closures, and bussing (Milner & Howard, 2004)

2. Black students have not fared well in public education since the *Brown* ruling; as stated, representation matters. Aside from representation, understanding and empathy matter as well. Data has shown that Black students have been more likely to be disciplined more harshly than their white counterparts, leading to a disconnect with the education system (Riddle & Sinclair, 2019).

3. There seemed to be essential connections with the teacher, students, communities, and the *Brown* ruling (Milner & Howard, 2004).

The state of Black education in the United States can be directly connected to the *Brown* ruling. The *Brown* lawsuit intended to see equity in resources, not a washing away of the Black education system (Tillman, 2004). In the pre-*Brown* educational environment, Black students had Black teachers, principals, and superintendents, who were members of their communities. These educators held better understandings, possessed cultural competencies, and developed meaningful relationships with their students and their families outside of school (Milner & Howard, 2004). In many instances, African-American teachers and principals often held better credentials than their White counterparts (Milner & Howard, 2004). There was a familial and communal connection. Students saw themselves represented in their educators, which allowed them to have higher performance (Milner & Howard, 2004). These African-American educators often represented surrogate parental figures, disciplinarians, counselors, role models, and overall advocates for African-American students' academic, social, cultural, emotional, and moral development (Milner & Howard, 2004).

With the passage of desegregation laws, massive layoffs and demotions occurred in the Black educator force (Milner & Howard, 2004). Between 1954 and 1965, 38,000 African-American teachers and administrators across 17 states lost their positions (Milner & Howard, 2004). There is much more to the story than numerical data, although it provides insight into

how the African-American educational workforce began to see a consistent decline. With African-American educators being demoted or losing jobs, there was no clear trajectory for superintendent positions. The *Brown* ruling intended to break barriers of oppression for students, but it seemingly produced more barriers for African-American educators. Although they were skilled and educated to support and represent African-American students, the population was now integrated. There seemingly was little to no place for these skilled and qualified educators on the educational ladder, and this determinant continues to affect teachers' upward professional mobility.

Description of the Problem

According to the School Superintendents Association (AASA), during the 2019-2020 school year, of the 1,141 superintendents in California, Oregon, and Washington, 41 were African-American, and just 19 were African-American women, representing less than 1% percent of superintendents. With 1,543 African-American women administrators in the region, there is a qualified pool of African-American women that can serve as superintendents, yet the transitions are slow-moving. African-American women represent less than 1% of superintendents in the region, although they represent 12% of the region's total population. There is a low representation of African American superintendents, which is cause for further study.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems.

Research Questions

1. What systemic barriers hinder African American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts?

2. What strategies do African American women superintendents use to overcome these barriers?

3. In what ways, if any, do African American women superintendents perceive the influence of race and gender on their path to the superintendency?

4. What systemic reforms are needed to increase the diversity of superintendents in the western United States?

Significance of the Study

An underlying assumption in this study is that systemic barriers inhibit the diversification of the superintendency, which is, as of this writing, overwhelmingly white and male. School district leaders looking to dismantle and recreate systems that reflect their student demographics can use the findings from this study to create new, inclusive systems. Although some research has begun to explore African American women superintendents, additional research on this topic is needed to "increase the presence of the African-American women in the superintendency" (Wiley et al., 2017, p. 22) and for school districts to provide avenues for identification and support of Black women interested in administration specifically the superintendency (Revere, 1986).

Furthermore, limited research (Kowlaski & Brunner, 2011; Wickham, 2007) has examined the barriers to the superintendency faced by women in general. Focusing the work specifically on African American women will uncover the ways that the intersection of race and gender impact the experiences of aspiring superintendents. This study aims to identify and present structures to support and increase African-American women in the superintendency by investigating systemic barriers to the superintendency.

Theoretical Framework

Black feminist thought (Collins, 2008) will be used as the theoretical framework for the study. Black feminist thought as a framework means leading from the lens that Black women

are powerful agents of knowledge, specifically their own experiences (Collins, 1986). This theory provides a different avenue to understand the experiences of black women, which includes the confrontation of race, gender, and class oppression. The most distinguishing feature of Black feminist thought "is its insistence that both the changes the consciousness of individuals and the social transformation of political and economic institutions constitute essential ingredients for social change" (Collins, 1990, p. 553). Using Black feminist thought as a framework allows the participants to be the experts of their experiences, specifically concerning their race and gender. The basic crux of this theory is Black women are experts of their stories and experiences, and no one is better to share those experiences and recommendations to support their needs.

Description of the Study

This study will use Merriam's (2002) basic qualitative research to examine systemic barriers to the superintendency and identify strategies for dismantling these barriers. Merriam's (2002) approach allows for a thorough examination of a phenomenon through myriad data collection strategies, including, but not limited to, interviews, observations, focus groups, and document review. This study will use a minimum of five semi-structured interviews and document reviews to collect data.

Chapter Summary

This study is about the barriers African-American women in the superintendency in California, Oregon, and Washington face. While women of color, specifically African-American women, have broken and continue to break various glass ceilings, educational leadership is one of the most difficult to crack with consistency. Some African-American women superintendents have utilized supports to assist them in their professional development. The literature review

will discuss the history of the Superintendency in the United States, African Americans in

Education in the United States, and African American women in education in the United States.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Superintendents represent 12% of educational staffing, and African-American students represent nine percent of students served across the region. The fact that African-American women represent less than one percent of superintendents is cause for concern. The purpose of this study is to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems.

In this chapter, I will review and analyze the literature of the history of the superintendency in the United States, explaining how the position began and developed over time. The literature will also include how African American women transitioned into these supervisory positions. Lastly, the chapter will review the literature concerning African-American women superintendents, the theoretical framework of Black Feminist Thought, and how the framework is appropriate for this study.

Superintendent Demographics and History in the United States

The history of the superintendency in public schools in the United States has been a unique position. From its inception, the superintendency intended to do two things: keep men in the field of education in an unfeminized way and exude control over the female dominate profession (Blount, 1998). The superintendency in the United States historically has been a white male-dominated position. While the field of education has been predominately female, the face of the superintendency in the United States has not (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). The development and expansion of the superintendency in the United States can be closely traced to the development and growth of the education system in the United States (Callahan, 1966). As the United States shifted from an "agricultural to an industrial economy, people migrated in ever-

increasing numbers from rural farming exponentially following unprecedented waves of immigration" (Bjork et al., 2014, p.1). With the movement and expansion of population and the shift in economic structure, "the purpose of schooling was redefined shifting from simply ensuring that students were literate and numerate to broadening access and nurturing an understanding of the American society and established values and beliefs" (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 1). Mirroring the United States, the superintendency has gone through phases of change, and while it has been an ever-evolving position, it has not been as friendly and welcoming for women, specifically women of color.

Since the turn of the 20th-century, women have dominated the field of education, yet white males still dominate the superintendency (Brunner, 1999). While the field of teaching is considered a feminized field, educational leadership, specifically the superintendency, was created to exude power and control over women at the same time excluding them from positions of authority and leadership. Because education developed as a female field, there was no need to increase pay because women did not have the financial responsibilities of men (Callahan, 1966). Teaching was a new role for women, who, for the first time, experienced independence from their fathers and husbands (Callahan, 1966). At the turn of the 20th-century women worked outside of the home and dominated education classrooms, yet men dominated money and were solely responsible for what happened in schools and school districts (Callahan, 1966)

Phases of the Superintendency in the United States

The superintendency can be broken into five phases: superintendent as teacher-scholar, organizational leader, democratic-political leader, applied social scientist, and communicator. During the early years of the position, it was considered temporary, "which can explain why many historians did not view the position as being relevant to contemporary practice" (Bjork et

al., 2014, p. 9). Early in the development of the educational system in the United States, researchers and local boards questioned the role of a superintendent. While there were various makeups of educational committees and boards, there was not a centralized place either federally or at the state level where the development of educational legislation or training was taken up, thus the birth of the superintendency (Callahan, 1966). The role of the superintendent, while contentious, was developed and appointed to maintain the elements of education: permanence, personal responsibility, and continued systematic labor (Callahan, 1966). It would be the superintendent's responsibility to know the conditions of each element and to bring forward the elements which lagged (Callahan, 1966).

The five phases of the superintendency as developed by Callahan (1966) and Bjork (2014) are described below.

Superintendent as Teacher-Scholar

In the early phases of the role of superintendent, they were classified as teacher-scholars. The title "teacher-scholar" can be likened to a master teacher. The responsibility of these superintendents was to develop teachers and inspire them, revise courses of study, ensure improvement as necessary, and provide needed supplies for teachers and students (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 9).

Superintendent as Organizational Leader

The superintendent as organizational leader was focused on the business of education. During this phase, Americans were more critical of all organizations, and education was not ignored. Superintendents as organizational leaders focused on the mechanical and functional aspects of the school. This type of superintendent demanded them to lead the school community in being more efficient, effective, and financially stable (Bjork et al., 2014, p. 10). The Great

Depression was a pivotal point in United States history as the focus of organizations was no longer business and methodological improvement. There was a new wave of superintendents who did not believe the sole focus of the superintendent should be financial. While they argued the financial and methodical growth of school districts was important, the role and responsibilities needed to be addressed in more democratic ways.

Superintendent as Democratic-Political Leader

The superintendent as democratic-political leader's primary responsibility was educational leadership through a democratic framework (Callahan, 1966). The superintendents needed to create a space where they could coach and develop leadership in teachers and administrators, creating a space for democratic engagement as well as the day-to-day managerial and business requirements. Similar to the superintendent as organizational leader, the superintendent as democratic-political leader did not meet all of the needs of the ever-changing position.

Superintendent as Applied Social Scientist

The superintendent, as applied social scientist, takes many elements of the previous phase. There was a removal of focus on the democratic process and an emphasis on the person getting the job done. He was responsible for "maintaining the solidarity of the group" (Callahan, 1966, p. 218). This phase of the superintendency focused on the setting of goals, assigning of tasks, and defining of purpose. These were not elements of the superintendent's role within previous phases. Of the five phases, this phase was the most realistic. Superintendents hired in this phase were selected to do the realistic day-to-day job and not fulfill an idealistic one. During this phase, superintendents received more training to make the job more sustainable and streamlined.

Superintendent as Communicator

This last and current phase of the superintendent's role reflects a modern approach for a constantly evolving position. With the emergence of an information-based society, expectations of superintendents have shifted. According to Bjork et al. (2014), "They are now challenged to master the art of communication and support the use of technology in leadership, teaching, and administration" (p. 13). This phase is a more holistic application and expectation of the role of superintendents, who serve as the face of their school districts. Table 1.6 offers a visual representation of the different historical phases of the superintendency.

Table 1.6
Phases of the Superintendency

Phases of the Superintendency	Time period	Characteristics of the period
Teacher-Scholar	1850-Early 1900s	- Implemented minimum, mandated state curriculum (Bjork et al., 2014) - Supervised Teachers
Organizational Manager	Early 1900s-1930	- Focused on the structural development of schools - Financial stability
Democratic-Political Leader	1930- Mid-1950s	- Developed teacher leadership
Applied Social Scientist	Mid-1950s-Mid-1970s	- Set goals, assigned tasks, and defined the purpose of the districts
Communicator	Mid-1970s- present	- Represented the public

African-Americans and Education in the United States

To understand the African-American education experience in the United States, a brief explanation of court rulings is appropriate. In 1886 the United States heard the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case. The *Plessy* ruling was based on the Louisiana Separate Car Act. This law stated, "in order to promote the comfort of passengers, railroads have to provide equal but separate accommodations for the white and colored* races on lines running in the state" (Duignan, 2021). Homer Plessy, a fair-skinned Black, sat in the White's only car and was arrested when he refused to move. The case losing at each court level made its way to the Supreme court. In 1886, the Supreme court issued their decision that separate was equal (Hoffer, 2012). The *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling was issued 7-1; the ruling went on to state the Separate Car Act was not in violation of the "fourteenth amendment because the fourteenth amendment applied only to political and civil rights (like voting and jury service), not social rights" (Duignan, 2021, para. 1).

The *Plessy v. Ferguson* ruling was engrained in United States history as the constitutional justification for racial segregation until the *Brown* ruling. The *Brown v. Board of education Topeka Kansas,* overturned the Plessy ruling stating that separate was not equal in education, and ordered that schools be integrated "with deliberate speed" (Tillman, 2004, p. 110). There was no guidance from the courts allowing individual states to interpret what this meant; this ambiguity allowed states to file endless lawsuits, which slowed down the process (Lyons and Chelsey, 2004). The slow-rolling execution of school integration led to *Brown* II in 1955, which offered more insight into the integration process. Vast amounts of literature have been written about the lasting effects and importance of the *Brown* decisions. Since its inception, The *Brown* ruling has impacted education for students of color, specifically African-American students

(Lyons and Chelsey, 2004). While the ruling intended to level the metaphoric playing field in education for African-American students, researchers argue that *Brown's* ruling harmed African-American students and educators. As a result of the landmark case, a "whole generation of Black educators was lost" (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 302).

Before the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* ruling, public schools in the United States were segregated. Black schools had their own fully staffed schools with administrators and teachers. With the *Brown* ruling and desegregation of schools, African-American educators lost their jobs significantly (Milner & Howard, 2004). Forty years after the *Brown* ruling African-American educators represented 6.5% of the teaching population (Milner & Howard, 2004). Per the National Center for Educational Statistics, during the 2015-2016 school year, African-American teachers represented seven percent of the total teaching population, which was a decline from the 2003-2004 school year (NCES, 2015) Since the passage of *Brown*, what was once a robust teaching population had not seen significant growth over the last 50 years.

Before the *Brown* ruling, "Black students attended schools operated mostly by experienced, dedicated, concerned, and skilled Black educators" (Milner & Howard, 2004, p. 286). These teachers lived in the communities with students and their families, attended church, were family friends. It was these "surrogate relationship parent figures …where teachers acted as disciplinarians, counselor's role models, and overall advocates for their academic, social, cultural, emotional and moral development" (Milner & Howard, 2004, p. 286). While the potentiality of the *Brown* ruling at the time had not been fulfilled, the African-American community of education was significantly destroyed, with no clear structure for how to repair it.

Out of this shift, African-American students have continually been one of the lowest-performing groups of students across the United States (NCES, 2015).

Various requirements were implemented following the *Brown* ruling to determine which teachers would be transferred to newly integrated schools across the country (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Before 1950 testing and certification were not requirements for teaching (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). After the *Brown* ruling, teacher competency tests were implemented, and the tests measured "general and professional knowledge…. with the tests some more than others, being culturally biased (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014, p. 329). It was these measures that rapidly removed the African-American teaching force from newly integrated schools. Along with new testing and certification requirements, the firing and non-rehiring of African-American teachers played a significant role. This non-replacement of teachers also included educators who retired to diminish the African-American teaching force in the United States (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Because the court did not provide guidelines or support on de-segregate schools, many schools retained their White teaching staff even if these teachers were not fully certificated while releasing fully certificated African-American teachers (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014). Lastly, after the *Brown* ruling, "the demotion of principals and other tenured educators was another strategy that deferred the professional advancement of African-American educators after school desegregation" (Lash & Ratcliffe, 2014, p. 330). The *Brown* ruling led to the systematic dismantling of the African-American educator workforce and a proper pipeline for professional ascension.

Since the *Brown* ruling, data on school integration and the performance of students of color, precisely African-Americans, have been closely tracked. "One aspect of the *Brown* legacy that is undeveloped in the literature is the significance of the leadership of African-American

principals in pre-K-12 education both before and after *Brown*" (Tillman, 2004, p. 101). Suppose the leadership of African-American principals is underrepresented. In that case, the journey and leadership of African-American female superintendents are non-existent, and this can be seen in the decline of the number of African-American teachers and administrators in the years following *Brown v. Board of Education* from "82,000 to 38,000 in 1964" (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 300), precisely ten years after segregation was outlawed. Not only was the number of African- American teachers and administrators declining, but the first substantive study on African-American female superintendents also is not seen until the 1984-1985 school year, where a study was done on the 29 African-American female superintendents across the United States (Revere, 1987).

With the passage of *Brown*, many changes occurred within the field of education. These changes not only affected the students but educators and leadership as well. It must be first understood that change was not immediate. It was not until 1955, with the passage of *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka Kansas II; often referred to as Brown II (*Jones, 2006, p. 9), which stated that "segregated schools had to be dismantled with 'all deliberate speed,' that some change began to occur" (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 299). Due to the vagueness of the ruling, many of the southern states took no action towards desegregation (Lyons & Chesley, 2004). Depending on the source consulted, it took upwards of ten years for desegregation to be seen in many southern states (Lyons & Chesley, 2004). "Eventually, with the active enforcement by federal courts and the Civil Rights Division of the Justice Department, particularly from the mid-1960s to approximately 1980, the vast majority of the school districts were integrated that had formerly been segregated by law" (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 299).

With the *Brown* ruling beginning to be enforced, African-American educators were systematically released or demoted, with many retiring (Tillman, 2004). During a time in the United States history when African-Americans were legally discriminated against through segregation and Jim Crow, African-American educators were not first in line to maintain their jobs at the newly integrated schools, especially if replacing tenured white educators (Lyons & Chesley, 2004). When the *Brown* ruling was handed down, there were "82,000 Black teachers, but by 1964, 38,000 Black teachers and administrators had lost their positions in 17 Southern and Border states" (Lyons & Chesley, 2004, p. 300). This history sheds light on the decline of African-American teachers and principals. If the number of African-American educators and school site leadership was on the decline based on the closing of African-American schools and the loss of jobs to White Counterparts, what did that mean for African-American leadership at the district level?

Bell (2005) summed up the lessons and lasting effects of the *Brown* ruling. Many factors are left out of the *Brown* ruling conversation, which helps support Bell's argument that the *Brown* ruling was not about the integration and equalization of education but converged with the more significant needs of the United States. When the *Brown* ruling was issued, the United States was in the Cold War with Russia. The consistent issues of race both in print and via television were hampering the fight against communism abroad; while undermining the efforts to combat communism at home (Bell, 2005). By understanding the more considerable social unrest surrounding the *Brown* ruling, a larger picture comes into view. While the ruling moved to desegregate schools, which led to other public spaces' desegregation, there were no supports provided to the desegregation. Leaving states to their own devices to execute *Brown* could be a sign the ruling was made to change the United States' global image at the time.

Along with interest convergence, Bell (2005) also explained there are "instances where a remedy will be abandoned as soon as it threatens the only societal states of whites, particularly those in the middle and upper classes" (p. 1059). With the first *Brown* ruling in 1954, there was such resistance in the southern states and no support from the other two government branches the courts shifted course. The *Brown II* ruling in 1955 changed the language to include all deliberate speed language. The addition of this language effectively halted all school integration efforts for at least fifteen years (Bell, 2005). Ultimately, schools were desegregated with later enforcements, but these stalling tactics offer the question: was segregation ever the true intention?

African-American Women Superintendents in the United States

It was not until the 1984 – 1985 school year that research was conducted regarding employment levels of African-American women superintendents in the United States. Revere (1987) completed a study about African-American women superintendents' experiences in the continental United States. According to Revere (1987), "During the 1984-1985 school year, there were 29 Black female superintendents employed, representing 0.18% of the over 16,000 public school districts in the United States" (p. 512). These 29 African-American women superintendents were spread across New York, New Jersey, Illinois, Minnesota, Ohio, Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Virginia, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia, with California leading the states with six African-American female superintendents (Revere, 1987). This study found that while these 29 African-American women superintendents represented such a low number, it was a significant increase from 1970. There was a report of three African-American women superintendents in 1983 where 16 African-American women were reported across the United States (Revere, 1987).

In Revere's (1987) study, 22 of the 29 African-American women superintendents participated. Through a series of in-person interviews, this particular study focused on general themes about these African-American women superintendents' age and family background, educational background, career path, and demographic data (Revere, 1987). What is missing in this study is the underlying issues that these women faced in achieving the superintendency and the support these women received in achieving the superintendency. This study being one of the first significant studies about African-American women superintendents, was not a comprehensive study. The study solely provided quantitative data about African-American women superintendents, but it did not provide suggestions on increasing the number of African-American women superintendents. It simply provided data about these women. This study speaks to a void that there is seemingly a statistical lack in African-American women superintendents throughout the United States, but the "why" is not answered.

Since the Revere (1987) study, there have been other studies about the retention, hiring, support of African-American women superintendents. Brown (2014) discussed the challenges that school districts in different regions face with the recruitment and retention of African-American superintendents. Brown (2014) explained, "Although the number of African-American women in the superintendency continues to grow, their growth in no way compares to White women and men" (p. 3). In her study, Revere (1987) identified challenges African-American women superintendents faced. Little research since speaks to the challenges African-American women superintendents face. African-American women still represent less than two percent of all superintendents across the United States, with the African-American population representing 13.4%. *Brown* executed a study with eight African-American women

superintendents and their experiences. These participants were from the Southeastern United

States. In this study, Brown (2014) argued

> the struggles that African-American women have endured concerning recruitment and
>
> retention in the public-school superintendency appear related to democracy. The
>
> meaning and practice of democracy, however, are complex within our society. For many,
>
> it stands for freedom- freedom as it relates to being valued within the systems of White
>
> male power and structure. (p. 2).

African-American women face a consistent challenge in the United States due to the

essence of who they are. This freedom Brown (2014) described has "been challenged and

stifled, and it often requires conformity or even a masking of their true selves to be what White

society would have them to be" (p. 2). African- American women have to conform and hide to

ascend and see success both in and out of the workplace. Even with this dual-life and

conformity, it has not been enough to overcome the systematized structures developed to keep

them out of certain areas, the superintendency being one. Brown (2014) summed up her study

with the participants' thoughts and argued that race and gender play a significant role in both the

recruitment and retention of African-American women superintendents. If this is true of these

participants in Revere's (1987) and Brown's (2014) study, it stands to a reason similar themes

will be discovered in this study of African-American women in California, Oregon, and

Washington. However, these studies do not speak to the dismantling of these systems and

challenges.

Theoretical Framework

Black feminist thought (Collins, 2008) is the theoretical framework for this study. Using

this framework, I will delve into participants' experiences to understand the systemic barriers

they faced on the path to the superintendency, how they overcame these barriers, and how systemic barriers can be dismantled to create pathways for diverse educational leaders.

Collins (2008) described Black feminist thought with the following six tenets. In the first tenet, why Black feminist thought, Collins explains that in the United States, Black women continue to be an oppressed group. These women are living in a dichotomy of their constant oppression and their continual activism against their oppression. According to Collins (2008), "Black feminist thought aims to empower African-American women within the context of social justice sustained by intersection oppressions" (p. 26). They are providing a space for Back women to share their experiences and voices. With its second tenet, Black feminist thought seeks to present "diverse responses to common challenges within Black feminism" (Collins, 2000, p. 28). While Black women face common challenges, they do not all face the same experiences. Black feminist thought presents a lens where the overall political context can be understood, so varying and diverse experiences are understood in context.

Once the context is understood and the practices and actions are analyzed, the third tenet emerges. According to Collins (2008), "Black feminist practice and Black feminist thought concern the connections between U.S. Black women's experiences as a heterogenous collectivity and any ensuing group knowledge or standpoint" (p. 33). This tenet provides space to understand how Black women who have been oppressed have come to understand their oppression in context and create their understandings and responses, which can be categorized as resistances. These resistances come in various forms, which provide space for the fourth tenet, "dialogical practices and Black women intellectuals" (Collins, 2008, p. 37). Despite facing oppression, African-Americans have made significant contributions to the intellectual community. This tenet is critical, and Black women intellectuals are central to Black feminist

thought because "our experiences as African-American women provide us with a unique angle of vision concerning Black womanhood unavailable to other groups…" (Collins, 2008, p.39). Black women are the experts on Black women; they can analyze and share our experiences' importance in a scholarly way. Also, Black feminist thought is a critical social theory (Collins, 2008), and for it to operate effectively as a social justice project, Black feminism has to be dynamic and changing, which is the fifth tenet.

As stated previously, Black women are the experts on their experiences. Collins (2008) argued that Black women could not lose touch with their experiences or the practice of Black feminism. It is continuous and ever-changing as our experiences are ever-changing, and space must be made for these changes in the study of our experience. The last and arguably most important tenant is the connection between U.S. Black feminism and social justice causes. Black women do not and have not struggled in isolation. There is a "wider struggle for human dignity, empowerment, and social justice" (Collins, 2008, p. 46). Black feminist thought makes space to understand the experience in a context and how the essential context of struggle, equality, and human dignity is moving forward. Each of these tenets adds to the understanding of Black women and their experiences in the United States.

Collins (2008) focused on the intersectionality of race, gender, and class. Black feminist thought creates spaces for the Black women intellectual/academic to participate in the academic system that has historically marginalized them. Collins (1986) argued that "many Black intellectuals, especially those in touch with their marginality in an academic setting, tap this standpoint in producing distinctive analyses of race, class, and gender" (p.14). A significant point developed in Black feminist thought is that Black women historically have been marginalized, and their contributions are either overlooked or devalued. Black feminist thought

both as a frame and methodology gives Black women space. The space that is provided from Black feminist thought is necessary because Black women have labored in virtual obscurity in the United States.

In her explanation of the necessity of Black feminist thought, Collins (2008) identified three main points; "first, the exploitation of Black women's labor essential to long-standing ghettoization in service occupations-represents the economic dimension of oppression" (p. 6). Because of Black women's standing in the United States and the need to survive, provide, and protect their families, they have had few opportunities to engage in traditional academic work and, thus, in many instances, have been excluded. The structure that African-American women in the United States were born into by design has systematically excluded the African-American and specifically the African-American female's voice, thus the need for Black feminist thought.

The second point Collins (2008) described is "the political dimension of oppression has denied African-American women the rights and privileges routinely extended to White male citizens" (p. 6). Political spaces in the United States have historically been racially segregated. African-Americans in the United States have had equitable rights withheld from them, including voting, holding political office, and receiving equitable treatment within the justice system, to name a few. Because segregation was legally allowed, the exclusion crossed into several arenas, specifically education; this exclusion led African-Americans and, in many instances, women to protest the exclusion or create their institutions for spaces to be created for advancement. Black feminist thought gives voice to these systems as a starting point and explanation as to why this theory is needed.

The last point Collins (2008) provided to describe the need for Black feminist thought is in paying "lip service to the need for diversity, but changing little about one's practice" (p. 8).

Collins argued it is not enough to acknowledge the system if nothing is done to rectify it. Acknowledgment, or lip service, as she calls, it is yet another form of suppression of the Black feminist voice. The problem has been identified by the structure that allows the problems and exclusions to continue or not. There must be a willingness to make a structural change and personal changes that will make participants of the power structure uncomfortable—saying that African-American voices are needed and yet continuing to leave them out of spaces and not allowing for equal representation is racist. The tenants of Black feminist thought provide a framework of how Black (diaspora/ not just the United States) female voices must be included and how the inclusion of these voices is directly connected to the greater sense of holistic inclusion that needs to happen in the United States.

Chapter Summary

The superintendency in the United States was a position created to keep White males in education, which was a female-dominated workforce (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). The field of education was and to some extent is still considered a feminine job, though there are many males in educational roles. The superintendency has never been a feminized role, and while women now hold the position, it is still highly male-dominated. There is not equal representation in this role when looking at the number of African-American women who hold the position, especially in California, Oregon, and Washington. The literature shows a gap in representation, which can be attributed historically to court legislation such as *Brown v. Board of education in Topeka, Kansas*. If it was believed in education that representation matters, we must probe deeper into African-American women's superintendents' experiences. This study intends to probe more deeply as to why this lack of representation exists and offer strategies for implementation to increase representation at the superintendency.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems. The findings of this study may be used to increase the number of African-American female superintendents in the California, Oregon, and Washington regions.

This chapter includes a detailed description of the research design and the methodological procedures used to collect the data of African-American women superintendents' experiences and journey towards the superintendency. While this is a growing body of research, at this time, there is no specific literature about African-American superintendents' experience in California, Oregon, and Washington. It is essential to add to this growing body of research and give voice to experiences not explicitly focused on literature because African-American women are members of the greater community serving in these roles who have expertise that can grow the understanding of the superintendent role. The chapter explains the research design, including methods for data collection and analysis. It concludes with a review of the limitations of the study and the role of the researcher in this project.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems. Four research questions guide this inquiry:

1. What systemic barriers do participants perceive hinder African American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts?

2. What strategies did the participants use to overcome these barriers?

3. In what ways, if any, do participants perceive the influence of race and gender on their path to the superintendency?

4. What systemic reforms are needed to increase the diversity of superintendents in the western United States?

Approach

Bhattacharya (2017) explained the "three broad purposes of qualitative research, which do not include the need to predict or generalize. Instead, qualitative researchers conduct studies to understand, interrogate, and deconstruct" (p. 19). She also explained that there are certain assumptions that researchers make when executing qualitative research (Bhattacharya, 2017). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative researchers seek to understand participants' experiences and the ways they interpret those experiences. Qualitative researchers frequently seek to understand how experiences related to race, gender, ethnicities, stereotypes, and phenomena shape the people who have experienced them (Bhattacharya, 2017).

This study focused on current African-American women who are superintendents of public school districts throughout California, Oregon, and Washington. Accessing state education databases provided the number of African-American women in the superintendency. This information showed the number of African-American women transitioning into the superintendency but did not represent the number of African-American students in the region. The number of female African-American students in public schools in these three states is 8% of the total population of students, while the number of African-American female superintendents represents less than 2% of superintendents in these states. These low numbers are startling, compelling research into exploring why and understanding the experiences of current African-American female superintendents. If representation matters, there is a severe lack of representation among African-American women. If African-American girls cannot see themselves in the highest levels of educational leadership, they may begin to internalize and

doubt themselves and the levels they can achieve. To understand this lack of representation, a fuller picture has to be painted. The African-American women superintendents in California, Oregon, and Washington's experience can begin to fill out the picture. I am interested in the lived experiences of these women to provide them with the "framework to share their expert-level knowledge regarding the unique phenomenon of obtaining this position in a white male-dominated field" (Wiley et al., 2017, p.18). Because of the interest in these women's experiences from their perspective, this study is qualitative by nature.

Methodology

This study used Merriam's (2002) basic qualitative methodology to explore the experiences of African American women superintendents, including their paths to the superintendency. Basic interpretative qualitative studies exemplify all the characteristics of qualitative research, that is, "the researcher is interested in understanding how participants make meaning of a situation or phenomenon. This meaning is mediated through the researcher as an instrument, the strategy is inductive, and the outcome is descriptive" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 6). In the most basic terms, this study seeks to understand and then describe these women's experiences and share their stories, with the possibility that changes can be made structurally to support other women who will travel the same journey. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) also stated that qualitative researchers conducting a basic qualitative study would be interested in (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences. The overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences. (p. 24)

Merriam's methodology is appropriate for this study because it is solely focused on the participants' experiences. They are sharing their experiences and identifying the spaces in the

journey that they deem essential. "The primary goal of a basic qualitative study is to uncover and interpret these meanings" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 25). The data collection methods described below illustrate the ways that interviews will allow participants to share about and reflect on their experiences as superintendents as well as their path to the superintendency.

Methods

This section describes the participants and how they were recruited. Following is a description of the data collection and data analysis procedures.

Participants

This study focuses on African-American women superintendents in K-12 unified public-school districts in California, Oregon, Washington. Due to the many differences between public school districts, this study does not include public K-8, public K-6 independent charter schools, network charter schools, or county superintendents. Focusing solely on K-12 public school districts, which are larger and more numerous in each state, allows for a study across similar types of organizations and potentially includes a larger number of eligible participants. In addition to currently serving as a public school superintendent in California, Oregon, or Washington, participants must have been African-American women. Due to the limited number of women who might meet these inclusion criteria, I recruited women from three states. Although each state had slightly different qualifications for the superintendent, conducting a study across three states provided more assurances for participant confidentiality.

According to data obtained from respective state education websites across the three states, 19 women met the criteria. Of these qualified women, I recruited six women to participate in this study. This is a significant participant amount because, in most qualitative research, the researcher is looking for an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon that is focused

on the how and why of a particular issue, situation, subculture, scene, or set of social interactions (Dworkin, 2012). This level of in-depth understanding and analysis cannot be executed with a larger participant group.

To recruit participants, I examined publicly available data, such as statewide educational websites, to identify the number of African American women in the role of public K-12 superintendents. After identifying the women who served in this role, I reached out to each participant's assistant, introduced myself, explained the study since their assistants had direct access to their calendars and scheduling. I worked with the assistants to determine the best way to share the information about the study with the superintendent and schedule an initial interview with the superintendent. After the initial points of contact, I recruited six participants for the data collection phase.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews. Although there were a variety of options for data collection, semi-structured interviews were "between structured and unstructured, in this type of interview either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of fewer structured questions" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 110). Semi-structured interviews offered a consistent set of questions to participants and allowed space to delve deeper into different areas that sparked interest or were repetitive across interviews. As Patton (2014) suggested, these interviews provided a means to understand participants' experiences to "want to find out what is in and on someone else's mind" (p. 426).

Interviews

I conducted two one-hour interviews, with built-in time for rapport development with each participant. Building rapport with participants was essential because for participants to

share their experiences deeply, they had to feel comfortable and safe. The participants needed to feel and believe they could trust that I would not mishandle them or their stories. The interviews were scheduled at a time that was convenient for each participant. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the interviews were conducted using online videoconferencing. At the beginning of the first interview, each participant was asked a series of demographic questions.

The interview questions for the first interview are listed in Appendix C. The questions for the first interview were divided into two sections. The first section included low-level relationship-building questions, and these questions were intended to make the participants and interviewer comfortable with one another. The second set of questions were developed to begin to identify themes that would tell the participants' stories as well as answer the research questions. The interview questions for the second interview, which all six participants participated, were developed after the first round of interviews were completed. These questions delve into the five themes that were unearthed in the first round of interviews.

Data Analysis

With the permission of each participant, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A professional transcriptionist app (Otter.ai) was used to transcribe the interviews. The resulting transcripts were compared to the audio recording and corrected as needed to ensure the transcript's accuracy. Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) basic inductive and comparative analysis strategy was used to analyze the data.

The first step of the data analysis was category construction (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). After the first interview was transcribed, I carefully re-read the interview and had a conversation with the transcript. Conversations with the transcripts were asking questions of the conversation; the participant said this, does she mean this? I want to get more information about this section.

This participant answered this way, do I see this same response or theme in other responses? In the margins, as I read, I made notations, asked questions, comments, and thoughts; this was the initial step in coding. Identifying ideas that could be potential themes, Merriam and Tisdell (2015) referred to this process as open coding. Since it was early in the process, I was open to all possibilities. Once I re-read the entire transcript, I grouped notes that had similarities. This process was referred to as "analytical coding because it goes beyond descriptive coding. It is coding that comes from interpretation and reflection" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015, p. 206). The analytical step included several reviews to rearrange and reorganize the codes. These first two steps were done with each transcript.

After transcripts were grouped and coded, lists from each transcript were merged into one list; this was the preliminary outline of reoccurring patterns or ideas for the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Once initial codes were identified and grouped, the next step was naming the categories (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Constructing the categories/themes was a careful process. These categories/themes needed to be present across all of the data and be large enough for analysis to answer the research questions. The sorting and naming of these categories came from the data itself. The naming of the categories themes came from three places: the researcher, the participant's words, and the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). I took the groupings, reviewed them, and determined two things: what did I learn from this information group, and what was one word or phrase that summed up the grouping, producing the category titles. Developing these categories was important because it allowed me to begin to answer the research questions, fulfilling the purpose of the study.

Once the themes were identified and labeled, the next step was to determine which categories/themes applied to which research questions. Each research question was written on a

large poster post-it note. Each category was written on color-coded post-it notes, and each post-it note was placed on the corresponding research poster as an answer or a thought that needed to be expanded. This step took several rounds because I had to step away from what was solely observable towards what was inferred from the data that could answer the research questions and lead to action steps. This step was the theorizing step, where from a transformative researcher's perspective, I began to take these categories developed directly from the participants' experiences and developed plans of action that in chapter five of the study turned into documentation for the next steps (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The theorizing section of data analysis gives readers importance and validation of participants' experiences for the greater education community.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Jones et al. (2013) explained that trustworthiness is essential for qualitative research because it ensures the data are credible and reliable. To ensure the data collected for this study are trustworthy, I used several strategies described by Creswell and Creswell (2018). First, using semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask each participant a set of questions while also providing participants opportunities to expand on their answers. In addition, the second interview allowed me to follow up with participants after analyzing data collected from the first interview. The second interview was used to clarify key points, explore initial themes, and investigate topics raised from the first interview. A second strategy used to establish the trustworthiness of the data was triangulation, that was, using "different data sources by examining evidence from the sources and using it to build a coherent justification for themes" (Creswell & Creswell, p. 200). I conducted a review of publicly available documents as a way to corroborate the data collected through interviews.

A final step to ensure trustworthiness was member checking. Member checking can "determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings by taking the final report or specific descriptions or themes back to participants and determining whether participants feel they are accurate" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 200). At the same time, there were concerns related to member checking (Hallett, 2012) that urged researchers to carefully consider this strategy because c the information shared might be too expressive, and participants could be unwilling to share when seeing it in print. In this study, participants were asked to review a summary of themes that emerged from the first interviews. In the second interview, they were asked to comment on the themes. Participants had the opportunity to review chapter four (the study's findings) and add to the findings if needed.

One final step to ensure the trustworthiness of the data was bracketing (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). As the researcher, I had a personal interest in the participants' experiences both because of what I witnessed as an educator and because of my interest in ensuring that educational leaders reflect the diversity of students they serve. To ensure I bracketed or set aside my assumptions, I kept a researcher journal to reflect on and document the journey, thoughts, and experiences concerning my past experiences. I also reflected upon my internal and professional desire to eventually become a superintendent in the state of California, which will be shared in chapter six researcher reflections. I continued to bring credibility to this study through the consistency developed in the interview protocol by identifying the codes and interpreting the data. The journal provided a means to acknowledge my own experiences and bracket them; that is, the participants' experiences can be "understood in new and undiscovered ways" (Bhattacharya, 2017, p. 64).

Researcher's Role and Positionality

In this study, I was the research instrument. This study is personal to the participants.   It is my job as the researcher to ensure I develop a level of trust with the participants. Also, the districts where they work were described in broad terms. As a researcher, I exercised active listening, compassion, patience, understanding, and respect during each interview. These stories and experiences of these women were personal and essential to them. As the researcher, the participants were provided the ability to share their stories in a safe and respected space. The same care and concern were taken when sharing these women's experiences as well.

In doing preliminary research to find a mentor, I discovered fascinating data about African-American women superintendents or the lack thereof. This exciting data and the lack of answers led to this study. As a high school principal, I see the day-to-day effects of representation for students of color. Also, I remembered my first day as a principal. On that day, I met many families, and one student asked, "Oh, you are the principal?" I said, "yes," and she smiled so brightly. I chuckled and asked the reason for her smile. The student stated she had never seen a Black woman principal, and she was happy. I carry this encounter with me during my work because I understand what seeing people who look like you in authority positions means and can do. Knowing that I brought this position to this study, I had to acknowledge it to guide the study. To ensure the study was about the participants' experience and not mine, I used a researcher journal to document thoughts, feelings, and connections that arose for me to process my experience with the study.

Understanding the importance of representation and the historical near-exclusion of African-American women from educational leadership, this was a bias that I needed to check during the study. To address the concerns of historical exclusion and the effects they play in the

current education system, I considered adding interview questions to see if the participants had experienced any kinds of exclusions or how they saw themselves be excluded in education due to their ethnicity. While I had my own opinions about why this happened, this study was about the participants and their experiences, and I did not want to guide them to share or say anything that was not their experience. Again, I used the researcher journal to describe how I experienced hearing the participants' experiences and what emotions or thoughts arose for me.

Assumptions

I brought several assumptions to this work. I assumed that the participants would share openly and with candor. To encourage this candor, participants were identified by pseudonyms. In addition, the study intended to focus on three states, thus increasing the likelihood that they were not easily individually identified. I also assumed participants were willing to share their experiences as a means to help other African-American women who aspire to the superintendency.

I assumed the participants experienced situations directly connected to their gender and race. As Collins (2008) described, I assumed that participants were aware of their marginalization, and in fact, they believe they have been marginalized, and that voice needed to be given to the disregarded group. While I assumed these women understood the underlying political and historical actions that potentially affected their experience, I presumed these women had ideologies to share that can give insight to younger African-American women seeking to sit in their seats. I presumed these women not only understood the underlying historical and political influences but will have taken small actions that empowered them throughout their journeys.

Limitations

As with any study, this inquiry has some limitations. The first limitation was that this study had a limited number of potential participants in California, Oregon, and Washington that represented these women's experiences and not African American women as a whole. Although their experiences may not be different from other African-American women who are superintendents, their experiences will add to current scholarship on this topic (Wiley et al., 2017). Their experiences could inform current and aspiring superintendents, which potentially will not garner broader themes.

The purpose of this study was for the participants to share their experiences in ways they felt comfortable sharing. If the participants did not feel comfortable sharing their experiences, it would be difficult to elicit the stories that were crucial to this study. Consequently, their anonymity was protected. In addition to using pseudonyms, participants' demographics were shared in the aggregate, and the districts where they work were described broadly. Both of these efforts left essential details but were necessary to balance participants' privacy with the overall findings. This research is significant because this study was limited to California. California prides itself on its diversity; however, that diversity is not trickling up to school leadership roles. Because California is a far western state, we don't consider segregation much because it is considered a southern thing, which leaves us colorblind in many ways.

Chapter Summary

This chapter explained the basic qualitative research methodology and methods by which I collected data about African-American women in California, Oregon, and Washington. Using semi-structured interviews, I collected data from participants about their experiences and journey to the superintendency. Once data was collected, Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) basic inductive

and comparative analysis strategy was used to develop categories and theories that answered the

studies' research questions, ultimately leading to the development of recommendations and

action steps.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

This research study intended to study the experiences of African American superintendents in the western United States (California, Oregon, and Washington). Despite my extensive outreach efforts, all of the participants from this study are from one of the three states. Many of the experiences rang true for the majority of the participants. There were stories of joy, triumph, firsts, highs, lows, and devastations in their journeys. The theoretical framework used to support this research was Black Feminist thought, which argues that Black women are experts at sharing their stories and experiences and offering solutions that support their needs. Through the intersectionality lens of race and gender, these experiences responded to the research questions. The research questions were: 1) What systemic barriers did participants perceive hindered African-American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts, 2) What strategies did the participants use to overcome these barriers? 3) In what ways, if any, do participants perceive the influence of race and gender on their path to the superintendency? 4), What systemic reforms are needed to increase the diversity of superintendents in the western United States?

Six participants were interviewed twice for one hour, each time via the Zoom video conferencing platform. Each participant was a sitting superintendent of a K-12 unified school district. This study was designed as a regional study of California, Oregon, and Washington state. However, all the superintendents responded to participate live and work in one state; therefore, the study findings are limited to one state. From the interviews and the data analysis, the following themes emerged and will be presented: Ethics, Mentorship, Politics, Relationships, and Representation.

Participant Descriptions

Table 1.7 provides general demographic information about the six study participants. In addition, below the chart, there are brief descriptions of each participant. All of the participants' names, schools, cities, and school districts are pseudonyms used to protect participants' anonymity.

Table 1.7
Superintendent Demographics

Participant Pseudonym	Age Range	Marital Status	Number of Children	Highest Degree held	Credentials held	Superintendent Certificate	Number of Students in District
Jasmine	50-54	Married	1	Doctorate	Multiple Subject with EL Authorization, Clear Administrative Services	Yes	1,610
Kenyatta	45-49	Married	2	Doctorate	Multiple Subject, Clear Administrative Services	Yes	696
Megan	45-49	Married	2	Doctorate	Multiple Subject Credential, Clear administrative Services	No	50,000

Table 1.7
Superintendent Demographics (continued)

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J'nette	40-44	Married	1	Doctorate	Single Subject English credential, Clear Administrative services	No	8,400
Erica	50-54	In Between	2	Doctoral Candidate	Multiple Subject Credential, Clear Administrative Services	Yes	1,350
Leslie	55-59	Married	2	Doctorate	Multiple Subject Credential, Clear Administrative Services	No	498

Jasmine

Jasmine has been in education for over 30 years. She has a light brown complexion, shoulder-length medium brown hair, has been married for more than 15 years, and has one son. Jasmine is in her third year as the Superintendent in her school district, which she describes as small and urban, serving about 2,000 students with a 20-million-dollar budget. Initially, she did not see herself as a superintendent; though, she explained she comes from a family of educators and superintendents. She explained that she felt the superintendency was more of a figurehead position, and superintendents are not as engaged in educating, serving, and providing opportunities for students in the way she had the chance to in other positions.

Kenyatta

Kenyatta is in her fourth year as the Superintendent in her school district that she described as an urban district with a small-town feel. Kenyatta has a medium brown complexion and wears her natural jet-black hair in different braided styles. Kenyatta is married to a Black police officer and has two children. Kenyatta serves in a small district with only 696 students with a 14-million-dollar budget. Kenyatta has been working in education since college; initially, she wanted to be a school psychologist. She comes from a family of service. Her mother, a nurse, instilled in her the idea of service and giving back to the community.

Megan

Megan was born, raised, and attended schools in the same district she currently serves as superintendent. This district is a large urban district serving 50,000 students with a budget of $590,000,000 dollars. She has medium brown skin, long dark brown hair, which she frequently wears in a high bun. Megan is married with two pre-teen children. Megan has a lot of history in this community and district, not just attending its schools from kindergarten through high school, but her mother did as well.

J'nette

J'nette began her career in the same city she grew up in and attended school. She had no intention of getting into the field of education. She explained she initially wanted to be an orthopedic surgeon because she played a lot of sports growing up and watched the video of her knee surgery. J'nette has dark brown skin; she wears her jet-black hair straightened and wears glasses. J'nette is married with one daughter. J'nette is in her 21st year as an educator and in her seventh year as the Superintendent in her school district that has 8,400 students and has a 101-million-dollar budget.

Erica

Erica had a unique educational journey. At eighteen years old, Erica began teaching. She taught for a very long time in Catholic and public schools. While teaching, Erica married and had two daughters. Erica has light brown skin with black hair, which she usually wears down and straightens. Erica has been the Superintendent of her school district for over seven years, where she serves 1,500 students with a 20-million-dollar budget.

Leslie

Leslie knew she wanted to be a teacher since she was eight years old. She began her teaching career in the same school district where Megan currently works. She also knew that one day she would be a superintendent. Of all the jobs she's had, teaching is her first love. Leslie has chocolate brown skin and wears her natural hair either blown out or in its natural state. Leslie has been married for over 20 with two adult children and two grandchildren. She is currently in her third year as the Superintendent of her district. She describes it as a small urban district that serves just under 1,000 students with a budget of six million dollars.

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Findings Overview

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These participants had vast experiences to share about their journeys into the superintendency and stories they held close. In many instances, these stories shaped and continue to shape who they are and the work they do. The participants' experiences and stories will be shared through the below themes.

Five research themes arose from the participants' interviews. The themes being were as follows: representation, ethics, politics, relationships, and mentoring. Each theme will be explained and elaborated on through the participants' experiences and stories.

Representation

With each participant, the idea of representation was present. Each participant explained that representation is essential because students and staff need to see positive reflections of themselves in everyday life. Positive representation counteracts the negative media narratives for many communities of color concerning this study of African American communities, specifically. As discussed in the literature, representation matters because "if a Black student has just one black teacher, they are thirteen percent more likely to enroll in college; those with two black teachers are thirty-two percent more likely" (Getting Smart, 2018). Each participant recounted how having African American examples planted a seed of leadership in their minds, whether through mentorship or school leadership. Seed planting looked like people close to them mentors, school leadership, or others suggesting they go into administration and by providing examples of how to begin the process to enter administration, sharing job postings, offering mentorship, etc.

Kenyatta explained an experience she still carries with her when she thinks about how important her work is and how much representation matters. While in college, she worked in an after-school program as a tutor. In her tutoring group, she was one of two African-Americans; the rest of the team was white. She remembered vividly the young African-American girl she was tutoring, who requested to change tutors to another woman who was white with blonde hair. Kenyatta asked the girl, "Oh, that was your tutor last year?" The student said no, and that the tutor was just better. Kenyatta asked what made her better. The student could not articulate why the other tutor was better, but she just was. The only difference between the two was their race; from Kenyatta's perspective, the student's desire to change tutors was due to the race of the other tutor.

Kenyatta, being distraught, shared the story with her mother. Her mother asked if she recalled Jane Elliot's brown vs. blue eye study? She informed her by stating, "In the study, students were identified as less than if they had brown eyes. As a result, they were not allowed to play at recess, eat lunch together, or line up first. Elliot's study was an experiment of the treatment of black people in the United States." This study and incident stuck with Kenyatta because it reminded her of the lingering traces of slavery, Jim Crow, white supremacy in education, and the need for more representation. It was from this incident and her service background that Kenyatta decided to go into education. Kenyatta wanted to counteract the negative representations of African Americans in education through her work.

For Megan, representation is important on many different levels. It is not just important that she became a superintendent, but what has she personally has done to ensure others have opportunities to grow their leadership and sit in the superintendent seat. Megan stated:

I think it is interesting that you picked up on this theme of mentoring because what I have found being in the system is that unless I am actively kind of tapping folks of color, the people who tap me actually tend to be mainly white… what I mean and I have found that if we're not doing that intentionally for folks of color a lot of times they don't necessarily realize how talented they are or have the potential, we have to intentionally disrupt systems that do not see or include people of color.

For Megan, disrupting these systems looks like actively mentoring men and women of color in leadership, creating pathways in her district specifically dedicated to supporting the leadership development of people of color. She is interested in building structures that will help others. She also believes that the need for representation has to be a shift of an organization and not solely one individual, even if that individual is the superintendent. Megan explained she

takes the lens of representation into all avenues of her work. When working with Human Resources around hiring specifically internal candidates, she elevates uncomfortable conversations. For example, if a candidate has been in the district for several years, applied for a particular leadership position several times, and is still not moving forward, she asks, " Has anyone talked to the candidate? Has anyone offered to coach? How are we growing our internal candidates? How are we building pipelines for these people of color?" For Megan, representation is essential, along with building structures to support people of color, who are frequently left out of leadership positions.

Relationships

Relationships show up consistently in the participants' stories, and depending on the nature of the relationship, it can be a hindrance or support. While moving into the role of the superintendency, each participant had to consider several different levels of relationships and interactions. In this section, participants describe how their colleagues engaged with them when they became superintendents. In some instances, participants define microaggressions and aggressions and, to their surprise, support from unexpected avenues.

When J'nette was interviewing for an associate superintendent position, several relationship dynamics occurred that made her consider how she engaged with colleagues, subordinates, and superiors. She stated

Because I push right and people don't always like to be pushed back, so I think just really being mindful of people. You know who have their own mindset and biases about who should be in roles and who shouldn't, and there was a whole interesting dynamic. Right after the interview for the associate superintendent position, I felt great about it. I thought I did really well. At that time there was a board member who was sitting on the

panel, which is typical and you know after I had two people come and say just hey you for what it's worth, I thought you did a really great job. I thought that was really interesting, and I hadn't been told, one way or the other, I was moving forward, but I figured with their condolences like obviously, I wasn't moving forward that why they were like its really hard to interview amongst your peers and I'm thinking okay well you know, then God didn't want me in that position. The superintendent calls me and essentially tells me he didn't want me, he didn't think that I had the credentials, he didn't think I had the experience, he didn't think I'd be good for the job, which I thought wow interesting and so he said. So tell me why I should hire you and I was like well, I honestly didn't think I was moving forward after the communications that were shared with me, so I think if you have a process, the personnel need to follow the produces because that certainly was a hindrance.

Because J'nette worked in the district, she had a relationship with the superintendent. She worked with him before. J'nette felt good after her interview; however, her feedback led her to believe she was not moving forward in the process. When the superintendent approached her with this conversation, she felt compelled to share her thoughts on why the interview experience was harmful, precisely because she would have to continue to work with this team and wanted to maintain positive relationships with them. Interviewing in my current district was already challenging, but having my current employer feel comfortable to tell me he did not think I was "good enough" for a position was damaging. This is not a conversation an employer is likely to have with an external candidate. J'nette and other participants had to show up knowing how teammates felt about them and their work. In many instances, J'nette and the other participants had to hold these feelings, continue to work to the highest standards, and ensure their current

working relationships were not damaged to the working relationships. J'nette ultimately was appointed as the Associate superintendent but worked directly with a superintendent who was clear about his lack of desire to work with her.

How these relationships are handled even when they feel negative is extremely important and can have a lasting effect on one's career. But, again, the willingness of how the community a leader is are serving will work with that leader, speaks to the relationships said leader has developed. Megan explained how she experienced relationships with undertones of racism throughout her career as an educator.

I was the first black principal at…. elementary school, they had all white principals before that, and I remember when I took the job, I got the keys I went to look around, and you know they had googled me, and they had printed out my dissertation, it was like who is this person. I was young, and one of the teachers knew my mother from teaching and called her to just say how could she possibly be ready to do this, right? My mom told me, 'the best thing you can do is be the best principal you could be.' When I got into the job, I had all of these parent meetings, and it was like they were re-interviewing me to test if I was competent, if I was smart. The first two to three months, these meet and greets. I remember they had a box ... it was like Oprah. People would put their

questions in and they pull them out and literally question me to see if I could do the job.

Megan was the first black principal at this predominantly white elementary school in her district. While this was her first principal appointment, she had all of the credentials and a variety of different experiences that prepared her for this position. While the community had interviewed her and selected her, it seemed that her skin color was an issue. No other principal before Megan was subjected to this level of scrutiny after they had been hired. From this, Megan learned that

she could not control what people thought or how they would behave or interact with her; she could only control how she responded and showed up. Ultimately, Megan took her mother's advice, and her school community learned how well she could do the job, and strong community relationships were built-in service of students.

In leadership, it is essential to learn how to navigate contentious relationships as much as it is the ones that come easier. J'nette described how she uses relationships that could be contentious to get work done. She recounted an experience she had with another Associate superintendent/colleague when she became the Superintendent. Her white male colleague told her that he was supposed to have that job. Seeing that feelings were present, she had to figure out how to cultivate this relationship for the greater goal.

> Because I wanted people to see in my actions how I interact, people were like well
> they're afraid that you're going to come in and you, start firing people. I'm like I need
> people to do their jobs, and they need to do it well, and I did have to let people go, but I
> also believe in being very transparent and direct with people about my expectations, and
> if they're not meeting it I tell them, but then saying so, how can I support you? I will get
> you a coach; I will meet with you every week, every other week I can assign you,
> someone, to come to your meetings or whatever it is. So, I realized I could talk and tell
> people all of that, but I'd rather just show them. With my colleague and Assistant
> Superintendent, I cultivated that relationship and played up his strengths. I learned in this
> work I do not need the credit, nor do I always need to be in front of people.

While still learning how to better support this specific colleague, she understood the need for him to be seen and "lead." J'nette also understood that this particular colleague has cultural capital in the district. Although there were feelings of animosity, she had to figure out how to

leverage this relationship into one that would be supportive to her during her time as the superintendent. By personally coaching this colleague and providing him different leadership opportunities, they ultimately got what they needed; he could lead and be seen. The structures that J'nette desired were implemented. Over time, the relationship grew, and the colleague began to use his district capital to support J'nette's superintendency initiatives.

Politics

Politics is embedded in educational leadership. While none of the participants particularly enjoyed the political aspect of their job or journey, they understood its need and how it helped and hindered them. For this research, when I refer to politics, I am describing the power dynamics between individuals and groups and how those power dynamics play out in the workplace. An example of this in a school setting would be if a principal wants to introduce a new initiative, and it has the potential to be contentious, the union site leadership will need to support, the veteran teachers need to help and potentially present the initiative to the staff for their buy-in. While the principal is the leader of a school, they are not always the person with the most social capital on a school campus.

Politics play a huge role in obtaining a superintendent position but also maintaining it. In most districts, the school boards are elected bodies. The public, through their votes, trusts the school boards that they will choose someone as the superintendent who will serve the community's interest. Thus, the superintendent is the face of the school district. Megan describes the role of the superintendent as having three responsibilities.

> The superintendent has to deal with people; that's the relationships; we have to deal with
> the fiscal/financial piece of it, so you know the financial sustainability of the
> organization, and the overall success and achievement, and the health of students.

Megan described these as the main functions of the superintendency. But, she explained,

> These three functions are wrapped in relationships and wrapped in the political, and then all those kinds of things... but you have to focus on those three base things to ensure that your organization is successful.

These three responsibilities become embedded in the politics of the superintendency, specifically with relationships with the board of directors. Kenyatta described an experience she had with her very first board of directors, where the relationships directly affected politics and ultimately profoundly affected Kenyatta's longevity in that position and district.

> A defining moment came when I had two board members that were under huge pressure. Because when I became the superintendent, I brought others who looked like me with doctorates; with the competency, who had walked the walk of changing schools, I knew I could help us change the system. I was the superintendent for about six years. I had two board members, one of them who looked like me, call me into a private meeting and tell me that I had to fire one of the people that I had hired, a very strong administrator. And I remember that day as if it was yesterday; I mean, these were people who supported me but were very fearful of the city's politics. The city is very political, many people who I'm going to liken to Trump supporters, for lack of a better term, that kind of a person, and so they were being pushed to have me get rid of this person because she intimidated certain people just by her presence and intellect. And I thought I just looked at them and said, first of all, have wasted my time by calling me here. I said, secondly, there's no way on God's green earth I'm going to fire somebody because the community is afraid of what she's going for children, I'm not going to do it. And I know that probably means that I'm losing your support right as I sit here, and that's okay. I said, ``but I'm going to stand. I've done nothing

wrong; we have created, if you look at our work in …. we've done, we did all of the research-based things that need to be done for black and brown children are in place.

Ultimately, Kenyatta separated from the district due to the drastic shift in the political climate and lack of support from the board. This explains politics very clearly. In this context, the board members were afraid of backlash from the community. They had a request of Kenyatta, a request she was not willing to complete because it was not good for students. Because she was unwilling, she ultimately lost support from the board. Kenyatta's experiences indicated that the relationship between the superintendent and the board is critical because the superintendent is the one employee of the Board of directors. Therefore, these two entities have to find alignment on the growth and forward movement of the district.

Ethics

Ethics guide the work of any educator; it is no different for the superintendent. However, ethics is a theme that truly guides the work of a superintendent, the decisions they make and continue to make, the initiatives they push, the goals they set. Jasmine described how she faces ethics as the Superintendent.

> I observed, and I listened a lot. There were a variety of things I knew needed to shift solely from a compliance perspective. [district name] was a small district and behind in its implementation of new educational policies. Change management is very difficult, especially when you're in a place that has done things a certain way for decades. When I got to [district name], the previous superintendent had been there for over a decade; all-white females led the organization. As I began to question and makeshifts, a narrative began to develop. All of the chiefs and the majority of the directors began to resign.

Jasmine explained that the narrative began to tear down the organization, destroy the culture, and

not understand the community; she was unethical. Jasmine explained there were significant

compliance issues that needed to be addressed. Many of the directors began resigning because

they felt the moves were unethical and not how they were accustomed to doing things.

> By year three, I had an entirely new team, and this is where the troubles began. Again, the
>
> narrative pushed people out, hiring my friends and family, shifting the organization's
>
> culture. As a result, one director, when she left, sent a very accusatory and scathing email
>
> out to the entire district stating that she could not ethically continue to work in an
>
> organization that she felt was shifting and going in the wrong direction.

> Jasmine's organization, as she described it, has been and continues to be a revolving

door. The organization, because it is small, has been very familial and culture-based. At the

same time, Jasmine supports the culture; she also understands that education law is present for a

reason. Jasmine did not believe culture and compliance had to be compromised. Shifting from

solely focusing on culture in her district has been challenging for staff members to support. The

new vision and movement of the organization, precisely when their site leadership has been with

them in some instances over a decade, has transitioned out. Jasmine described the current state

of the organization.

> One principal resigned, one had to be released, all due to personnel issues that I cannot
>
> publicly speak to, which they all know. Rallying students, staff, and some families, these
>
> former employees attended board meetings calling for my contract not to be renewed.
>
> Several former staff members organized a student walkout at one of the high schools,
>
> encouraging them to stand up for their district. Sitting in board meetings hearing lies

about me and the work I am doing is difficult. Knowing what I am doing is good for students is what I hold on to.

Ensuring that students have the best possible district teachers, staff, administration, leadership, etc., is essential. If the organizational leadership is not fully prepared or possesses the things they need, there would continually be a gap in the administration and support for students. Making ethical choices are not always easy, especially when there has not been a structure of complete transparency. Many of the issues around compliance that Jasmine began to enforce were initiated by the previous superintendent, who, as stated previously, was a white woman and approved by an all-white board of directors. Jasmine explained, "these were policies the previous superintendent and board put in place; I am simply enforcing them."

> Jasmine explained why the moves and enforcement of policies are essential by saying the things I am addressing deal with finances, credentials, and instruction. The schools in the district perform well but to move from good to great compliance matters. As the superintendent, I am the face, and in such a small district with many shifts, I understand that people have a variety of feelings. However, these feelings cannot overrule what is right and good for students.

While she is still dealing with the feelings that former and current staff members have in the district and continues to demonstrate, she knows that the law and many staff members support the changes, but it does not make it easier. Jasmine explained

> to bridge the gaps and build harmony and collegiality so that we can move forward; I have healing circles at all of the schools to continue to share the vision of growth for the district and allow spaces for current employees to share and create opportunities to move forward so that we can continue to serve our students and families.

She doesn't know how this will end or how long she will stay at…. as the character attacks and lies are difficult to manage, but she knows that she is doing her job and will move…. forward, leaving it in a better condition than when she started.

Mentorship

The theme of mentorship is a fascinating one, while in many instances, these women were tapped or identified by mentors for the different positions they held in their careers. However, while these mentors tapped, pushed, and encouraged these women to move to the next level, there is another mentorship side. Each participant discussed this unofficial brotherhood their White male counterparts were members of. Unfortunately, this brotherhood often supported each other's journey up the professional ladder and frequently excluded Black women.

Each participant shared an experience of how mentorship supported them on this journey. Mentorship took different forms for each woman. For example, early in her career, Leslie knew she wanted to be a superintendent; her then principal encouraged her to move into administration and begin reading and researching the Superintendency to prepare her for the job she wanted. Throughout her journey, he was always there to support her and give her counsel. Through mentorship, Leslie was able to build a village of support to assist her in navigating the journey to the superintendency, which began with her first principal who told her, "You need to pursue administration he said, you have to have a leader and broader reach, and I think you should go to school to be an administrator." Those first words early in her career guided her; this is a coaching relationship that she still depends on to this day.

Similar to Leslie, Erica knew she wanted to be a Superintendent. Erica explained,

I always knew I wanted to be a superintendent at some point. My mentor helped me

devise a plan which included obtaining my superintendent's certificate and enrolling in a

doctoral program. While in my doctoral classes, the board of [name of school district]

reached out to me about hiring me as their superintendent. Initially, I did not want to go

but felt divinely led to do so.

The mentorship the participants experienced was all different, from offering conferences,

check-ins, shoulders to cry on, thought partnership, and encouragement. However, the one piece

of mentorship support that all the participants received was this idea of "tapping." The

participants all explained tapping to be their mentors or someone in their mentorship circle

pushing them into the next phase, encouraging them to apply, telling them about upcoming

opportunities they thought would be good fits for; and in at least one case calling the search firm

and recommending a participant for a position.

 For most of the participants who were "tapped," someone told them they should apply to

positions and begin to move up the ladder. In many of these instances, the mentor tapped them;

they served as references or reached out to search firms to encourage them to speak with their

mentees. Kenyatta recalled a time when there was a superintendent position available.

I remember my mentor telling me he thought I should apply. I didn't apply to that job

because I knew interested people and the political ramifications of that. People often feel

very personal and territorial over jobs.

Although Kenyatta ultimately moved into the superintendency, she recalled telling her

mentor that she applied for the position. He asked if she listed him as a reference because he

knew the research firm; she didn't. Kenyatta explained that he said, "why didn't you put me as a

reference? I'm going to call someone". "He called someone at the search firm to say, 'hey, you

should really give her consideration." This was the first Superintendent position Kenyatta

applied to, and she ultimately was offered the position. This example Kenyatta shared was like

the stories of the other participants. While their resumes and experience made these women qualified, often, they needed someone to vouch for them. They needed someone to use their power and experience to get them in the door. A door that should not have been closed to them. Kenyatta summed up mentorship nicely "the networking and keeping those relationships is important because you don't even know who's going to help you."

Conclusion

Through the themes of representation, mentorship, politics, ethics, and relationships, participants shared their stories and experiences of getting into the superintendency. These themes come up frequently as these are the facilitators and hindrances they faced both getting here and while continuing this job daily. These women's experiences through these lenses are essential because they allow these education stories that aren't often heard to be lifted. These stories are important because they show that in a world post-Brown vs. The Board of education, Topeka, Kansas, there is still no equality; there are still systems of inequity and lack of access. These women's stories and the themes from their stories illustrate how much work is still left to be done in educational leadership.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter begins with an overview of the problem, a review of the purpose statement, and a review of the research questions. From there, I will review the methodology used and present the major findings and recommendations for further study and application.

During the 2019-2020 school year, there were 1,141 superintendents in California, Oregon, and Washington state. Of that number, 41 were African American, and 19 were African American women. With a total of 1,543 African American women in administration in the region, and African American women representing less than 1% of superintendents, further investigation of this problem was needed. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative study was to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems. The research questions which guided this study were as follows: (1) What systemic barriers hinder African American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts? (2) What strategies did the participants use to overcome these barriers? (3) In what ways, if any, do participants perceive the influence of race and gender on their path to the superintendency? (4) What systemic reforms are needed to increase the diversity of Superintendents in the western United States?

This chapter will discuss the significant findings developed out of the participants' lived experiences through the five themes of representation, mentorship, relationships, politics, and ethics. Finally, this chapter will discuss limitations and areas for further research.

In order to collect the data, a basic qualitative research design was used. After the recruitment phase and identifying and confirming six participants, two one-hour semi-structured interviews were conducted. Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, these interviews were

conducted via Zoom. Once the interviews were completed, the transcriptions from the video were transcribed and compared to the audio recording for accuracy. The data was then analyzed using Merriam and Tisdell's method. Phrases, words, and ideas that were repetitive were grouped together to create data points. From these data points, the themes of representation, relationships, ethics, politics, and mentorship were developed. In chapter four, the themes were presented through the lens of the participants' stories. In this chapter, the themes presented will be analyzed and compared to the current literature. From this analysis will come recommendations for further research and application.

<div align="center">**Findings**</div>

Representation

The first and most significant finding is the lack of representation. Representation speaks directly to Research Question One of systemic barriers that African American women face when seeking the superintendency. Each participant mentioned they did not see people who looked like them doing this work. Representation is the basis for this work. As reviewed in the literature, African-American students who see themselves represented in their educators are more likely to have post-secondary educational experiences (Egalite et al., 2015). Because this is true for students, the same can be said for adults in the workforce, as demonstrated by the study's participants. Therefore, increasing the representation of African-American women in the superintendency and the pipeline to the superintendency for African-American women is imperative.

As explained in the research, minority teachers are under-represented in American public schools. The disproportionate number of minority teachers is particularly noteworthy because a

growing body of research suggests that minority students could benefit from assignments to teachers of their own race/ethnicity (Egalite et al., 2015).

The participants explained that they did not often see themselves reflected in the superintendent role, and while a few participants were not interested in the position, the overarching thoughts were they didn't have many points of reference, if any, for the role. Participants understood the importance of representation. Simply seeing a person who looked like them could have increased the likelihood of them moving into a similar position, and to some extent, the participants wanted to give that to others. By holding this position and sharing their stories, these women are providing the opportunity for other African American women to dream of being Superintendents if they choose. Milner and Howard (2004) explained that prior to the 1955 Brown vs. Board of education Topeka Kansas ruling, schools were segregated. African American students fared better because there was a connection, high standards, and the expectation of success from teachers and principals who reflected their ethnic background. Representation matters because the connection and expectation of success, excellence, and scaffolding are present (Cherng & Halpin, 2016). By these women sitting in the seat as superintendents, they are not only increasing representation, but they are setting an expectation and standard of success, hard work, and excellence for potential African American women interested in the position.

Mentorship

Increased representation was not the only response to Research Question One, which asks, "What systemic barriers do participants perceive hinder African American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts?" Wiley et al. (2017) explained the importance of mentorship support as a means of keeping "African American women

administrators in Texas in education" (Wiley et al., 2017, p.18). Participants of this study shared

that their mentors supported them through the process of obtaining a superintendency. These

mentors guided them through identifying the skills they needed, credentials to attain, and

professional organizations to join that would put them closer to their goal of being a

superintendent. While mentorship speaks to systemic barriers, it also answers Research Question

Two as a strategy these participants used to combat the barriers they faced.

The part of mentorship that was most important was this idea of tapping, where mentors

supported or suggested participants consider the superintendency role. The participants' mentors

played a significant role in endorsing them for interviews, recruiting firms, and interview panels.

These endorsements supported the participants in securing their positions. Wiley et al. (2017)

explained how their participants, who were superintendents in Texas, described the importance

of mentorship. Each participant "shared names of specific individuals who they called upon to

share ideas and gain general encouragement "(Wiley et al., 2017, p.22). Having a person who

could support their professional development and growth was imperative to their success.

Lastly, mentorship recreated structures that were dismantled by integration. Milner and

Howard (2004) explained there was not only a loss of prescience but a "loss of voice because

nobody assumed that they were capable of really being good teachers" (p. 290). Along with the

loss of leadership and demotions, there was a loss of mentorship and development of the African

American educator. Having mentors for participants allowed them to find their voices and

navigate a structure that did not always support them. It provided structural support for the

participants that they often could not find in other places. Each participant spoke about

mentorship and how much it positively affected their careers and journeys toward

superintendency as described in the literature, mentorship provided ongoing support that was not

met in other areas (Egalite et al., 2015). Mentorship proved to be the community of support

participants needed to navigate the different elements of the superintendent journey and the

superintendency. Mentors vouched for these women, coached these women, and assisted them

in opening doors that were often closed to them. Since the superintendency has been dominated

by white males, African American women often do not have access to these social circles

(Kowalski & Brunner, 2011). However, these mentorship relationships created social circles for

participants where they could be cultivated and supported in their jobs. Mentorship for these

women was a safe space away from the difficulty of the superintendency, and in turn, these

women who had such positive mentorship experiences mentored others.

Relationships

As participants journeyed towards the superintendency, how they navigated collegial

relationships played a huge factor in their work. The theme of relationships focuses on how

participants navigated relationships that could have affected their work negatively or positively.

In some instances, their relationship dynamics shifted when they moved into supervisory roles of

peers or were competing against peers for the superintendent positions (Wiley et al., 2017). The

leveraging and developing of relationships was a strategy the participants used to combat

systemic barriers. These relationships, in most cases, helped the participants to move their work

forwards and develop camaraderie and community. These collegial relationships played

important roles when participants were moving practices, coaching, and shifting priorities.

Having strong relationships with their teams and collegial support helped them in advancing

their visions and agendas for their specific districts and ultimately was important to "improving

the impact on the communities they served" (Wiley et al., 2017, p. 22). Aside from aiding in

moving the work forward, the relationships the participants developed affected the hiring and

promotion practices of their colleagues. Their colleagues and teammates, in many instances,

were ' able to step into different areas of leadership. Because of these relationships, many

difficult and challenging conversations were had, which led to professional growth and

development. Each of these participants believed in cultivating positive relationships for the

movement of the work to support students and support individual growth in adults (Wiley et al.,

2017).

The relationships of superintendents towards their colleagues, communities, and districts

can be found directly in the literature through the different periods of the superintendency over

time historically. Since its inception in the early 20th century, the superintendency has held

several iterations in its role. While relationships are a theme that can be seen in all of the

iterations of the role, it is the last three phases that hold relationships and the work in high

priority; the superintendent as democratic leader, applied social scientist, and lastly,

communicator. Although the role has developed to have many responsibilities, being able to

work collegiality has not always been the focus. It was not until the mid-1950s that the

superintendency transitioned into a space where the need for relationships grew. Being able to

create functional spaces where staff could share concerns, voice opinions, and offer initiatives is

a new thought space. Callahan (1966) and Kowalski and Brunner (2011) explained the growth

of superintendency and how the person in this role has to be able to grow the leadership of their

staff and direct reports. The superintendent cannot be a person of solely directives and isolation.

This role is a public-facing role, and in order to complete the public-facing roles, the

superintendent has to coach their leadership team and ensure they have everything they need to

work independently and successfully.

Politics

Much of the work Superintendents do is relational. The relationship work seeps into other areas of the work, especially the political. Political work comes in many different forms, both within the district and outside.   Politics are defined as the power dynamics between individuals and groups and how those power dynamics play out in the workplace. The experiences of the participants with politics align with Research Questions One, Two, and Three. Politics, depending on the circumstance, could be a barrier depending on the relationships and interactions with the board of directors. The relationship with the board could also be a strategy and structure for support if the members and the superintendent were in alignment. In at least one instance, the political theme negatively affected one participant because of her race and gender.   While this was an area that was difficult for all participants, it was a necessary function. These political dynamics, in some instances, cost participants their jobs and shifted how initiatives were implemented. Participants were very aware of how they moved, even when they believed their actions were best for students and staff. The other aspect of the political arena was connected to representation and mentorship, in how these superintendents created pipelines of support and mentorship more structures that could potentially increase representation.

The superintendent as a political leader "is an acute political organizer... whose responsibilities are to act as lobbyists and political strategists" on behalf of their districts. (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011, p. 147).   The superintendent has to juggle the politics both within and outside the district. This is probably the most difficult of the jobs the participants faced. Ensuring they are serving their districts effectively on the inside and ensuring they are meeting the demands that are placed on them by their boards and communities on the outside. Politics cannot be avoided as it can be seen through all of their work.

Another finding connected to the political theme is lobbying or strategizing to align and meet the ever-changing goals and needs of the district. Participants explained how necessary it was to organize and align colleagues, team members, board members, and community members to achieve the business of the district. Doing this type of work, it cannot be done unilaterally because it has to be achieved as a team effort. The responsibility of the superintendent is to create a team, which is based on the development of relationships. As explained in Chapter Four is not always an easy task. The literature supports the political theme by stating the superintendency has been and continues to be "primarily centered on political leadership in a truly democratic context" (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011, p.147). Participants continue to work in this dual context to achieve a greater goal for the district and its students.

Ethics

The finding of ethics as described by the participants speaks to their decision-making process in relation to abstaining from the superintendency and once in the superintendency. They demonstrated this by how they showed up as leaders, most importantly how they demonstrated their beliefs and values for students and families through the mentoring work they do, through hiring practices to ensure they are breaking many of the same barriers they faced and continue to face in their own journey's. Wiley et al.(2017) explained that serving in different positions throughout the districts shows commitment to positively impacting students and their achievement. While this does not speak directly to ethics, it does speak to the ethical commitment superintendents need to make in order to withstand the harsh realities of their work.

The ethics theme can be seen throughout the literature. Wiley et al.(2017), in their study of superintendents in Texas, explained that one of their findings was personal strength. The strength spoke to their desire to serve with humility, reflection, and learning from their

experiences to ensure a positive impact on students and student achievement. The importance of

serving the community and building structures allowed for the success of the students and

community. There was a desire that they made adequate decisions and solid structures for and in

the communities they served. The parallels while losing can be connected to the theme of ethics

from this study. The participants desired to make decisions that were in service of their districts.

These women were aware and careful of the initiatives they pursued. Each of them wanted to

ensure they were doing what was right and good. Throughout the literature, ethics shows up as

this desire to properly serve their communities in a way they historically have not been served.

The theme of ethics directly connects to Research Question Two. Participants used ethical

decision-making as a strategy to overcome systemic barriers by demonstrating their capability to

complete the job in skillful, legal, and conscientious ways.

Recommendations for Practice

When speaking to the participants, there were several suggestions they offered that could

mitigate many barriers for other potential African American women superintendent candidates,

which they faced in their journeys. There are three recommendations that are connected to the

findings of representation and mentorship. The lack of representation is what led to this study.

Representation is the most important of the findings. Simply, there needs to be an increase in the

number of African American female superintendents. In order to do this, school districts need to

create structures that provide support for interested candidates. Professional development that

offers to coach potential internal candidates would allow districts to develop their own

administrators. These students, at the end of their program, would be guaranteed administrative

roles in partnering districts. A requirement for these partnerships would require certain

percentages of enrollments for African American women. These programs would be required to

provide goal setting and coaching opportunities through the interviewing process. As an incentive aside from an administrative placement, the school districts could provide reimbursements for the administrative classes' candidates; these partnerships would look to limit financial strain on interested candidates and, from the start of their journey, provide the opportunity to build community and mentorship for themselves.

Aside from these pipelines built in collaboration with colleges and universities, building internal support networks within school districts is needed. These networks would be formalized networks supported by the district for African American women in leadership who desire the superintendency. These spaces would serve as professional development, affinity group space, opportunities for coaching and growth. African American women would be able to come together and create formal or private communal spaces within their places of employment where they often are isolated and overlooked.

As seen throughout the literature, as well as the participants' experiences, mentorship is crucial. Creating opportunities for both formal and informal coaching for African American women leaders is imperative. For example, when an African American woman is appointed to a leadership position in a district, they can be assigned a mentor in senior leadership. This mentor can assist with goal setting, coaching conversations, and general support to assist the candidate in moving through their professional goals. Creating these communities and structures within school districts with the intention of mitigating the need to look outside of their own school districts to create opportunities for advancement for themselves. These communities make mentoring explicit, demonstrating that districts value the power and importance of mentorship, that it is not something continually left to individuals in leadership have to find themselves, in hopes that they find it.

Recommendations for Further Research

In reviewing data collected for the study, there were five clear themes, which led to recommendations for action and further research. Discussions of the experiences of African American women educators and superintendents are a steadily growing body of literature. This study was intended to be a regional study, but because only superintendents in only one of the states responded, the study is limited to one state of the three. The next phase of research needs to be across the United States to identify if these regional themes can be found across the country. This would be important research to determine if this issue of representation is nationwide and what structures could be replicated across other states.

A second recommendation to increase representation would be researching strategic recruitment strategies. Delving into how school districts recruit for leadership opportunities and determining how leadership recruitment can be expanded to be more inclusive. More than reviewing recruitment strategies is reviewing how these strategies are connected to district goals of diversity, equity, and inclusion and how the work being done to recruit is aligned or not with the goals. Along with researching recruitment strategies, elements of this would include researching grow-your-own-leadership programs that other districts across the country are using and determining how they can be replicated.

Conclusion

While this study was limited in its scope, the findings and recommendations are still significant and have implications beyond these limitations. There is a significant lack of representation of African American women at the superintendent level in education. While these participants reached the goal of obtaining a superintendent seat, there were challenges getting there around race and gender. School districts need to take serious looks at and consider how

they can remove these obstacles so African American women can have the same access as their white male counterparts. As an aspiring superintendent, I found there were many things I did not think about when coveting the position until I conducted this study. As will be discussed in chapter six, there are significant parallels between my experiences as a high school principal and the experiences of the participants of this study.

CHAPTER SIX: MY REFLECTIONS

Writing this dissertation has been a journey. A journey that brought me many feelings and thoughts. I learned many things about myself as a researcher, student, and human. The stories of the participants all have a special place in my heart. They are a part of a collective; they are a part of my journey. I started this journey for personal reasons. If I am going to be a superintendent in the future, I will need a circle. I need a circle of African American women who have been where I want to go. Who could cheer me on, who could coach me, who could be my educational moms in a sense? However, what I received was so much more than that. The power in their voices and the power in their stories gave me a new sense of determination, a new sense of understanding, and a reconnection to why I indeed do this work.

I have no doubt I have the ability and the stamina to be a Superintendent one day. The lingering question is, do I have the desire? If I decide to sit in the seat, I will do the job to the best of my ability, but what I will carry into that role will be more than just my experience, more than my education. I will be carrying the stories and encouragement from all the African American women who did it before me. The African American women had to dim themselves, shrink themselves, walk the line, be gracious and quiet when they did not want to be. So, I will be an African American woman superintendent not only for the communities I serve but for my culture and my ancestors before me who endured so much so that I can be great. I will do my best not to disappoint.

What stood out most to me in this research were the sacrifices the participants made and the connection to my own experience as a principal. In 2021, these highly qualified women were still being second-guessed. These participants' journeys were full of self-doubt, questioning, and

an "extra dues" or the "black woman tax." Listening to these stories, I understood all too well about this extra tax of being a Black woman. We live in a country where we as Black women have to show up in excellence at all times; there is no room for era or mistake. There are these consistent questions about how you show up. How much of yourself do you give? How does showing up as my authentic self with natural hair, colored nails, and a jean jacket affect how I will do my job. Hearing the women grapple with these same issues that I face in my seat that are packaged in the guise of professionalism resonated with me. It was through this research I say that who I am only enhances what I do. Seeing that in these women helped to solidify for me the continued importance of showing up as myself and allowing my personality to shine through my work.

Five themes came from this study, which are as follows: representation, ethics, mentorship, politics, and relationships. Listening to these stories, coding the data, and ultimately reflecting on the journey, being an African American woman superintendent is no different from being a principal, except the scale is more extensive, and the stakes are higher for my participants. In my current role as a high school principal, I found many parallels between the participants' experiences and my own. It is almost as if the principalship is preparation for the superintendency. However, it is not lost on me or my thinking that the micro and macro aggressions, the mistreatments, and the double standard my participants face daily, are similar to my own.

Each of these five themes resonated with me personally and professionally and gave me insight into things I might consider when my time comes. More importantly, this journey gave me time to reflect on where I see similarities. Representation is so important; enough cannot be said about seeing people who look like you working in service of you. I see the need for

representation in my role daily. In communities of color where students are black and brown, representation needs to be increased in the teaching force. Knowing that representation is essential from both the literature and this study and seeking to increase representation to reflect the students in my community proves to be a problem. Being told that I have changed the culture and community of the school when all I have done is increase the teachers of color, connect and play into the other themes of ethics and politics. It leaves me questioning is what I am doing wrong by increasing the representation to reflect students. What I am doing is not wrong because it is aligned with research; yet, it creates tension between my inherited staff members and me.

The ethical and political themes arise in this example because, as the principal, I have to find ways to bridge the gaps between the staff and get the students what they need. This is political and ethical, and it is not easy. The intricate workings required to do this job to the best of my ability are not without difficulty, nor can they be done in isolation. A community of support and mentorship is required. Before embarking upon this study, I had a community of other African American women principals with whom I could connect, women with whom I am in a relationship. Before this study, I had two leadership coaches/mentors who helped me navigate how I wanted to move in my career. After completing this journey, I have six women who, in many ways, I identify with and who are willing to support me on my journey no matter where it ends.

Serving students and the community is a work of the heart. It is developing structures and systems that will increase student achievement, ensuring students can go into the world with the tools needed for success. I see these themes play out in my daily work as I continue this work. It is complex, and it is taxing to my spirit and occasionally my reflection. Nevertheless,

daily, if I can walk away knowing I am doing good work and serving my students and my community as my participants continue to serve, it is continuously worth the difficulty.

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APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Benerd College

RESEARCH SUBJECT'S CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

Where are all the African-American Women Superintendents in California, Oregon, and Washington State?

Name of Lead Researcher: Toniesha Webb
Name of Faculty Advisor: Dr. Laura Hallberg

You are being invited to participate in a research study, and your participation is entirely voluntary.

A.   **Purpose of Research**. The purpose of this study is to identify systemic barriers to the superintendency for African American women and identify strategies to disrupt these systems.

B.   **Duration of Participation**. The expected duration of participation in this study will be two one-hour interviews plus five minutes to complete a demographic survey.

C.   **Research Procedures**. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to complete a demographic survey and two one-hour interviews. These interviews will be held via teleconference.

D.   **Foreseeable Risks**. There are some possible risks involved for participants. The possible risks are the disclosure of information that may be extremely important to you personally. You may feel some discomfort by sharing your personal experiences. I do not anticipate any adverse impact to your or any discomfort as well as your journey to the superintendency. You may stop at any time or you may choose not to answer questions.

E.   **Benefits**. There are some benefits to this research, which are primarily aspirational. Data collected through the interviews will be used to identify barriers African American women face when pursuing the superintendency and identify strategies to disrupt those barriers.

I.   CONFIDENTIALITY

I will take reasonable steps to keep confidential any information that is obtained in connection with this research study and that can be identified with you. Measures to protect your confidentiality include the use of pseudonyms for participants. In addition, school districts will be described broadly rather than specifically.

Upon conclusion of the research study, the data obtained will be maintained in a safe, locked or otherwise secured location and will be destroyed after a period of three years after the research is completed.

II.   PARTICIPATION

You were selected as a possible participant in this study because you are an African-American female superintendent in a K-12 Unified School district in California, Oregon, or Washington. Please feel free to ask any questions you may have. Your decision whether or not to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you decide to participate, you are free to discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

III.   UNIVERSITY CONTACT INFORMATION

I am the lead researcher in this study, and I am a student at the University of the Pacific, Benerd College. This research study is part of my doctoral dissertation for my doctorate in education.

If you have any questions about the research at any time, please contact me at (510) 759-1609 or by email at T_webb3@u.pacific.edu or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Laura Hallberg at Lhallerg@pacific.edu.

If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research project or wish to speak with an independent contact, please contact the Office of Research & Sponsored Programs, University of the Pacific at (209) 946-3903 or by email at IRB@pacific.edu.

IV.   NO COMPENSATION & NO COMMERCIAL PROFIT

No compensation is being offered for participation in this study.

V.   ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND SIGNATURE

I hereby consent: (Indicate *Yes* or *No*)

· To be audio- and video-recorded during this study.   ___Yes ___No

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you have been afforded the opportunity to ask, and have answered, any questions that you may have, that your participation is completely voluntary, that you understand that you may withdraw your consent and discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, that you will receive a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Signed: _____   Date:_____

Research Study Participant (Print Name): _____

Researcher Who Obtained Consent (Print Name): _____

APPENDIX B: DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY

Please provide the following information:

Marital Status		Age	
Single		Under 35 Years of Age	
Married		35-39 years of Age	
Divorced		40-44 years of Age	
Widowed		45-49 years of Age	
Domestic Partnership		50-54 years of Age	
Number of Children		Years of Age	
		60 or over years of Age	

What is the highest degree you hold?

Were you an elected or appointed Superintendent?

How many students were enrolled in your district during the 2020-2021 school year?

What was your school district's budget during the 2020-2021 school year?

How would you describe your school district (urban, suburban, or rural)?

Please share your educational background.

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW #1 QUESTIONS

What was the catalyst that made you consider the superintendency?

Share your professional journey to the superintendency. What obstacles did you face on your journey?

What supports did you build to assist you in the journey and job?

Can you describe a time where you felt race/gender directly affected your journey towards or in the Superintendency?

Based on your experience, what structures need to be implemented to increase diversity in the superintendency?

APPENDIX D:

INTERVIEW #1 QUESTIONS ALIGNED WITH RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Rapport building Questions:	R1: What systemic barriers do you perceive hinder African American women from becoming superintendents in public school districts?	R2: What strategies did you use to overcome these barriers?	R3: In what ways, if any, do you perceive the influence of race and gender on their path to the superintendency?	R4: What systemic reforms are needed to increase the diversity of superintendents in the western United States?
What was the catalyst that made you consider the Superintendency?	Interview Questions: Share your professional journey to the Superintendency. What obstacles did you face on your journey and	Interview Questions: What supports did you build to assist you in the journey and job?	Interview Questions: Can you describe a time where you felt race/gender directly affected your journey	Interview Questions: Based on your experience, what structures need to be implemented to increase

	how did you tackle them?		towards or in the Superintendency?	diversity in the superintendency?
Potential follow up questions	What were structural barriers that you can identify from your journey?		What is an experience that neither helped or hindered your journey but is an important lesson for you?	What advice would you give African American women who aspire to be a superintendent?