LEADING THE WAY: CAPTURING THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF

AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS

IN THE STATE OF OHIO

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By

Tonya M. Bailey-Walker

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ABSTRACT

The underrepresentation of the African American female superintendent is disappointing and calls into question the reasoning behind such despairing amounts. In order to address that issue, one must examine the history of the African American female superintendent, recognize the barriers that she faces, and inquire about her lived experiences. The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. The research answers the question of what are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio with an emphasis on their career paths, barriers, perspectives and successes. Black Feminist Theory and Critical Race Theory represent the theoretical frameworks for the research. The qualitative approach to this research was a phenomenological case study. Data for this case study were collected from four current African American superintendents in the state of Ohio. The participant presented a variety of reasons why she felt there are so few African American female superintendents in the state Ohio. The lived experiences of the participants in this study expounded the strategies necessary for overcoming barriers, facing challenges, or striving for success.

DEDICATION

  I first give this dissertation back to God because without Him in my life guiding me, I would not have made it through this process. This dissertation is also dedicated to my mother, Sharon L. Jackson, because she taught me that education is the great equalizer and with God on my side, all I do is win. Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my three precious blessings, Jessie, Justin, and Jalynn, you three are my reason. Thank you for being such loving, caring and supportive children.

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CHAPTER I

Introduction

Research has shown that people of color have represented only 2.2% of the nation's superintendents (Alston, 2005). Although during the 2014-2015 school year, the state of Ohio may have contributed to increasing that percentage with African Americans representing 5.5% of the superintendents in the state of Ohio. However, there continues to be a disproportionate number of African American female superintendents across the country.

In terms of becoming a superintendent, African American women have shown the least amount of movement as it relates to that of White females, White males, and Black men (Jones & Montenegro, 1983). In top school leadership positions, like the superintendent, African American women are almost nonexistent (Revere, 1987). According to the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), during the 2014-2015 school year there were a total of 832 superintendents in the state of Ohio. Within that number there were a total of 46 African American superintendents and 24 of those superintendents were women. African American women represented less than 3% of the total number of superintendents in the state of Ohio.

The underrepresentation of the African American female superintendent is disappointing and calls into question the reasoning behind such despairing amounts. In order to address that issue, one must examine the history of the African American female superintendent, recognize the barriers that she faces, and inquire about her lived experiences. Unfortunately, because historically the position of superintendent has been a gender bias, male-dominated position, there is very little literature on the African

American female superintendent (Alston, 2000, 2005; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). The literature on the role and position of the superintendent is predominantly taken from the perspective of White male superintendents (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

In spite of their low representation in educational leadership and the barriers that they face, African American female superintendents exceed the expectations of many and continue to prosper within their roles as superintendents (Alston, 2005). As servant leaders, "female superintendents tend to demonstrate a strong sense of efficacy, dedicate themselves to the care of children, practice survival skills, use collaboration that is relational and consensus building, and believe in God" (Alston, 2005, pp. 681-682). It is for these reasons and more that the literature should reflect the career paths, lived experiences, barriers, and perspectives of the African American female superintendent. Closing the gap between the literature and the career paths, lived experiences, perspectives, and barriers of the African American female superintendent will foster a deeper understanding of the role of the superintendent as seen through the eyes of an African American woman.

Statement of the Problem

A literature search conducted by Angel, Killacky, and Johnson (2013) revealed that since 2007 there has been little work completed on the focus of the African American woman superintendent. Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) posited that although there is a growing body of literature on women superintendents, the amount of literature published on African American women superintendents is still substantially low. The lack of information on the African American female and her role as

superintendent uncovers a gap in the literature on the lived experiences of the African American female superintendent.

Purpose of the Study

There is an under-representation of African American women in the role of superintendent across the nation (Alston, 2000; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). There has been very little information presented about the African American female superintendent and her lived experiences (Revere, 1987). The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. The focus of this study was the career paths, barriers, perspectives, attitudes, and successes of African-American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio?

a. What are the career paths?

b. What are the barriers?

c. What are the perspectives?

d. What are the successes?

Significance of the Study

The information presented in this research revealed the organizational structures such as a school district of the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in hopes of improving past practices in the areas of recruitment and retention. Brown (2014) posited that "the recruitment and retention of African American

women in the role of public school superintendent in the United States is uniquely challenging due to historical and sociopolitical factors within regions" (p. 575).

In addition, the research informs the organizational structures of colleges and universities of the need to provide research and literature on the lived experiences of African American women superintendents to those African American women who aspire to become superintendents. This research contributes to the existing literature on the role of the superintendent in the areas of transformational leadership, servant leadership, and change agents through the perspectives of African American women superintendents in the state of Ohio.

The research contributes to Black Feminist Thought through the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. The research also supports the premise of Critical Race Theory, which addresses the perpetual forms of discrimination, structural arrangements that not only inhibit but also contribute to the ongoing oppression and racial inequalities of the disadvantaged (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008).

<div align="center">**Theoretical Framework**</div>

Black Feminist Thought

In *Ain't I A Women,* the primary purpose of the author, bell hooks, was not on exposing the racism of White women but to elaborate on the idea that "sexism greatly determines the social status and experience of Black women" (hooks, 2001, p. 20). hooks argued that the internalization of racism shapes the consciousness of African American women. Hill-Collins (1990) went even further to include class discrimination within the interlocking system of oppression. It is within this interlocking system of sexism, racism,

and class discrimination that Black Feminist Thought exists (Hill-Collins, 1990). Hill-Collins presented Black Feminist Thought as a theoretical framework because it provides an interpretive perspective of the Black women's lived experiences (Hill-Collins, n. d., para. 4). Black Feminist Thought "specializes in formulating and rearticulating the distinctive, self-defined standpoint of African American women" (Hill-Collins, 1989, p. 750). Therefore, examining the career paths of the African American women superintendents in the state of Ohio through the lens of Black Feminist Thought affords the opportunity to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and barriers of African American women (Angel et al., 2013; Hill-Collins, 1990).

Feminist theory presents a lens that draws on the perspective of women and the "position that [they] occupy within a social context characterized by a patriarchal sex-gender system" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 23). The African American woman is situated within a social context characterized by a patriarchal gender-race-class system (Hill-Collins, 1990). As a result of this interlocking system of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1991), the experiences of African American women in the United States are different from other women and African American men (Howard-Hamilton, 2003).

Race and class discrimination are the two elements that distinguish feminist theory from Black feminist theory (Harris, 2007; Hill-Collins, 1991). One example of this divide is represented in the speech Sojourner Truth gave in 1852 to a group of men and women at the second annual convention of women's rights movement in Akron, Ohio (hooks, 1981; Truth, 1998). Although her speech was several decades ago, it is still a good representation of the divide that exists between the feminist theory and the Black feminist theory (Alston, 1999; Hill-Collins, 1991; hooks, 1981). In her speech, Truth

(1998) asked the question "Ain't I a Woman?" which drew attention not only to gender inequality but also to racial inequality. The following is from the speech where Truth (1998) argued first for the rights of Black women and then argued for the rights of all women:

> That man over there says women needs to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or gives me any best place. And ain't I a woman? Then that little man in black there, he says women can't have as much rights as men, 'cause Christ wasn't a woman! Where did your Christ come from? From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with Him. (p. 169)

Alston (1999) argued that African American women have been "addressing the concerns of White male domination and hegemony" (p. 84) for a very long time. Howard-Hamilton (2003) asserted that the "double oppression" that African American women endure was created when their "subordinate status was assumed and enforced by White and Black men as well as White women" (p. 19). During the Women's Suffrage March of 1913, African American women who participated in the march were forced to march in the back, viewed as women by the dominant group, yet "they were still Black women" (Alston & McClellan, 2011, p. 137).

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) explained the epistemology of African American women as unique because knowledge for the African American woman is constructed from two different forms of oppression, race and gender. Black Feminist Thought incorporates the realities, "challenges and consequences of being a member of two historically oppressed groups" (Allen, 1998, p. 575). Hill-Collins theorized that Black

Feminist Thought provides a conceptual lens in which the world is able to view the "simultaneity of race, class, and gender oppression" (Hill-Collins, 1990, para. 3), portraying "African American women as self-defined, self-reliant individuals confronting race, gender, and class oppression" (Hill-Collins, 1990, para. 1).

In her speech, Sojourner Truth provided a conceptual lens of her "personal life experience [as] evidence of [a] woman's ability to function as a parent; [to do] the work equal of a man; to undergo persecution, physical abuse, rape, torture; and to not only survive but emerge triumphant" (hooks, 1981, p. 160). This portrayal of the lived experience of Sojourner Truth is an example of Black Feminist Thought because it is an interpretive perspective of a Black woman's lived experiences (Hill-Collins, 1991). Truth sharing her accounts of being a Black female slave makes her account of the struggles of being a Black female more believable and credible than someone who merely read about the experience (Hill-Collins, 1991). Black Feminist Thought stands on the premise that telling the lived experience or story from the perspective of the person who lived it creates an opportunity to expose the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism and highlights acts of resistance (Allen, 1998; Alston, 1999; Hill-Collins, 1990; Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009). From the standpoint of the feminist theory, Allen (1998) suggested that "when we privilege the knowledge of the oppressed or outsiders, we reveal aspects of the social order that previously have not been exposed" (p. 577).

Feminism played an important role in the development of Critical Race Theory (CRT) by providing "insights into the relationship between power and the construction of social roles . . . the patterns and habits that make up patriarchy and other types of domination" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012, p. 5). Alexander-Floyd (2010) argued that

"critical race Black feminist, like other feminist working within Critical Race Theory

. . . extend critical race theory's basic frameworks to address questions of [race], class,

gender, and sexuality" (p. 812). As it relates to educational leadership and the lived

experiences of an African American female superintendent, "CRT is a valuable lens with

which to analyze and interpret administrative policies and procedures in educational

institutions and provides avenues for action in the area of racial justice" (Parker &

Villalpando, 2007).

Critical Race Theory

According to Delgado and Stefancic (2012), Critical Race Theory (CRT)

recognizes that race and racism are at the core of American society and in order to create

a world that is free of racial inequalities, the "experiential knowledge of people of color is

legitimate and critical to understanding racial subordination" (Parker & Villalpando,

2007, p. 520). CRT is rather new in its approach to understanding, exposing, and

opposing inequalities in education (Chapman, Dixson, Gillborn & Ladson-Billings,

2013). Trevino et al. (2008) stated that CRT was developed by scholars of race:

> As a critical response to the problem of the color line, informing it with
>
> transformative politics, first in the area of legal studies and soon thereafter
>
> permeating and invigorating the margins of other fields including sociology,
>
> justice studies, and education. (p. 7)

Critical Race Theory provided the theoretical framework needed to study the lived

experiences of African American women superintendents in the state of Ohio because not

only does it recognize "the complex ways that race intersects with gender, class, and

ethnicity" (Hill, 2009, p. 1) but also it will provide the characteristics needed to tell the

personal accounts of the lived experiences, to expose discrimination, oppression, and racial inequalities (Alexander-Floyd, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Ladson-Billings (2009) explained that CRT came into existence during the mid-1980s by way of critical legal studies (CLS). The CLS represented legal scholars who argued against the legal system and laws that continued to "foster social inequalities" (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 88). Ladson-Billings asserted that the CLS acquired the "critical theory of the Frankfurt School and argued that legal language is a discourse that continues to perpetuate hierarchies – male over female, rich over poor, Whites over Blacks and other people of color" (p. 88). Recognizing that Whites still dominated the critical discourse, legal scholars of color pulled their attention away from CLS and directed it more towards CRT (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Often acknowledged as one of the founding fathers of CRT, Derrick Bell created an intellectual legal dialogue forum that addressed systems of power that discriminated based upon race, class, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). CRT illuminates the injustices of racial inequalities and oppression while attempting to provide a place for those who have been victimized an opportunity to be heard in their own voice (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Trevino et al., 2008).

CRT addresses the perpetual forms of discrimination, structural arrangements that not only inhibit but also contribute to the ongoing oppression and racial inequalities of the disadvantaged (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Trevino et al., 2008). Ladson-Billings (1998) believed that racism is so embedded in the core of society that it has become a norm or natural part of society. According to Ladson-Billings (2009), critical race theorist adheres to the following beliefs: (a) Racism is normal, (b) storytelling is crucial to

examining race and racism in society, (c) the goal of the CRT theorist is to critique liberalism, and (d) bring awareness to racial realism (p. 88). A shift happened within the CRT paradigm from a Black and White paradigm to considering the "racialized lives of other oppressed minorities" (Trevino et al., 2008, p. 7) like women of color and the inclusion of education (Bloom, 2013).

Jones (2013) described CRT as being a platform that "provides a basic set of principles that seek to identify and analyze the structural and cultural aspects of education" (p. 75). Jones suggested that the philosophies of CRT are used to identify barriers within the superintendency that are based upon gender bias and racial discrimination; while determining ways to address "disproportionate number of African American women" (p. 75) superintendents. Gerry House, a former superintendent made the following comment, "What I experienced was subtle, but the subtleties are not imagined," she said. "Race and gender are always the elephants in the room. To dismiss them as real issues is to put our heads in the sand" (Gewertz, 2006, p. 5). The goal of CRT is to address the elephants in the room (Chapman et al., 2013; Jones, 2013). Historically, women and women of color "continue to resist the [gender and race] challenges" and continue to pursue the role of superintendency (Alston, 2000, 2005; Brown, 2014).

Researcher's Lens

As the researcher, it is important to recognize that my ontological and epistemological philosophies can influence the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Ladson-Billings (2000) posited that a person's truths or realities construct the systems of knowing. My epistemology derives from believing that what I know and how I have

come to know is through my experiences. As a result of this philosophical belief system, my research was based upon the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy, "a researcher's ontological assumptions impact topic selection, the formulation of research questions, and strategies for conducting the research" (2011, p. 4). As an African American female, currently in school leadership, my ontological philosophies not only influenced the topic of my research but also influenced the theoretical perspective of my research. The methodology threaded throughout this research was the critical perspective (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Within the critical strand are both critical race theory and feminism (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The feminism strand includes the Afrocentric feminist epistemology or Black Feminist Thought (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Definition of Terms

The terms defined throughout the document support the purpose of the study. However, I have provided definitions for the following terms to assist the reader in understanding how I presented data provided by African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

Barriers – Roadblocks or distractions that try to hinder a person from achieving his or her career goals.

Career Paths – The journey a person takes toward obtaining his or her career goals.

Lived Experiences – Those encounters in life that affect a person's pursuit toward achieving his or her career goals.

Perspectives – Point of view; it is a person's beliefs, experiences and opinions.

Summary

There are five chapters in this dissertation. Chapter I gives a statement of the problem which supports the purpose of the study. The research question is presented in chapter one along with the significance of the study. Chapter I also includes a brief synopsis of the theoretical framework of the study, as well as provides a description of the researcher's lens.

Chapter II analyzes the literature that is pertinent to the study. The chapter begins with a focus on leadership and the different types of leadership. The chapter then moves into the history of women and African American women in educational leadership. This chapter expounds on the barriers for women and African American women superintendents. Literature on the career path to the superintendency and strategies of success are also found within this chapter.

Within Chapter III of the dissertation is a description of the research methodology that was used to conduct this study. The first part of the chapter gives an explanation as to why the phenomenological approach is most suitable for this type of study. The chapter then discusses the source or sources that provided data and the different way in which data were collected. The final section of this chapter reviews ways that data were analyzed. This section explains that the iterative approach to data analysis was the most effective way to analyze data from this qualitative approach to research.

Chapter IV presents the results of data that were collected to address the research question. Data examined the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. The chapter begins with the career paths of each

participant, then moves to exploring the barriers and overcoming barriers, concluding with sharing perspectives, attitudes, and successes of each participant.

The last chapter of the dissertation, Chapter V, begins with summarizing the topic of the study, then transitions to discussing conclusions about the findings. Lastly, any recommendations for future research related to this topic are presented.

CHAPTER II

Literature Review

The underrepresentation of the African American female superintendent and the lack of published literature on the African American female superintendent is problematic. Not only is the physical presence of the African American woman absent from the superintendency, but also missing is the African American woman's lived experiences and perceptions as a superintendent (Shakeshaft, 1989). Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) argued that by no means are African American women superintendents "invisible to themselves . . . their scarcity in school districts makes their practices in the role of superintendent invisible to most Black women and others in the academy who may aspire to the position" (p. 537). Alston (1999) propounded that the literature on the career paths of female superintendents, especially Black female superintendents does not exist, primarily because the current literature on superintendents' careers documents the career paths of men.

By attempting to answer the research question, what are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, I am hoping to contribute literature that will assist in closing an existing gap. Brunner (2008) believed that "as researchers, we have the power to shape and pass on collective knowledge about the superintendency, and therefore, have the responsibility to examine the nature of the knowledge we generate and disseminate" (p. 663).

This literature review focused on the history of women in educational leadership and African American women in educational leadership; examined the barriers to the superintendency for women and how those barriers are different for African American

women; explored the career paths for women superintendents; and discussed strategies for succeeding in the superintendency. The theoretical and conceptual framework for this study consisted of Black feminist thought and critical race theory. Black feminist thought and critical race theory provided a framework that exposed the intersectionality of race, class, and gender through "storytelling/counterstorying [from the perspective of] one's own reality" or lived experiences (Hill-Collins, 1990; Jean-Marie et al., 2009, p. 564).

Leadership

Leadership is a process where one person or a group of people are positively influenced to accomplish a set of goals and objectives determined by an individual or an organization (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Northhouse, 2010). Alston and McClellan (2011) stated that leadership is about taking risks, be willing to make mistakes and learn from them; and when done correctly, people are inspired to perform at a level of excellence. With a large portion of women excluded from literature, an assumption is made that leaders are male (Alston & McClellan, 2011). Historically, the definition of leadership has been linked to having a male dominating trait and the "characteristics associated with leadership are those of masculine connotations" (Alston & McClellan, 2011, p. 18; Levac, 2008). Women should have equal access to leadership positions within "formal structures," like the superintendency; which have been historically "systematically advantageous to men" (Levac, 2008, p. 41).

Women as Leaders

In order to be considered an effective leader, women in leadership often have to balance being both likeable, a perceived feminine trait, and competent, a perception of male leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Although there has been an increase in women

entering the field of educational leadership, it still remains a male dominated field (Alston, 2005; Bjork, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). Bjork (2000) purported that men and women differ in their approach to educational leadership. The characteristics of a woman school leader are closely related to the paradigm shift in education, where school leaders are concerned about student achievement and child development (Bjork, 2000). Bjork continued with:

> Women are also perceived as being more likely to be facilitative and collaborative in their working relationships, and they tend to use democratic leadership styles and power, which contribute to achieving high levels of job satisfaction among staff. They are also viewed as being change agents deeply involved in reform and working toward creating common visions of schooling for children and climate conducive to learning. (p.10)

Although the literature on women in leadership has increased, there still remains a disproportionate amount of African American women portrayed in leadership roles (Alston, 2000; Alston & McClellan, 2011).

African American Women as Leaders

According to Jones (2003), traditionally within the Black community, the younger children are cared for by the older female sibling and this is done with little to no formal guidance or instruction (as cited in Alston, 2005). African American women have had experiences that unknowingly prepared them for leadership roles (Jackson, 1999). "Black female educators and Black female superintendents, however small in number, demonstrate that they are well prepared to lead" (Alston, 2005, p. 681). Believing that in order to effect educational change, many African American women are choosing to leave

their lower-level administrative and teaching positions in search of a leadership role as a superintendent (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Hudson, Wesson, and Marcano (1998) shared that an educational leadership quality of African American female superintendents is their activism for all children (as cited in Tillman & Cochran, 2000). Not only is she a change agent but also because she has concern for all students, the African American female superintendent is a transformational leader (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Brown, 2014; Northouse, 2010).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership is described as the new leadership paradigm that encompasses a moral foundation which is built upon a code of ethics (Alston & McClellan, 2011; Northouse, 2010). According to Northouse (2010), transformational leadership focuses on the transforming or changing of an individual or organization. Some believe that transformational leaders are not just exceptional leaders but leaders who can change their environment (Kirby, Paradise, & King, 1992). The central focus of the transformational leader is to improve the performance of his or her followers by motivating that person to reach his or her highest potential; when this is accomplished, the organization is able to function more effectively (Kirby et al., 1992; Northouse, 2010). Even though the responsibility of the transformational leader is to introduce the initiatives that will bring about change, in the end the followers need to express their true desires for change (Alston & McClellan, 2011). Transformational leaders are concerned about the emotions, values, ethics, standards, and long-term goals of the individual or organization (Northouse, 2010). The personal characteristics of a transformational leader are "dominant, self-confident, strong moral values, and possessing a desire to influence"

(Northouse, 2010, p. 174). Kouzes and Posner (2003) posited that leadership is something that is available to everyone, and people are able to display these leadership skills in various ways and at different levels in society. According to Levac (2008), women who continue to be excluded from positions of leadership, like the superintendency, can recognize the benefit in this newer perspective on leadership, because it highlights their extraordinary leadership skills displayed in the maintenance of their families, churches, and communities. When considering leadership as it pertains to women and women of color, transformational leadership is apposite because it can be altered to ensure that leadership responds thoughtfully to "underrepresented and marginalized populations" (Levac, 2008, p. 41). Santamaria and Jean-Marie (2014) purposed that educational leaders who are women and also members of historically underserved groups in the U.S. (e.g., American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Hispanic, Black or African American) tend to manifest cross-cultural leadership practices through different filters of experience than their mainstream and dominant-culture peers. One explanation for this is their ability to take positive attributes of their cross-cultural difference and combine them with empirically effective leadership practices (e.g., transformational leadership), which for them has resulted in different and often positive outcomes.

African American Women as Transformational Leaders

African American women are considered to be transformational leaders based upon their fervent pursuit for a morally based establishment of their leadership (Alston & McClellan, 2011). African American female superintendents also exemplify what Kouzes and Posner (2003) described as the five practices of exemplary leadership: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and

Encourage the Heart. Transformational leadership in education is having the ability to encourage achievement by way of inspiring people to grow and do their very best (Choudhary, Akhtar, & Zaheer, 2013; Northouse, 2010). According to Tillman and Cochran (2000), African American female superintendents are more aware of the lower expectations placed on poor and minority students by educators because this may have been a barrier for them to overcome in their own educational experiences. As a result of these experiences and being able to overcome these challenges, African American female superintendents are more apt to inspire their students toward achieving success because they are a living example (Tillman & Cochran 2000). In addition, Tillman and Cochran argued that African American female superintendents are not only "role models for their students and staff [but also] play a critical role in influencing educators to raise academic and behavioral expectations for poor and minority students" (p. 48). African American female superintendents are attentive to the concerns of their followers and are willing to empathize and nurture their followers, similar to a servant leader (Alston, 2000, 2005; Alston & McClellan, 2011; Northouse, 2010).

Servant Leadership

Choudhary et al. (2013) suggested that the difference between transformational leadership and servant leadership is the way in which the leader focuses on the follower. Transformational leaders are motivated to engage their followers toward achieving the goal; whereas the servant leader focuses on the service provided to the followers. The servant leader is someone who naturally wants to serve first and then aspirations to lead become a conscious choice (Greenleaf, n.d.). Servant leaders focus their attention on the

the needs of others first, by assuring that "people's highest priority needs are being served" (Greenleaf, n.d.).

Servant leaders are charged with fostering a common vision, while concerning themselves with the development of their followers while attaining the goal (Alston & McClellan 2011; Choudhary et al., 2013; Letizia, 2014; Northouse, 2010). Servant leader focus on the needs and the well-being of their followers through developing and growing them in the direction of becoming servant leaders themselves (Northouse, 2010). The primary concern of servant leaders is serving others; they have a "social responsibility to be concerned with the 'least privileged' and to recognize them as equal stakeholders in the life of the organization" (Alston & McClellan, 2011, p. 58; Choudhary et al., 2013; Northouse, 2010, p. 385). The behaviors and characteristics of a servant leader are authenticity, empowerment, stewardship, and providing direction; these lead to follower well-being, optimal human functioning, and a sense of community within the organization (Dierendonck & Patterson, 2015). It has been theorized that:

> In becoming a servant leader, a leader uses less institutional power and less control while shifting authority to those who are being led. Servant leadership values everyone's involvement in community life because it is within a community that one fully experiences respect, trust, and individual strength. (Northouse, 2010, p. 385)

Alston and McClellan (2011) argued that African American women leaders throughout history have surmounted the solicitation and execution of servant leadership within their communities through their service and activism.

African American Women as Servant Leaders

"Servant leadership is not only about doing the acts of service, but also being a servant and being entrusted with the responsibility of demanding economic, educational, and/or political changes that transform communities and institutions for generations" (Alston & McClellan, 2011, p. 62). Alston (2005) posited that African American women superintendents are a clear representation of servant leadership. The African American woman superintendent as a servant leader is willing to take risks to lead in poorly managed and maintained urban school districts that have a high minority population (Alston, 2005; Alston & McClellan, 2011; Jackson, 1999). Through her ability to possess a strong sense of efficacy, dedicate herself to the education and well-being of the children, and the ability to foster relationships and unanimity, the African American female superintendent is able to demonstrate her servant leadership skills (Alston, 2005). The primary focus of the servant leader is to serve first then to lead (Alston, 2005; Alston & McClellan, 2011; Northouse, 2010). Alston (2005) affirmed that:

> Black female superintendents choose to serve first and simultaneously lead. These women successful in their efforts and know how to be effective educational leaders, creating a legacy of service. It is this legacy of service, the choice these women make every day in their actions and interaction within and against the institution of school that frames the larger learning for organizational and educational leadership today. (p. 682)

History

Women in Educational Leadership

Superintendents have been responsible for the daily activities and operations of schoolhouses since the 1800s (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). During this time period, some women became managers of public schools. However, if a woman were to become a chief administrator [superintendent] for a school, she would have had to be the founder of that school (Alston, 2000). This is primarily because the field of education started out as a male-dominated industry and later shifted to a female-dominated industry (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Even with the shift toward the field of education becoming a female-dominated industry because more women were entering the field as teachers, positions like the superintendency remained male-dominated positions for the entire 20th century (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). According to Tallerico and Blount (2004), 85% to 96% of all superintendents were men during this time period.

Between the period of 1910 and 1970, educational leadership experienced a marginal shift and women began to integrate the position of superintendency (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Many of the women in school leadership between the 1900s and 1930s were elementary principals and county and state superintendents (Alston, 2000). In 1909, Ella Flagg Young became the first female superintendent to lead a big city school system, the Chicago public schools (Keller, 1999). Keller stated that the increase in women superintendents during the 1920s and 1930s was the result of a dominance of women in the field of teaching at that time and the push for change in school leadership by women political activists. Blount (1999) argued that "suffrage activism and the larger women's movement effectively propelled women into school leadership positions" (p. 9). Between

the years of 1910 and 1930, women in the superintendency had increased from 9% in 1910 to 11% by 1930 (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

As a result of sex segregation (Tallerico & Blount, 2004) by 1950 (Keller, 1999) the number of women in the superintendency began to decrease. By the 1970s, women represented only 3% of the superintendency and men a high of 97% (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). These numbers shifted again and by 1998 women represented 10% of superintendents across the nation (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Even with the increase in representation, women superintendents are stagnantly underrepresented in the field of educational leadership. As this information relates to the purpose of this study, the career path of the African American female superintendent in the state of Ohio, the history and representation of the African American female superintendent is even less (Alston, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

African American Women in Educational Leadership

As stated by Jackson (1999), "African American women as teachers, administrators, and educators in general have been missing from much of America's history" (p. 147). The history of the African American woman in educational leadership is very different than the history of a White woman in educational leadership (Jackson, 1999). There are some events in the history of America that makes the history of an African American woman in educational leadership different from the history of a White woman in educational leadership; for example, the period of time in history where it was against the law for Black people to learn how to read and write (Alston, 2005). Unlike White women, who were able to receive a formal education prior to the 1900s, Black women did not receive a formal education until the early 1900s (Alston, 2005). Once

Black women became formally educated, they became teachers, which were "considered to be one of the top seven professions held by Black females" (Alston, 2005). Very similar to the history of White women in educational leadership, there were some African American women who founded several private schools from elementary schools to women's colleges (Alston, 2000).

By the 1930s African American women in educational leadership were represented by what was known as a Jeanes supervisor (Alston, 2005). The vision of Anna T. Jeanes, a Philadelphia Quaker, was to hire and train college educated, Black teachers to supervise Black schools and to improve Black communities (Alston, 2008). Alston (2008) propounded that African American female superintendents of today stand on the broad shoulders of the Jeanes supervisors of yesterday. A fund named after the first "Jeanes Teacher," Virginia Randolph, was established in 1937 to provide money to promote the ideals that were developed and taught by Ms. Randolph (Alston & Jones, 2002). Alston (2008) explained that the Jeanes supervisor also known as Jeanes curriculum director was so "popular and successful with the African American schools and communities that it remained in place until 1968" (p. 30). Through in-services and training, the Jeanes supervisors were able to introduce new methods of teaching the curricula and improve instruction (Alston, 2005).

Brawley (1971) explained that African American women were selected because of their ability to be "self-effacing, stimulating others to put forth their best effort rather than making [themselves] too active or prominent" (as cited in Alston, 2008). In their roles, these Jeanes supervisors were much like the superintendents of today (Alston & Jones, 2002). During the desegregation of the nation's schools, the Jeanes supervisors

along with other Black school leadership positions were eliminated when Black and White schools merged; however, White school leadership positions were maintained (Alston, 2005). "During the desegregation period of the 60s and 70s, men and women who were teaching and leading in all-Black schools found few opportunities to integrate the schools that the children of their communities soon attended" (Alston, 2005, p. 676).

With the desegregation of schools came a downward shift in in the representation of African American school leadership, especially the representation of African American women in school leadership (Alston, 2008); thus causing the African American women who aspired to be superintendents to enter into a maze of barriers and obstacles. This maze of barriers was not limited to the African American female; it also applied to any woman who was either currently a superintendent or aspiring to become a superintendent. However, the barriers and obstacles for an African American woman were and still are different than those barriers and obstacles for a White woman. This is because the African American woman is not only faced with gender as a barrier but also faced with race as a barrier. Black people who want to be promoted to the superintendency could gain some insight from the struggle of the women who are currently in superintendent positions, because like Black people, they are the minority facing similar barriers and obstacles (Alston, 1999; Williams, 1984).

Barriers

Women Superintendents

A barrier that is common for all women superintendents and those aspiring to be superintendents is gender. Gender bias is something that can reinforce the "glass ceiling effect and prohibit women from attaining positions as superintendents" (Dobie &

Hummel, 2001). Miller, Washington, and Fiene (2006) indicated that the lack of women in administrative roles, like the superintendency, is the result of gender bias and discrimination. Women may be close to achieving a promotion and they may have all the qualifications to receive the promotion but are unable to crack the barrier of the "glass ceiling" (Keller, 1999). The superintendency is a male-dominated industry which makes it very difficult for a woman to enter and be successful. The U.S. Census Bureau has described the superintendency as the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Bjork, 2000). This can be interpreted in many different ways; however, research has shown that men are more likely than women to advance to the top school leadership positions (Dobie & Hummel, 2001). The role that the professional search consultant plays creates an external barrier for women aspiring to become superintendents because they act as *gatekeepers* (Castro, 1992) to positions dominated by White males (Alston, 1999; Brown, 2014; Brunner, 2008; Dobie & Hummel, 2001).

Miller et al. (2006) presented three different male dominating models that help explain the barriers that women face as superintendents or aspiring to become superintendents. These male dominated models "create attitudinal and institutional barriers" (p. 221) for women who are aspiring to become superintendents. The first model is the meritocracy model which focuses on the barrier that women themselves are the reasons why they have not been promoted to the superintendency (Miller et al., 2006). In the meritocracy model, personal traits, characteristics, abilities, self-image confidence, motivation, or aspirations are the reasons why women have not been promoted and is founded upon a belief that the people who are most competent are the one who are

promoted (Miller et., 2006). With the majority of men being promoted to the superintendency, this sends the disheartening message that men are the more competent. In most cases, because the superintendency is a male-dominated position, the gender biases are revealed when women applicants are required to have higher qualifications, more academic degrees, and experience to be considered a candidate for the position of superintendency (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999).

The second model is the discrimination model which shifts the barriers from being internal like the aforementioned model to an external barrier. The discrimination model presents obstacles that hinder the advancement of women into the superintendency (Miller et al., 2006). This is often found in the career path of a woman who is locked into a position at the elementary level and the career path to the superintendency is often found in the secondary level of administration (Miller et al., 2006).

In addition to this discriminatory model are the discriminatory practices of search consultants and board members. "Individual acts by search consultants and board of education members have neither altered organizational practices nor enhanced the social responsibility essential to changing the male-dominated system" (Bjork, 2000, p. 9). The "good ole boy" networks are large part of the male-dominated model that have contributed to barriers that impede women from obtaining positions as superintendents (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). Many search consultants are a part of this network, which is a "deciding disadvantage" for women aspiring to become superintendents (Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Miller et al., 2006). This network continues to isolate women from the possibilities of promotion (Alston, 2000; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999).

The third model is the "women's place model" (Miller et al., 2006). According to Whitaker and Lane (1990), "the educational system follows the model of the traditional home: men manage, and women nurture the learners" (as cited in Miller et al., 2006, p. 25). Within the "women's place model" women are faced with the barriers that exist with the idea of marriage and family while pursuing the superintendency (Miller et al., 2006).

The male-dominated models identified barriers that primarily were based upon gender. There are also internal and external barriers that contribute to the "career constraints" of women in pursuit of the superintendency (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 20). Dobie and Hummel (2001) suggested that one external barrier facing woman superintendents is their family and home responsibilities. External barriers intersect and at times reinforce internal barriers (Jones & Montenegro, 1983). This is clear with the internal barrier of women having to choose between being a "wife-mother" and becoming a superintendent (1983, p. 21). The aforementioned external and internal barriers are what Brunner (2008) referred to as "limited discourses, [which are] limited interpretations of why women and persons of color enter administration," (p. 668). As defined by Grogan (1999) discourse is the "collective knowledge of a social institution that is handed on to us by those who have the power to shape the practices and beliefs that forms a particular institution" (pp. 200-201). Brunner (2008) stated:

> While [the] conclusion [that women do not enter the superintendency because of home and family responsibilities] may reflect the experiences of many women, this discourse is limited in its ability to describe the nature of the lives of some women (those who have no children [or not married], for example). (p. 671)

The maze of barriers and obstacles that women have to travel through in order to be promoted to the superintendency is extensive and at times difficult. This barrier maze is even more difficult and more extensive for African American women because they are "doubly handicapped" (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 22) in their aspirations to the superintendency (Grogan, 1999).

African American Women Superintendents

When considering the barriers of the African American woman who aspires to be a superintendent, it is important to note that she is faced with not only the gender bias barrier, but also a barrier based upon her race. Brunner (1998) identified gender as the major factor of the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency. However, Hill-Collins (1990) posited that the underrepresentation of Black women can be contributed to not only gender discrimination but also race and class discrimination. The Black woman lives in two worlds simultaneously and when compared to White men and woman her aspiration towards the superintendency is harder to reach (Alston, 1999). The African American woman's climb toward the superintendency is an arduous one, "often pushing against inhibiting selection criteria that screen them out" (Revere, 1987, p. 511). African American women are faced with the barrier that even after meeting the job requirements, many are passed over for the position of superintendency because of their race (Brown, 2014). Brown gave an account of one African American female who faced gender and race issues during her first position as a superintendent. Her participant stated, "the major barrier for the first position I held was that there were White males on the board who could not get beyond a Black and then secondly a female" (Brown, 2014, p. 579).

In addition to the barriers that exist as a result of gender and race differences, Brown (2014) asserted that barriers and obstacles continue to exist in the recruitment and retention process "and yet African American women continue to [overcome these obstacles] by seeking a role that has been traditionally held by White males and to lesser extents, Black males, and White women" (p. 575). These obstacles include "discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, issues relative to mentoring and promoting women, and the lack of commitment to diversity in colleges, schools, and departments of education preparing future educational leaders" (Tillman & Cochran, 2000, p. 50). Universities claim to promote diversity and want to increase social justices, but the daily activities and functions of the university perpetuate the "good ole boy" network (Alston, 1999; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). The course work in administration or educational leadership programs naturally reflects the White male perspective but is a disservice to African American women entering the field of educational leadership because the experience and perspective is different for women of color (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). Some barriers are tied to the lack of information, research, and literature on the African American female superintendent and her experiences. Brunner and Peyton-Caire (2000) further explained:

> Although the literature on superintendents largely represents White men, there is a small, developing body of literature focused on women. But, there is still very little published specifically about Black female superintendents or other women of color. Certainly, the lack of published research about Black female superintendents is further evidence that they are scarcely represented in the superintendency ranks. (p. 534)

The lack of information or "data itself is a major hindrance to improving the situation" (Keller, 1999, p. 6) for an African American female aspiring to become a superintendent because there is no path to guide her nor road for her to follow as she journeys toward the superintendency (Alston, 1999, 2000; Angel et al., 2013). The lack of literature presents a gap in the knowledge about the number of African American women serving as superintendents and the literature on why there are still so few African American women promoted to the superintendency (Angel et al., 2013); which makes the career path for an African American woman superintendent challenging, yet obtainable (Brown, 2014).

Career Path to the Superintendency

Alston (1999) asserted that the "typical woman [superintendent] not only does not look like the typical male [superintendent], but also the path she takes to achieve her position differs as well (p. 80). Factors such as family and marital statuses, interruptions in participating in the labor market because of the decision to raise the children, occupational structures, such as the external barrier of a consultant may impede or alter the expected timeframe of a woman's career path (Brunner, 2008; Jones & Montenegro, 1983; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Maienza, 1986).

The level of education plays a big part in the career path of women superintendents and very specifically African American women superintendents (Angel et al., 2013; Jackson, 1999; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999; Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010). Angel et al. (2013) conducted a study on African American women aspiring to the superintendency, and within this study their findings revealed a "necessity of preparedness" (p. 604). Each participant in the study "held a doctoral degree or was

enrolled in a doctoral program and held state certification at the superintendent level"
(Angel et al., 2013, p. 609). In Jackson's (1999) study of African American women
school superintendents, out of 41 participants, "a total of 31 have the highest degree
offered in the field" (p. 148). In a study performed by Kowalski and Stouder (1999) it
was discovered that female superintendents in the state of Indiana were more likely to
have a doctoral degree as opposed to male superintendents.

The career path to the superintendency is going to be different for women and
people of color because "their attributes and experiences fall outside norms and notions
of what is best or natural for candidacy" (Brunner, 2008, p. 663) and even more so for
women of color (Alston, 1999; Brown, 2014). From the study conducted on the career
paths of women superintendents, Brunner discovered that men spend about five years
teaching before pursuing the superintendency and "60% of the women spent 10 years in
the classroom before pursuing a career as a superintendent" (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner,
2000, p. 99). Brunner (2008) argued, "school boards do not often hire people who have
not followed the common road for superintendency success. One significant reason is that
discourse generated by headhunters [gatekeepers] discourages school boards and others
from considering candidates who 'teach too much'" (p. 667). A large component of the
career path to the superintendency is the recruitment and hiring practices.

Superintendent Cameron shared in Brown (2014) that the barrier is not in the
application and interviewing portion of the recruitment process but the "problem lies in
the decisions made by those in power" (p. 577). Because the barriers in the career path of
an African American female superintendent are different, Brown (2014) suggested using
"self-recruitment and self-retention" (p. 583) as an African American woman's way of

establishing a position in this male-dominated industry. Superintendent Markworth asserted in Brown (2014), "you have to put yourself in the position to be recruited. You have to search websites, talk to folks, and don't be afraid to make those connections" (p. 584). Brown (2014) also noted that with regard to the self-recruitment and self-retention, African American women who aspire to the superintendency will need to consider and be prepared for the possibility of relocating. Embedded within the concept of self-recruitment and self-retention are the concepts of mentoring and support networks, which are also strategies of success for women (especially African American women) aspiring to the superintendency (Alston, 1999, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Brown, 2014; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

Strategies of Success

Mentoring

Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2010) recommended that "women seeking leadership positions [should] align themselves with mentors who are experienced in their careers and with those who possess qualities for achieving successful outcomes" (p. 3). Research has indicated that mentoring is one of the most successful strategies used by women and women of color to not only help them obtain a position as a superintendent but also retain the position of superintendency (Alston, 1999, 2000; Anderson, 2000). Mentoring defined by Hill and Ragland (1995) is a platform for mentors to "guide, train, and support a less skilled or experienced person called a novice, mentee, or protégé" (p. 72). Mentors support their mentees by helping them become acclimated to the organizational norms and procedures, becoming familiar with key individuals within the organization, and providing different tools for success (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). In

their findings, Kowalski and Stouder (1999) noted what some female educators

considered to be beneficial to their success: (a) "identifying and maintaining a sponsor

[mentor], and (b) obtaining the support of family and friends" (p. 4). Along with

mentoring, creating a networking system is essential to the overall success of women,

especially Black women superintendents (Alston, 1999, 2000; Brown, 2014; Brunner &

Peyton-Caire, 2000).

Networking/Support Systems

Alston (1999) noted that the lack of an "old-boy network," support system, or

sponsorship has contributed to the barriers that exist for African American women

superintendents and those women in pursuit of the superintendency. Hill-Collins (1990)

shared that "Maria Stewart was one of the first Black feminists to champion the utility of

Black women's relationship with one another in providing a community for Black

women's activism and self-determination" (p. 4); a support system that will help foster

success in the role of superintendent (Alston, 1999; Angel et al., 2013; Brown, 2014,

Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Jackson, 1999; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999). In a study

conducted by Dobie and Hummel (2001), female superintendents attributed their ability

to "function successfully in [a] high pressure leadership position to the presence of at

least one key person in whom she could completely trust and with whom she could

discuss her problems" (p. 26). Keller (1999) asserted that women benefit from a support

network not only as she is searching for a position as a superintendent but also as she

retains her position as superintendent.

Summary

The literature review provided support for the study on the career paths of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of Black Feminist Thought and critical race theory reinforced the idea that when given the opportunity to voice their own personal experiences through storytelling and conversation, African American women are able to contribute a wealth of information regarding educational leadership (Bloom, 2013). The historical perspective of both women and women of color in educational leadership laid a foundation for studying and presenting additional research on the career paths of African American women superintendents. The literature review was able to bring attention to the different barriers for women who aspire to be superintendents and how different those barriers look for African American women who aspire to become superintendents. By examining the literature on the career paths and strategies of success for African American women superintendents, the study is supported by research.

Within Chapter III is a description of the research methodology that was used to conduct this study. The first part of the chapter gives an explanation as to why the phenomenological approach is most suitable for this type of study. The chapter then discusses the source or sources that provided data and the different way in which data were collected. The final section of this chapter reviews ways that data were analyzed and discusses the credibility, dependability, transferability, and limitations for this phenomenological case study.

CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

This methodology chapter examined the research design, data collection, data analysis, participant selection, and credibility, dependability, and transferability of a phenomenological case study (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Willis, Jost, & Nilakanta, 2007; Yin, 2003). The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. Therefore, the focus of this study was the career paths, barriers, perspectives, and successes of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

This chapter begins with an examination of the research design and the methodological approaches that were used for collecting and analyzing data. Following the restatement of the research question is the description of the research setting. This entailed detailed background information on the environments of each participant and a description of where each interview took place. After the explanation of the participant selection process and description of the sample group, the chapter focuses on the procedures used for collecting and analyzing data. This chapter concludes with an examination of credibility, dependability, transferability, and limitations.

Case Study Approach

The qualitative approach to this research was a phenomenological case study. "Phenomenology formatively informs, reforms, transforms, and performs the relation between being and practice," (van Manen, 2007, p. 26). According to Yin (2003), a case study interposes knowledge about lived experiences by capturing the complete and

consequential uniqueness of real-life experiences. According to van Manen (2007), phenomenology is a clear reflection of lived experiences free from hypothetical contamination. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to contribute to literature the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. The descriptive, exploratory, and explanatory case study strategies were integrated within this intrinsic case study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2003). Yin (2003) stated that a case study "is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident," (p. 13). This definition contributes to the decision to use the phenomenological approach to inquiry (Creswell, 2007). The phenomenological approach involves research that focuses on the lived experiences of a phenomenon shared between several individuals (Creswell, 2007). The focus of this case study was the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. Incorporated within the research design was the interpretive approach and the critical approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Willis et al., 2007).

Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) defined the interpretive approach as an approach to the research that "focuses on subjective experiences, small-scale interactions, and understanding" (p. 15). This approach allows for the opportunity to conduct the research from a phenomenological perspective. The phenomenological perspective provided information and knowledge about the way African American women experience the superintendency and the road to the superintendency (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The critical approach to research examines the orientation of social justice

and how power and dominant discourse within society influence experiences and understandings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Willis et al., 2007).

The use of the critical approach within this study of the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio provided perspectives and generated discussions that focused on those environments that are weighted down by heavy discourses of social justice (Hesse-Biber & Leavy; Willis et al.).

Research Question

What are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio?

a. What are the career paths?

b. What are the barriers?

c. What are the perspectives?

d. What are the successes?

Participants and Settings

In order to protect the identity of the superintendents, pseudonyms were assigned to each superintendent. The typology of each district identified by the Ohio Department of Education in 2013 is found in Table 3.1. Superintendent Diane Taylor was in a suburban school district with low student poverty and average student population size with 5, 907 students enrolled, 61% poverty and 82% minority. Superintendent Mary Thompson was in a suburban school district with low student poverty and average student population size with 5,811 students enrolled, 42% poverty and 48% minority. Superintendent Wendy Riley was in a suburban school district with low student poverty and average student population with 889 students enrolled, 53% poverty and 85%

minority. Corrine Moore was in an urban school district with high student poverty and average student population with 3,182 students enrolled, 88% poverty and 100% minority.

Table 3.1

School District Typology

Superintendent	Student Enrollment	Percentage of Poverty	Percentage of Minority Students	District Typology	Student Poverty
Diane Taylor	5, 907	61%	82%	Suburban	Low
Mary Thompson	5,811	42%	48%	Suburban	Low
Wendy Riley	889	53%	85%	Suburban	Low
Corrine Moore	3,183	88%	100%	Urban	High

Three of the four superintendents were located in Northeast Ohio and one was located in Central Ohio. There were currently no African American female superintendents in rural school districts in the state of Ohio.

Sample

The research question played an important role in determining the sample group for this qualitative research study. The selection process for the sample group encompassed several techniques, but most importantly the sample group was criterion-based or a non-probability sample group (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

The study concentrated on a small purposive sample group of four African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. Because they had "some specialized knowledge of the setting," this was considered a convenience sample (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 46).

When trying to determine and formulate my sample group, I found it to be challenging. I was aware of two African American female superintendents in the state of

Ohio. When I spoke to someone from the Ohio Department of Education, I was informed that information about the race and gender of a superintendent could not be shared. I began asking African American men and women who are in educational leadership for information about other African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. One African American female, who is in educational leadership, shared a name with me and I was able to add that person to my sample group. I acquired my last participant by word of mouth as well. While sharing my frustration surrounding not being able to find information about existing African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, a fellow doctorate student supplied me with the name of an African American female superintendent and I was able to add her to my sample group. Developing my sample group was challenging. It was not until I conducted my final interview that I found out that there are actually five African-American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. Unfortunately, I was unable to include her in this research case study.

Data Collection and Source

Within a phenomenological study, "data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and consist of multiple, in-depth interviews with each participant" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Data for this case study were collected from current African American superintendents in the state of Ohio. There was a one-on-one interview conducted with each participant. The one-on-one interview was to gather data. There were attempts to conduct a second interview; however, when trying to schedule the second interviews, the participants did not respond. The purpose of the second interview was to follow up with the participants on the progress of the research and to gather any additional data or expand on data that were already collected. The second one-on-one

interview would have been for the purpose of member checking (Guba & Lincoln, 1994;

Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004).

In order to ensure the authenticity of each interview, I decided to transcribe the

interviews as opposed to having someone else transcribe them. I did not want to take the

chance of losing any of the participants' actual statements, which could have some effect

on data. Member checking gave the participants the opportunity to read the transcripts

from the first interview and verify that what they intended to say was clearly scripted in

the transcripts (Shenton, 2004). Attempts were made to allow for member checking to

occur. A copy of the transcribed interview was either mailed or hand delivered to the

participant. Participants were provided with a copy of their transcribed interview.

Unfortunately, the participants did not provide verification of their transcribed interviews.

Each one-on-one interview lasted approximately one hour. During the research

process, audio tapings of the interviews were secured in a locked, password-protected

file, and transcribed notes used for coding and emerging themes were placed in secured

office files. The location of these interviews was determined by the participants to ensure

comfortability. Interviews via telephone were also an option; however, no participant

selected this to be an option for her interview. For this case study, each participant opted

to have her interview take place in her office. The interview structure modeled an

informal, low structure type of interview (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). The low structure

type of interview is most common when conducting a case study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy,

2011).

Data Analysis

Data from this qualitative case study were analyzed holistically using the iterative approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2003). A holistic analysis is an analysis of the entire case and the iterative approach allows for an immediate analysis of data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2003). The iterative approach to data analysis is most commonly found with the qualitative approach to research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). Using a grounded theory approach to analyzing data is iterative (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011). A grounded theory approach to analyzing data allows for the researcher to collect data using open, axial, and selective coding (Borgetti, n.d.).

I began analyzing my data using open coding by "identifying, naming, and categorizing" experiences and trends found in each interview (Borgetti, n.d., p. 2). During this process, I wrote notes, underlined, and made several highlights on the transcribed interviews. After completing the process of open coding, I began axial coding, which is correlating the codes with one another (Borgetti, n.d.). To correlate the codes with one another, I color coded the different codes and then inter-color coded sub-categories within the coding. Lastly, I completed analyzing my data through the use of selective coding by identifying one theme as the central theme and connecting all other themes to that central theme (Borgetti, n.d.). Within this area of coding, I labeled each central theme and sorted the interviews according to the central theme. I also color coded the central themes. The purpose of this data analysis was to identify themes that emerge within each case. The use of these data analysis models allowed for the assertion and interpretation about data to occur, leading to a more in-depth discussion about the research findings (Creswell, 2007).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was established through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Credibility was confirmed that the findings from this case study were consistent with reality (Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Credibility can be established using several different methods. Within this case study, credibility was ensured through the use of procedures that facilitate truthfulness from the participants during data collection (Shenton, 2004). In order to ensure that data being collected were authentic and from a place of willingness, participants were given the opportunity to refuse to participate (Shenton, 2004). Participants were encouraged to be as open and as honest as possible, and it was made clear to each participant that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions that were asked during the interview (Shenton, 2004). Iterative questioning was also employed as a method to establish credibility. Iterative questioning allows for the opportunity to return to previously asked questions or rephrase a question for clarity (Shenton, 2004).

Shenton posited that frequent debriefing sessions with the researcher's supervisors would help to establish credibility. The debriefing sessions were with my chairperson. They served as sounding boards for sharing thoughts, developing new ideas, and receiving effective feedback. Reflective commentary was another credibility strategy used during data collection. Reflective commentary was used as I recorded my thoughts during each interviewing session to recognize any patterns that may appear during data collection and identify developing theories (Shenton, 2004). In order to reinforce credibility, member checking was used during the initial data collection session (Guba &

Lincoln,1994; Shenton, 2004). Member checking allowed each participant the opportunity to read the transcript to ensure that what was said was what was intended (Shenton, 2004). Shenton suggested the use of thick rich descriptions to promote credibility because it "helps convey the actual situations that have been investigated," (p. 69).

Transferability establishes whether the findings of one study can be applied to other situations (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004). Thick rich descriptions not only help to establish credibility but also support transferability. Thick rich descriptions were used to conceptualize the study, giving readers an opportunity to determine if their situations match the research (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009). Shenton (2004) explained that describing the process of the study in detail helps future researchers repeat the work. Ensuring the credibility of this study enhanced its dependability (Shenton, 2004).

Lastly, confirmability was used to establish the trustworthiness of the case study. "Confirmability is the qualitative investigator's comparable concern to objectivity," (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). In order to reduce the effect of the researcher's biases on the finding, the use of triangulation and an audit trail assisted in establishing the confirmability for this study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Shenton, 2004).

Limitations

One limitation that may affect the research process are personal biases as an African American female currently in educational leadership. Having had some negative experiences with being denied promotions to higher level leadership positions because I

am an African American female may cause my researcher's lens to be biased. I had been an assistant principal of the same high school for seven years. I had been looked over for promotions within this school district on three different occasions. The first was for the high school principal. The district hired a White male who had been a middle school principal but had no high school experience. The second was for the middle school principal, which just a year prior I had been informed that if I chose to "stick around," it would be my position. The superintendent selected a White female with only charter school experience.

The last occasion that I was denied a promotion had the most negative effect on me which led to my resignation at the end of the school year. After the high school principal (the principal from the first occasion) resigned in August to accept a promotion in another school district, the school district needed to replace the principal rather quickly. After returning from my honeymoon, the superintendent requested a meeting with me to discuss the principal position for the high school. I began to get excited because in my mind, I was the most qualified. This is in comparison to the other assistant principal, who only had four years of experience. Unfortunately, I was not offered the position. I was told by my superintendent, an African American male, that he had selected the other assistant principal, a White male, to become the new high school principal. The superintendent attempted to explain that presenting the other assistant principal to the Board of Education for consideration would be met with less resistance. What was troubling to me was that this African American male superintendent, who claimed at times to be my mentor, chose to only present one name to the Board. In other words, the Board was not even given the opportunity to show resistance against me, if

they were going to resist at all because my name did not go before the Board. The presumptions of the superintendent prohibited my progress. I realized at that time how my life mirrored some of the research that I had read while I prepared to conduct this qualitative research study.

Another limitation is the lack of literature on the study of the African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. As I continue to conduct my research to enhance my literature review on the African American female superintendent that is more current, I am faced with the reality that finding current literature is very difficult. This limitation further supports the purpose of this research, which is to provide literature on the lived experiences of the African American female superintendent.

Summary

The methodology chapter examined the research design, data collection, data analysis, participant selection, credibility, dependability, transferability, and limitations of a phenomenological case study (Creswell, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Merriam, 2009; Willis et al., 2007; Yin, 2003). The purpose of this phenomenological case study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. Therefore, the focus of this study was the career paths, lived experiences, barriers, perspectives, attitudes, and successes of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

Data for this case study were collected from current African American superintendents in the state of Ohio. There was a one-on-one interview conducted with each participant. Data were gathered from this one-on-one interview. The settings for the case study were suburban and urban school districts. Pseudo names were used to protect

the identity of the participants. There was a criterion-based, small purposive sample group. Data from this qualitative case study were analyzed holistically using the iterative approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2003). This chapter concluded with an examination of the credibility, dependability, transferability, and limitations of the case study.

Chapter IV presents the results of data analysis. This chapter provides the findings related to the research questions: What are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio?

CHAPTER IV

Results of Data Analysis

This study examined the lived experiences of four African American female

superintendents in the state of Ohio. In this chapter data are presented under the

following categories: career paths, barriers, perspectives, attitudes, and successes of each

participant. There were four participants in this case study. The Table 4.1 lists descriptive

information for each participant.

Table 4.1

Participants

Participant	Married Single Divorced	Children	Years as Superintendent	Number of School Districts	Doctorate Degree
Corrine Moore	Married	Yes	12 years	one	Completing
Dr. Wendy Riley	Divorced	Yes	4 years	one	Yes
Mary Thompson	Married	Yes	4 years	one	No
Dr. Diane Taylor	Single	No	4 years	one	Yes

Two theories served as the framework for this study: Black Feminist Thought and

Critical Race Theory. Black Feminist Thought stands on the premise that telling the lived

experience or story from the perspective of the person who lived it creates an opportunity

to expose the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism and highlights acts of

resistance (Allen, 1998; Alston, 1999; Hill-Collins, 1990; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). In

addition to Black Feminist Thought, Critical Race Theory adds to the theoretical

framework for this case study of the lived experiences of African American women

superintendents in the state of Ohio. The CRT "recognizes the complex ways that race

intersects with gender, class, and ethnicity" (Hill, 2009, p. 1) as well as provides the characteristics needed to tell the personal accounts of the lived experiences, to expose discrimination, oppression, and racial inequalities (Alexander-Floyd, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012).

Data from interview question number one are found in the *Career Path* section of this chapter. Found in the Barriers section are data based upon interview questions two and three. Questions four, five, six and ten were used to gather data on the perspectives of the participants, which are located in the *Perspectives* section. Data on the successes of each participant derived from questions seven, eight and nine can be located in the *Successes* section. Also included within each section are the interview questions that were presented to each participant, followed by their responses. With the purpose of exposing discrimination, oppression, and racial inequalities, while maintaining their credibility and believability, the participant's personal accounts of her lived experiences are presented in her actual voice (Alexander-Floyd, 2010; Delgado & Stefancic, 2012; Hill-Collins, 1991).

Career Paths

Data collected within this section examined the career paths of each superintendent. Each participant provided a detailed account of her journey toward becoming a superintendent.

Interview Question: *Explain and describe your career path toward becoming a superintendent. Was it always a goal or did it develop into a goal because of an experience that you encountered during your educational career?*

Dr. Wendy Riley: Well let me begin at the beginning, I was not an education major in undergrad, never took an education course. I was an Applied Math major, originally engineering, switch to math and received a Bachelor of Science and Mathematics from Spelman College. Interned at NASA Research Center while in school and then began my career at NASA Research Center, quickly became discouraged do to the lack of support. If you will do to the nature of the job and being the only minority female in my division, I quickly realized that this was not a life career that I wanted. Didn't know at the time that my desire was to impact people. While I still love math and have an analytical mind, I just was not feeling the idea of being a palpitation engineer, having a computer and an engine; that is what I did all day. I quickly went back to my counselor and said this is not working; I don't like this. She gave me some advice saying, *get out before you get stuck on the money*. Because of course you can imagine the money was phenomenal. While soul searching and trying to figure out my next path, I began tutoring students through a program called upward bound. I tutored calculus and physics and that brought me so much joy. I looked forward to the tutoring sessions more than the looking forward to going to work over at NASA. My counselor said that if you really enjoyed that so much why not consider being a teacher. So I investigated Baldwin Wallace College, they had a program if you had a degree you can get your Master's in Education and get certified by taking a few of the practicum courses. That is what I did. I also began working with the Upward Bound program while getting those certificates and degrees; that was my first introduction to education. So a backward route to getting to education.

My intent was to teach math for the rest of my life. I started teaching math; I loved it. Taught for seven years, quickly ascended to Teacher of the Year, Department Chair, Curriculum Advisory; traveling to conferences around the country, I loved teaching math. That was the time of the proficiency test; scores were good, but the value added was what was noted. Back then there was no construct called value-added, but I found solace in moving kids whatever grade at least on grade level above in their math skills. I was content and was going to teach 30 years and retire like my sister. I got a call from the assistant superintendent of the district saying, *you have got to make a bigger impact*. At most, I touched maybe 110 -120 kids. She said, *you have got to make a bigger impact*. The district found themselves in a crunch and they did not have a couple of principalships filled at the beginning of the school year. Help stabilize.

I did one year as the 10th grade unit principal; I loved it. I understood the bigger impact; I understood what that meant. Was settling in there and got a call again from the same assistant superintendent; after one year she says, *you need to have your own building*. I would never forget the conversation because, I began to craft my paradigm in terms of my career; look at everything as an opportunity. I become the principal of a middle school and I was principal there nine years. Took a school that no one wanted, had a reputation of being a place where bad teachers and students were sent and in about 3 years we were a National School to Watch. We maintained that title for two consecutive years. Needless to say, presented all over the country, built a team, built a family atmosphere; I am doing

fine. Guess what? I have never applied for a job thus far; the phone has always rung and it is the same lady. She is now Chief of Staff [different school district]. Bigger impact right, I had already cut her off and said, *Hey, I know what you are calling about*; this was a Deputy Chief role.

The whole hierarchy of having chiefs and deputy chiefs, a CEO were all new to me; Deputy Chief of K-8 schools what does that mean. I have 5 superintendents and 81 principals under my direct supervision. I'm a middle school principal; but she had saw something in me and had seen it all those years and knew I could handle it and I did. Assembled a great team with the K-8 schools, I had actual 30 of the 40,000 students under my jurisdiction. What I will say is that the year, that district obtained continuous improvement; which was equivalent to a C. That is the one and only time it achieved that ranking. It was due to the fact that the K-8 schools received consecutive years of value added. If you do two consecutive years of value-added you get a C or continuous improvement; despite other metrics that may not have been met and that is what we did with our K-8s. That district presented me with so many challenges that I had to overcome; I think my skin is much thicker. Experiences that I will cherish and have learned from for a lifetime.

From Deputy Chief to Chief Strategic Implementation Officer as we began this new transformation plan and then ultimately, Chief Transformation Officer at the cabinet level, with three different superintendents in a five-year tenure. Now this is where it gets real, because in the big city, being a cabinet level member, your life is not your own; you are a public figure. The public views you, in particular, in public schools as always incompetent until you prove competency. So, when you make a bad decision, you will be crucified. So this was the lesson like none other.

I actually left that district under duress, due to an indiscretion. It had nothing to do with the performance of the job, children or money; but a personal indiscretion, that was exacerbated by the media, causing a negative cloud over the district. I resigned, walked away; story was killed at that time. However, that was a defining moment in my life because as you can see the career was building.

Had no desire to be a superintendent could have ridden the cabinet level out for many, many years. In particularly, because of being a woman, I always had that buffer when things go to hot I always had a superintendent; which was a male that could squash the drama. But finding myself out, without my Ph.D., soul searching and reflecting once again. With the advice of my mentors, the Chief of Staff that had called me all those years; I am not going to work. I am going back to school. I had taking 10-12 years to work on the Ph.D., was ABD and actually resolved that it is as good as it gets.

So that stop gap was very meaningful. Gained my Ph.D., did some consulting, got my daughter through college and graduated, but there was still something burning on the inside saying your career is not over. While at CSU and consulting in a district where a couple of influential people in that community said *you are phenomenal, you know education, you know kids, your passion is evident and we have an opening for a superintendent would you consider it*. I

threw my name in the hat and just said that if it is the Lord's Will it will be; if not I will continue to teach. So, I became the superintendent of this district; which themselves were in a place of total dysfunction. The district was financially put into fiscal caution; people were fleeing the district, so I kind of looked at our connection as divine. Here when some would think I was untouchable; a district where no one wanted to touch and together we are on a mission, and we are doing well. So that is how I got to the superintendency and I have been here three years and I just signed my contract to do another four. So there is a story for you.

Mary Thompson: Was it always a goal to become the superintendent? It was not my goal to become superintendent. It just kind of happened; I spent a considerable amount of time in this district. I was an assistant principal in the late 90s at the high school and in the early 2000 I came back. I'd left and gone to a different district to become a principal, came back from that district and was a principal at one of the middle schools. Then took on a second middle school in this district for seven or eight years. During that time was able to do some really good work with teachers; did some exceptional work. Actually, I ended up turning the school around. There was a research study conducted on our school and we were one of nine schools outlined as high poverty and high performing in this research study that was supported by the Ohio Business Roundtable, Ohio State, and the Department of Education. I happened to be the principal at the time that led that work.

We were very proud of that work and that work led to a promotion within the district for me. I became the executive director in charge of all middle schools. I was enjoying that job for about six months; then I was courted by the Department of Education to come down to be the assistant superintendent. I left and I was the assistant to the State Superintendent and I did that for almost two years; and had planned to continue to learn policy and education leadership, from a bird's eye view. But, the superintendent here announced his retirement about a year and half into my work and the Board sent him to ask me to come back to be the superintendent and that's how it kind of just fell in my lap.

I thought if I really wanted to succeed the guy who was here at the time, the best chance for me being able to do that would be if I had stayed in the district; but that was not a goal for me. But I did it because the Board asked me and it was this district and I love it. I spent most of my career in this district, doing some good work. I thought if I am ever going to be a superintendent, this would probably be the only place I would do that; so it just happened.

Dr. Diane Taylor: Well, I didn't start in education. I received my Bachelor's and Master's in Sociology. I wanted to be a sociologist actually of education. I really wanted to study the behaviors of people and how that interaction really bolded with education. My parents were both educators; my grandmother was a third generation educator in my family. So, I did not want to purposefully go into education. It wasn't until my last semester of receiving my Master's in Sociology; I was a teacher's assistant for a professor and the majority of the students who I

was assisting were high school students who were not prepared for college. The University was a large institution much larger than my historically black college I attended. I was like, I am spending all this time helping all these students; *why aren't these students prepared for this intro to sociology class? What is happening in the schools?* That question just kind of stayed in my mind and I'm talking to my parents asking, *do you know what's happening*? I decided to do an Intro to Education class and kind of see what was happening. Long story short, I ended up enrolling into the Master's in Education; I graduated with my Master's in Sociology that May and immediately went into the graduate program in education that fall. Got my Master's in Education with a teacher certification, did the Master's in Administration and then started the doctoral work. So, it kind of evolved. So that was not a traditional journey.

So when I started teaching, I only taught for three years and then after my third year my mentor said that I have a placement for you and I became an assistant principal of a middle school. I was there for two years and I decided I want to move south closer to home. I became an assistant principal . . . umm for two years and then the principal there said you can work on this small school grant. When the school district transitioned to small schools, I had the opportunity to start my own small school. Did that for two years and then I was promoted to principal. Then after two years, the superintendent called and asked me to go to another high school. I was at that high school for two years then a friend of mine received his first superintendency. He called and asked if I would go with his team as Deputy Superintendent and I said, *yes*. It was five of us from five different states; we all moved and I stayed there for four years. I will only go for four years, so the fourth year he was like, *you need to figure out what you are going to do*. I really wanted to do some philanthropic work and he is like, *you need to start applying for some superintendency jobs . . . you gotta go through the interview phase and learn what that is going to be like and get your rejection letters*. I decided to start applying and this was the only job that I applied and interviewed for. So, when it is for you it is for you.

Corrine Moore: It was always a goal. I remember the first teacher orientation meeting that I had in this school district and the facilitator posed a question relative to what each individual felt that their goal would be in becoming a part of this school district and I said, *I was going to be superintendent*. It just kind of came out and some folks were like, well! People remembered that and when I was named superintendent, some folks that were still here came and said, *do you remember when we were at teacher orientation when we were all first hire*? I said, *I do*. So, I think it was something that I have always wanted to do.

I've only worked here. I am 36 years in this district; I am a retire-rehire. I retired in 2015 in June and was retired for one day and came back. I started off as a substitute teacher at the high school, in the alternative school. Because I was dual majored in elementary education and special education, I became a special education teacher, a work-study coordinator. and unit coordinator position; which was an administrative position at the middle school. Then was promoted to the

unit principal at the middle school. Then was promoted to principal at an elementary school. From there, I was promoted to assistant superintendent, then deputy superintendent and then superintendent. This is my 12th year as superintendent, 5 years as assistant and then deputy superintendent; 17 years in totality in the superintendency in some form.

In the above data, each participant was able to speak about her career path to the superintendency. According to Superintendent Corrine Moore, becoming a superintendent was always her goal. She recalled a time during her first year teaching orientation when she was asked what she wanted to be, and she stated that she wanted to be a superintendent. This was quite different for Dr. Wendy Riley and Dr. Diane Taylor, who both shared that becoming a superintendent was not part of their career plan. However, this soon changed once Dr. Riley entered a classroom that allowed her to tutor students in math, and once Dr. Taylor realized that students were entering into beginning level college courses as struggling writers. It seems to be no matter the reason, they both decided that they wanted to have a bigger impact on the educational process for students. Superintendent Mary Thompson expressed that although she did not desire to become a superintendent, because she loved the district she had worked for, she agreed to return to serve as superintendent. The participants were also able to share different accounts of barriers that they face as African American female superintendents.

Barriers

Data that were collected surrounding the idea of barriers were gathered from two different angles. The first type of barriers being addressed are those barriers that the participant may have or may not have faced along her journey to becoming a superintendent. Each participant also provided ways that she overcame these barriers. The second type of barriers being examined are those barriers that the participant is

currently facing. Each superintendent shared the tools or strategies that she used to

address her current barriers.

Interview Question: *Explain and describe some barriers that you faced as you*

journeyed toward becoming a superintendent. How were you able to overcome those

barriers while becoming a superintendent?

> **Dr. Diane Taylor:** I didn't really have any barriers. When I went through the application process, I would say that was one. If a barrier, the one barrier would be just the process itself. The application process is very intimidating. A search firm did the superintendent search for this district. Just the process of doing the application is very intimidating. They want a lot of information. I mean a letter and sample writing. They want so much. I think that process is intimidating. I think that's a way they kind of weed out who can survive just the first step, doing the application. Then the second phase was phone interviews. The phone interviews, I think can be a little intimidating a little bit, because you are not in front of the person. I would say, I really don't like doing phone interviews, because I don't think you really get enough about the person on a phone interview. They did two phone interviews with me and they called me back and said they had narrowed the slate of candidates and narrowed them down three candidates they were going to move to the Board and I wasn't one of the three that they gave to them initially, according to the firm. About a couple weeks later, they called back and I would never forget the first thing he said, *Diane, there has been a turn of events*. All I could hear him say was, *a turn of events*. He said, *they wanted your profile included in the slate of candidates that would move on*. In the final three, I was the only female; there was a Black male and a White male. From that process, there were two face-to-face interviews with the Board and there was a community interview.
>
> I never had a community interview before; I was by myself. Each candidate had their night. The District wanted the community to really have a feel for the person that was going to lead this district. The District fortunately had had [named previous female superintendent in the district]. So being a female, I guess wasn't anything new to them. I am the first Black female superintendent. So that was [barrier], but other than that I can't say that I had rejections and closed doors and all of that in the period of time; to go . . . district to district to district . . . it wasn't my experience.
>
> **Mary Thompson:** I would say the biggest barrier I faced on this journey was my transition from the Department [State Department of Education] back to this school district. I came back during the time; it was a lot of angst, anxiety and frustration with all the educational reform that was taking place. Folks thought the legislators of the Governor and the Department of Education was responsible for

all that angst, change, reform and accountability. People in the teaching ranks, folks here felt like it was too much. I can back from the Department, where a lot of people thought was the source of frustration, to this role and that was a real challenge for me even though I had only been gone for not even two years from this district; back from the Department where most people were blaming the problems of teachers on, that was a big barrier. People saw me as an extension of the Governor and his agenda or legislators and their agenda; and they were a little on edge about that.

I came back and ran into a teacher strike, which has been the source of my frustration. It has been a big barrier and a hurdle for me ever since. I have not even been able to overcome the teacher strike. People think that I came from downtown to further the Governor's agenda and I have not been able to beat that. The Board who hired me with no interview process, they didn't do any search. They just sent the superintendent downtown to take me to lunch and said, *tell her to come back*; all of the people with the exception of one are gone. The parents flipped the community, who picked the school Board and put a bunch of angry parents on the school board who blame me for the strike and those are school board members now who run the school the school board. Yeah, so that has been the biggest barrier and that will be the reason I transition out.

African American Female Superintendent it's almost that we're nonexistent. I'm the only one in central Ohio; have a renowned career and background. I have done really good things on behalf of kids; have been spotlighted as a change agent, even in this community, in this very school district. Yeah, I have a lot to be proud of but it's extremely difficult, because it's difficult for people who look like me. People have a hard time, particularly, I'm finding that females have the hardest time with females in charge in education. I think education is predominately female career. Most people or teachers are women, but most people in leadership are men. There are a lot of women who are more cmfortable taking orders and direction from men then they are women, even in our own profession and that saddens me.

Dr. Wendy Riley: So, barriers to becoming a superintendent. Well a couple of barriers for me…the search firms. Most superintendent searches are done by a firm and these firms control who they bring to the Boards for consideration. The baggage that I have and will forever have; the search firm for this district did not bring me to the table because they didn't even want to deal with having to try and explain having the baggage. I could have been and was the best candidate but didn't even make the final cut.

During this part of the interview I informed the participant that I was unaware of this information and she decided to briefly elaborate on what took place in her previous district.

I have to speak to it because as a woman, so many people wanted me to lawyer up and fight. I had a relationship with a subordinate. They say that happens all the time with men and it is just a matter if someone gets moved to a different division.

As a female Chief at a table where there are about ten of us, three female chiefs out of ten. You are sitting there as a Chief and realize that you are a Chief, but you are still a female and you are not an equal. You are not on a level playing field. I have a couple of situations that I can speak to . . . yes, personal indiscretion. People wanted me to fight; even a news channel wanted to give me a platform to say, *this happens all the time with men*. But at the end of the day, through all of the investigations nothing is found, but that never mitigates the damage that was done with the initial media. So lesson learned that as a female you are never on an equal playing field with men. So that is one.

The other is the idea that as a female people always assume you ascend to your role not because of your competence, but because of who you know and what you are doing. That was always something I subconsciously had to fight against. I walk in front of a community forum and I get the looks like, *who is she sleeping with* or *who she kin to . . .* until I present the facts. You always have to prove yourself competent rather than people assume you're competent, which men could walk to the podium Black, White, Asian; they can walk to the podium and people are just waiting like, *they are in that position[superintendent], so they must know what they are talking about*. But we have to prove ourselves over and over and over and over.

Dealing with being a female in a male dominated position. Now, education is female dominated, but when you get superintendent ranks . . . The telltale for me is when I go state conferences and they're hundreds, because there are 600 some odd districts in Ohio; and look out there and there is just a sea of White men. You can count definitely the Black male and female on two hands.

The other piece is the assumption. This is more gender than Black female. Just being at the table, the assumption that you are the female, you will be the secretary or you will get the coffee. No, I don't take notes and I don't get coffee. That gives you an edge and it is such a tricky line to walk, because you do have to make those statements; but then you become the "B" person. No, I am not that type of person either, but I am not going to be assumed to be the docile passive; I will take the notes; I will get the coffee. No, I am not the secretary. That has trickled over into the personal life. That is the other dance you have got to dance because when you are the boss you are large and in charge and people take your kindness for weakness. When you go home you have to learn how to spin your head around and then assume the right gender role with your marriage or with your relationship.

Corrine Moore: I don't know if I would describe them as barriers. I guess I have always been self-initiated and self-motivated. I'm a nerd, still am. Graduated from high school when I was 16. So, I have always been very academically focused. I really don't let outside forces influence me negatively. If I have set my mind to do

something and achieve it; I am pretty straight-forward, in terms of turning barriers into successes. Which is why I think I have survived so long in this position. Some barriers obviously would be persons who have tried to be a deterrent. I call them distractors. They are still very prevalent and very much out of my control in terms of what their agenda is and what mine is. I stay focused on my agenda, which sounds a lot easier than it really is. It requires a lot of self-talk, a whole lot of prayer. I'm kind of centrally focused. I am here for the children and everybody here knows that because I say that all the time, *I'm here for children; I'm not here for grown folk*. Grown folk help me accomplish what it is I am trying to do. So I need you to help me reach my goals; but my primary reason and focus in the schools is the children. So I think that is how I have been able to overcome. I keep my eye on the prize, it's the children. When I have really, really hard days, I will go visit a school, see children on a playground, go in classrooms; I get re-focused.

Interview Question: *What are some barriers that you currently encounter as an African American female superintendent? What tools or strategies are you using to address these current barriers?*

Dr. Diane Taylor: So you land the job and now you are here and that is when the roadblocks come. It's amazing someone just told me, *Doc you know your presence is strong and people . . . well sometimes people . . .* I was like, we are not going to go back to the Michelle Obama speech where you all are intimidated because I am Black and I am confident in myself and y'all think we are the black "B." What is the issue? Now it's a Black woman at the table and my entire cabinet was white except for me and (names a male member of her executive team). I said, okay now you are in a seat and people think, it's business as usually. You have to work harder. I believe I had to work harder to establish respect in this district, and say to people, it's not business as usually. I get it, I'm like the fifth superintendent in like seven years. I think their game was like, *we are just going to wait you out*. Mine was, I am going to treat you with respect and you are going to treat me with respect. I just wasn't placed here; I was ordained to be here. I believe that because I believe spiritually, God closes and opens doors and if I wasn't supposed to be here I wouldn't be here and He (God) didn't take me through those troubles of where I had to interview ABCDEFG. I think I am supposed to be here, so now that you know I am here, how can we work together to move this district forward. I have had to move people off the team because it was clear that they were not going to work for an African American woman. Some say they just wouldn't work for women, so that has been a challenge. I think people expect African American superintendents . . . I won't say that . . . people expect me to take on and tackle issues that I think that they would not have required from others. For example, there is a belief that since I am an African American leader that I should tackle all of the African American issues. I'm like okay; I'm supposed to break all the barriers and the walls and sing Kumbaya.

They want you to be the face of things and what I have pushed was that I'm going to be the face but the plan is going to be something that we work on together. So one of the first things that I did was start on a five-year strategic plan. That's the first thing we did here and part of that plan was; here's where we are academically; here's where we are financially, and in order to sustain that we cannot go further. So, I brought together communities, students and parents and we worked for six months on a five-year strategic plan which included an equity goal. The community wanted that, they said we believe that this district has not focused on equity and there are a lot of inequities; so our go to is equity. So, we put the plan together and we even and it as a new mission. We came up with a decision-making criteria of how we are going to make decisions in this district, even our core values. It was even important to the community that we established some consistency in programming for all students so that really gave me the opportunity to say if I am going to focus on inequities then the focus is on the goal and not Diane Taylor's focus. The plan cannot be Diane's plan it has to be something that we all agree on and come together; something we can live with and it has to outlive Diane. I had the Board adopt the strategic plan.

So you have those barriers and I think there is one more; the other barrier was once we did the strategic plan year one, last year I was able to push for an equity policy. So we are the only district in the county who has an equity policy. Now that true colors really came out because people said okay you're going to focus on the Black kids what about the White kids. Okay wait a minute, equity is we all do better; we do better when we all do better. So that was a barrier because people on one hand they want you to bring people together on the other hand they are… oh wait if you are going to focus on that what does that mean for these kids. So it's really educating your community from a different lens and I think that is something that you have to do or you are going to be a pawn in the game. I think those are some of the barriers you are going to have to figure out… a way to encourage others to see things from a different point of view without pushing the agenda on them, but still letting them know that this is a sense of urgency.

Mary Thompson: Not being able to disconnect my time and the work I did at the department from who I was as an educational leader on the ground, in the field; that is been a big barrier for me. Not being able to breakthrough to women in the profession and get them to embrace the idea of having a fellow woman in the CEO seat and celebrate that, has been another challenge.

So, what tools? All the networking I can do, there are very few Black female superintendents but the few that there are . . . I know most of them. We have pretty good communication, so networking. Whenever I can support people who aspire to be in this kind of role that look like me, I do that. I do my very best to try hire people that look like me that want to be in leadership roles. So that is what I am doing. If it's not me . . . then if I cast the net and expand the net and try to get other folks who look like me, who want to be in this, then maybe it will be them, you know. So I think that this is the best tool and approach that I can take at this time.

What do I do when I see the barriers right in front of me – for the most part if it is something that I feel like I can confront and bring some awareness to; I don't have any problem doing that. Maybe that has been part of what has been perceived to be my problem because I have no problem calling you that fact. This is a female dominated career track and we are more comfortable taking orders from men even in our own profession then we are supporting and celebrating and uplifting women. So what does that say about our agenda or our desire to reach girls and promote girls in our community, in our state, and in our country; if we can't even acknowledge it within ourselves, within our own profession as adults. We certainly aren't doing what we need to do to further the cause for our young girls later own. So, I have no problem confronting people with it and raising their awareness and bringing it to their attention.

I had a situation last spring with a principal who was being very unprofessional in my opinion with another female leader who was a central office leader. The tone that she was taking with this female who was not a peer of hers but actually a superior was in appropriate. So, I called her in and talked to her about it. Put the emails in front of her, talked to her about what I perceived unprofessional behavior and inappropriate tone. Talked to her about the fact that I really didn't believe that we would be having this conversation if that person was a male, because she wouldn't ever overstep her boundaries if it was a male. I asked her why she felt like she had the latitude to scold her superior and why she feels like she has the latitude and freedom to badmouth and disrespect her? She said, 'I have never met anyone more incompetent.' So I had the conversation of who helped you get where you; *was it a woman? Yes, me. I hired you . . . my assistant superintendent at the time was a female, she interviewed you . . .we saw the leadership potential in you . . .you need to acknowledge or just be aware of the fact that you are in a predominately female career and career path and you seem to not celebrate women in leadership positions women just like you . . . but you push back and you need to be aware of that and you are not helping the cause.*

Dr. Wendy Riley: So right now I am actually in a cohort of urban superintendents we meet monthly in DC and the one [barrier] that is so real and so hard. We are talking about your media presence and your delivery and your perception and how you message things. Everyone talks about, you gotta let people feel your passion . . . your passion . . . your passion . . . and I sit there and I struggle. Because passion from an African American female is always always construed as anger. So when you're speaking passionately about the vision and the children, people hear you and they hear anger . . . *what is she mad at*. So, I have been really trying to be conscientious about delivering my messages with passion but not sounding or coming off has angry. That is real because the angry black woman stereotype is real in people's eyes. We have seen it from you know the First Lady. I have seen it from Donna Ford, she speaks about the gifted students and I felt her passion but everyone else in the audience were like "Oh my gosh she's so mad." I'm thinking, she's just passionate about what she is doing.

That is number one for me, to not build a fence or barrier around be me because people perceive me as being angry when it is just pure passion.

That is my reality today. So in speaking slow delivered speech emphasizing certain words. Strategically trying to be mindful that you can't let people perceive you as being angry therefore the message gets lost. You have got to get the message over and if it takes you to water down your emotions, your passion doing that because you just think you are hitting it and people feel your heart and spirit; and they have put up a defense like "Oh my gosh she is so mad." So that is a strategy that I am dealing with daily.

Other strategies . . . trying to navigate and infiltrate the good ole' boys club and I am serious about that. I have never in the past felt the need to go to the bar with the boys but it is like now I do because I need them to see me as their colleague and as colleagues they go out and have a beer. Now, I don't necessarily have to have a beer but I have to show them that I am not afraid to hang out with you; you are my colleagues. That is hard because it is just not in my sphere of life but recently I have. It has been okay. Now sure they speak with a little trepidation around me; they may not let it go the way they would if I weren't there but it is okay. But at the end of the day they are beginning to see me as a colleague. I'll probably never be on the same playing field but at they know I am not standoffish and won't associate with them. I have found that it has opened up some avenues of conversation about some things that they were afraid to talk about because they didn't know how to approach it; but that is a strategy. I am really not trying to infiltrate but become a little more comfortable with White males. Now it seems to me that whenever there is a White female superintendent in the mix, they [the White female superintendent] are okay; they're comfortable. It's my comfortness that I have to hone and get better at. So that is intentional, working on the passion; delivery that is intentional. I think those are the biggest things.

Corrine Moore: I think that being an African American female superintendent is doubly, if that is such a word. A dual problem because I am an African American female obviously; having served as an assistant and deputy superintendent to my predecessor, he was an African American male. This is a predominately African American school district, high poverty students. I saw him face some of the same situations that I face and his response to them. People tended to be much more accepting and receptive to them. A male tends to be able to articulate himself in a certain manner or in sometimes in any manner that he may feel appropriate. That is not going to be received the same way if a female says it or does it; that has been my experience. For example, you can have a male superintendent who is very aggressive in terms of speech, in terms of giving directions, in terms of communication skills; however, people have told me *you looked at me a certain way*, I haven't said anything. As a matter of fact, one of my styles is, the more frustrated I become the lower my voice gets. I am not the one you are going to hear down the hall. Some of those subtle but yet very blatant discrepancies and variances that an African American female superintendent has to be very cognoscente of; it's unfair but it's reality. I am very deliberate in my speech, in

my presentation. I am forthright but I am very cognoscente of that because the way that I say things are always going to be; I believe they are under a microscope. Which in my experiences it is not always the case with males.

Also, for a significant number of males, it is challenging for them to take directives from a female, particularly a Black female, *and you are going to tell me what to do*. I have had to deal with that and the way that I have tried to combat that is to demonstrate my competency and gain the professional respect of people. When you do that, you are less likely to deal with that on an ongoing basis. I went through a renovation project by the time I became superintendent. We had begun the project but I saw it to its completion. It was not uncommon for me to walk into a room and not only be the only female there but to be the only African American. There were some expectations relative to what I would not know and I remember walking into one meeting and did not know a lot and I said to myself *this is the last time this will happen*. I started studying up on construction and positioned myself to be in a position where I would be able to intelligently articulate my concerns. I believe had I been a man there would have been an expectation that I would have known, so you have to come with your "A" game.

Yeah coming with your "A" game, be knowledgeable, being prepared, being an effective communicator and keeping people focused. I found that for me, if I keep myself and other people focused on our goals, our strategies and our vision. This is our purpose if we are reviewing our continuous improvement plan; out strategic plan than let's stay focused on that. Let's stay focused on our goals, our objectives, our mission. How are we going to be successful? That has also helped me a great deal. I think people come to respect you when they learn from working with you, that you know what you are doing; you know what you are talking about. You also are going to be receptive to their input and what they have to bring too, positively; particularly in a challenged school district such as this.

Presented in the aforementioned data are detailed descriptions of barriers that each participant may have encountered along her journey toward the superintendency and those barriers that she currently faces. Data were able to show that the barriers for an African American female superintendent varied from the application process to being a female in a male-dominated career. Data revealed that barriers can arise from leaving the Department of Education to become a superintendent to the consequences of a personal indiscretion. The participants also shared a variety of barriers that they currently face as African American female superintendents. As they were able to share their current barriers, the participants listed different strategies that they used to overcome each

barrier. Data in this section supported the literature that highlights the resiliency of the African American female superintendent (Brown, 2014). The participants also provided their perspectives on a variety of topics which contributed to the research on the lived experiences of African American female superintendents.

Perspectives

Data in this section examined the perspectives of each participant on the effects of race and gender and challenges of an African American female superintendent. These data also take a look at the advantages and disadvantages of being an African American female superintendent. Lastly, data provided the perception of each participant on the reason why there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

Interview Question: *Explain and describe some of your experiences as an African American female superintendent. Has there ever been a time in your career as a superintendent where you felt that race and/or gender had an effect on how people responded to you?*

> **Corrine Moore:** Do I converse with African American female superintendents, *yes*! Do I converse with male Caucasian, female Caucasian superintendents, *yes*, African American male superintendents, *yes*; have very positive and collegial conversations and relationships with them. That is a plus but, there still remains that reality for me and for another African American woman answering that question. See, part of mine, I believe may be self-imposed because of the school district in which I serve and the community in which I serve. Because the community at large has such negativity spin put on it even with the school district; that within all cases is so far from the truth. My students do a number of very positive, just amazing things that are not going to be reflected on the State Report Card. The media in most cases don't descend upon us when there are positive things. I have a communications administrator who sends out press releases and all of that, but if there is an inclination that there is something negative that is happening, they swarm. That is my reality. So from my perspective, it may be

different for someone. Possibly, if I had been placed in another school district, that would not have been my experience but it has been my experience here.

I know it's a factor [race or gender] whether it is unfair or not; it is a reality. I mean even now in 2016, I go to meetings and predominately it's White male. Although there are African American superintendents there. But I think that it's important that people come to know and respect you for your knowledge base. Even 12 years into this, there are some meetings that I walk into that I'm cautious. Particularly, if I'm in a large meeting with more fluent superintendents. From my perspective, people that may not understand in totality what I am dealing with; not because they don't want to but because it's just not their reality. So, in that way, I can share information. A most recent one was the retire-rehire. In terms of, I have watched a number of Caucasian males do what I did and the response has been quite different and some of that I believe was because, I was not only African American but a female.

Mary Thompson: We got the double whammy. Sometimes it's hard to tell whether the response that you are getting is because you are a woman or is the response you are getting because you are black or is the response you are getting because you are a black woman and it is not the same struggle for African American men. If they get a response that they question right away they only have to think about the fact that you are only saying this to me because I'm African American, they don't have to question the other parts of who they are. But, before this situation here with me coming back to become the superintendent and the strike and all of that, I probably would have been able to answer that question completely different.

Because I think I was promoted to this role because people saw me as a rarity in the field. Like we have competent, strong leadership, who knows curriculum; and teaching and learning; and assessment working in high poverty schools with disadvantaged minority students; and has shown in more than one district that she is capable of changing and improving outcomes for kids. So all those things are things that actually got me to this seat, as opposed to now.

But who I am as a Black female is why I believe I am going to be taking out of this seat. The Board interviewed a White male and not surprising to me. They didn't go find someone who looked like me. They went to find someone who looked very much like everyone else in central Ohio. So what got me this job I think was the fact that I had this strong educational background, proven results. I was celebrated and revered by people you know in this district and [names another district]. I mean worked in a lot of places, very well respected. It didn't hurt that I was African American and I was a woman and I came from an impoverished situation and beat the odds. So, I think all that got me the job; but the work has been forgotten. The results have been forgotten and now they want to replace me with someone who doesn't look like me. This is what people talk about all the time. This is not the first time it has happened; it is the first time it has happened to me, but it is not the first time it has happened. I am feeling like what people have been discussing and bemoaning about our people in the past and

now I understand, because I lived it. It gives you an appreciation and understanding. You hope that's not what you have to go through; you don't have to experience it firsthand to understand it; but I had not experienced it and I can't really say I did understand it so you know it happened to me.

So my tenor will be three years. Which when I was approached about this job I fully expected to come back here and see my kids through high school and retire here. That was my goal. Once I decided okay I am going to go do this job it is not what I had planned on my career trajectory but they asked me and I love this district. I will stay there and finish my career there because I know that district. I won't have to shop for another job. Well I walked into a labor strike. I had no idea people were as angry as they were when I got here and you know just like that it changed all of those plans.

Dr. Diane Taylor: When we think about it [race and gender] there are 32 districts in Cuyahoga County and there are only three African American female superintendents. Then across the state, there are not a lot of us. So when we walk into a room; when they say that this is a good ole' boys network, it is; the language that they use. I mean we walk into the room and I more so than Corrine Moore; I think is in a very different category because she is a retire/rehire. She does what she wants, when she wants and how she wants. She is so fascinating to me. With me it was establishing a room within the room, establishing credibility. It's like I don't have to sit in the back of the room and listen to the good ole' boys. I have a voice. I have an opinion and whenever I deem necessary, I am going to voice it and I am not afraid to. But, I don't; I am very reserved in a sense. I would sit back and listen and think, *okay is it really time to speak*. If I don't have anything to say that is going to add, then I am going to just go ahead and shut up.

It was very important for people to understand, that the work we are doing in this district is good work because of the students. It is a very different work, from a very different perspective from some of my other colleagues. Some of the things that you [her colleagues] are fighting for now; we have been fighting for these things, for a very long time. So trying to get them (colleagues) to understand and now they are understanding it, because their districts are becoming more diverse. It's interesting that you have to go up to them and say, *hey, I'm the superintendent*, because they immediately think that you are the assistant superintendent when you walk into the place.

BASA is the Buckeye Association of Secondary Administrators and they have a cohort where they do a training for all superintendents, first year superintendents. So when I went the first meeting they had these name badges and I walked up to the lady and they said, *oh my gosh your Diane Taylor*, well how did you all know? I walked in the room and I said, *well I be dog gone*. There was no one in the room that was African American my first year. I think a few months later I told another African American female superintendent about these BASA meetings, *you need to sign up*. Then I talked to an African American female, Chief Academic Officer and she told me about the African American female

superintendent in Central Ohio. So I said, *we need to get her…tell her about this* because I didn't want to be the only one getting the first year training.

Dr. Wendy Riley: Absolutely, so I guess the question is not has it happened; the question is, has it had an effect on me? For me as an African American female, I wear my hair, my weaves or whatever. When people see me, you can read their facial expressions, *you're superintendent*? As if superintendents have to be crumpy and dumpy. I drive a little Mercedes; I've got the blond covering up the grey and people look, *you're the superintendent*?

When I first came, the comments were not, *oh she has the PhD or she has 25 years*. The bloggers, *our superintendent is hotter than yours*. You just let it roll, but you have to prove your competence. I even went through this phase of dying my hair jet black, pulling it back into a bun, straight Mrs. Crabtree look. Then I had people say, *why*? Because, I don't want any attention. They were just like, *why are you doing this*; *be yourself and let your work speak for you*. Those are real dilemmas that I had to deal. You think about how you dress. I don't wear heels. I am in the pants suit club with Hillary but I've also noticed that when we go to the conferences most of the women have on skirts sets or suit and that's just not me. Again, I try it and then you just say I cannot be what I am not and you go back and put your pants suits on. But just the idea of you trying to acquiesce and you trying to fit in and you are trying to not draw attention to yourself. What does that have to do with the job? So, yeah that is something that affects me.

The other piece, the hair for black women. So I had gone through this whole phase of natural and letting my perm grow out. So, I am natural, but natural doesn't work in superintendent land. Then it is like do I put on a wig or do I get a weave because natural was not working. I would just pull it back; but it was just a struggle of what do I do. Do I braid it and wear the crinkles? Especially in this town, they say all politics is local and they are looking like what is going on with her head? I was told, *you are to militant, you are to Africentric, you are scaring the constituents* and that is real. You can say, *I want to be myself and it's just hair*, but again it is just like the message; *it's just my passion*. But if you put up the barrier, they are not going to hear the message; they are not going to hear you. They are not going to see your brilliance. They are not going follow your vision, because they can't get past the natural hair or the passion in your voice. So you go home and you reflect, pull it back in a bun. They love you or they love the blond. Someone even said, *I like the little blonde straight hair, you look so non-threatening*. Because of course, the blonde straight is probably leaning more toward a more Eurocentric look; you deal with that every day.

Do I wear my natural? Do I do jet black? Do I do the blonde? What do I do? Do I wear the pants suits because you don't want your message and your work to get lost in that superficial stuff? You can say forget them, I am going to be me; but you are the public servant trying to move a mission and you need the public buy-in and belief. So, you struggle with those decisions and some people say, *I don't struggle with that*. Well, okay maybe you will never have to pass a [school] levy where you are and maybe you are not going to need the buy-in of

the Mayor and the city. When I think about the Black women throughout the country, that I have interacted with; I haven't seen them be natural. I have seen the traditional profile, which is non-threatening; no one else has to do that but us, it softens your look.

Interview Question: *What have you found to be the most challenging about your position as an African American female superintendent?*

Dr. Diane Taylor: I think one is when you have to introduce yourself. It's amazing I can be in a room with a team and people not knowing who the superintendent is they wouldn't think it was a Black superintendent. Because I think it is people's perceptions of who are in these roles. I think it is sometimes challenging because I feel like I am always having to justify and giving people more background information about decision that I think weren't required of my predecessors. It's . . . *okay I'm going to turn right, why are you going to turn right? Because I want to turn right well you have to give me more details of why you want to turn right*. I don't know if that speaks to gender; I think it speaks more to race. I think we fool ourselves if people don't believe African Americans are as smart as Whites; they believe it. They see us as the first in being in our positions.

I will never forget my first graduation ceremony my one of the high school assistant principals came over and said to me, "We need to order your robes because they wear the robes for the graduation ceremony." I said, "Oh okay." I make sure give my size to make sure it's not too short and then someone says, "Do you want to get the tam?" I said, "Well, I don't want to wear that tam on my head; do everyone else wear one?" That person said, "No, nobody else wears one." I said, "Well, why should I wear one?" That person said . . . and I will never forget this . . . . "Well no one else has a doctorate." I said, "No one else had a doctorate. No, I don't have to wear one it's no big deal." This person said, "Yes you do." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because the kids need to see that on your head and ask." So I said, "Wow!" Sure enough, I wore that Tam.

I think challenging people to know that there are race issues in this district and we can't be afraid to tackle them. But we don't have to press them upon people that it is our hidden agenda; it is thee agenda in this America.

I think for a female's perspective I do have one for that, it is in the area of building construction. That has been a challenge because that is truly another male dominated world. To go to those meetings and many times I am the only female in the room, that is intimidating; because they have their own language; they have those acronyms. I had to speak up a couple times and said *this is how we are going to do this*. You have to switch hats and get away from the polite little girl from the South and really demand that your presences and your demands are made known; because in that room of people you become invisible to them. They are talking over you and you just have to say *oh no; who is in charge? the superintendent*. So many times you have to make sure people understand your

position and then it's amazing how quiet people get and start listening. When you say it's a powerful job it is; it's amazing. If I wasn't grounded and rooted, you can easily take advantage of your position in this position.

You can make traction; even in meetings, I try to speak last on purpose. I read up on how to meet with men; how do men lead different from women and when should you speak. I have had to learn to speak last because when you speak first people think that is the golden word and they don't listen and creativity goes right out the door.

Corrine Moore: I don't think I would offer a different answer. I have given you some insight albeit limited but some insight. I don't think that there is one prevailing most challenging. I really don't. Now obviously I enjoy being in [names school district]. It has been my choice to spend my entire career here, so with the challenges I would not have one specific challenge.

Mary Thompson: I just say when you walk into a room to a conference expect to be alone. I mean there is nobody like you when you walk into those big events or meetings of the minds where people are talking about things that are happening in their district. There is nobody to connect with; nobody who looks like you; nobody who can see things from your lens; nobody who you can commensurate with or provide a perspective that you can latch on to . . . it's just lonely . . . it's very, very lonely.

It's also difficult to be or to hold true to your core beliefs and values about kids and what kids need, when you particularly are African American. I would say in African American leadership; I don't want to hear excuses about what kids can't do. I don't want to hear the excuses about where they come from; what they don't have and how unprepared . . . their situations at home. I reject it and people know that; don't talk to me about it. I don't think we are doing our kids any favors by giving them a free pass because they are impoverished. In fact, I think we are doing a disservice to kids by writing them off for those reasons. Because the only way out and I am living proof; the only way out of that situation is through education. You are not going to convince me that there is any other way. That is how I lead and I don't apologize for it and sometimes it presents problems because people who don't look like you and don't understand that; don't want to hear that. They don't want to hear that you are promoting and supporting kids that they don't believe have a chance. I am going to continue to advocate for all kids, but particularly those kids . . . disadvantaged, special education, ESL, African American, Girls in STEM; whatever it is that puts the odds against you.

I am going to put a lot of attention, support and resources around trying to uplift those kids. People don't want to hear that . . . that is a hard message to deliver. Even challenging the beliefs and barriers that people put in place around kids who get into gifted programs. I always look at those programs with an eye on how many girls do I see; how many Black kids do I see? Are you trying to tell me we don't have any African American or kids of color who are smart? I don't buy that, so give me a list that reflects our school district.

Dr. Wendy Riley: I would say that the challenge here is working with vendors and outside people that probably have never worked with an African American female superintendent, that have the last say. So some succinct examples: we built technology hub and we are going to do bids; we are going to accept bids and I am going to pick who I want. I picked an African American contractor. You would have thought it was the apocalypse . . . blown away. Every step of the way everyone assumed they cannot be a legitimate contracting company; they can't know what they are doing. So when the plumbers come and when all of the vendors come and they come to my office and they meet with me, I'm grilling them; I am asking questions and they kind of look at me like, *who are you to be questioning me.* I say my signature has to go on this contract. There have been points of contention and we have had contentious conversations because they would not accept the fact that . . . the buck stops with me. You can talk to the Director of Operations; he works for me. You can talk to the Principal; he works for me. So that has been an eye opener. It also makes me appreciate those vendors that do come in with that fresh perspective. You are the boss and here is what we do.

The other part [that is challenging] is reprimanding employees, particularly men. That gives me a feeling that I don't like because it is like an anti-gender role. You do have to sit up and you do have to go toe to toe. I have had a couple; they could not take it and they got belligerent and they just couldn't take and after that . . . fired on the spot. But that's the part I hate. I never want to be taken out of my natural gender role. There is just something that is unnatural to me about a woman reprimanding a man even to the point where voices get a little raised. Now that is something that I am learning; that is a strategy, you're getting louder, I am getting softer. I am not going to over talk you and I can't over power you; my power is in my pen. I am going to bring my voice level down. The more you keep cutting me off; I am going to let you but at the end of the day my power is in my pen. That is what I would say has been a true challenge here.

Working with vendors and outside agencies that are taking back and have not had to deal with particularly a female superintendent and African American; that is smart and has done her research; and understands the work. Because as I start talking about the specs of the job, they are looking like what do you know about specs? I did my research; I've seen jobs that you have done; and I understand what is involved. We are taught and started from little girl that we have to be twice as good to get just maybe half the credit that someone else would get. My momma told me as a little girl *you've gotta do twice as much and you've gotta be twice as good*, so before I am meeting with people, I researched you. I know what your company does; I know what this job entails; and I know what the average price is. So, I'm speaking in your world where as most vendors are used to going to meet with the boss and they are telling them [the boss] and the boss is like *okay*. But I am not, because I have to be twice on top of it just to get half.

I am in this little district with less than 1,000 kids. I know for a fact, if I had been a White male with my background and my track record I would be in a big district. That is the challenge that I find here but it is getting better because

your reputation begins to proceed you. It gets out there and people begin to say, *oh I knew when I was coming here* [she is referencing the contractors] *I had to be on my game because they said that Super over there, she's on top of her stuff.* That is good I want you to know that, so don't come with the fluff. The beauty of being in this small district is I know how to change oil on a bus; I know how to order tires . . . all of that. Whereas in a big district, your people can blow smoke up you because you don't know what happens in the weeds; I get in the weeds here because I have to. I have the best of both worlds, so I understand what it takes to get the job done.

Interview Question: *What are some advantages and/or disadvantages of being*

an African American female superintendent?

Dr. Diane Taylor: I think one disadvantage is that there is not a real network, so you have to find the network. Fortunately, because we have a first ring superintendents network of 17 districts we meet monthly. It is all the entering suburbs around Cleveland and that is how I was able to meet [named two other African American female superintendents]. So had I not been in that I would never have met those two and then when I went to the BASA again neither one of them were there. I think that is a disadvantage because you have to find the network with people who look like you because automatically, at least for me, there is an immediate comfort even sometimes if there is a Black male superintendent.

The advantage of that conversely is you get to establish a new founding and you begin to get other women to dialogue and let them know that it is important. BASA has this Women in Leadership Conference and they have asked me to be on the planning committee. The first one [meeting] I went to they have all these women here; it was majority White. There were maybe four Black women in the room. So on my comment cards I was like wait a minute; I know first-hand, I can count 20 African American female leaders in Columbus and in Dayton and none of them are even here. So if we really are talking about women in leadership, why aren't we really getting those African American women involved. I think you have to make people conscientiously aware that there is something missing here. I think they think that because there are women here; I don't think many of them are aware that there is a difference. I think that they think that because we are all women and we got through the door; that we are okay. That their challenges and my challenges are the same, but they are not.

The advantage is you have to have the courage to make it known and to try to establish a connection or platform for that too be lifted. I hope that I am aspiring others to seek this role and hope that people are seeing that Diane Taylor, she got there; she is doing a hard job; she is doing a nice job; she can do it.

Corrine Moore: I think most of it is, whether your African American or green or blue or whatever, if you are competent in what you do you are going to garner some respect for that. There is going to be people obviously from the outside that are going to make judgment. This is personal and my lived experiences. Not knowing a lot about what goes on internally in the school district, I've worked for several boards at this point during a twelve-year span, they know what I've accomplished in the district. They know the challenges that are here in the District, so I think a lot of that has to do with the knowledge level of those who would want to label the District in a negative way. Obviously serving as an African American . . . primarily African American students, I think it's an advantage. But I also have some phenomenal Caucasian teachers. I have some phenomenal Indian teachers. That's not necessarily defined by race or gender. I have some like I said phenomenal teachers from all ethnicities from all races; however, I think that for me it's been beneficial because these are my children. Just keeping it real; these are my children. I think that it has helped me in actually knowing the community, knowing the culture; and knowing what to expect and what not to expect; and know how to deal with it effectively. So, I think that that has been an advantage.

I think that I could serve in a District that wasn't primarily African American, because wherever you go there you are in terms of your set of skills. Maybe get different results when you are talking about State Report Card because in some more affluent districts, they're not dealing some of the challenges that I am. There are some things that they are not having to spend a lot of time, if any dealing with because it's not a problem. But for me it's going to be huge, which is why I have all kinds of wrap-around services, believing in educating, the whole child; so everything becomes relative at some point.

Mary Thompson: I feel the biggest advantage is being a model. When I walk into the schools and the kids see me . . . [names the city] is a minority-majority district now. The kids of color have surpassed our White students in population and we have a lot of disadvantaged kids in this district . . . a lot. So when I walk through the school buildings and they see me it is a source of pride for those children. I am an example of somebody who has beaten the odds. I am the person in charge and the kids appreciate and like that, the kids do. There are also some folks that don't like that, but we know they are out there.

Disadvantages other than the fact that you are not going to find a lot of other people like you; so you are not going to have a really good network base to work with because there are very few of us. Other than that, the fact that it's going to be a constant challenge; everything that you do is going to be questioned, second guessed. It's just not there yet, we are just trailblazers. Maybe 10 years from now the educational community will be saturated with African American female superintendents but right now we are just blazing the trail. It's difficult and we a taking the lumps. Lori [African American female superintendent] had the same [referencing Mary Thompson's current situation] situation last spring. How

do you explain that; is it coincidence two African American females in one year face the same situation when you only have single digits in the state?

Dr. Wendy Riley: I think some of the challenges have been with the constituents in the political realm or your colleagues. The advantage, you truly relate with the on the ground troops; the parents because you are a mom. The teachers, parents, students . . . that is the advantage. If you have a White male sitting here, particular in an urban district, the chances that you relate to my plight are slim to none. I love the relationship with the kids and now I am even learning that I think I have the advantage of being a Black female in this community. I am going to say you are more than just the superintendent; here you are the Olivia Pope. You have been called to heal this community, to unite this community and because I think I have the passion, now my people understand the passion. They can feel the passion and they understand it and they understand the vision. The jewel is that you have to learn how to flip it when it is now time to deal with your colleagues and the political realm. They don't want to hear the passion; they want to hear the facts. They don't want it to sound threatening. When I am at the concert and the parents are there . . . and we are going to build new schools and we are going to do better [with exclamation in her voice], it's the amen choir. You are going to get the response as if you are in church but you can't speak like that at the conference because that's *oh she so mad*. So there is an advantage.

Interview Question: *Why do you think there are so few African American female*

superintendents in the State of Ohio?

Dr. Diane Taylor: I don't know how many women aspire to be in the role. I sometimes think if my circumstances were different; I love seat number two, deputy superintendent. I loved it because, that piece I was kind of in control of teaching and learning. You are leading the creativity of what is going to happen for kids. In this role, your managing all the other stuff. I think maybe people don't want the bureaucracy of it. I think I would say because there is a lot that comes with it and you gotta have thick skin. Are the doors open for African American women? I always see were minorities are encouraged to apply.

I think sometimes you have to be coached; you have to do your homework and I think we have to do it more so than anyone else. I get it. I think that is maybe why. I think that if I was married with kids I don't know if I would be sitting here. I think my priorities would be different. I don't know anyone in this seat who is married with little kids because it is very demanding. Maybe that is why.

The other piece is I had the advantage of seeing it from seat number two. I think if you had the opportunity to sit as an assistant superintendent or something like that you can be closer to it and you can see what happens. I hesitated before I accepted. Because fortunate I only had five Board members but when I was in Michigan my former boss had seven and in some districts there are nine. You

have to think about there are nine people, nine personalities and nine different agendas and at the same time manage the work. I don't know how many women would want the weight of that work. The trade-off you get, for me is a lot of lonely nights. I am not going to say lonely nights, let me say a lot of fulfilled nights you are out in the community. I was at an event last night, night before I was here until 10:00 doing negotiations; I mean you give up a lot of time. You give up a lot of your life for the lives of the kids; you have got to balance and support. Perhaps many women don't do it because they know what they have to give up in order to do it well.

Corrine Moore: You know I really don't know. I think that some of it may be for education overall. If I were a young person, young professional or a young college student determining a career; as much as I love it I don't know if I would go into education with the state that it is in now. I mean there is so much in the state of Ohio, so much accountability. Not that there shouldn't be accountability don't get me wrong, there should be accountability but with the structure of it now with the report card and if you don't do this; it's a very punitive system. It's a system to me that is flawed; it's inequitable in terms of funding. For me it is not a good time in education and it was when I started and the superintendency puts you at the helm of all of this. Depending on your district, if you walk into this district, you know your hands are full; you know they talk about academic distress. So a superintendent in a district such as my district, you know you are going into a challenge. I had somebody tell me before I took the superintendency and they knew it was being offered to me, *you know you are ruining your career*. I said, *why would you say that*? It was someone who I professionally respected and he said, *you are ruining your career, why would you consider doing that; you need to go somewhere else where you are not going to have all those challenges; where you can go in where you know everything is positioned for success. You are going where everything is positioned for failure; you are going to assume this and you know that everything is positioned for failure*. I got really upset but as the years have gone by, I have kind of said, I know what he meant. I know that he told me that with my best interest at heart. I think for some more challenged districts, that would make a person think twice about it.

I have heard some superintendents say that it is the last job that they want to have; that they want to be so close to retirement. So close, that if they make it through two-three-year contract, they're good. As opposed to me, I had a lot of years ahead of me but still wanted to take the risks; my lived experiences have been here and thought I could make a difference. I know why; I think that it could be number of reasons. It could be, do you really want to take on that level of challenge in these times? What are communities looking for in a superintendent; what do they want them to be; who do they want to be the face of a particular school district? Depending on that, you can possibly have some female African American superintendents aspiring to be and not being the choice.

Aside from the personal reasons an African American female would have, in terms of, I don't know if I am ready to do that yet or if I'm ready to take on all

of that responsibility, because it is an enormous amount of responsibility. The people that I supervise work in other locations but whatever they do, at the end of the day, I'm responsible. Whatever happens whether I am there or not this is the face that represents the school district and so it is an awesome amount of responsibility, but I like it.

Mary Thompson: Well I think it's a no brainer for me . . . like why bother. First, you have to acknowledge that you don't see it very much so what is the likelihood that I am going to get that chance; I am going to be able to break that glass ceiling. People probably don't want to deal with it; it's a big job too and you have to give up a whole lot for the job. They are just not willing to give that up. You get farther away from kids the higher up you go and a lot of people went into the business to be on the ground with kids. Also, why deal with the trouble, the politics and the paper. Just think about it, if people in education would stop and think about what happened to Dr. Harris; however, it went down. The PR around her for as long as it was and look at the same thing that is happening to me for different reasons but the same outcome. Tell me the last time you saw that happen to two White men in a row. I think the thing with Dr. Harris started what 2012, we are just putting it to bed. She is enjoying what would be probably the first year that people aren't talking about it anymore in the newspaper. You know four to five years she dealt with that in the paper; there was a guy in another school district that had some trouble and he was in the paper briefly. Is that really what you want to sign up for? You have to really think about that hard and people don't . . . that is a message that no one wants to hear.

Dr. Wendy Riley: This is deep because not just in Ohio but in the whole country. I look at the gender role being a superintendent, it's an antithesis to your natural gender role. That is a personal belief, that God didn't make women to be in charge. The man is supposed to be the head. So when you are in that role, you are in charge and with that responsibility comes some tactics and those tactics then get construed as negative on a women and you are labeled the B-word; and that is real. So some women don't even want to buck their natural gender role. But then that glass ceiling is real and for those of us that are resilient will keep bucking it until it breaks. Most women don't want to deal with that. Most women don't want to deal with the drama; the stress that comes with breaking that ceiling. It is not a comfortable place to be; it's a rewarding place, but it's not comfortable. I dread going to the conferences because you've got to put on a façade. I just dread it. I loved it as a principal; I loved it as a deputy, but when people . . . she's the superintendent . . . there's this persona that you have to display and weakness is nowhere in it [superintendency].

It is not the easiest thing to ascend to; because superintendent is done by search firms, by in large. Search firms are owned by White men and they deal with what feels natural to them which are other White men. They feel that they can sell them easy because they understand them and their resumes are so cut and dry and pristine; never will you or rarely will you see any personal inferences. I

mean when I became . . . the media called me and said we found out you filed bankruptcy in 1995 . . . wow . . . yeah okay . . . but I don't recall that ever being an issue with anyone ever, particular a male, a White male. So is that a sign that I have no ability to manage a district because I personally filed bankruptcy. I had been divorced; you can't keep your marriage together so how are you going to keep a district together? Of course, you had the indiscretion, so your judgment must be poor; not 25 years of an impeccable track record . . . none of that. Women often don't want to deal with that stuff. You are opening my heart up, my world up… to the world.

   My national take on this, I have seen and I hate talking about it because it is so true. Growing up I always admired the women that led big cities. . . Arlene Ackermen, Beverly Hall, Barbara Bryd Bennett, and Maria Goodlow. You watch these women and today where are they all; they are all dead or in prison. Arlene Ackermen just died of cancer, Beverly Hall died way before her trial date . . . Atlanta with the score scandal, Barbara Bryd Bennett on her way to prison, Maria Goodlow, Seattle died of cancer. If you look at the big city superintendent Kia Anderson; people are like what is wrong, she looks so happy now. But maybe she knew when enough was enough and she did her year. Part of it is knowing when to get out before it kills you or in Barbara's situation going to prison. So now I am looking at the ascending African American females Darrin Drivery, Meria Joel Carstarphen in Atlanta, Sharon Contreras in Guilford County, Jaime Alicea from Syracuse. I look at that national landscape and you've got these 40 years olds coming up and ascending but when you look at the generation before them they all died. Not one retired, Carolyn Johnson . . . Boston, she retired and I think she has dementia. It's like no one does the job retires and lives to enjoy or retires-rehires like males do.

Data were able to uncover perspectives on why there are so few African American female superintendents; the advantages and disadvantages to being an African American female superintendent; the effects of race and gender; and identifying challenges to being an African American female superintendent. Data provided an explanation from the perspectives of the participant of why they feel there are so few African American female superintendents. Data on the perspectives of the participants with regard to advantages and disadvantages to the position of superintendent showed that the participants believed that being an African American was an advantage because they were able to relate and connect with their students, parents, and community. Data on

the disadvantages of being an African American female superintendent focused on the lack of representation of African American female superintendents and educational leaders within various networking systems. The participants shared that oftentimes they find themselves to be the only one who looks like them at state and national level conference.

Data presented the participants' perspectives on the effects of gender and race as they pertain to their position as superintendent. The superintendents in this study provided perspectives that revealed data on the different ways gender and race may have affected them as superintendents. Through data the effects of race and gender proved to be challenging to the participants in this study. Data also revealed that coupled with race and gender was the challenge of working with contractors or constructions companies. No matter the disadvantage, how challenging or reasons as to why there are so few African American female superintendents, the participants have experienced successes. The participants in this study spoke about their successes and what they consider to be contribution to their success as superintendents.

Successes

Presented in this section are data on the contributing factors of success for each participant. Also found are data that focused on the benefits of mentoring; and various ways that mentoring has proved to be beneficial for each participant. In addition, this section examines data on the leadership style of each participant.

Interview Question: *What do you contribute to your success as a superintendent?*

Corrine Moore: First, what do you define as success? Is longevity success? Is student academic achievement success? Is all A's on the state report card success? What do you define as success and then I would have to look at it that way? If I looked at my definition of success in terms of, do I believe that I made a difference in the lives of hundreds of children; I do. Do I believe that I give 100% every day; I do. Do I believe that I give my children the best educational opportunities; I do. I am their biggest advocate. So by that barometer, I have been a success. Now when you look at the State report card and others that would view us from that; have I been successful? It would depend upon what our barometer measuring stick is used to define success.

I just think a commitment, a dedication, a love for my children [contribute to my success]. I care deeply about the people here, the community, my employees; I really do. I mean you are not anywhere 36 years and don't love it and the people that are there. I mean you would have to be a robot and I'm not. I have always tried to be knowledgeable; keep the latest things going here in terms of professional development. Forging positive relationships with my unions and my parents. That continues to be a challenge because players change; there's always those distractors and those who's going to use their measure stick to make their judgments. Personally, I know why I have been here so long, God. He has placed me here. From a profession I can give a plethora of professional reasons and I'm not just saying that to say that; that's really why I have been here so long. I pray my way through.

Dr. Diane Taylor: I contribute my background and my faith. Blessed in my parents raised four kids to be grounded. What I mean by grounded is that we honor each other and other people and we aren't afraid of experience. I am not afraid to talk to anybody about anything. I am not afraid to express myself although I may do it hesitantly but I am not afraid. But, I think those experiences have definitely contributed to my success that I have traveled abroad to different states met different people met different walks of life I think has contributed.

Mary Thompson: I think the success that I've had is because I have strong core values and believe that I should lead with the kids in mind first. I have not deviated from that and so because I make all my decisions around kids first; I think that has led to my success.

Dr. Wendy Riley: Nothing but the grace of God. Never aspired to be one and so again when people see something in you that speaks volumes. Nothing but grace, even through the situation that derailed my career; it didn't stop it. But it derailed it and forever leaves me with a scar, that I will live with. I am a spirit filled person and I know that God has a will for my life. Through the resilience, the wisdom earned, lessons learned, all of that has only made me stronger. For example, media comes here, he can take a chair and give me his card I will call him when I get a chance. But I would never have gotten there if I hadn't been through this media fiscal; skin is thick. Experiences have thickened my skin.

So even if I am knocked down I know how to get back up. I think by nature as black women; we get knocked down all the time and we get back up; except now I have learned how to get backup swinging. Because I have a purpose and I have a mission . . . resilience. You just think about African American women period; we have no choice. All that we had to endure and yet still carry a family; yet still keep it together. We are strong; we are independent and that can have a negative impact on the personal relationship side. I have been told you are too strong for me; you are to independent for me and I get it . . . I do get it. Now again, I am still a woman; I go home and I cry. Sleepless nights, there are tears; I get emotionally drained but the skin is thick.

Interview Question: *Is it beneficial for the African American female*

superintendent to have a mentor or mentors? Do you currently have a mentor or

mentors? If so, is he or she, or they male, female or both? Are they the same race as you?

Corrine Moore: I think that mentors are important. I think that particularly in the superintendency, because it can be lonely in terms of another principal can find another principal to talk to; a teacher can find a teacher; a student can find a student; and a parent there is another parent. Although with my immediate cabinet, we work very well together; they know a lot about what I am doing, but they're not superintendents. I think it is very important for superintendents to just have someone that you can just pick up the phone and they will have an understanding. If not a 100% understanding, they'll have some understanding of what you are going through; a listening ear. It's really good when you pick of the phone and it's someone more seasoned than you. T.D. Jakes talks about expanding your circle and don't always be the smartest person in the room; if you are you need to expand your circle.

I have been fortunate to have all of that. I have a former African American female superintendent who has retired and if need be, she is there as a listening ear. I have practicing superintendents who I would even call them friends; who I could call and they can call me and we maybe are talking about board issues or student academic achievement or the report card or whatever. I have superintendents who are probably, most of them are retired, but who are very seasoned and who can say to me *don't do that*? *Why would you do that*? Some practicing superintendents, we would just call each other and just say, *my goodness you wouldn't believe what just happened to me*. I think that all of those help the superintendent become well rounded and to be able to have someone who has an understanding of what it is you are dealing with and give you ideas; I think that mentors are good. They are male and female, predominantly female; some are the same race as me and some of them are not. I have tried to be a mentor to up and coming or newer superintendents with myself now being considered a veteran.

Dr. Diane Taylor: I have had both White and Black [mentors] who have saw the potential in me and that maybe at that time didn't see it myself. One in particular is Dr. Flora Diez. When I was getting ready to do my administrative internship, a White female from the University wanted me to work with whom she thought was one of the best principals in public schools. So this was a White woman telling a Black girl, I think you should work with her. I met with Dr. Flora Diez who happened to be from Mississippi and she just really took me. When my mom passed, she and her husband just took me in; just was there for me and really showed me the ropes about being a good leader; a sound leader and she has been my mentor ever since.

Dr. Diez continued to encourage me and supported me. She is retired now but if I ever need a word of inspiration I would call her. I think that keeps you grounded and keeps you knowing that you truly are trailblazing it away. Because others who may have wanted to get there are not there yet, but you can show them that you can get here; and this is what it takes; and these are the experiences that you should have.

Mary Thompson: I have a White male mentor and it is the gentleman that served in the role before me, my predecessor. He had been my mentor for almost 20 years. We have a really good connection and we worked together in another school district. There are no women, I mean the only chance I would have had was if Dr. Harris was around and she wasn't when I was promoted into this position. I do have a mentor; he does not look like me. He is helpful because he has done this job. But he can't be as helpful because he didn't face the same challenges that I am facing, so he can't coach me through those. He will never be able to coach me through, how to navigate being a Black woman in charge. So, you think sometimes, I will compromise that because maybe that will be secondary. That may not be a priority for me; I just need him to coach me through how to do the job, not how to do the job as a Black woman. That is idealistic, not in this situation. The situation I endured and walked into, with the strike and all that; it probably would have been extremely helpful to have a Black woman who had done the job; and who could talk to me about how to handle some of the conflict; and how to handle some of the criticism I faced for two years and the confrontations. Yeah, it would have been helpful to have somebody who had lived through that, a Dr. Harris for example, but it's just not there. So, I might become that person for everybody.

Dr. Wendy Riley: Mentors are absolutely paramount and what I have learned recently is that you must have a few. You need a few to help you navigate the various realms or spheres that you operate. The one mentor that kind of tapped me on the shoulder along the way, an African American female; she hired me as a teacher. She saw the genius in me or she saw what was in me. She also could relate to me, but now that she has gotten me to these levels; I now have a White male mentor, because I need to navigate that world. We've got a relationship as mentor/mentee that I can say, *help me understand how this works*. This is on the

national superintendent level. This was a mentor given to me by the AASA organization. He's a superintendent of a large school district out West and when I speak to him about my situation, he puts it in straight perspective. He says, *Everyone's got something. Now what you've got to do . . . you've got to hone your message. You've got to go to media school and learn how to hone the message, own it, move past it, and go on.* To know that everyone has something, I didn't know that.

I have mentors in the realm of politics; just local navigation, knowing the movers and shakers. Who are the political wheelers of this city? I have my spiritual mentors. You know, my Big Mama at church, when at the end of the day it is just me and the Lord; Big Mama just pray with me and let me just cry on your shoulder.

I have a White female. I think because I was a female superintendent; she is actually [names another African American female superintendent] too. She is actually our mentor in helping us on entering into this new realm. She, of course is White because there were no other blacks and I would say that that is the least effective one. That is the least effective one because she speaks about the work. That is an interesting dynamic because she just speaks about the work and it is almost as if she doesn't want to recognize that we are women; let's just do the work; superintendents just do this this this. Okay, but we are female superintendents and that's a different nuance. She has never spoken to me or to us about that and maybe she doesn't feel that because she is a White female. That is interesting now that I think about that but she has never talked to us about female stuff; it is just superintendent do this; and get your calendar; and make sure you have this strategy; and get this infrastructure set. I want to say, but do you cry, do you wear stockings or do you wear socks. That is what I want to talk about; should I pull the bun back.

Interview Question: *Describe your style of leadership.*

Corrine Moore: My leadership style I would describe is situational. Hershey and Blanchard . . . when they talk about situational leadership. Looking at a given situation or given employee and tapping into how I would need to lead that person. Now obviously there is an overall mission, goals, and visions of the district and that is going to remain constant with everyone. But even if I look at my immediate cabinet starting with my directors, there are ones that I can give something to and I know when I get it back it's going to be done with precision. Then there are others that I would say *read this and we are going to come back and we are going to talk about it or do this and bring it back to me and we are going to review it together.* I kind of adjust my leadership. Now everybody will probably say, *she's firm* and I could give some other adjectives and that's okay; they know I love them. Women have a certain no nonsense about her; so don't think I'm a doormat. Some people come in here and think I'm a bartender. I want to know about your family, if you want to share that with me. I'm going to be a listening ear to help guide you through that to the best of my ability; if you

request, I'm going to pray for you. But at the end of the day, you have to do your job and you need to know that I mean business about that; and everybody and in all cases doesn't receive that.

I think people have come to know that I will do contortionist moves, no embellishing to help people be successful. Because like I tell them, if you are successful; my students are successful. I'm your biggest advocate. You know I'm here for children but I need you; so why wouldn't I want you to be successful. Why wouldn't I want you to do your best job. So, I am going to everything that I can; I'm going to talk to you, professional development; I'm going to send you to another school; I'm going to observe, whatever I can do to help you be successful.

Does that mean I have had to make a recommendation to the Board for termination? I have because at the end of the day, it is about the children and to me I have endless patience for teaching . . . for helping . . . helping redirect. I have zero to no tolerance of non-compliance and defiance, because I can't help you. I would say it's more situational. I hope it's somewhat transformational in terms of getting folks to buy into the vision and what it is we are trying to do here. But I think any leader it does them well to know who they are working with and to know that person's abilities and weakness, and to give them help where they need it. Give them opportunities to shine and help you out while using their talents.

Dr. Diane Taylor: Visionary definitely, I think that is number one. I am definitely a big picture. I think I will leave it at visionary because I have some others. You…kind of fluctuate with your styles. You kind of change depending on the situation, but I think visionary. I am working on how do I get people to add more meat to your vision, because sometimes people don't see it. I think visionary leaders can be big picture and not know how to put the pieces in place. I am blessed that I can see the big picture and I have put pieces in place and that goes back to my experiences as deputy superintendent. That has been a good balance for me, to be able to see that piece and then ownership. So visionary leadership is definitely my go to.

I think people have to understand that every decision is not a collaborative decision and that some decisions I am going to make. I don't need to talk it over with you; this is what we are doing. That can be difficult when you are trying to establish your collaborative culture. But I think you offer enough of *here is the big picture*; this is what we are going to do. How you do; you can do it in your own discretion, but we are going to do this. I think that is how you have to establish true leadership. When people understand that there are some non-negotiable; in this role it is about kids. We are a kid-centered organization. We even have a cabinet mission and our cabinet mission is to make sure the decisions that we are making are kid-centered decisions. I say, *I don't want to hear your personal*. We are here for the kids because if it wasn't for the kids we wouldn't be in these positions.

Mary Thompson: I am kind of the situational leadership; my style is situational. Depends on what the situation is but for the most part, I am a collaborative

person. I am kind of a task master. I want to hire people who compliment me; who I can rely on to get the work done with very low supervision. I hire good people and I hire them hard and take them through the process so that I can get them on the team; and let them go and not micromanage them. I like to bring people to the table and turn on ideas. But I also know that I am going to have to make the final decision and I am comfortable with that. I would like to say, if I walked into another situation that required something else, more of a dictatorship kind of style, I could morph into that. It depends on what is necessary at the time and I think your style has to change as the climate of the district changes. You can't just be one person all the time; you can be this one person when things are going well and when the crisis come, you might have to be something else. You get into financial trouble, you have to go out and lobby for money for kids; you might change your style to be very flexible.

Dr. Wendy Riley: Situational . . . servant leader, but definitely situational in having had the experience that I have had in the big urban [school district] and now this small [district]. Situations are day by day; they are different by context. I am a consensus builder; I am truly about team. I have had so much success in my principal role and my deputy chief role, that I am sold on – we get more together, than if it were – everyone just did their independent job. I appreciate the human capital that I have; people know that I genuinely care and love them like they are my own and that speaks volumes to people. People work hard when they know that someone notices and someone cares. I don't know where I got that from that is just my style, that's just me.

So great consensus builder, great team maker, situational; I lead as a servant and I think that is how I would describe it. None of those are pure textbook answers, but that is just what I have found to be my success. That textbook stuff, we've got to transform education. I just had this conversation with the Board about this report card and you have to be politically correct, but I wanted to say the report card is garbage; what does it measure? It is a corporate mentality giving a matrix to something.

I'm building whole healthy humans, there is no measurement for that; but I know when it is being done and when it is not. So we are going to play the game, we will shoot for the A. We are going to get 70% to pass, but are our kids healthy happy whole and are they learning to the best of their ability; that's the difference with us [women]. I'm Ph.D. and should have been transformational, but again we are female and we speak from our heart. I could give you the theoretical version; our groundedness is from a nurturing, holistic view of what we do, not a corporate mindset or a textbook model. We know that and will speak that if we have to.

When describing reasons for their successes, data showed that the participants

believed that God is a contributing factor toward their success. This is also seen in data

on mentoring. The participants expounded on the importance of mentoring and how it contributes to the successes and sustainability of an African American female superintendent. Lastly, data showed that the participants described their leadership style as situational. However, there was one participant who described her leadership style as visionary. Data revealed that the successes of the African American female superintendent is contributed to her ability to lead her district with an understanding that student achievement is the number one priority.

Summary

The results of data analysis chapter present data collected during the research process that answers the research question of what are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. This chapter presented data categorically based upon the research question. It began with the lived experiences of each participant, explored the barriers, and concluded with the perspectives, attitudes, and successes of each participant.

Data analysis performed on the lived experiences included details surrounding career paths and the effects of race and gender and individual challenges in the role of superintendent. Data analysis on barriers explored two different angles. The first type of barriers were those barriers faced along the journey to becoming a superintendent. The second type of barriers examined were those barriers that each participant was currently facing. Included in this chapter on data analysis were tools or strategies used for overcoming barriers.

Data analysis was conducted on the contributing factors of success for each participant, which included the leadership style of each participant. In addition to the

benefits of mentoring, various ways of mentoring were shown to be beneficial for each participant. This chapter concluded with data analysis on the attitudes and perceptions of each participant as they related to the challenges of being African American female superintendent. This involved examining the advantages and disadvantages of being an African American female superintendent as well as providing a perception from each participant on the reason why there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

CHAPTER V

Summary

This chapter summarizes data that support the research question of what are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. In this chapter are the findings and the discoveries of the career paths, barriers, perspectives, and successes of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. This chapter closes with leadership implication, recommendations for additional research, and conclusion.

The underrepresentation of the African American female superintendent is disappointing and calls into question the reasoning behind such despairing amounts. In order to address that issue one must examine the history of the African American female superintendent, recognize the barriers that she faces, and inquire about her lived experiences. Unfortunately, because historically, the position of superintendent has been a gender bias, male-dominated position, there is very little literature on the African American female superintendent (Alston, 2000, 2005; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). The literature on the role and position of the superintendent is predominantly taken from the perspective of White male superintendents (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. The following are the research questions for this study: What are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio? What are the career paths? What are the barriers? What are the perspectives? What are the successes?

The qualitative approach to this research was a phenomenological case study. "Phenomenology formatively informs, reforms, transforms, and performs the relation between being and practice" (van Manen, 2007, p. 26). According to Yin (2003), a case study interposes knowledge about lived experiences by capturing the complete and consequential uniqueness of real-life experiences. According to van Manen (2007), phenomenology is a clear reflection of lived experiences free from hypothetical contamination. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological case study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents.

Within a phenomenological study, "data are collected from the individuals who have experienced the phenomenon and consists of multiple, in-depth interviews with each participant" (Creswell, 2007, p. 61). Data for this case study were collected from current African American superintendents in the state of Ohio. This study concentrated on a small purposive sample group of four African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, because they had "some specialized knowledge of the setting" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 46). A pseudonym was used to protect the identity of each participant. There was a one-on-one interview conducted with each participant. Data were gathered from this one-on-one interview. Each one-on-one interview lasted for approximately one hour. The interview structure modeled an informal, low structure type of interview (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011).

Data from this qualitative case study were analyzed holistically using the iterative approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Yin, 2003). The purpose of this data analysis was to identify themes that emerge within each case. The use of these data analysis models

allowed for the assertion and interpretation about data to occur, leading to a more in-depth discussion about the research findings (Creswell, 2007).

The findings of this case study were intended to present the lived experiences of the African American female superintendent in the state of Ohio. The theoretical framework of this study, Black Feminist Thought supports the findings of this case study. Each participant was able to share her lived experiences, journeys, and perspectives, which created an opportunity to expose the intersectionality of racism, sexism, and classism, and highlights acts of resistance (Allen, 1998; Alston, 1999; Hill-Collins, 1990; Jean-Marie et al., 2009). Following the findings discoveries are discussed on search firms, why so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, benevolent sexism, strategies and preparedness, and participant leadership styles, with a focus on transformational and servant leadership.

Findings

There were several themes that emerged within the findings of this case study (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1

Emerging Themes

Research Question	Emerging Themes
Career Paths	Traditional vs. Non-Traditional
Barrier & Challenges	Gender Bias Duality Proving Competency Higher Standards Cultural Differences
Perspectives & Successes	Advocacy Networking Mentoring Spirituality

Career Path

  Traditional vs. Non-traditional. Within the findings of the career path of the African American female superintendent in the state of Ohio emerged a theme of the non-traditional career path versus the traditional career path. The non-traditional pathway was one that showed the participant beginning her career in a non-educational field. This was the case for two of the participants. Dr. Wendy Riley began her career in the NASA Research Center in the area of palpitation engineering; Dr. Diane Taylor earned her bachelor and master's degrees in Sociology. When these superintendents had a desire to improve student achievement and the educational process, Dr. Taylor and Dr. Riley entered the field of education. However, according to three of the participants, Dr. Riley, Dr. Taylor, and Superintendent Mary Thomas, becoming a superintendent was never a goal. It was not until they began their career in education did the trajectory toward becoming a superintendent be unveiled.

  Once on this pathway, the superintendents began a more traditional journey. This entailed becoming a classroom teacher, entering into lower-level administration, obtaining central office positions, such as Chief Transformational Officer or Assistant Superintendent; all before becoming Superintendent. Believing that in order to effect educational change, many African American female superintendents are choosing to leave the lower-level administrative and teaching positions in search of a leadership role as superintendent (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). This was definitely the case for Superintendent Corrine Moore, whose goal was not only to become a superintendent, but also who has spent her entire educational career within the same school district.

I remember the first teacher orientation meeting that I had in this school district and the facilitator posed a question relative to what each individual felt that their goal would be in becoming a part of this school district and I said, *I was going to be superintendent*. I am 36 years in this district; I am a retire-rehire. I became a special education teacher, a unit coordinator position; which was an administrative position at the middle school. Then was promoted to the unit principal at the middle school. Then was promoted to principal at an elementary school. From there, I was promoted to assistant superintendent, then deputy superintendent and then superintendent.

Included in the theoretical framework of this case study are the philosophies of CRT that identify barriers within the superintendency that are based upon gender bias and racial discrimination (Jones, 2013). Despite what the challenges or barriers are, African American women "continue to resist the [gender and race] challenges" in pursuit of the superintendency (Alston, 2000, 2005; Brown, 2014). The participants within this case study provided several different accounts of the barriers and challenges they are faced with as African American female superintendents.

Barriers and Challenges

Gender Biases. There were several themes that emerged in the findings that focused on the barriers and perspectives of the African American female superintendent. However, gender biases and duality are the two major themes that surfaced from the barriers and challenges that the participants shared in their lived experiences. Gender biases emerged as a major theme primarily because each participant shared several

accounts of her lived experiences that revealed her gender being the reason for some of the challenges that she faces as a superintendent. For example, Superintendent Corrine Moore and Dr. Taylor shared that men have a difficult time taking directives from woman, particularly Black women, and this has been a challenge for them. Dr. Taylor has had to move people off her team because of this discrepancy. For Dr. Wendy Riley, gender bias is understanding "that as female you may hold a position at the table, but the realization is that you are still a female and you are not equal; you are not on a level playing field." Superintendent Mary Thompson shares that her challenge has not been with men not being able to take directives from a woman, but women not being able to take directives from another woman. Whether it be the inability of a male or female to take directives from a female, there still seems to be challenges and barriers of gender biases within the role of African American female superintendent. Each participant presented different accounts of gender biases as they moved through the interview questions.

Within gender biases are some prevailing gender expectations. Miller, Washington, and Fiene (2006) presented three different male dominating models that help explain the barriers that women face as superintendents or aspiring to become superintendents. The "women's place model" explains the pervasive differences in gender expectation (Miller et al., 2006). One of the participant, Dr. Wendy Riley, expressed her challenges with addressing gender expectations:

> Just being at the table, the assumption that you are the female, you will be the secretary or you will get the coffee. No, I don't take notes and I don't get coffee."
> She goes on to explain that because you have now addressed the gender bias and

assumption, "That gives you an edge and it is such a tricky line to walk, because you do have to make those statements; but then you become the "B" person." No, I am not that type of person either but I am not going to be assumed to be the docile passive; I will take the notes; I will get the coffee. No, I am not the secretary.

Gender bias is something that can reinforce the "glass ceiling effect and prohibit women from attaining positions as superintendents" (Dobie & Hummel, 2001). In top school leadership positions, like the superintendent, African American women are almost nonexistent (Revere, 1987). According to Superintendent Mary Thomas, the non-existence of the African American female superintendent is a barrier toward the superintendency. Superintendent Thomas shared, "African American female superintendents . . . it's almost that we're nonexistent . . . it's extremely difficult, because it's difficult for people who look like me. I think education is a predominately female career. Most teachers are women, but most people in leadership are men." Although there has been an increase in women entering the field of educational leadership, it still remains a male dominating field (Alston, 2005; Bjork, 2000; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000).

Duality. Black Feminist Thought integrates the realities, "challenges, and consequences of being a member of two historically oppressed groups" (Allen, 1998, p. 575). The second major theme to emerge from the questions surrounding the barriers and challenges of the superintendency is the idea of duality or as one participant stated, "the double whammy," (Superintendent Mary Thompson). According to Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011), the epistemology of African American women as unique because

knowledge for the African American woman is constructed from two different forms of oppression, race and gender.

When considering the barriers of the African American woman who aspires to be a superintendent, it is important to note that she is faced with not only the gender bias barrier, but also a barrier based upon her race. The African American woman situated within a social context characterized by a patriarchal gender-race-class system (Hill-Collins, 1990, para. 3). As a result of this interlocking system of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1991), the experiences of African American women in the United States are different from other women and African American men (Howard-Hamilton, 2003). When speaking about barriers and challenges with being an African American female superintendent, both Superintendent Corrine Moore and Superintendent Mary Thompson shared some experiences with the idea of duality

> Having served as an assistant and deputy superintendent to my predecessor, he was an African American male. This is a predominately African American school district, high poverty students. I saw him face some of the same situations that I face and his response to them. People tended to be much more accepting and receptive to them. A male tends to be able to articulate himself in a certain manner or in sometimes in any manner that he may feel appropriate. That is not going to be received the same way if a female says it or does it; You can have a male superintendent who is very aggressive in terms of speech, in terms of giving directions, in terms of communication skills; however, people have told me *you looked at me a certain way*, I haven't said anything. Some of those subtle but yet very blatant discrepancies and variances that an African American female

superintendent has to be very cognoscente of; it's unfair but it's reality. (Superintendent Corrine Moore)

We got the double whammy. Sometimes it's hard to tell whether the response that you are getting is because you are a woman or is the response you are getting because you are black or is the response you are getting because you are a Black woman and it is not the same struggle for African American men. If they get a response that they question, right away they only have to think about the fact that you are only saying this to me because I'm African American, they don't have to question the other parts of who they are. (Superintendent Mary Thompson)

As the participants spoke about gender biases and duality, three other themes emerged: proving competency, cultural differences, and higher expectations or standards. These three themes are closely related to one another and in most cases can be found overlapping with gender biases and duality.

Proving Competency. Proving her competency as a superintendent surfaced as a similar theme among the participants. Having to prove competency was a similar challenge among the participants in this study. With the majority of men being promoted to the position of superintendent, this sends a disheartening message that men are the more competent. This emerging theme aligns with the African American female addressing gender biases and the challenges of duality. Dr. Wendy Riley shares her experience:

The other is the idea that as a female people always assume you ascend to your role not because of your competence, but because of who you know and what you are doing. That was always something I subconsciously had to fight against. I

walk in front of a community forum and I get the looks like, *who is she sleeping with* or *who she kin to . . .* until I present the facts. You always have to prove yourself competent rather than people assume you're competent, which men could walk to the podium Black, White, Asian; they can walk to the podium and people are just waiting like, *they are in that position[superintendent], so they must know what they are talking about.* But we have to prove ourselves over and over and over and over.

Three of the participants shared very similar experiences related to proving competency and gender biases while working with construction companies. According to Dr. Taylor, Dr. Riley, and Superintendent Moore, the field of construction is a male- dominated world made up of predominately White men. The participants shared that oftentimes they were the only female and the only African American in the room. It is because of these dynamics, the participants found that working with vendors, contractors, and constructions companies created barriers and challenges.

Dr. Taylor spoke about having to "switch from being the polite little girl from the South and really demand that your presence and your demands are made known because in that room of people you become invisible to them. They are talking over you and you just have to say *oh no; who is in charge? the superintendent.*" Dr. Riley expressed that her challenge has been "working with vendors who probably have never worked with an African American female superintendent, that has the last say." Dr. Riley explained:

When all of the vendors come and they come to my office and they meet with me, I am asking questions and they kind of look at me like, *who are you to be questioning me.* I say my signature has to go on this contract. There have been

points of contention and we have had contentious conversations because they

would not accept the fact that . . . the buck stops with me. You can talk to the

Director of Operations; he works for me. You can talk to the Principal; he works

for me.

Superintendent Corrine Moore not only experienced being the only female and only

African American in the room but also having her competency or ability called into

question. Superintendent Moore shared:

I went through a renovation project by the time I became superintendent. We had

begun the project but I saw it to its completion. It was not uncommon for me to

walk into a room and not only be the only female there but to be the only African

American. There were some expectations relative to what I would not know.

Being forced to prove their competency was not a stand-alone challenge or barrier that

these women faced. The participants in this case study explained how as African

American female superintendents they have higher expectations placed on them while

being held at a higher standard.

Higher Standards. From the participants' experiences surrounding the necessity

to prove competency, another theme emerged, higher expectations or standards for the

African American female superintendent. Having to prove competency is in itself an

example of higher expectations or standards placed on African American female

superintendents. The superintendency is a male-dominated position, the gender biases are

revealed when women applicants are required to have higher qualifications and more

academic degrees and experience to be considered a candidate for the position of

superintendency (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999). Being held to a higher standard or

expectation was not a surprise to the participants; they anticipated that they are held to higher expectations. However, not only do they meet the expectation, but they also go beyond the expectation.

Dr. Wendy Riley explained, "we are taught and started from little girl that we have to be twice as good to get just maybe half the credit that someone else would get. My momma told me as a little girl *you've gotta do twice as much and you've gotta be twice as good*." The expectation shared by some of the participants is that African American female superintendents are expected to work harder proving competency and establishing respect. Dr. Diane Taylor believes that people "expect me to take on and tackle issues that I think that they would not have required from others." The theme of being held to higher expectations emerged within the barriers and perspectives of the African American female superintendent. Two participants shared two very different lenses to this theme. Regardless of the storyteller, the story was the same. Both participants understood that higher expectations were placed on them either because of gender, race, or both. Hence, lending to the concept of the African American female existing in an interlocking system of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1991). Dr. Wendy Riley was held to a higher standard with regards to a personal decision that she refers to as a personal indiscretion. As a result of her personal indiscretion she was asked to resign from a high level position in a major school district. She shared this experience because she understands that the only reason why she was held to this standard is because she is a woman.

I have to speak to it because as a woman, so many people wanted me to lawyer up and fight. I had a relationship with a subordinate. They say that happens all the

time with men and it is just a matter if someone gets moved to a different division. People wanted me to fight; even a news channel wanted to give me a platform to say, *this happens all the time with men*. But at the end of the day, through all of the investigations nothing is found, but that never mitigates the damage that was done with the initial media. So lesson learned that as a female you are never on an equal playing field with men. (Dr. Wendy Riley)

Dr. Diane Taylor shared an experience where she, like Dr. Riley, was held to a higher standard. What was revealed to Dr. Taylor was that she was held to a higher standard in qualifications and education. There had not been a superintendent prior to her, that held a doctorate degree.

I will never forget my first graduation ceremony my one of the high school assistant principals came over and said to me, "We need to order your robes because they wear the robes for the graduation ceremony." I said, "Oh okay." I make sure give my size to make sure it's not too short and then someone says, "Do you want to get the tam?" I said, "Well, I don't want to wear that tam on my head; do everyone else wear one?" That person said, "No, nobody else wears one." I said, "Well, why should I wear one?" That person said . . . and I will never forget this . . . "Well no one else has a doctorate." I said, "No one else had a doctorate. No, I don't have to wear one it's no big deal." This person said, "Yes you do." I said, "Why?" She said, "Because the kids need to see that on your head and ask." So I said, "Wow!" Sure enough, I wore that I am. (Dr. Diane Taylor)

As an influencer within the theoretical framework, CRT addresses the perpetual forms of discrimination (Trevino et al., 2008). While sharing their lived experiences, the

participants spoke on how cultural differences contributed to the challenges and barriers they faced as African American women. The challenges of cultural differences surfaced within structural arrangements that not only inhibit but also contribute to the ongoing oppression and racial inequalities of the disadvantaged (Howard-Hamilton, 2003; Trevino et al., 2008).

Cultural Differences. As the participants shared their lived experiences a theme emerged that drew attention to the cultural differences of the African American female superintendent. Very similar to the previously mentioned emergent themes, this theme also surfaced as a result of questions that focused on the challenges and barriers of the African American female superintendent. The participants shared lived experiences that revealed the challenge of cultural difference and the role that these differences play when faced with the challenges of gender biases and duality. For example, it is no secret that when an African American woman speaks with passion in her voice, she is perceived as being angry or hostile. Dr. Wendy Riley shared:

> Everyone talks about, you have let people feel your passion . . . your passion . . . your passion . . . and I sit there and I struggle. Because passion from an African American female is always always construed as anger. So when you're speaking passionately about the vision and the children, people hear you and they hear anger . . . *what is she mad at*. That is real because the angry black woman stereotype is real in people's eyes. We have seen it from you know the First Lady. I have seen it from Donna Ford, she speaks about the gifted students and I felt her passion but everyone else in the audience were like "Oh my gosh she's so mad." I'm thinking, she's just passionate about what she is doing.

Dr. Wendy Riley was the only participant who shared that a barrier for her was having to consider how she wears her hair, what types of suits to wear, and not allowing her vision or passion to be misconstrued and lost in the "superficial stuff." In order to be considered an effective leader, women in leadership often have to balance being both likeable, a perceived feminine trait, and competent, a perception of male leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2007).

> For me as an African American female, I had gone through this whole phase of natural, but natural doesn't work in superintendent land. I was told, *you are to militant*, *you are to Africentric*, *you are scaring the constituents* and that is real. If you put up the barrier, they are not going to hear the message; they are not going to hear you. They are not going to see your brilliance. They are not going follow your vision, because they can't get past the natural hair or the passion in your voice. So you go home and you reflect, pull it back in a bun. Someone even said, *I like the little blonde straight hair, you look so non-threatening*. Because of course, the blonde straight is probably leaning more toward a more Eurocentric look.

> You think about how you dress. I don't wear heels. I am in the pants suit club with Hillary but I've also noticed that when we go to the conferences most of the women have on skirts sets or suits and that's just not me. Again, I try it and then you just say I cannot be what I am not and you go back and put your pants suits on. But just the idea of you trying to acquiesce and you trying to fit in and you are trying to not draw attention to yourself.

Do I wear my natural? Do I do jet black? Do I do the blonde? What do I

do? Do I wear the pants suits because you don't want your message and your

work to get lost in that superficial stuff? You can say forget them, I am going to

be me; but you are the public servant trying to move a mission and you need the

public buy-in and belief. When I think about the Black women throughout the

country, that I have interacted with; I haven't seen them be natural. I have seen

the traditional profile, which is non-threatening; no one else has to do that but us

[African American women], it softens your look. (Dr. Wendy Riley)

Moving away from the barriers and challenges to being an African American female

superintendent, the participants also shared through their lived experiences, their

perspectives toward the superintendency as well as their successes as superintendents.

According to Hill-Collins (1990), Black Feminist Thought is essential to the theoretical

framework of this study because it offers an interpretive perspective of the Black

women's lived experiences (para. 4).

Perspectives and Successes

Four major themes emerged as the participants answered questions that focused

on the advantages and disadvantages of being an African American female

superintendent, as well as questions that concentrated on contributions to their success as

superintendents. Those major themes are advocacy, networking, mentoring and

spirituality.

Advocacy. A major theme that surfaced as the participants shared their lived

experiences as African American female superintendent is the advantage of being an

African American. They shared that as an African American superintendent, they are able

to connect more with the community and with the students. The two following participants shared very similar perspectives on the advantages of being an African American superintendent:

Obviously, serving as an African American to primarily African American students, I think it's an advantage. I think that for me it's been beneficial because these are my children. Just keeping it real; these are my children. I think that it has helped me in actually knowing the community, knowing the culture; and knowing what to expect and what not to expect; and know how to deal with it effectively. So, I think that that has been an advantage. (Superintendent Corrine Moore)

The advantage, you truly relate with the on the ground troops . . . the teachers, parents, students, that is the advantage. If you have a White male sitting here, particular in an urban district, the chances that you relate to my plight are slim to none. I think I have the advantage of being a Black female in this community. I am going to say you are more than just the superintendent; you have been called to heal this community, to unite this community and because I think I have the passion, now my people understand the passion. (Dr. Wendy Riley)

Not only did the participants share that as an African American they have a greater ability to connect with the students and community but also as an African American they understand that they are role models for the minority and the disadvantaged students. Tillman and Cochran argued that African American female superintendents are not only "role models for their students and staff [but also] play a critical role in influencing educators to raise academic and behavioral expectations for poor and minority students" (p. 48). Superintendent Thompson shared that it was

important for the students to see an African American who had beaten the odds and who overcame difficulties.

> I feel the biggest advantage is being a model. When I walk into the schools and the kids see me. We have a lot of disadvantaged kids in this district. So, when I walk through the school buildings and they see me, it is a source of pride for those children. I am an example of somebody who has beaten the odds. I am the person in charge and the kids appreciate and like that. (Superintendent Mary Thompson)

> As a result of these experience and being able to overcome these challenges, African American female superintendents are more apt to inspire their students toward achieving success because they are a living example (Tillman & Cochran 2000).

Continuing with emergent theme of being an African American as an advantage within their roles as superintendent, African American female superintendents are more aware of the lower expectations placed on poor and minority students by educators because this may have been a barrier for them to overcome in their own educational experiences. The participants within this study talked about their plight to make education equitable for all students. The superintendents shared their intolerance for the low expectation being placed on minority and disadvantage students.

> I would say in African American leadership; I don't want to hear excuses about what kids can't do. I don't want to hear the excuses about where they come from; what they don't have and how unprepared or their situations at home. I don't think we are doing our kids any favors by giving them a free pass because they are impoverished. In fact, I think we are doing a disservice to kids by writing them off for those reasons. Because the only way out and I am living proof; the

only way out of that situation is through education. I am going to continue to advocate for all kids, but particularly those kids . . . disadvantaged, special education, ESL, African American, girls in STEM. (Superintendent Mary Thompson)

The information provided by the African American female superintendents within this study presented networks and networking systems as both an advantage and disadvantage to the success and sustainability of the African American female superintendent in the state of Ohio.

Networking. As the participants shared their advantages of being an African American female superintendent they also spoke about some disadvantages. From the perspectives of the participants, a disadvantage has been trying to maneuver through the good ole' boy network system, while faced with not having a networking system of their own. Within the findings, the participants' inability to establish a network because there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio emerged as a theme.

The superintendents in this study shared an awareness of the necessity of having a networking system. Keller (1999) asserted that women benefit from a support network not only as she is searching for a position as a superintendent but also as she retains her position as superintendent. However, the disadvantage that they are faced with when trying to establish a network is there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. Superintendent Mary Thomas shared this perspective that, "you are not going to have a really good network base to work with because there are very few of us."

As the participants spoke about networking systems, the participants acknowledged the existence of the good ole' boy system and the realness of this networking system to not include them. The good ole boy networks are a large part of the male-dominated model that have contributed to barriers that impede women from obtaining positions as superintendents (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). According to one participant, Dr. Diane Taylor, "When they say that this is a good ole' boys network, it is." This network continues to isolate women from the possibilities of promotion (Alston, 2000; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999). Having an understanding in the realization of the good ole' boy network, the participants addressed a disadvantage that they face is not having an established network and searching out ways to create one. Because there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, a network that may not be made up of just African American females but may include African American males, because the goal is to establish a sense of inclusion and comfortability. Hill-Collins (1990) shared that "Maria Stewart was one of the first Black feminists to champion the utility of Black women's relationship with one another in providing a community for Black women's activism and self-determination" (p. 4); a support system that will help foster success in the role of superintendent (Alston, 1999; Angel et al., 2013; Brown, 2014; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Jackson, 1999; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999).

Dr. Diane Taylor stated, "I think one disadvantage is that there is not a real network, so you have to find the network. I think that is a disadvantage because you have to find the network with people who look like you because automatically, at least for me, there is an immediate comfort even sometimes if there is a Black male superintendent."

In the following response, Dr. Taylor gave details of a time when she saw no African American women at a state level organization meeting. The actions of Dr. Taylor in the following account revealed how she went about establishing a networking system of African American women in leadership.

BASA is the Buckeye Association of Secondary Administrators and they have a cohort where they do a training for all superintendents, first year superintendents. So, when I went the first meeting, I walked in the room and I said, *well I be dog gone*. There was no one in the room that was African American my first year. I think a few months later I told another African American female superintendent about these BASA meetings, *you need to sign up*. Then I talked to an African American female, Chief Academic Officer and she told me about the African American female superintendent in Central Ohio. So I said, *we need to get her…tell her about this* because, I didn't want to be the only one getting the first year training. (Dr. Diane Taylor)

Dr. Taylor also shared that although there have been networks established to represent women in leadership, there still remains a disproportionate amount of African American women within these networks:

BASA has this Women in Leadership Conference and they have asked me to be on the planning committee. The first one [meeting] I went to they have all these women here; it was majority White. There were maybe four Black women in the room. So on my comment cards I was like wait a minute; I know first-hand 20 African American female leaders in Columbus and Dayton and none of them are even here. So if we really are talking about women in leadership, why aren't we

really getting those African American women involved. I think you have to make

people conscientiously aware that there is something missing here. I don't think

many of them are aware that there is a difference. I think that they think that

because we are all women and we got through the door; that we are okay. That

their challenges and my challenges are the same, but they are not. (Dr. Diane

Taylor)

Dr. Taylor pointed out that the challenges of an African American female

superintendent are distinctly different from the challenges that a Caucasian female

superintendent may encounter. The Black woman lives in two worlds simultaneously;

and when compared to White men and women, her aspiration towards the

superintendency is harder to reach (Alston, 1999). Black Feminist Thought expresses that

the experiences of African American women in the United States are different from other

women and African American men (Howard-Hamilton, 2003) because of an interlocking

system of oppression (Hill-Collins, 1991). Granted, there is nothing wrong with

networking with other women in leadership. However, when African American female

educational leaders are able to network with one another and share similar challenges and

experiences, their sustainability and success as educational leaders become more

attainable.

Under the premise that having an established networking system is vital to the

success of a superintendent, the participants expounded on other items that were vital to

their success as superintendents. There were two major themes that emerged from the

discussions surrounding contributors to their success. One theme that surfaced was the

necessity of having mentors to guide them through their roles as superintendents. Another

theme that emerged while discussing contributors toward their success is their faith and belief in God.

Mentoring. Research has indicated that mentoring is one of the most successful strategies used by women and women of color to not only help them obtain a position as a superintendent but also maintain retain the position of superintendency (Alston, 1999, 2000; Anderson, 2000). All the participants spoke about the benefits of having a mentor. According to participant Corrine Moore, "I think that mentors are important. I think that particularly in the superintendency, because it can be lonely." They all seemed to have more than one mentor and the role of each mentor may be different depending on the need of the participant. For example, Dr. Wendy Riley shared "mentors are absolutely paramount and what I have learned recently is that you must have a few. You need a few to help you navigate the various realms or spheres that you operate." In a study conducted by Dobie and Hummel (2001), female superintendents attributed their ability to "function successfully in [a] high pressure leadership position to the presence of at least one key person in whom she could have complete trust and with whom she could discuss her problems" (p. 26). In discussion, Superintendent Moore shared the following thought, "I think it is very important for superintendents to just have someone that you can just pick up the phone and they will have an understanding. If not a 100% understanding, they'll have some understanding of what you are going through; a listening ear."

Superintendent Mary Thompson shared her account of the importance of mentors, but she includes in her discussion that at times having a mentor of the opposite race and gender was not helpful to her because he was not able to help her maneuver through a difficult time that she felt she was enduring because of her race and gender.

Superintendent Thompson felt as though she would have been better served had she had an African American female, who had been a former superintendent and had gone through something very similar as she was experiencing.

> I have a White male mentor and it is the gentleman that served in the role before me, my predecessor. He had been my mentor for almost 20 years. We have a really good connection and we worked together in another school district. There are no women, I mean the only chance I would have had was if Dr. Harris was around and she wasn't when I was promoted into this position. I do have a mentor; he does not look like me. He is helpful because he has done this job. But he can't be as helpful because he didn't face the same challenges that I am facing, so he can't coach me through those. He will never be able to coach me through, how to navigate being a Black woman in charge. (Mary Thompson)

Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2010) recommended that "women seeking leadership positions [should] align themselves with mentors who are experienced in their careers and with those who possess qualities for achieving successful outcomes" (p. 3). Although helpful being able to have a mentor, Superintendent Thompson was not able to align herself with an African American female superintendent mentor who would have been helpful in showing her how to navigate through the turmoil she experienced as a superintendent because there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

Spirituality. A strong sense of faith and belief in God emerged as a theme when the participants spoke about the reasons for their success as a superintendent. Having a spiritual foundation surfaced early in the research when Dr. Wendy Riley and Dr. Diane

Taylor shared their journey to the superintendency. Dr. Riley expressed, "I threw my name in the hat and just said that if it is the Lord's will it will be," and she relied on her faith and belief in God to determine if she would be hired as the superintendent. Dr. Diane Taylor described a very similar experience:

> I just wasn't placed here; I was ordained to be here. I believe that because, I believe spiritually, God closes and opens doors and if I wasn't supposed to be here I wouldn't be here and He (God) didn't take me through those troubles of where I had to interview ABCDEFG. I think I am supposed to be here.

This spiritual thread moved through the document as the participants shared how they overcame barriers with "a whole lot of prayer" (Corrine Moore) to how they have been able to sustain as the superintendent. Corrine Moore attributed her longevity in her position to God. She shared, "Personally I know why I have been here so long, God. He has placed me here. I can give a plethora of professional reasons and I'm not just saying that to say that; that's really why I have been here so long. I pray my way through." Dr. Taylor shared that she "contributes [her] background and [her] faith" to the successes she has had as the superintendent. Being rooted in a belief that you are ordained to be in the position of superintendent would lend to the belief that God is the reason for success as superintendent. Believing that God has placed her in the position of superintendent and He alone is the reason for her success, Dr. Riley shared:

> Nothing but the grace of God. Never aspired to be one [superintendent] and so again when people see something in you that speaks volumes. Nothing but grace, even through the situation that derailed my career; it didn't stop it. I am a spirit filled person and I know that God has a will for my life.

Even when Dr. Riley talked about her mentors, her faith and spiritual beliefs surfaced.

She spoke about "Big Momma," a person at her church, who "at the end of the day

[when] it is just me and the Lord, Big Momma just prays for me and lets me just cry on

[her] shoulder."

Discoveries

Discoveries were made in different categories that surfaced within the findings of

the research. This section discusses these discoveries. It begins with search firms and the

role they play as the "gatekeepers to the superintendency. The section moves on to

present the discoveries that were uncovered during discussions surrounding the

participants' perspectives on why there are so few African American female

superintendents. An outlier was discovered within data and it is being described as

benevolent sexism (Glick, 2013). This discovery is discussed in detail before moving on

to the strategies and preparedness of the participants. This section concludes with a

description of the participant's leadership style and a discovery that connect

transformational and servant leadership to their already existing leadership styles.

Search Firms

The role that the professional search consultant plays creates an external barrier

for women aspiring to become superintendents because they act as *gatekeepers* (Castro,

1992) to positions dominated by White males (Alston, 1999; Brown, 2014; Brunner,

2008; Dobie & Hummel, 2001). Two of the participants in this study shared their

experiences with search firms. In both experiences the search firms were responsible for

conducting the superintendency search for the districts where the participants are the

current superintendents. "Individual acts by search consultants and board of education

members have neither altered organizational practices nor enhanced the social responsibility essential to changing the male-dominated system" (Bjork, 2000, p. 9). The irony of both their experiences is that neither one of the participants was selected by the search firms to move on to the next level. Had it not been for the Board in one case and the community leaders in another requesting the participants be included in the next phase of the interviewing process, their journey to the superintendency would have stopped with the search firms.

> They [the search firm] called me back and said they had narrowed the slate of candidates and narrowed them down three candidates they were going to move to the Board and I wasn't one of the three that they gave to them initially, according to the firm. About a couple weeks later, they called back and I would never forget the first thing he said, *Diane, there has been a turn of events*. All I could hear him say was, *a turn of events*. He said, *they* [the Board and the community] *wanted your profile included in the slate of candidates that would move on*. In the final three, I was the only female; there was a Black male. (Dr. Diane Taylor)
>
> The search firms. Most superintendent searches are done by a firm and these firms control who they bring to the Boards for consideration. The baggage that I have and will forever have; the search firm for this district did not bring me to the table because they didn't even want to deal with having to try and explain having the baggage. I could have been and was the best candidate but didn't even make the final cut. (Dr. Wendy Riley)

As Dr. Wendy Riley shared her perspective on why there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, she believes that one reason is

associated with search firms. She explained that "ascending to the superintendency is not the easiest thing to do because the search for the superintendent is conducted by search firms. Search firms owned by White men and deal with what feels natural to them, other White men."

Why So Few African American Female Superintendents?

As the participants answered the interview question that focused on the shortage of African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, there were some definite similarities in their responses. These similar responses are categorized in Table 5.1 as *Existing Glass Ceiling*, *Demanding Position*, and *Challenging with Great Responsibilities*. The participant's perspectives are aligned with each category.

In addition to these aforementioned categorical similarities presented in Table 5.2, the participants also shared their individual and personal perspectives which included looking at the interview from a national perspective. As she provided her perspective on why so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, Dr. Wendy

Table 5.2

Perspectives on Why So Few African American Female Superintendents

Participants	Existing Glass Ceiling	Demanding Position	Challenging with Great Responsibilities
Supt. Corrine Moore	What are communities looking for in a superintendent; who do they want to be the face of a particular school district? Depending on that, you can possible have some African American female superintendents aspiring to be and not being the choice.	The new stresses or expectation in education; if I were a young professional or a young college student determining a career; as much as I love it I don't know if I would go into education with the state that it is in now.

I mean there is so much accountability in the state of Ohio. There should be accountability but with the structure of it now, with the report card; it's a very punitive system. It's a system to me that is flawed; it's inequitable in terms of funding. For me it is not a good time in education and it was when I started; and the superintendency puts you at the helm of all of this. | It could be, do you really want to take on that level of challenge in these times? It is an enormous amount of responsibility.
I think for some more challenging districts; that would make a person think twice about it. |
| Dr. Wendy Riley | The glass ceiling is real and for those of us that are resilient will keep bucking it until it breaks. Most women don't want to deal with the drama; the stress that comes with breaking that ceiling | It is not a comfortable place to be; it's a rewarding place, but it's not comfortable. I dread going to the conferences because you've got to put on a façade. I loved it as a principal; I loved it as a deputy, [but as the superintendent] there's this persona that you have to display and weakness is nowhere in it [the superintendency]. | You are in charge and with that responsibility comes some tactics and those tactics then get construed as negative on a woman and you are labeled the B-word; and that is real. |
| Dr. Diane Taylor | Are the doors open for African American women? I always see were minorities are encouraged to apply. I think sometimes you have to be coached; you have to do your homework and I think we have to do it more so than anyone else. | You give up a lot of time. You give up a lot of your life for the lives of the kids
Perhaps many women don't do it because they know what they have to give up in order to do it well. | The Board of Education - You have to think about there are [several] people, [several] personalities and [several] different agendas and at the same time manage the work. I don't know how many women would want the weight of that work. |
| Supt. Mary Thompson | First you have to acknowledge that you don't see it very much so what is the likelihood that I am going to get that chance; I am going to be able to break that glass ceiling. | You have to give up a whole lot for the job. They are just not willing to give that up. | People probably don't want to deal with it; it's a big job too
Why deal with the trouble, the politics and the paper (the media). |

Riley noted "it is not just in Ohio but in the whole country." Dr. Riley went on to share why she felt this was a national phenomenon:

> My national take on this, I have seen and I hate talking about it because it is so true. Growing up I always admired the women that led [school districts in] big cities Arlene Ackermen, Beverly Hall, Barbara Bryd Bennett, and Maria Goodlow. You watch these women and today where are they. They are all dead or in prison. Arlene Ackermen just died of cancer; Beverly Hall died before her trial date in Atlanta with the score scandal; Barbara Bryd Bennett on her way to prison, Maria Goodlow, Seattle [school district] died of cancer.

Part of it is knowing when to get out before it kills you or in Barbara's situation going to prison; look at superintendent, Kia Anderson. People are like what is wrong; she looks so happy now. But maybe she knew when enough was enough. So, now I am looking at the ascending African American females Meria Joel Carstarphen in Atlanta, Sharon Contreras in Guilford County, Jaime Alicea from Syracuse. I look at that national landscape and you've got these 40 years olds coming up and ascending but when you look at the generation before them they all died. It's like no one does the job retires and lives to enjoy or retires-rehires like males do.

During her interview, Superintendent Mary Thompson believed that more African American women do not seek out the role of superintendent because as you move up the ladder toward the superintendency, you become further away from the children and many women enter the field of education to be on the ground with the students. According to Dr. Taylor, the role of the superintendent is more about managing and less opportunity is given creatively leading the teaching and learning process .

While discussing this interview question, Dr. Diane Taylor acknowledged the demands that the position might have on a woman causing her to choose between being a "wife-mother" and becoming a superintendent (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 21). When considering the professional choice to be a superintendent, Dr. Taylor shared a personal statement as she explained why she believes there are so few African American female superintendents.

> I think that if I was married with kids I don't know if I would be sitting here. I think my priorities would be different. I don't know anyone in this seat who is married with little kids because it is very demanding. (Dr. Diane Taylor)

One last perspective that addressed this interview question was an unexpected statement. Dr. Riley stated that as she "looks at the gender role of being a superintendent, it's an antithesis to [a woman's] natural gender role." With that said, she feels that "some women don't want to buck their natural gender role." It is her "personal belief that God didn't make women to be in charge; the man is supposed to be the head." She accounts this as being a reason why women may choose not to aspire to be superintendents. The idea of a "woman's natural gender role" resonated throughout Dr. Riley's interviews and is considered to be an outlier within data.

Benevolent Sexism

During the interviews with Dr. Wendy Riley, she on several occasions made reference to what she felt was the correct gender role for a woman. This information was

alarming and made cause for further research to help understand this belief. After combing through literature on feminism, anti-feminism, and non-feminism, which did not describe Dr. Riley's belief, however, a term did emerge that provided a clear description of this particular belief. Dr. Wendy Riley's personal belief can be described as benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1997).

According to Glick and Fiske, there are two kinds of sexist attitudes within the concepts of the Ambivalent Sexism Theory: hostile and benevolent. Both hostile sexism and benevolent sexism "presume traditional gender roles and both serve to justify and maintain patriarchal social structures," (Glick & Fiske, 1997, p. 121). However, "hostile sexism communicates a clear antipathy toward women, benevolent sexism takes the form of seemingly positive but in fact patronizing beliefs about women," (Chen, Fiske, & Lee, 2009, p.765). Not only does benevolent sexism reinforce traditional stereotypes and male superiority but also benevolent sexism has been known to increase women's acceptance of hostile sexism, because both benevolent sexism and hostile sexism postulate the idea of gender roles (Chen et al., 2009; Glick, 2013; Glick & Fiske, 1997). An example of this is shown in a statement that Dr. Riley made during a discussion surrounding the challenges of being superintendent. Dr. Riley expressed a dislike and challenge she has with reprimanding male employees. Having to do this gives her a feeling of discomfort because it goes against what she considers to be her natural gender role. Dr. Riley shared:

> That's the part I hate [reprimanding a male employee]. I never want to be taken out of my natural gender role. There is just something that is unnatural to me about a woman reprimanding a man even to the point where voices get a little raised.

Found within Dr. Riley's statements are some traditional stereotypical views of women; however, her approach to this is not intently negative or sexist. Therefore, it can be concluded that in some of Dr. Riley's lived experiences, she has endorsed benevolent sexism and by doing so, she has inadvertently validated hostile sexism (Chen et al., 2009; Glick, 2013; Glick & Fiske, 1997).

According to Glick (2013), benevolent sexism translates to women who men will be there to provide, protect, and treasure. Some women may find themselves validating BS because of a belief system that have been with them since birth, which is men are the providers and are purposed to protect women (Glick, 2013). When she spoke about her career path to the superintendency, Dr. Riley shared that she had no desire to be a superintendent and could have stayed at the cabinet level, primarily because as a woman, when things became difficult, there was a male superintendent who could squash the drama. This statement is not a negative sexist statement; however, Dr. Riley is alluding to the idea of a man protecting her from a difficult situation. Benevolent sexism (BS) can be described as a collection of sexist attitudes that depict women stereotypically; however, shown in a positive way (Glick & Fiske, 1997). While answering an interview question that pertained to barriers that African American female superintendents are faced with, Dr. Riley shared this one of the barriers that she faces:

> The other dance you got to dance because when you are the boss
> you are large and I charge. When you go home you have to learn how to spin your
> head around and then assume the right gender role with your marriage or with
> your relationship.

This statement, although stereotypical in its views of the correct gender role of a woman in a marriage, is not a negative sexist statement.

As she shares her lived experiences, Dr. Riley believes that a natural gender role for a woman exists and to be out of this role is discomforting. She believes that God did not create women to be in charge; that the man is considered to be the head and to be in charge goes against her natural gender role. Although her belief system says otherwise, she has selected to be in a position that puts her at the head. It is with all surety that Dr. Riley has expressed a disdain for the expectations of the position; however, resiliency, strategies, and preparedness has helped sustain her as the superintendent.

Strategies and Preparedness

"Black female educators and Black female superintendents, however small in number, demonstrate that they are well prepared to lead" (Alston, 2005, p. 681). The necessity for preparedness was a definite trait found in the lived experiences shared by all of the participants. Superintendent Corrine Moore spoke about the importance of being prepared in an experience she had with a construction company:

> I remember walking into one meeting and did not know a lot and I said to myself *this is the last time this will happen*. I started studying up on construction and positioned myself to be in a position where I would be able to intelligently articulate my concerns. I believe had I been a man there would have been an expectation that I would have known, so you have to come with your "A" game. Yeah coming with your "A" game, be knowledgeable, being prepared. (Corrine Moore)

Angel et al. (2013) conducted a study on African American women aspiring to the superintendency and within this study their findings revealed a "necessity of preparedness" (p. 604). The preparedness was not only present in equipping oneself with knowledge prior to entering a meeting with construction companies, but also preparing oneself for the ascension to Deputy Chief in a large urban school district.

Strategically, Dr. Wendy Riley was preparing to do just that as she once again was being called on by her mentor to have a bigger impact on the educational process. Dr. Wendy Riley began to change her thought process in terms of her career. She explained, "I began to craft my paradigm in terms of my career; look at everything as an opportunity." It was liberating to hear that when faced with what they perceived to be challenges or barriers to their superintendency, each participant shared a variety of strategies that they employed to overcome the challenges and barriers. Listed in Table 5.3 are the various strategies that each participant used as a way to overcome barriers or address challenges.

Table 5.3

Strategies Used by African American Female Superintendents in the State of Ohio

Participants	Strategies
Dr. Wendy Riley	To be mindful that you can't let people perceive you as being angry therefore the message gets lost. (Barriers)
	You have got to get the message over and if it takes you to water down your emotions, your passion doing that because you just think you are hitting it and people feel your heart and spirit. (Barriers)
	To navigate and infiltrate the good ole' boys club because I need them to see me as their colleague and as colleagues (Barriers)
	[As] you getting louder I am getting softer. I am not going to over talk you and I can't over power you; my power is in my pen. I am going to bring my voice level down. (Challenges)
	Resiliency, the wisdom earned, lesson learned; when knocked down learn how to get back up. (Successes)

(continued)

Table 5.3

Strategies Used by African American Female Superintendents in the State of Ohio

(continued)

Participants	Strategies
Dr. Diane Taylor	With me it was establishing a room within the room, establishing credibility. (Lived Experiences) Don't be afraid of the experience; stay grounded and honor each other and other people (Successes)
Supt. Corrine Moore	I really don't let outside forces influence me negatively. If I have set my mind to do something and achieve it; I am pretty straight-forward, in terms of turning barriers into successes. Which is why I think I have survived so long in this position. (Barriers) I stay focused on my agenda, which sounds a lot easier than it really is. It requires a lot of self-talk, a whole lot of prayer. (Barriers) When I have really, really hard days, I will go visit a school, see children on a playground, go in classrooms; I get re-focused. (Barriers) The more frustrated I become the lower my voice gets. I am not the one you are going to hear down the hall I am very deliberate in my speech, in my presentation. I am forthright but I am very cognoscente of that because the way that I say things are always going to be; I believe they are under a microscope. Which in my experiences it is not always the case with males. (Barriers) Forging positive relationships with my unions and my parents. (Successes) Stay knowledgeable; professional development for the latest things in education (Successes)
Supt. Mary Thompson	All the networking I can do, there are very few Black female superintendents but the few that there are [network](Barriers) Whenever I can support people who aspire to be in this kind of role that look like me, I do that. I do my very best to try hire people that look like me that want to be in leadership roles. If I cast the net and expand the net and try to get other folks who look like me, who want to be in this, then maybe it will be them. (Barriers) I have strong core values and believe that I should lead with the kids in mind first (Successes)

Styles of Leadership

The participants in this study were asked to describe their leadership style. Three

out of the four participants identified their leadership style as being situational and one

participant described her leadership style as being visionary. Although each participant

provided a description of their leadership style, situational leadership was present in all of

the descriptions. Situational leadership is a style of leadership that is most effective when

a leader is able to change his or her leadership approach to meet the needs of the employees (Hersey & Blanchard, 1988; Northouse, 2010). Superintendent Moore had this to say, "My leadership style, I would describe is situational. Looking at a given situation or given employee and tapping into how I would need to lead that person." Dr. Diane Taylor included situational leadership in her description but made it clear that her leadership style is visionary. In her description, Dr. Wendy Riley not only describes her leadership style as situational but she also added servant leadership to the description.

Transformational Leadership

As each participant described her leadership style or styles, it was surprising that one participant included servant leadership and another participant had hoped that her leadership is transformational in terms of people buying into her vision. It seemed as though the participants would have spoken more about being transformational and servant leaders coupled with situational leadership. The fact that this did not happen was interesting because as the participants answered questions that focused on their lived experiences, both servant leadership and transformational leadership resonated throughout these experiences. One participant made reference to transformational leadership but in her discussion, she implied that male superintendents lean more toward describing themselves as transformational leaders and female superintendents are more nurturers as leaders. According to Alston and McClellan (2011), this is just the opposite and that the transformational style of leadership at times is closely related to a more "feminine" style of leadership.

The terms that they used to describe their leadership style as situational or visionary could easily fit into the definition of transformational leadership. For example,

when Superintendent Moore shared that she will listen, help guide, and if need be, pray

for her employees because "if you are successful, my students are successful."

Transformational leaders are concerned about the emotions, values, ethics, standards, and

long-term goals of the individual or organization (Northouse, 2010). As she spoke a need

for change in her district, Dr. Diane Taylor exhibited attributes being a change agent. In

the following statement not only is she a change agent but also because she has concern

for all students, this African American female superintendent is a transformational leader

(Alston & McClellan, 2011; Brown, 2014; Northouse, 2010).

> They want you to be the face of things and what I have pushed was that I'm going
>
> to be the face but the plan is going to be something that we work on together. So
>
> one of the first things that I did was start on a five-year strategic plan. That's the
>
> first thing we did here and part of that plan was; here's where we are
>
> academically; here's where we are financially, and in order to sustain that we
>
> cannot go further. So, I brought together communities, students and parents and
>
> we worked for six months on a five-year strategic plan which included an equity
>
> goal. (Dr. Diane Taylor)

Even though the responsibility of the transformational leader is to introduce the

initiatives that will bring about change, but in the end the followers need to express their

true desires for change (Alston & McClellan, 2011). Dr. Taylor was not only able to

bring about change by influencing the community, but also she was able to display her

ability to be "self-effacing, stimulating others to put forth their best efforts rather than

making [herself] too active or prominent" (Brawley as cited in Alston, 2008).

The community wanted that, they said we believe that this district has not focused on equity and there are a lot of inequities; so our go to is equity. So, we put the plan together and it as a new mission. We came up with a decision-making criteria of how we are going to make decisions in this district, even our core values. It was even important to the community that we established some consistency in programming for all students. So, that really gave me the opportunity to say if I am going to focus on inequities then the focus is on the goal and not Diane Taylor's focus. The plan cannot be Diane's plan it has to be something that we all agree on and come together; something we can live with and it has to outlive Diane. I had the Board adopt the strategic plan. I was able to push for an equity policy. So we are the only district in the county who has an equity policy. (Dr. Diane Taylor)

Personal characteristics of transformational leaders are "strong moral values and a desire to influence" (Northouse, 2010, p. 174). The participants in this study possess these characteristics and it became evident has they shared different facets of their lived experiences as African American female superintendents. Superintendent Mary Thompson attributed her success as a superintendent to her strong core values and belief in leading with keeping students as the priority. Both Superintendent Thompson and Dr. Taylor expressed a desire to influence others who look like them that aspire to be superintendents. Dr. Taylor hopes to accomplish this by being an example of someone who is not only doing the hard job of being a superintendent but also doing it well. Superintendent Thompson shared that she makes it a goal to hire people who look like

her who want to be in leadership roles. This was shared as one of her strategies for addressing the small network of African American female superintendents.

Servant Leadership

The primary focus of the servant leader is to serve first then to lead (Alston, 2005; Alston & McClellan 2011; Northouse, 2010). The servant leader is someone who naturally wants to serve first and then aspirations to lead become a conscious choice (Greenleaf, n.d.). Servant leaders focus their attention on the needs of others first, by assuring that "people's highest priority needs are being served," (Greenleaf, n.d.). While sharing their lived experiences, the participants revealed characteristics of being servant leaders. However, just as seen with transformational leadership, only one of the participants included servant leadership in her description of her leadership style.

As Dr. Riley is describing her leadership style under the pretense of a situational leader, she is also describing herself as a servant leader:

> I am a consensus builder; great team maker, situational; I lead as a servant and I think that is how I would describe it. We get more [accomplished] together, than if it were everyone just did their independent job. I appreciate the human capital that I have; people know that I genuinely care and love them like they are my own and that speaks volumes to people. People work hard when they know that someone notices and someone cares. (Dr. Wendy Riley)

The servant leader values everyone's involvement in community life because it is within a community that one fully experiences respect, trust, and individual strength (Northouse, 2010, p. 385). As African American female superintendents, it became clear through the discussions of their lived experiences that all the participants in this study are

servant leaders. They put the needs of others before their own and demonstrate to others that they care about their overall well-being. As a servant leader, the African American female superintendent is willing to take risks to lead in poorly managed and maintained urban school districts that have a high minority population (Alston, 2005; Alston & McClellan 2011; Jackson 1999). Based upon the information provided in Table 3.1, which details the school district typology, it is evident that the participants in this study have taking on the task of working in urban and suburban school districts that have a high population of minority students.

One of the emergent themes that surfaced in the findings lends to the discussion surrounding the participants in this study demonstrating attributes of a servant leader. Each participant shared that an advantage that they had as African American female superintendents was being able to develop the relationships with their community, parents, and students. This being primarily because they are African Americans serving in a predominately African American school district, and in the case of one participant a 100% African American school district. As one of the primary concern of servant leaders, these participants demonstrate a "social responsibility [with their concern for] the 'least privileged' and [how they are able] to recognize them as equal stakeholders in the life of the organization" (Alston & McClellan, 2011, p.58; Choudhary et al., 2013; Northouse, 2010, p. 385). Each participant shared how making education equitable for all students was a major priority and that being an advocate for disadvantaged students, impoverished students, and minority students was a major focus for them in their roles as superintendent.

The servant leadership of each participant in this study is shown through their dedication to the education and well-being of the children (Alston, 2005). Through dialogue around what she considered to be contributors to her success, Superintendent Moore stated very candidly that it is her commitment, dedication, and love for her children [students]. Continuing with Superintendent Moore's candidness:

I am here for the children and everybody here knows that because I say that all the time, *I'm here for children; I'm not here for grown folk*. Grown folk help me accomplish what it is I am trying to do. So I need you to help me reach my goals; but my primary reason and focus in the schools is the children.

This same premise was found in a variety of the participants' discussions about their lived experiences. Dr. Diane Taylor explained:

When people understand that there are some non-negotiables and in this role it is about kids. We are a kid-centered organization. We even have a cabinet mission and our cabinet mission is to make sure the decisions that we are making are kid-centered decisions. We are here for the kids because if it wasn't for the kids we wouldn't be in these positions.

Their overall dedication to students and improving the educational process for all students was a topic that threaded through many of their answers to questions that brought forth their lived experiences. An importance message for all the participants in this study to convey was that their primary focus as the superintendent is the concern for the development of the whole student. Dr. Wendy Riley expressed she focuses on the whole student. Something she feels is a common trait among women leaders, which is

supported by literature. Alston (2005) stated that as servant leaders, "female superintendent tend to . . . dedicate themselves to the care of children" (pp. 681-682).

> I'm building whole healthy humans, there is no measurement for that; but I know when it is being done and when it is not. So we are going to play the game, we will shoot for the A. We are going to get 70% to pass, but are our kids healthy, happy, whole and are they learning to the best of their ability; that's the difference with us [women]. (Dr. Wendy Riley)

As the participants in this study shared their lived experiences, a strong sense of faith and belief in God surfaced. As servant leaders, the African American female superintendents in this study demonstrated a strong belief in God (Alston, 2005). The participants believed that they have a purpose and a calling from God in their lives to serve as the superintendents of their school districts. They attributed their successes as superintendents to their faith and spiritual connection to God. Prayer is something that Superintendent Corrine Moore spoke about on two different occasions. The first is when she shared a strategy for overcoming barriers. The second time that she brought up prayer was when she spoke about supporting her staff and when requested by a staff member, she would be willing to pray with him or her. The idea of prayer as a way to address barriers or troubled situations promotes the message that, "And whatever things you ask in prayer, believing, you will receive," (Matthew 21:22 New King James Version).

The belief that God opens doors and assigns people to various tasks can be found in various scriptures throughout the Bible. On her journey to the superintendency, Dr. Wendy Riley put her faith in God and trusted His will for her life as she pursued her career as a superintendent. Hebrews 10:36 (New King James Version) says, "For you

have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise." When Dr. Diane Taylor shared that she was "ordained [by God]" to be the superintendent of her district, that "God closes and opens doors," she is referencing two different scriptures from the Bible. Revelations 3:8 (New King James Version) addresses the idea that only God can open and shut doors, ". . . I have set before you an open door, and no one can shut it." In reference to being "ordained" to be the superintendent, she draws on the scripture Psalms 37:23 (New King James Version), "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord and He delights in his way."

Leadership Implications

It has already been stated that the position of superintendent has been a gender bias, male-dominated position (Alston, 2005; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). That does not mean it has to remain that way. Through the development of the leadership training programs and improved hiring practices among school boards and search firms, African American female superintendents can contribute to closing the gender bias superintendency gap. Universities claim to promote diversity and want to increase social justices, but the daily activities and functions of the university perpetuate the "good ole boy" network (Alston, 1999; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). When the participants in this case study spoke about the "good ole boy" network, it was in reference to it being a challenge and at times a barrier to the position of superintendent, because search firms were a part of this networking system.

Women should have equal access to leadership positions within "formal structures," like the superintendency; which have been historically "systematically advantageous to men" (Levac, 2008, p. 41). The research from this case study indicated

that search firms can be a barrier for African American female superintendents, primarily,

because of the role they play in who they present as a candidate for the superintendency

to school boards. The research has shown that African American women are often

excluded from the selection process. The barrier is not in the application and interviewing

portion of the recruitment process but the 'problem lies in the decisions made by those in

power' (Brown, 2014, p. 577). It is from the abovementioned points that leadership

implications are presented in the areas of superintendent training programs, search firms,

and school boards.

Leadership Implications for Superintendent Training Programs

The literature suggested that colleges and universities have shown a lack of

commitment toward diversifying their superintendent training programs (Tillman &

Cochran, 2000). Therefore, a leadership implication for superintendent training programs

is for there to be a more diversified recruitment process. It is suggested that indicators be

in place to monitor the number of women of color admitted into these training programs.

This recruitment process should be re-evaluated yearly to address any cultural differences

or gender-biases that may impede women and women of color from entering into the

training program.

With a large portion of women excluded from literature, an assumption is made

that educational leaders are male (Alston & McClellan, 2011). This perpetuated flaw

needs to be challenged by the superintendent training programs. It is recommended that

the superintendent training programs include literature that reflect the educational

leadership experiences of women and women of color. The course work in administration

or educational leadership programs naturally reflects the White male perspective but is a

disservice to African American women entering the field of educational leadership because the experience and perspective is different for women of color (Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000). A leadership implication for superintendent training programs is to incorporate literature authored by women and women of color within the curriculum. In addition to this, it is recommended that superintendent training programs have existing African American, Latino, and Asian female superintendents share their perspectives and lived experiences with both male and female aspiring superintendents.

As an avenue toward closing the gap of a male-dominated industry, it is also suggested that superintendent training programs should prepare aspiring African American women in the area of "self-recruitment and self-retention" (Brown, 2014, p. 583). Superintendent training programs should develop curriculums that teach women of color various ways of how to market themselves so that they can be considered for superintendent positions. Rooted within the concept of self-recruitment and self-retention are the concepts of mentoring and support networks, which are also strategies of success for African American women who aspire to be superintendents (Alston, 1999, 2000; Anderson, 2000; Brown, 2014; Brunner & Peyton-Caire, 2000; Tillman & Cochran, 2000). As a result of this information, it is recommended that superintendent training programs provide African American women with mentors. The superintendent training program should have the resources to connect aspiring African American female superintendents with other superintendents. There should be an assertive effort on the part of the superintendent training program to connect aspiring African American female superintendents with other African American female superintendents or women of color in educational leadership.

Lastly, staying in the vein of self-retention and self-recruitment, it is suggested that the superintendent training programs teach aspiring African American female superintendents not to rely on search firms to make the connections. This means instruction in the area of how to make the appropriate connections and how to effectively communicate with people in order to be recruited by school districts (Brown, 2014). This will afford the aspiring African American female superintendent the opportunity to present herself to a school board and bypass the search firms.

Implications for Search Firms

The participants shared their perspective of the role of the search firm and how it may can hinder the hiring process for African American females aspiring to be superintendent. Many search consultants are a part of a good ole' boy networking system, which is a "decided disadvantage" for women aspiring to become superintendents (Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999; Miller et al., 2006). This network continues to isolate women from the possibilities of promotion (Alston, 2000; Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999). Therefore, a recommendation is given to search firms to make a consciuous effort to encourage, include, and promote African American females who aspire to be superintendents.

It is important that search firms become more diverse in their selection of candidates to present to school boards for prospective superintendents. One participant in this study shared that she believes that because the majority of search firms are owned by White men that they search for what is familiar to them, other White men. With that being said, it is recommended that search firms conduct culture and diversity training for

their employees. This would allow for the members of the search firm to become more familiar with a diverse population of qualified candidates to present to school boards.

Implications for School Boards

Based upon the literature and data found in this study, the African American female superintendent is able to transform, cultivate, and lead successful school districts. With so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio it is an implication of this study that school boards make an asserted effort to hire African American female superintendents. The participants in the study revealed that one of the reasons why they feel as though there are so few African American female superintendents is because of the existing glass ceiling. In order for aspiring African American female superintendents to move beyond this existing glass ceiling it is recommended that school boards require that the search firms present to the board a diverse population of qualified candidates, which should include more African American female candidates. An additional recommendation for school boards to ruminate is a provision that will help support the sustainability of the superintendent. After hiring a newly appointed African American female superintendent, it is recommended that the school board offer a diverse selection of mentors who will strengthen her ability to successfully lead their school district.

Implications for Aspiring African American Female Superintendents

As the participants in this study shared their lived experiences, several items began to resonate as recommendations for aspiring African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. The findings revealed that establishing mentors and constructing a network is essential to the success of an African American female

superintendent. Therefore, it is a recommendation that an aspiring African American female superintendent seek out a mentor or mentors. As shared by the participant, this may be someone who motivates the aspiring superintendent to make a bigger impact on the educational process. It is important to note that the research also revealed that because there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, finding a mentor who looks like her may be difficult. However, an African American male, Caucasian male or female are viable options because the key is to have someone who will impart information, model the way, and encourage fortitude.

The participants in this study shared that the absence of African American women leaders within different networking systems is not only challenging but also discouraging. Dr. Diane Taylor disclosed that although there are networks that have been established for women in leadership, there still remains a deficit in the presences of African American women within these networks. Therefore, in addition to identifying mentors, it is also recommended that aspiring African American female superintendents join networks that acknowledge and embrace the contributions of African American female leaders in education. However, based upon the research from this study, finding a network such as this may be difficult. In the event that a network such as this cannot be found, it is suggested that an aspiring African American female superintendent not only begin to create her own network, but also seek out those networks that support the endeavors and experiences of both women educational leaders and African American male educational leaders. This is recommended because according to the findings of this study, the African American female superintendent can find some level of comfort within a network of African American male superintendents.

The participants in this study all exhibited an ability to tackle challenges and barriers with a strategic planning and preparedness. The strategies that the participants of this study used to overcome barriers and face different challenges is presented in Table 5.2. When confronted with similar challenges and barriers, it is recommended that an aspiring African American female superintendent incorporate some of aforementioned strategies within her already existing repertoire of strategies. Another recommendation for aspiring African American female superintendents is to understand the necessity of preparedness. For most of the participants within this study, preparedness could be considered a strategy for addressing gender biases. Three of the participants shared that when encountering constructions companies or contractors, they felt a necessity to be prepared. This feeling existed primarily because there was a prevailing assumption that as women they would not be familiar with the terminology of different construction projects.

In another case found within this study, the strategy of preparedness is suggested when completing the application process to becoming a superintendent. This study revealed that the application process toward becoming a superintendent can be challenging, intimidating, and strenuous. One participant, Dr. Diane Taylor, shared that this was a challenge for her. She suggested that one of the reasons there are so few African American female superintendents was because of the application process. Dr. Taylor advised that aspiring African American female superintendents receive some coaching to help them navigate through the application process. Therefore, it is recommended that aspiring African American female superintendents seek out the

assistance of a superintendent who would be willing to coach her through the application and interviewing process toward becoming a superintendent.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following are recommendations for future research:

- It is recommended that future research focus on the topic of benevolent sexism and the belief systems of women and women of color in educational leadership as it pertains to sexism and the stereotypical role of women in leadership. Is there a belief among women and women of color that being in a position of leadership is counter to a woman's natural gender role in society and that leadership is more natural to men because of the religious belief that they are considered to be the head? What role does religion and background play in this belief?

- Additional research should take place not only in the area of the lived experiences of African American female superintendents but also in the area of the lived experiences of Latino and Asian female superintendents.

- An annual quantitative study should be done that collects and reports data on the number of women of color who are currently serving as superintendents, the demographics of their school districts, the population of students within the school districts, community contributions, and the longevity of the superintendent.

- Even with the odds stacked up against them, women of color continue to pursue positions as superintendents. Research should be conducted to examine the resiliency of women of color in educational leadership and their motivation to crack the glass ceiling.

Conclusion

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. One conclusion is the participants in this case study research were faced with different challenges and barriers as they journeyed toward the superintendency. Along the way they encountered stifling gender biases; duality is unavoidable; proving their competency is constant; higher standards are expected and cultural differences are not always accepted. As the participants shared their perspectives on topics such as the successes of an African American female superintendent; what are some advantages and disadvantages; and reasons why there are so few of them in the state of Ohio, the conclusions were extensive and insightful. For example, an advantage for an African American female superintendent is being African American. Because she is African American, her lived experiences have prepared her to be an advocate for the disadvantaged student, for increasing the representation of girls in STEM programs, for filling the advanced placement classes with minority students, and for equitable education for all students.

Unfortunately, a disadvantage that also proved to be a challenge and a barrier is the search firm. It can be concluded from the findings of this study that search firms can directly affect the career path of an aspiring African American female superintendent. More times than not, the African American female superintendent is not presented as a likely candidate for most superintendent positions. Fortunately, the participants within this study were not affected by an inhibiting search firm.

One conclusion from what the participants attribute to their success as superintendents was undoubtingly their spiritual foundation. Each participant expressed that their belief and faith in God is the reason for their accomplishments. Along with their

spiritual rootedness, the participants of this study shared the importance of having mentors and establishing networks. With the realization that there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio, the idea of networks although is a disadvantage for most African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. There is an understanding of the importance of networks.

The participant presented a variety of reason why she felt there are so few African American female superintendents in the state Ohio. The "why bother" statement seemed to surface the most. For example, "why bother" with the unfairness of accountability; "why bother" with the glass ceiling; "why bother" with the politics and demands, and "why bother" with choosing career over family or even having a family. Nevertheless, the superintendents in this study demonstrated that although there may be the question of "why bother," they have chosen to be the leaders of their school districts, displaying their ability to be transformational, visionary, servant and situational leaders.

Lastly, the lived experiences of the participants in this study expounded the strategies necessary for overcoming barriers, facing challenges, or striving for success. It also goes without question that these African American female superintendents exhibited a necessity for preparedness. In the end, the resiliency of the African American female superintendent in the state of Ohio allows her to place the focus on the whole student, ensuring that every student receives a quality, equitable education, that prepares the student for the global community.

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APPENDIX A

REQUEST TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH

Request to Participate in the Research

The following correspondence was sent to each participant via email requesting her participation in the case study.

(Participant),
My name is Tonya M. Walker and I am conducting a case study research on the career paths, lived experiences, barriers and perspectives of African-American female superintendents in the state of Ohio. I am reaching out to you requesting your participation in my research. I am excited about the opportunity to speak with you as I attempt to close the gap in the literature on African American female superintendents.

Please consider my request for your participation in this research. As an African American female in school administration and aspiring to one day become a superintendent, I am excited and wait in anticipation for the opportunity to speak with you.

Attached to this email are the first three chapters of my dissertation, my approved HSRB application, the consent letter and interview protocol (interview questions). Please let me know if there is anything else that I will need to provide.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tonya M. Walker

APPENDIX B

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

"The Career Paths, Barriers, Lived Experiences and Perceptions of African American Female Superintendents in the State of Ohio"

A. PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND

Tonya Walker, principle investigator, is conducting this research study to provide literature that will contribute to closing the gap in the literature on the career paths, lived experiences, perceptions and barriers of African American female superintendents. The focus of this study will be the career paths, lived experiences, perceptions, attitudes, successes and barriers of African-American female superintendents in the state of Ohio.

B. PROCEDURES

C. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There is no physical risk to participants of this study. The participants will be given pseudo names to protect their privacy. To ensure the best level of comfort for the participants, the interviews will be conducted at a location chosen by the participants. Participants will review interview material for the study, and will be provided with the opportunity, if they wish, to comment on the transcribed interview.

D. BENEFITS

By participating in this research, you will contribute to the literature on career paths, lived experiences, perceptions and barriers of African American female superintendents.

E. COSTS

There will be no cost to you as a result of taking part in this study.

F. PAYMENT

There is no compensation for your participation in this study.

G. QUESTIONS

If a research-related injury occurs, or if you have questions about the research, please first contact Dr. Judy Alston, 226 Dwight Schar College of Education, (419) 207-4983. If for some reason you do not wish to do this, you may contact the Human Subjects Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects, by calling (419) 207-6198 between 8:00AM and 5:00PM, Monday through Friday.

H. CONSENT

You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep. Additionally, a copy of the interview protocol (questions) will have been provided to you prior to signing this

informed consent form. Please indicate, by signing your initials on the space provided below, that you have been given a copy of the interview protocol to review.

_____   I certify that a copy of the interview protocol (questions) have been given to me. I have reviewed the proposed interview rubric and consent to this line of questions.

I voluntarily decided to participate in this research project. The investigator named above has adequately answered all questions that I have about this research, the procedures involved, and my participation. I understand that the investigator named above will be available to answer any questions about experimental procedures throughout this research. I also understand that I may refuse to participate or voluntarily terminate my participation in this research at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am entitled. The investigator may also terminate my participation in this research if she feels this to be in my best interest. In addition, I certify that I am 18 (eighteen) years of age or older.

_____   _____
Date   Signature of Study Participant

_____   _____
Date   Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

1. Explain and describe your career path toward becoming a superintendent.

    a. Was it always a goal or did it develop into a goal because of an experience that you encountered during your educational career?

2. Explain and describe some barriers that you faced as you journeyed toward becoming a superintendent.

    a. How were you able to overcome those barriers while becoming a superintendent?

3. What are some barriers that you currently encounter as an African American female superintendent?

    a. What tools or strategies are you using to address these current barriers?

4. Explain and describe some of your experiences as an African American female superintendent.

    a. Has there ever been a time in your career as a superintendent where your felt that race and/or gender had an effect on how people responded to you?

5. What have you found to be the most challenging about your position as an African American female superintendent?

6. What are some advantages and/or disadvantages of being an African American female superintendent?

7. What do you contribute to your success as a superintendent?

8. Is it beneficial for the African American female superintendent to have a mentor or mentors?

    a. Do you currently have a mentor or mentors? If so, is he or she, or they male, female or both? Are they the same race as you?

9. Describe your style of leadership style.

10. Why do you think there are so few African American female superintendents in the state of Ohio