

The Lived Experiences of African American Female Superintendents

A dissertation presented to
the faculty of
The Patton College of Education of Ohio University

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Education

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April 2016

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Abstract

MASON, PATRESE A., Ed.D., April 2016, Educational

Administration The Lived Experiences of African American Female

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The superintendency is the most male-dominated position in education (Alston, 2000; Brunner, 2000). Statistical data report disproportionality in the number of African American women who have obtained superintendency. Women, particularly African American women, have continued to obtain certification and fulfill degree requirements, yet often do not ascend to the position of superintendency (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

This research study focuses on the phenomenon of the underrepresentation of African American women in the position of superintendency. This qualitative study examined the lived experiences of six African American females in the role of K-12 public superintendent. Three research questions guided the study and were centered around the participants' perceptions of superintendency, the impact of race and gender on their role and strategies for the aspiring superintendent. The study was conducted through the use of semi-structured interviews with African American women superintendents in the United States. Bandura's theory, critical race theory and Black feminist thought were utilized as frameworks to better understand participants' lived experiences as superintendents. The results of the study yielded three emergent themes: (a) stereotypes, (b) positionality and (c) mentorship relationships. Through the voices of study participants, their experiences as public school superintendents provide a

comprehensive perspective for aspiring superintendents, hiring consultants, school boards, educational leadership programs and policy makers.

Prologue

As a young black girl born in the 1970s and having grown up in the projects in South Carolina, times were tough. I was known as the little girl who one day would “make it out.” My grades were not great, my constant displacement in homes was becoming natural and the regular visits by the local police at our front door had become the norm. Yet, I knew there was more to what I saw, tasted, smelled, and experienced. I believed that I could have the education, the home and the resources like the White people I saw on the other side of town. I dreamed of California, Paris, and any place that would take me from where I was. Believing would have been easier if I could have seen someone that looked like me. As an elementary and middle school student, I recall walking miles to reach the White rich neighborhoods, knocking on doors and bidding for odd jobs to help buy food and pay the gas and electric bill. In the end, sometimes it just wasn’t enough. I pulled weeds, cleaned toilets, washed cars, babysat and harvested gardens for much too little pay. I often witnessed my mother working hard, with great pride to clean a White woman’s very large home for \$20. She dreamed of getting her GED. She was often expected to ascribe to the stereotypes of African American women during that era and geographical location. On our side of town, the most prized status was that of a high-school degree, an entry-level full-time job, a working vehicle and a place to call home. On my side of town, the goal was simple: survive. Little has changed today.

My memories of marching behind KKK on Main Street as a child in protest who was seen on the local news remain vivid. I was scrutinized for possibly having caused more trouble for the “colored” community. My courage as a child has only matured as a

women. I believe that it is critical for our nation to stand on truth, and it begins with each individual. This dissertation is pursued with the intention of bringing light and movement to a necessary area affecting our education: the presence of African American female educational leaders, particularly superintendents. Where are they? What is being done to ensure their ascension to the most male-dominated position in education?

My hope is that this study will uncover answers and empower those who read it to march with me in truth. I am the same little Black girl who has overcome a multitude of obstacles that few can relate. My pursuit remains the same: to shift my life in a vastly different direction from anything I saw as a child and to make contributions to the lives of others that will propel them both personally and professionally.

Dedication

I dedicate and attribute my success and doctoral journey to The Holy Spirit.

Acknowledgments

Thank you, Lord, for granting me the desire, grace and fortitude to begin and finish this dissertation journey. I am speechless over your comfort, guidance and favor. When I consider your goodness, I am filled with gratefulness, worship and praise.

To my four guys: thank you. LTC David Mason, Jr., my husband of nearly 24 years, I appreciate everything you have done to contribute to my personal and professional development. I love you. God gave me the best when he gave you to me. Thank you, SPC David Mason III, my wonderful son and favorite 22-year-old in the entire world. I am so proud to be your mother and honored to be your friend. I love you. Thank you PFC Patrick E. Mason, my wonderful son and favorite 18-year-old in the entire world. I am so proud to be your mother and honored to be your friend. I love you. David and Patrick, you are both an amazing, anointed gift from God. Continue to seek Him first and everything else will follow. Thank you, Basil, my K-9 friend, our family would be incomplete without you. You are an amazing trooper. Each of you keep me laughing, praying, reflecting and cooking! ☺

To the women who shared their experiences willingly and sacrificially, thank you. You are trailblazers who inspire and empower others. I pray for your continued success.

I extend my gratitude to my dissertation committee: Dr. Yegan Pillay, thank you for agreeing to be my chairperson in the middle of the dissertation process and after such tremendous transition with my prior committee and our college. Dr. Krisanna L. Machtmes, my committee member, methodologist and newly appointed department chair, I will not forget the day I met you on one of the coldest Saturdays in Athens. My

conversation with you was the beginning to making it through the end. Dr. Dwan V. Robinson, my committee member, thank you for your kind, gentle, consistent and inspirational strength. You have been a light at the end of the tunnel. Dr. Ginger Weade, my dean's representative, your smile just makes me think that I can conquer the world. I was always intrigued by your feedback and how it often mirrored what I had considered doing to extend my research. Thank you. Dr. David Moore, my previous department chair, for your encouragement and guidance. Keep your passion for research and students.

To my parents Mother Eatha S. Wells and the late John Henry Wells, Jr., thank you for instilling in me a strong work ethic at an early age. I appreciate everything you have done to contribute to my success. To my in-laws, Myrtis Perry Mason and the late David Mason, Sr., I appreciate everything you have done and continue to do to support my efforts, thank you.

To my church family, thank you for your continued encouragement, prayers and for being our Ohio family. Thank you to each of my family members and friends who offered a kind word or gesture to encourage and support the completion of this dissertation. You reminded me of my authority in Christ through prayer and shared unwavering laughter throughout the writing process. I encourage each of you to continue to press forward with your gifts, talent and anointing. Go and conquer in His name!

Finally, I thank every individual who extended kindness and unconditional love to contribute to my basic needs and my inner strength as a child to help me become a strong African American God-fearing woman. May God's favor and amazing grace cover you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make, which over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee (Edelman, 1989, p. 102).

Marian Wright Edelman's (1989) words undoubtedly resonate with other women who have made a difference in American history. The life experiences of Edelman, founder and president of the Children's Defense Fund, includes that of being a black female lawyer in Mississippi. She is the first African American woman admitted to the Mississippi state bar and began practicing at the height of the Civil Rights Movement. Her words on making a difference is what she and so many other African American female leaders have done over time. In 1939, educator, activist, reformer, bestselling author and administrator Edelman was born in and grew up just miles from my home in Bennettsville, South Carolina. Since that time, she and many others have shared their life experiences in an effort to pave new opportunities for women and minorities.

Edelman is known for her strong effectiveness and tenacity as a lobbyist, her consistent passion for children and her use of statistics to demonstrate the extent of a crisis (Leeman, 1996). From her courageous beginnings in the South to address the plight of struggling African Americans to her premier children's advocacy organization to educate a nation, Edelman's ability to lead has earned her more than 100 honorary degrees and numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian award. Today, similar to the few African American females who make it to the position of superintendency, Edelman has inspired others with experiences to make a remarkable contribution that have shifted our nation in a better direction.

Historically and across the world, great women like Edelman have broken new ground as trailblazers, legacy builders and pioneers in social change, political advocacy, world peace, and education (King, 1998). Such women have made it possible for an African American female candidate to be within reach of running for and becoming president of the United States. Yet, we have few African American females serving as leaders of public school districts, even though the U.S. is deemed one of the most ethnically diverse educational systems in the world (Glass, 2000).

Background of the Problem

Although African American women are represented as teachers, currently African American women represent the smallest number of educational leaders in the country (Gao, 2006; Kamler, 2006; Shields, 2005a, b) and are especially underrepresented as superintendents. A report from the American Association of School Administrators (2008) reported that 21% of public school superintendents in the U.S. were female but only 2% were African American females (see also Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

In a country with one of the most ethnically diverse educational systems in the world, it is unclear why there is less diversity among women in top leadership roles than among their male counterparts (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Women are overrepresented in the teaching profession and within university professional programs that are intended to prepare them as teachers, but are underrepresented as leaders of public school districts (Glass, 2000). Although policies are in place to address equal opportunities for employment in education, and although some U.S. public school districts have experienced small growth in the number of female administrators at the

district-office level, this growth has not occurred among superintendents (Brunner, 2000). There are still fewer females than males in leadership positions (Brunner, 2000), and especially the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Gewertz, 2006). Female superintendents have increased significantly since 1992 to 2000, but males continue to dominate 86% of superintendency (Kowalski, 2006). In fact, the U.S. Department of Labor has described superintendency as the most gender-stratified executive position in the country (Young & Skrla, 2003).

Superintendents of schools are expected to be instructional leaders and visionaries in school reform improve student achievement (Shakeshaft, 1989). Throughout our nation, superintendents (often referred to as chief school administrators) not only have executive oversight and administrative powers within an educational entity or organization but are faced with juggling a multifaceted job description. These areas include: (a) increasing student achievement, (b) maintaining buildings and grounds, (c) managing multi-million dollar district budgets and (d) acting as community liaisons. Such a complex and demanding role contributes to the notion of women's not being able to fulfill the role.

According to Tallerico (2000), "powerful invisible influences within the educational system, the administrator profession, and society reflect and reinforce long standing tradition of Caucasian male leadership of American Institutions" (p. 81). These influences are believed to be largely invisible. Over time, the superintendency position has been considered by society as one more fitting for a man (Skrla, 2000b) best occupied by those having characteristics thought to be held by males (Johnson, 1996; Skrla,

2000b). Women have faced multiple barriers such as gender bias, sex-role stereotyping, non-diverse school boards, lack of preparation and the fair opportunity to balance life and work (Alston, 1999, Blount, 1998). Beyond gender, “White women retain White privilege while women of color do not hold a color privilege suggesting that African American women’s experiences are similar in some ways to women in general, but different from the experiences of other women (Bloom and Erlandson, 2003, p. 23).”

Yet, the demographics of U.S. schools have changed. Public school students who belong to a racial or ethnic minority group increased from 22% in 1972 to 43% in 2006 and a decrease from 78% to 57% in White students enrolled (Planty et al., 2008).

Unfortunately, the demographics of school superintendents have changed little to match student demographics. “In the 2007-8 school year, only 17.6% of superintendents (both male and female) in U.S. schools were from minority backgrounds; 6.2% were minorities in small towns; in rural areas, 9.3% were minorities (Battle and Gruber, 2009, p. 127)”.

According to the National Alliance of Black School Educators (2010), currently out of the nationwide total of 14,559 superintendents, only 366 African Americans (137 women and 218 men) are serving as public school superintendents across the U.S. and the Caribbean. The diversity in superintendents does not match the diversity of our nation or of public school students. Our nation and the world that students live in is one of diversity. Therefore, the leadership of their schools ought to be diverse as well.

Although some policy makers believe that superintendents from any background easily empathize with students of other cultural and ethnic backgrounds, studies suggest otherwise (Alston, 1999; Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp, Malone, Walter, &

Supley, 2004; Tallerico, 2000). It is suggested that minority superintendents tend to understand a students' home and personal environment more, thus determining a suitable rewards or consequences (Carr, 1995; Reitzug & Patterson, 1998).

Over the last few centuries women's positions and opportunities in the educational arena have generally improved dramatically. Education has not only been linked to individual benefits such as intellectual, financial, psychological) that accrue to college graduates (Miller-Bernal 2000) but has also been linked to greater economic and social stability both for men and women as part of the common good. However, these opportunities have not transformed into leadership roles for women, and specifically African America women. The history of black women in higher education in the U.S. has always been a lesson in courage, persistence and overcoming adversity (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009). For more than 170 years, African American women in the United States have claimed their rights to an education and have courageously challenged the forces that tried to deny those rights (Taylor et al., 2009). In light of the changing demographics of U.S. schools, the need for diversity in leadership that features more African American in these roles cannot be overemphasized (Taylor et al., 2009).

The 2008 U.S. presidential election, which resulted in the appointment of President Barack Obama, the first African American president of the United States, offered an illustration of changing roles for race and gender for individuals aspiring for top leadership positions in the United States. In her concession speech in the Democratic primary race, presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton said:

It is now unremarkable for a woman to win primary state victories, unremarkable to have a woman in a close race to be our presidential nominee, unremarkable to

think that a woman can be the President of the United States. And that is truly remarkable. (Clinton, 2008, line 186)

It is no longer remarkable that an African American woman can be the leader of a school district. What is remarkable, however, is that African American women superintendents continue to be represented in low numbers all though they obtain the highest percentage of doctorates awarded to African Americans, including men (Johnson, 2012, p. 21).

African American women also have the highest percentage of doctorates awarded in education in the nation (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999).

At a critical time in the nations' educational system when a large proportion of superintendents are going to be retiring in the next 10 years, there is a need for more superintendents (Bjork & Keedy, 2009). The best and brightest educational leaders are going to be needed to lead change in the educational system (Orr, 2006). By conducting studies about the lived experiences of women in roles of leadership, researchers have attempted to discover how women can ascend to these positions (Blount, 1998).

In addition to these appalling statistics, as an African American female and educational leader, I have personally observed what appears to be a disproportionately low number of minority female superintendent candidates and superintendents. While well-credentialed educational leaders have communicated their attempts to break into the role of superintendent, they have faced invisible obstacles and unknown factors that continue to perplex them as to why they had not obtained superintendency, especially in light of racially diverse student demographics.

Underpinning of Study

As a result of studying the literature and of my personal observations and conversations with other African American female educational leaders, I sought to reach

a broader understanding of this phenomenon, and began to explore conducting a qualitative phenomenological study about the persistent underrepresentation of African American female public K-12 superintendents. A number of studies on the underrepresentation of women superintendents have suggested future research be conducted to capture African American female superintendents' voice on their lived experiences (Alston, 1999, 2000; Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 2000). I intended to make a contribution to social science as a researcher who placed herself in the research while having participants share their lived experiences.

Statement of the Problem

African American women continue to be underrepresented as superintendents although qualified candidates are available (Kowalski, 2006). Glass and Franceschini (2007) found that, in 2007, 21.7% of the 14,063 superintendents in the United States were women and only 2% were African American. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics (2007) revealed that a high percentage of U.S. teachers are females, but a low percentage of female teachers become superintendents. Women, particularly African American women, have worked in education and obtained certification as superintendents, but unfortunately are not ascending to superintendent positions (Glass & Franceschini, 2007) and are a small minority in the superintendency.

The literature regarding African American female superintendents also makes up only a small portion of the literature dedicated to superintendents in general. Little is known about African American female superintendents' ascension to superintendency, the barriers they faced, and the strategies they employed. It would even appear as though

this population of superintendents has been disregarded. The lack of data is problematic because researchers are unable accurately to develop and establish trends over periods of time (Shakeshaft, Brown, Irby, Grogan, & Ballenger, 2007). Additional studies must be conducted to understand these women's lived experiences. Tillman (2004) has also indicated that research about African American women is generally conducted by White researchers in predominantly White learning institutions. The researcher who conducted this study is African American, female, and an educator, and may bring additional sensitivity and insight to understanding participants' lived experiences.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American females in the position of K-12 public school superintendents, and to journal these experiences using the women's own voices. The study seeks to understand factors that contribute to African American women's obtaining and maintaining the role of superintendent; racial and gender barriers; and strategies that can aid in success. This study will ultimately provide understanding of what it means to be an African American woman superintendent and how she makes meaning of her role.

Theoretical Framework

Three theoretical frameworks were used in this study to examine the experiences of African American females in the role of superintendent. Critical race theory (Bell, 2000), Black feminist theory (Collins, 1986), and Bandura's (1986) theory of self-efficacy provided multi-dimensional perspectives of African American women leaders.

The first framework is critical race theory (Bell, 2000), which represents concern surrounding racism and racial discrimination. Originally founded as a response to a delayed civil-rights movement in the U.S., this theory targeted the law by exposing racial inequities supported by U.S. policy (Tate, 1997). Critical race theory focuses on the socially constructed and discursive nature of race and considers racism constant and normal in American society (Creswell, 2007). According to Tate (1997), this theory has provided critical perspectives on race and the ways in which causes, consequences, and manifestations of race, racism, and inequity affect people of color. It also gives researchers avenues to explore race and racism in all aspects of the research process (Creswell, 2007).

Secondly, Black feminist theory has been the framework used in multiple studies involving Black women in roles of educational leadership, and can be used to frame the lived experiences of Black women superintendents. First developed by Patricia Hill Collins (1986) to differentiate traditional feminist theory from the experiences of women of color, who also contend with racism (hooks, 1989), Black feminist theory is based on the ideology of African American women's use of marginality to reflect and incorporate the facets of self-definition and self-valuation in order to be effective change agents in society who can defy oppression (Collins, 1986; King, 1988). This theory provides a voice and rationale of African American women's views of the world and how women are able to overcome oppression and stereotypes. For example, Alston (2005) indicated that African American women superintendents have been effective change agents who are able to transform school systems.

The third theoretical framework perspective is Bandura's theory of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's skills to organize and manage self in a way that producing attainments (Bandura, 1997). The beliefs a person holds regarding his or her power to affect situations strongly influences both the power a person actually has to face challenges competently and the choices a person is most likely to make (Ormrod, 2006). Educational leaders who communicate a high degree of self-efficacy or confidence in their abilities tend to create opportunities for their students to achieve at higher levels (Ormond, 2006).

Research Questions

The first step in a research study is to frame the research questions. According to D. Silverman (2009), research questions dictate the direction of the study. The specific overriding questions for a study help narrow and focus the purpose statement as well as restate the study's purpose. According to Creswell (2009), if the research questions are not well crafted to show the study's significance, the study will be worthless. Black (1999) stated that research questions must have the greatest ease of administration, such that the scoring and interpretation are easily understood by anyone. Three research questions were carefully developed based on relevant literature and guided this study:

Question 1: How do African American female superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as public school superintendent?

Question 2: What, if any, experiences have African American female superintendents lived where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as public school superintendent?

Question 3: What strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as public school superintendent?

Overview of the Research Methodology

This study employed the use of a qualitative methodology approach to explore African Americans women's lived experiences as superintendents, including perceptions of their roles, racial and gender barriers, and strategies for success. This approach was appropriate as qualitative researchers seek to answer questions that emphasize how life experiences are created and given meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Consistent with this study, qualitative researchers in education "seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 2001, p. 11).

Limitations and Delimitations

Three possible limitations of this study should be considered. One limitation may be my own bias. Specifically, my personal and professional experiences and cultural bias as an African American female may be a limitation. As a current leader in public school education whose experiences may resonate with those of the participants, I acknowledge that my experiences, values and beliefs may influence interpretation of the interview data. I guarded against this limitation by allowing each study participant I interviewed to review her transcript of the interview. This ensured that the interview transcripts reflected what was said or intended to be said without any bias. A second limitation is a small sample. While the findings of this study cannot be generalized, the qualitative data collected may enable other African American female superintendents or educational

administrators to recognize something of themselves in the accounts. Finally, a third limitation is the necessity to rely on the truthfulness of the respondents.

Definitions of Key Terms

The following key terms were utilized throughout this study:

African Americans or Black: refers to a person having origins in Black racial groups of Africa; including people who indicate their race as "Black, African American, or Negro, or provide written entries such as African American, Afro American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010).

Barrier: That which prevents entrance, obstructs passage, retards progress or demarcates (Webster's New International Dictionary, 2002).

Gender/sex: Referring to the social expectations associated with femininity and masculinity as well as the rules for femininity and masculinity that are grounded in the biological/anatomical distinctions between women and men (Lips, 2003).

Lived experience: Lived experience includes what life is like in daily endeavors, occupations, perceptions, and relationships; they also provide a source and object for study. Lived experiences have been defined as immediate, natural fodder for reflection, an ego starting point that can emerge as a relived experience through reflection (Van Manen, 1990).

Mentors: Persons who act as advocates, provide knowledge regarding an organization, and offer strategies for success within the organization (Tillman & Cochran, 2000).

Participants: The participants in a phenomenological study are people who share their personal actions, insights, and reflections (Van Manen, 1990).

Populations: Groups large enough to aid in generalizing results (Creswell, 2009).

Qualitative interviewing: Guided conversation in which the researcher carefully listens “so as to hear the meaning” (Rubin & Rubin, 1995, p. 7) of what is conveyed.

Race: The socially constructed meaning including a variety of physical attributes including but not limited to skin and eye color, hair texture, and bone structures of people (Singleton & Linton, 2006).

Self-efficacy: The measure of the belief in one’s own ability to complete tasks and reach goals (Ormrod, 2006).

Superintendent: The chief executive officer of a school district employed by a board of directors to improve the educational system for the district (Webster’s New International Dictionary, 2002).

The oppressed: Oppressed is defined by Freire (2006) as the yearning for freedom and justice, and the recovery of lost humanity.

White privilege: Gain of social and political privilege simply by being White (Taylor, Gillborn, & Ladson-Billings, 2009).

Significance of Study

Although several studies have examined the underrepresentation of female superintendents, underrepresentation of women in the role of superintendents continues (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999).

However, Brunner (1998) found that current studies reflecting the experiences of superintendents are limited. This phenomenological study is intended to provide insight regarding this underrepresentation and to add to scholarly work in an area where few empirical studies have been conducted: African American females' lived experiences as K-12 public school superintendents from their own perspectives. The study also offers insight into their strategies for succeeding as superintendents. According to McCabe and Dobbertein (1998), exploring the experiences of women in the role of superintendency, as well as the satisfaction and challenges associated with the position, can provide other women with knowledge that helps in determining their career aspirations, as well as supporting their success in similar educational leadership roles.

Describing similarities and differences in participants' lived experiences can also give insight to policy makers and universities that prepare aspiring superintendents regarding societal factors contributing to the underrepresentation of African American female superintendents in K-12 public school districts. Professional programs that prepare aspiring superintendents will have relevant qualitative data to better prepare African American women to obtain, sustain, and retain the role of superintendent, which can help address the current underrepresentation of African American females in the role of public superintendent. "With the current low numbers, the loss of any potential African American woman superintendent must be avoided at all cost" (Barrens-Alexander, 2000, p. 10).

Organization of Study

Chapter 1 provided the introduction to the study, the underpinning of the study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the theoretical framework, research questions, the overview of the research methodology, limitations and delimitations, definitions of key terms and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of literature relevant to the study. Chapter 3 includes the rationale for qualitative inquiry, research design, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, credibility and trustworthiness, and lens of the researcher. Chapter 4 provides the results and analysis. Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings, implications and recommendations, and conclusion of the study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Historical Perspective on Education

Since the beginning of human existence, every generation's stock of values, traditions, methods and skills has been passed on to the next generation, primarily by women. "The systematic provision of literacy and learning techniques to many children has been a continual development over the last 150 or 200 years" (Kendall, Murray, & Linden, 2004, p.186). "In pre-literate societies, education was obtained through demonstration as young children learned from their elders" (Hochschild, 1995, p.123). Rural communities had few resources to expend on education and lacked commercially available means for schools. At later stages children received instruction of a more structured and formal nature, imparted by people who were not necessarily related in the context of initiation, religion or ritual (Hochschild, 1995). Some traditional knowledge was expressed through stories, legends, folklore, rituals, and songs, without the need for writing (Hochschild, 1995).

Education went through various stages all over the world, including the United States. The foundations of education in the U.S. cover trends in philosophy, policy, and institutions, as well as formal and informal learning from the 17th century to today. The foundation of literacy and mathematics were taught by the family members who had those skills. Literacy rates seemed to have been very high in New England and much lower in the South. "By the mid-19th century, the role of the schools had shifted where many of the educational tasks traditionally handled by parents, especially mothers, had become the responsibility of schools" (Hochschild, 1995, p. 87).

At the center of the American dream is the belief that, in this society, education opens the door to success. “The belief that the poorest American can accomplish greatness with hard work is one of this society's cherished cultural ideals” (Hochschild, 1995, p. 92). Many Americans perceive a college education as the ticket to the American Dream. The Dream is also symbolized by home ownership, a status symbol separating the middle classes from the poor. Sometimes the American Dream is identified with success in sports or the way working-class immigrants seek to join the American way of life. These aspirations and others make-up the American Dream in a broad sense, defining an ideal of upward mobility that has been systematically spread to other nations since the 1890s (Hedges & Sacco, 2012).

The American Dream does not, however, speak of the invisible barriers that some may never overcome as they seek to reach their dream. In their 2012 book *Days of Destruction, Days of Revolt*, Hedges and Sacco wrote:

The vaunted American dream, the idea that life will get better, that progress is inevitable if we obey the rules and work hard, that material prosperity is assured, has been replaced by a hard and bitter truth. The American dream, we now know, is a lie. We will all be sacrificed. The virus of corporate abuse—the perverted belief that only corporate profit matters—has spread to outsource our jobs, cut the budgets of our schools, close our libraries, and plague our communities with foreclosures and unemployment. (Hedges & Sacco, 2012, p. 307)

Black education in America. Dating back to when Black slaves who learned to read and write led to threat of physical harm or death, Blacks have viewed education as increasing hope and salvation for the future (Taylor et al., 2009). Regardless of how much education African Americans achieved, they still suffered discrimination based on skin color. Black people have continued to seek and embrace education as the ultimate

solution (Taylor et al., 2009). In spite of negative societal stereotypes of Blacks even as America developed history's most elaborate institutional barriers to deny African Americans equal access to learning and knowledge, Black people continued to pursue education (Taylor et al., 2009). Historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) were grown and shaped out of this striving of African Americans for education (Taylor et al., 2009). The extent to which individuals are provided the opportunity to seek and obtain knowledge indicates volumes about openness and power relations within any society. Yet for African Americans, the centuries-old struggle for access in higher education has been emblematic of the fight for equality and recognition in America.

Following the American Civil War, African Americans were no longer constrained by the bonds of slavery, and seized every opportunity to expand upon the clandestine educational practices that had existed in slavery (Anderson, 1988). Indelibly marked by their slave experience where they had been forcibly kept in a state of ignorance, Blacks invested education with great importance (Franklin, 1997). Formal education was a primary means for African Americans to distance themselves from slavery and their subordinate status in society. Education also enabled African Americans to achieve social mobility while "defending and extending" (Anderson, 1988, p. 3), their newly gained rights as citizens.

When the Civil War came to an end, African Americans' access to education changed drastically, particularly in the South. The Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction (as cited in Franklin, 1994) mandated that states provide provisions for every American to be educated. At first, the integration of schools provided education

for African Americans. However, this shift was not well received, and revocation of educational opportunities for African Americans resulted in the desegregation of schools. A dual and unequal educational system developed where African American teachers, principals and students began fending for themselves (Sizemore, 1986). African American teachers received only two thirds of the salary that Caucasian teachers received and taught in dilapidated school buildings with insufficient educational materials (Myrdal, 1962). During this time of difficulty, it was often African American female leaders that developed educational efforts, including teaching in segregated schools and establishing new schools and colleges for African American students (Alston, 1996; Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). The system developed by the African American community not only enhanced the education of African Americans but was also used as a model for Caucasian school systems (Myrdal, 1962). Eventually, the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision would affect the view of education in the nation and begin to shift African Americans' education tremendously.

Role of women in American education. The role of women in American education has evolved over the past 230 years from the Colonial era till today (Harwarth & Maline, 2009). In earlier years of American history, women were discouraged from pursuing higher education because it was considered unnatural for a woman to be educated (Stromquist, 2005). When a woman did advance her intellect, people might have considered her to be unsexed. When women did obtain higher education, they were often instructed in traditional domestic skills such as sewing (Stromquist, 2005).

Oberlin College, a private liberal arts college near my city of residence in Oberlin, Ohio, was founded in 1833, and was the first American institution of higher learning regularly to admit female and Black students (Cecelski, 2012). In 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention was held in New York to gain support for education and suffrage (Harwarth et al., 2009). Unfortunately, this had little immediate impact because women were still considered the property of men rather than individuals in society. Nevertheless, this convention was significant because it created a foundation for efforts toward equal education for women, even though this was not actually achieved until much later (Harwarth et al., 2009). According to Harper, Patton, and Wooden (2009), the Morrill Land-Grant Colleges Act of 1862 established universities to educate men and women in practical fields of study, but women's courses remained centered on home economics. By 1870, 30% of colleges were co-educational. In the 1930's, women-only colleges were established that expanded opportunities for courses of study to include more intellectual development as opposed to domestic instruction (Harwarth et al., 2009).

According to Shakeshaft (1989), the history of women in school administration is closely related with the history of women in the teaching profession. Between 1900 and 1930, women emerged in administration: 55% were elementary principals, 25% county superintendents, 8% secondary principals and 1% district superintendents (Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1989). There are limited data on the number of African American women who served as early administrators, indicating the need to explore this history further.

Women's educational position in America has greatly improved. "Roughly 20.1 million women have bachelor's degrees in comparison to the nearly 18.7 million men, a gap of more than 1.4 million that has remained steady" (Sahni & Shankar, 2011, p. 47). American women have also passed men in obtaining advanced college degrees, yet continue to trail men in professional subcategories such as business, science and engineering. Among adults 25 and older as of 2011, 10.6 million U.S. women had master's degrees or higher in to comparison to 10.5 million men (Sahni & Shankar, 2011).

However, currently, the trend among leaders of public education and superintendents has not shifted. Women are obtaining power politically, socially, and economically. Yet they are underrepresented in supervisory roles in education compared to the number of women in other types of organizations (Brunner, 2005). Women outnumber men in preparatory programs and continue to obtain superintendent certifications, yet they are not obtaining superintendent positions. Men outnumber women in obtaining the role of superintendent. In 2005, 72% of public school educators were women yet only 13% held top leadership positions, including that of superintendent (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Glass (2000) reported that of 13,728 superintendents leading public schools, fewer than 2% were women. Byrne depicted the trend as follows:

We now have fewer women heads of educational institutions than we had in the first two decades of this century. When women move into male areas, they remain clustered at the lower levels, marginally represented at the middle levels, and absent from the top other than the occasional deviant, nonconformist, articulate, pioneer. On a national scale there are fewer than 3% women heads of mixed institutions in education. (Byrne, as cited in Sampson, 1983, p. 52)

Role of African American women in education. Although much is known about the role of African-American women in society; less is known about African-American women in education due to the limited history available until the turn of the century. The intellectual void surrounding African American women in education can be attributed to the politics of a white male-dominated society that resisted recognition of African-American women and denied the importance of their lives and contributions through racial, sexual, and class oppression. However, the current and developing body of research on African-American women in higher education in America has provided groundwork for realizing their history, and has helped in dispelling myths, relating women's experiences, formulating theoretical frameworks, and establishing women's identity in higher education in the country.

The history of Black women in higher education in the U.S. is a lesson in courage, persistence and overcoming adversity (Taylor et al., 2009). For more than 170 years, African American women have claimed their right to an education and have courageously challenged the forces that tried to deny them (Taylor et al., 2009). Despite the problems noted within Black education, growing numbers of Black women sought higher education during this time (Miller-Bernal, 2000). In 1920, 20% of graduates of Black coed colleges were women. By 1930, the percentage had risen to 40%, and by 1940 graduating Black women outnumbered Black men (Rankin, 2001). One reason is that more Black men were moving out of teaching and into fields like business, preaching and dentistry (Rankin, 2001). With more teaching jobs opening, Black women were assembling in droves to get degrees. The first three Black women to earn PhDs, all in the early 1920s,

were Sadie Alexander, from the University of Pennsylvania; Georgia Simpson, from the University of Chicago; and Eva Dykes, from Radcliffe College (Rankin, 2001).

However, this was still a time of segregation in most colleges and universities, with clear inequalities in the funding of Black schools in comparison to White schools. Schools may have been separate, but they were definitely not equal (Rankin, 2001).

Historically, African American women did not pursue leadership roles outside the home, but this was not due to their lack of desire or ability to lead (Collins, 2008).

Societal practices often prevented African American women from pursuing leadership roles outside the home. Negative stereotypes developed by society have also contributed to barriers that affected society's image of African American female leaders and have restricted African American women from obtaining educational leadership positions: in particular, the position of superintendent (Banks, 2001). Literature is limited on African American women in the role of superintendent between 1956 and the 1970s (Arnez, 1986). However, an African American woman, Velma Dolphin Ashley, served as superintendent in Boley, Oklahoma from 1944 to 1956 (Revere, 1989).

Eventually, the federal government transformed the workplace for all women. In 1964, the federal government introduced affirmative-action legislation to eradicate unfairness in employment procedures and to focus on females and marginalized people who lacked representation in employment (Affirmative Action and Diversity, 2007). In the late 20th century African American women gradually began to obtain superintendent positions (Arnez, 1986; Revere, 1989): the number of female African American superintendents rose from five in 1978 to 11 in 1982 to 25 in 1985. However, there is a

shortage of African Americans in the United States who attend to educational matters, pupil issues, and other executive placements (Patitu & Hinton, 2003), which illustrates the importance of understanding how educational institutions identify and train leaders (Bisbee, 2007).

The Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 (as cited in Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995) has brought awareness to barriers to women's rising to upper-level positions, and led to the gradual rise of women who hold the position of school superintendent. However, an investigation by the federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995) revealed barriers and a glass ceiling that were rarely overcome by women or persons of color and could be impenetrable by minorities. To date, there has been little growth of African American women in superintendency; female African American superintendents continue to be underrepresented in comparison to their White male counterparts (Johnson, 2006) and are only a small percentage of the total number of female superintendents (Alston, 1999; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2005).

Contemporary perspective on education. Education can empower an individual to think, question, and see beyond the obvious. Education helps to broaden horizons; it is the basis of a civilization; it helps people to think rationally; it also reduces social and economic disparity (Ed Stat, 2010). Studies indicate that educated people have longer life expectancies and have more meaningful and interesting jobs than those held by uneducated people (Ed Stat, 2010). Educated people are found to have higher self-esteem and better problem-solving skills, and children of educated parents tend to have access to better education institution. Educated people are better positioned as well tend

to contribute positively to society. Education can also be a ladder to climb out of poverty, exclusion, ignorance, oppression, and war (Ed Stat, 2010).

However, historically, education in America has also been race-conscious and gender-sensitive in a negative way (Adams, 2001). In particular, since the inception of American higher education, women and minorities have experienced institutional discrimination in colleges and universities through denial of access, limited enrollment in certain academic programs, and restricted policies for advanced training and certification (Jenifer, 2005). Institutional discrimination occurs when rules of the institution are not equitable or have a depressing influence on people with the least amount of political and economic power, such as women and minorities (Jenifer, 2005). While reforms have brought new leadership, and greater gender diversity (Marable, 2003), African Americans remain underrepresented in higher education as administrators and superintendents (Patitu & Hinton, 2003).

The Public Education Superintendent

The role of public education superintendent. Heightened interest in public school leadership comes at a time when demands on local school leaders have never been greater. This is a time when schools face budget barriers, increasing numbers of at-risk students, and federal and state mandates which are often unfunded but determine much of what happens in the classroom (Taylor et al., 2009). In urban districts, board members rarely receive compensation. Additionally, superintendents are expected to be efficient managers and instructional leaders.

The issues in public school districts are more demanding than ever (Taylor et al., 2009). Public school district superintendents have administrative oversight of students, public schools, and educational services within a geographic area. School district superintendents are also hired by and answer to the school board of a local school district. It is critical that leaders distribute resources according to equity and fairness without alienating major constituencies. They must be good data analysts. They must push good practice and eliminate what isn't working. Under pressure to align local standards for teaching and learning with state standards, they also determine how to deliver high-quality instruction that can be boosted. Federal law also makes school district leadership transparent; the public must be informed regularly of district progress (Taylor et al., 2009).

As superintendents work with community and business leaders, they must also become school community-relations experts (Owen & Ovando, 2000). Experienced superintendents know the community and the various groups representing it. They work to bring a variety of voices together, creating unity of effort and positive power base (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). School districts are not freestanding, self-sufficient organizations. Rather, they are complex entities involving increasingly complex responsibilities for the superintendent to lead, facilitate and provide daily direction. It is in this domain that significant change is taking place (Johnson, 1996).

Women as public-education superintendents. Across the nation there are many more men than women in public education administration (Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Glass, 1992). There are more women than men in graduate programs and more

women than men employed as educators, “yet there is a persistent absence of women from the highest and most powerful administrative position in public education, the superintendency” (Morie & Wilson, 1996, p. 128). The gap between men and women superintendents remains vastly disproportionate with reports of 86.6% men and 13.2% women in that role (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). Additionally, Glass (1992) noted, “like many other high-profile leadership positions in American society, the American school superintendency is dominated by white males” (p. 9). In 1995, O’Connell also conducted a study which supported Glass’ findings, “that women and minorities were still underrepresented in the superintendency” (p. 3). Although “most of the world still believe men to be more suitable leaders because they are supposedly more ‘objective’ than women and less emotional, research on the performance of males and females in similar tasks shows no sex differences” (L. K. Silverman, 1986, p. 52). The role of gender stereotypes, institutional barriers, and mentoring are discussed next.

Gender stereotyping. Current research supports the notion that women are highly effective leaders, teachers and administrators who are committed and knowledgeable in their fields (Tallerico, 2000). Given qualified female candidates, particularly African American female candidates, the underrepresentation of women in superintendent roles appears to be due to other factors (Kowalski, 2006). Blount (2003) suggests that one reason for female dominance in teaching and male dominance in the superintendency includes the practice of women’s filling gender-specific roles and occupations, thereby perpetuating male networking, as well as stereotyping and limitations of essential work experience among women.

Over time, the role of the superintendent has been socially constructed as best occupied by males (Johnson, 1996; Skrla, 2000a) and masculine, just as in other workplaces (Skrla, 2000b). Shakeshaft (1989) claims that in order to be thought of as a qualified superintendent, one must also be thought of as in charge, particularly in a society where males are typically regarded as being in charge. According to Marshall (1986), the characteristics that are thought to be needed by a superintendent are not necessarily thought socially acceptable for females. Skrla (1998) noted that a successful superintendent is characterized as earnest, knowledgeable, influential, authoritarian, and goal-oriented, which are stereotypically connected with the male gender. “Male” traits are seen as strong and desirable, whereas “female” traits are seen as emotional or weak.

Indeed, in *Leadership in Organizations*, Yukl (2006) discussed gender biases for leaders in all walks of life: leaders have long been considered effective if they are “confident, task -oriented, competitive, objective, decisive, and assertive” (p. 427), all of which were traditionally viewed as masculine attributes. However, Yukl further contends that leadership also requires “strong interpersonal skills, concern for building cooperative, trusting relationships, and use of behaviors traditionally viewed as feminine, e.g., supporting, developing, empowering” (p. 427). For women to succeed, they must not only adopt the behaviors and attributes associated with the masculine gender, but also simultaneously not disrupt the expectations associated with the female gender” (Scott, 1999, p. 6).

African American women may bear an additional disadvantage, Turner (2002) interviewed 64 faculty women of color to investigate African American women’s

experience of barriers to leadership attainment. The consensus among the participants was that being both minority and female hindered their journey to their current leadership position in some way. Other barriers included experiencing little respect and being overused, such as being asked to manage menial tasks.

In general, typecasting women administrators “places limitations on the expectations of women and results in the devaluation of work done by women”

(Yewchuk, 1992, p. 188). However, Wilson (2004) wrote,

The sooner everybody understands the strategic importance of women’s brains, the better off we’re going to be. We may not be perfect, but we have this extraordinary prefrontal cortex. It enables us to think about twelve to twenty topics at once. If you can combine that with the kind of driven, focused energy that’s more associated with (men), you have a dynamite combination. (Wilson, 2004, pp. 91-92)

Institutional barriers. Despite gradually increasing numbers of women in roles that typically lead to the superintendent’s office, despite the predominance of women in university educational administration preparation programs, and despite a growing feminine presence in other historically male-dominated professional fields, women have made few gains in the superintendency (Adams, 2001; Jenifer, 2005). Women superintendents continually confront and are challenged by invisible barriers as they approach the top of the corporate/educational hierarchy: “glass ceiling barriers have blocked the advancement of minorities and women” (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995, p. 3). A study of African American women to understand the barriers they face in upper-level administration revealed that participants believed their advancement was stalled due to a concrete ceiling (Catalyst, 2004). The same report identified perceived barriers along with strategies to overcome them. Barriers identified in the study were

characterized as societal, internal and governmental and were found to slow down the progression of African American women as they ascended to the role of superintendent (Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995).

Women, and especially African American women, experience barriers related to obtaining educational leadership positions from early on in their education. Tillman and Cochran (2000) reported that schools and departments of education have generally failed to provide adequate support for diversity in professional preparation programs.

Administrative coursework is taught from the White male superintendent's perspective, omitting issues of gender, race, and ethnicity in ways that create "silent preparation programs" (Tillman & Cochran, 2000, p. 55) for the predominance of White men.

Additionally, African American women are not regarded as highly qualified, despite their educational credentials (A. Brown, 2011).

School boards that are predominantly made up of White males also hire superintendents, and are the gatekeepers to such predominant executive positions in the country (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Chase and Bell (1990) asserted that candidates need to understand gatekeepers and their perceptions of superintendents. The researchers' qualitative study noted that gatekeepers have an integral role in assisting women in acquiring superintendent positions. In-depth interviews were conducted with 27 female superintendents, 50 gatekeepers, and 44 school board members. Perceived constraints included school-district demographics and sexism involved in the superintendent hiring process. Glass and Franceschini (2007) also indicated that glass

ceilings, resistant school boards, lack of mentoring programs, and gender bias all contribute to the lack of women in superintendent positions.

Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) also found that women were typically hired as change agents, and once the changes occurred, women left the districts in which they were hired. Women left due to problems balancing family and work, expanded job demands and time commitment to the job, or a changing school board. Female superintendents in rural areas also cited physical remoteness, lack of support systems, lack of professional development, and overwhelming demands of the job (Glass et al., 2000). Glass et al. (2000) further reported that female superintendents believe that gender is a barrier to obtaining the position of superintendent.

Lack of mentoring and support. Another barrier for women in leadership positions has been lack of mentoring and support. For example, Alston (2005) identified obstacles that Black female administrators encounter when obtaining the position of superintendent, including: (a) absence of support systems, (b) absence of knowledge of organizational structure, and (c) few role models to obtain knowledge. Jackson and Harris (2007) also conducted a study in which African American female college presidents were asked about barriers en route to their presidency. The women said that the primary barrier preventing advancement was being excluded from non-professional networks, i.e., the good ole boys club or after-hour golfing at a private country club. Additionally, 35 of the 43 participants of the study cited having being stereotyped. In her qualitative study Daye (2007) also interviewed five African American women superintendents with the goal of determining how their leadership was affected by self-

perceptions of gender- and race-related barriers. Daye's study revealed common themes related to race and gender constraints including (a) school-district wealth, (b) suspicion and mistrust, (c) issues in job acquisition, (d) limited knowledge about expectations, and (e) absence of a support structure.

Strength and resilience of women leaders. Although women superintendents face a variety of challenges, several studies have demonstrated female superintendents' strength and resilience. In 2002, a qualitative study (Funk, Pankake, & Schroth, 2002) was conducted that identified similarities in characteristics and leadership styles of six female superintendents. The researchers described study participants as lifelong learners who were ethical, passionate and reflective. The researchers went on to develop a framework and profile of successful female superintendents. While participants in the study were from Texas, the findings may apply to female superintendents in general.

In the same year, Collins (2002) conducted a qualitative study of African American female superintendents that reported similar results insofar as study participants perceived their superintendency as a mission to serve. This interview study revealed the experiences of African American female superintendents and how they perceived the power of their role. The study concluded that access to education and employment opportunities were essential factors affecting study participants. Additionally, compared to their male counterparts, female superintendents reported relatively more situations involving inequity and scrutiny when attempting to obtain a superintendent position

Tillman and Cochran (2000) conducted a study examining the effectiveness of African American women in the role of superintendents. An extensive list of external and internal factors related to effectiveness was developed as a result of the study. The study concluded that African American women exemplify industriousness, positive self-esteem, resilience, and power. Tillman and Cochran also addressed practices employed by school districts and professional preparation programs that affect African American females. Such studies assist in addressing the disproportionately low number of African American females in leadership positions.

In Jones' (2003) study on African American women in roles of leadership, a description of the 21st-century superintendent was developed. The study used face-to-face interviews, observations and focus groups to examine the lived experiences of five African American administrators. As a result of the study, six themes on the leadership of African American women were compiled: these included: (a) early leadership, (b) tempered radicalism, (c) mentoring, (d) spirituality, (e) reciprocity, and (f) worthiness. Limitations of the study included a lack of data sources; inadequate implications for further research and the fact that study participants were from one Midwestern state.

African American women and women of color have been severely underrepresented in educational leadership (Alston, 1999; Blount, 1998; Revere, 1987; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sizemore, 1986). The lack of empirical studies in the literature does not reveal the contributions that these women have made to the field of education. Moreover, the lack of a national database to identify the number of African

American women in superintendency is a concern. Yeakey, Johnston, and Adkison (1986) also noted the omission of research related to minority school administrators. While minority women are reaching roles of administrative leadership, such as the superintendency, the number remains disproportionately low compared to the total number of women in the population (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999). Additionally, Alston (1996) indicated that scarcity of African American superintendents and the lack of recognition for their contributions in the field of education are problematic.

Conceptual Framework

The limited literature regarding African American women superintendents has shaped the conceptual framework for this study. Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, Black feminist theory and critical race theory are the three conceptual frameworks that shape the research study and are intended to provide a clear lens for this research.

Bandura's theory. A Canadian-born psychologist, Albert Bandura has played a key role in revolutionizing the study of human behavior in contemporary psychology over several decades (Schunk & Pajares, 2004). According to Bandura, one's self-efficacy plays an essential part in how one approaches personal vision, tasks, and challenges (Luszczynska, & Schwarzer, 2005). Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as the belief in one's skills to manage and produce given attainments. According to Ormrod (2006), self-efficacy is the belief in your own ability to complete tasks and reach goals. According to Bandura's theory, people with high self-efficacy are more likely to view difficult tasks as something to master rather than avoid (Mischel, & Shoda, 1995). Self-

efficacy also reflects an individual understanding of skills he or she can offer in a group setting (Ormrod, 2006). By influencing the beliefs a person holds regarding his or her power to affect situations, self-efficacy strongly influences both the power a person actually has to face challenges competently and the choices a person is likely to make (Ormrod, 2006). These effects are particularly apparent and compelling in behaviors affecting health and education (Luszczynska & Schwarzer, 2005).

According to this theory, people learn from one another through observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1988). Self-efficacy is developed from external experiences and self-perception; it represents personal perception of external social factors; and is influential in determining the outcome of many events (Bandura, 1988). Psychologists have studied self-efficacy from multiple perspectives; the dynamics of self-efficacy in different settings; interactions between self-efficacy and self-concept; and habits of attribution that contribute to or detract from self-efficacy (Luszczynska, & Schwarzer, 2005).

Critical race theory. Not surprisingly, critical race theory, as coined by Derrick Bell (2000), was originally founded as a response to what had been considered a stalled civil-rights agenda in the United States. It targeted the law by exposing racial inequities supported by U.S. law and policy (Tate, 1997). Far from functioning as “great equalizers,” schools also all too often perpetuate existing inequalities. In the field of education, critical race theory has become a widely used analytical tool for addressing school inequities; it was introduced in the field of education through a seminal article

published by Ladson-Billings and Tate entitled “Toward a Critical Race Theory of Education” (1995).

Some suggest that Whiteness holds material and symbolic property value in the United States, and critical race theory has used this as a framework for examining racism in education (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006) and to move discussions of race beyond the realm of the experiential to the realm of the conceptual. Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) argued that race and racism had yet to be given full explanatory power in educational scholarship. Approximately 10 years after Ladson-Billings and Tate’s seminal article appeared in *Teachers College Record*, a second generation of educational scholars was galvanized to show the growth and complexity of critical race theory and how its key constructs apply to educational issues. It has been used as a way to make race visible in the educational research process and systematically uncover the fact that race is still a determining factor in societal inequity and school inequities (Dixson & Rousseau, 2006). Dixson and Rousseau (2006) also contend that critical race theory employs reflexivity to expose and disrupt false empathy and replaces it with more laboratory-style approaches to conducting qualitative inquiry in urban education.

Black feminist thought. The premise for feminist theory began to take hold with movements for civil rights, human rights, and suffrage (Giddings, 1984). Race and gender continue to be major factors in our culture, such that social and employment opportunities remain unequal for women and minorities (Tallerico, 2000). The feminist movement

...refocused attention on underrepresentation of women in leadership and was accompanied by increased activism by women’s administrator organizations, the

creation of a women's caucus in professional organization, expanded career options for women overall, and increased efforts to bring women into school administration. (Tallerico & Blount, 2004, p. 646)

Black feminist thought was developed by Patricia Hill Collins (1986) to differentiate traditional feminist theory from experiences of women of color, who also contend with racism (hooks, 1989).

In 1837, Maria W. Stewart asked, "How long shall the fair daughters of Africa be compelled to bury their minds and talents beneath a load of iron pots and kettles?" (Stewart & Richardson, 1987, p. 67). Stewart was orphaned at age 5 and bound out to a clergyman's family as a domestic servant. She struggled to achieve an educational foundation when and where she could (Stewart & Richardson, 1987). Maria Stewart challenged other African-American women to not accept the negative images of Black womanhood, noting that race, gender, and class oppression were fundamental causes of Black women's poverty (Stewart & Richardson, 1987). In an 1833 speech she proclaimed, "We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them" (Stewart & Richardson 1987, p. 59).

Historically, U.S. White feminist scholars have resisted having Black women as full colleagues. This historical suppression of Black women's ideas has had a pronounced influence on feminist theory. Social theories should reflect women's efforts and lived experiences within intersecting oppressions of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and religion (Alexander & Mohanty 1997; Mirza 1997). Black feminist theory expresses a commitment to justice both for U.S. Black women as a collectivity and

for other similarly oppressed groups (Alexander & Mohanty, 1997). The tenets of Black feminist theory suggest that African American women have internalized negative stereotypes developed by society, but can counteract them by developing strategies to address racism, sexism, and other forms of negative self-image (Collins, 2008).

This literature review provided a historical perspective on education, Black education in America, the role of women in American education, the role of African American women in education, a contemporary perspective of education, the role of education superintendent, woman as public education superintendents, African American women as public education superintendents and the conceptual frameworks for this research study. This review supports that there is indeed limited literature on African American women superintendents and a need to conduct this research study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction to Study

Research on the lived experiences of African American superintendents is limited. It is essential to contribute to the literature on African American superintendents, their perceptions, racial and gender barriers, and strategies to succeed in their role. To gain a better understanding of African American women's lived experiences as superintendents in K-12 public school districts, this research study employed qualitative methods. Maxwell (2005) writes that the use of a qualitative method creates an avenue for researchers to understand the process by which events and actions take place. This research study was conducted using phenomenology that focused on the structure of an experience (Merriam, 1998). Such methodology relies on the lived experiences of study participants and their individual responses to a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). Additionally, phenomenology allows researchers to develop themes that reflect the voices of participants. By interviewing six African American superintendents, I examined and developed further understanding of the reasons for the disproportionately low numbers of African American women in the position of superintendent.

This study's qualitative research design employed interviews to explore the lived experiences and perspectives of African American females who are current superintendents for K-12 public school districts or have been superintendents for K-12 public school districts within the past three years. Face-to-face, in-depth, semi-structured interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes were conducted, with the number of participants

being based on the point at which data saturation was reached. Data saturation refers to gathering and analyzing data until no new insights are observed.

Research Questions Discussed

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. As described in the previous chapter, Bandura's (1997) theory of self-efficacy, Black feminist theory (e.g., Collins, 1986), and critical race theory (Bell, 2000) served as guiding conceptual frameworks to understand the experiences of African American women superintendents. The importance of the study was evidenced in the disproportionately low number of African American women in the role of superintendent, even given the increased number of African American women enrolling in educational leadership programs and attaining the credentials necessary to become superintendent. The research questions were designed to uncover understanding of the phenomenon to understand how race and gender affect the role of superintendent.

The current educational leadership of U.S school districts does not reflect the greater diversity of student populations. Accessing the experience and expertise of African American women superintendents may result in a decrease in the current disproportionality of women in the role of superintendent. I set out to answer specific research questions through interviews with African American women superintendents. Three research questions based on relevant literature guided this study:

Question 1: How do African American female superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as a public school superintendent?

Question 2: What experiences, if any, have African American female superintendents lived where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as public school superintendent?

Question 3: What strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as public school superintendent?

These research questions were designed to facilitate an in-depth understanding of the circumstances and issues of African American women superintendents. Merriam (1998) suggested that qualitative studies constitute an appropriate research design that provides researchers with a method objectively to evaluate and understand the dynamics of a particular concept: in this case, to provide further insight into the disproportionately low number of African American women in the role of superintendent. Qualitative research also allowed the researcher to maximize the voices of participants as well as further understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007).

Several studies have concentrated on the underrepresentation of female superintendents (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999). Yet, given the qualifications of female candidates, their underrepresentation remains a phenomenon for study, particularly as it relates to the African American female superintendent. Additionally, few empirical studies have examined this phenomenon from the perspective of the African American female superintendent. This study sought to explore and give insight into this phenomenon through purposeful participant selection using qualitative methods to understand lived experiences of African American female

superintendents. This chapter details the following: (a) research questions, (b) rationale for qualitative inquiry, (c) research design, (d) participation selection, (e) instrumentation, (f) data collection, (g) data analysis, (h) credibility and trustworthiness, (i) limitations of the study and (j) lens of the researcher.

Research Design

Research design refers to the strategy to integrate various elements of the research project in a cohesive and coherent manner; it is an avenue to structure a research project when addressing a specific set of questions (Trochim & Land, 1982). Creswell (2009) states that quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods are the three foremost research methods to consider in conducting a research study. Quantitative research is inquiry into social or human problems “based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers, and analyzed with statistical procedures, in order to determine whether the predictive generalizations of the theory hold true” (Creswell, 2009, p. 2). In contrast, qualitative research “is an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed views of informants, and conducted in a natural setting” (Creswell 2009, pp. 1-2). Mixed methods is a procedure for combining both quantitative and qualitative research in a single study to understand a research problem (Creswell, 2009). Given the type of research questions asked, qualitative research was the most appropriate method for participants to share their lived experiences as superintendents.

Rationale for qualitative inquiry. Qualitative researchers seek to answer questions that emphasize how life experiences are created and given meaning (Denzin &

Lincoln, 2008). Qualitative researchers in education “seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, a perspective or worldview of the people involved” in a study (Merriam, 2001, p. 11).

The majority of past educational research has used a quantitative research design (Gall & Borg, 1989). Nevertheless, quantitative research is limited to finding new knowledge on issues that can be quantitatively or objectively evaluated. However, not all educational concerns can be measured with numbers and analyzed through statistical procedures when predicting generalizations from a theory. Some problems may only be evaluated subjectively, i.e., appraising merit, value, or worth. Such subjective research is the purpose of the qualitative research design. Myers (2000) describes qualitative methods as tools used in understanding and describing the world of human experiences. Merriam (1998) also defines qualitative research as “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5).

According to Myers (2000), a central strength of the qualitative approach is the depth to which explorations are conducted and descriptions are written, usually in significant detail for the reader to grasp the full expanse of the situation. The focus of qualitative research is to offer a perspective of the issue while providing a well-written research report that reflect the researcher’s ability to describe the corresponding phenomenon (Myers, 2000). Based on Myers’ description, a qualitative study best satisfied the primary goals of this study. Creswell (1998) also indicated that the strength of a qualitative study is equivalent to

...heightening the awareness for experience that has been forgotten or overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped research can lead to better understanding of the way things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvement in practice. (p. 94)

Creswell (1998) defines qualitative research as

an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem the researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Creswell (1998) further posited that qualitative inquiry “takes the reader into the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue and displays it in all of its complexity” (p. 15).

Additionally, Creswell (2007) stated that qualitative research is best suited for research problems in which participants’ perceptions of their lived experiences are discovered; often, information is collected through in-depth interviews from participants’ own words.

A qualitative methodology is also appropriate for research problems in which the research variables are not known and need to be explored further (Creswell, 2007). In quantitative methodology, specific and narrow questions are asked to obtain measurable and observable data on variables, using instruments to collect data from subjects for statistical analyses (Creswell, 2003). However, quantitative research would not be appropriate for this study because variables are unknown and perceptions of lived experiences of participants need to be explored. In a qualitative study, increased knowledge is acquired from the participants’ varied experiences.

Merriam (2002) reports that there are six characteristics of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative researchers are focused on the process, rather than outcomes or products.

2. Qualitative researchers are concerned with how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.
3. The researcher for qualitative data is the instrument for the data collection and analysis. Data are collected by the human instrument as opposed to inventories, questionnaires, or machines.
4. Qualitative research involves fieldwork, i.e. going to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe and record behavior in its natural setting.
5. Qualitative research is descriptive and is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.
6. Qualitative research is inductive that builds on abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.

Phenomenological research design. Within qualitative research, there are five major traditions of inquiry: phenomenological study, ethnography, biography, grounded theory study and case study (Creswell, 1998). Phenomenological studies seek to understand how individuals view the meaning of experiences of a phenomenon. This study was designed using a phenomenological method of qualitative research to gain an in-depth perspective of African American women superintendents. Phenomenology was selected because it focuses on how meanings are made within everyday life and how those meanings are developed through social interactions (Creswell, 2003). A phenomenological study attempts to “understand people’s perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation” (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p.139). Further, “a phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several

individuals about a concept or the phenomenon” (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). Consistent with phenomenology, this study sought to understand the motives and beliefs behind people’s actions on a personal level, attempting to see things from other people’s point of view (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998).

Research design is a researcher’s set of advance decisions that create a plan specifying the methods and procedures for collecting and analyzing needed information (Creswell, 2009). Phenomenological researchers “seek to understand the deep meaning of a person’s experiences and how he articulated these experiences” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 96). As suggested by Seidman (1998), this researcher facilitated interviews in a natural setting to build rapport with study participants, focused on their lived experiences, used guided questions in interviews, reflected on the meaning of respondents’ experience, and triangulated data to minimize bias and maximize the effectiveness of the data collected. A phenomenological approach enabled exploration of and insight into the lived experiences of African American women superintendents.

Participant Selection

Sampling. Purposeful sampling was used for this research study. Purposeful sampling is the selection of individuals who can purposefully inform an understanding of the issue being explored or investigated (Creswell, 2007). Self-identified African American women superintendents were selected as participants. Creswell (2007) indicates that it is appropriate that participants involved in participant sampling share their lived experiences that relate to the question being investigated.

According to Maxwell (1996), there are specific goals when using purposeful sampling:

1. The sample needs to be representative of the setting, individuals or activities under study. In this study, I selected African American females who were currently K-12 superintendents in public school districts or had been K-12 superintendents in public school districts in the past three years. Qualitative methodology guided the number of participants. The number did not exceed 12.
2. The sample enables deliberate examination of questions presented at the beginning of the study and any additional questions that arise. Three research questions guiding this study were developed based on relevant literature. The 15 semi-structured interview questions in the interview protocol are presented in Appendix B. The interview allowed each participant to tell her experiences as an African American female superintendent.
3. The sample allows for comparisons that will show differences and similarities among the participants. The data analysis reveals comparisons that show differences and similarities among the participants: e.g., based on district size, educational background, strategies used to be effective and individual lived experiences as superintendent.

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission from Ohio University (Appendix A), I called the National Alliance of Black Superintendents (NABSE) to request information on receiving a directory of public superintendents. According to NABSE (2010), out of 14,559 superintendents nationwide, only 137

African American females serve as superintendents. Of these 137 superintendents, 41 could be identified. I obtained participants' school-district contact information and sent an IRB-approved email (Appendix B) to the superintendents in their respective school districts to explain the purpose of this study, invite their participation, and explain the steps that would be taken to secure their confidentiality (e.g., assigning a pseudonym for each participant, keeping tapes from the recorded interviews in a secure location where only I would have the key). Once participants were selected and had completed consent forms (Appendix C), I conducted face-to-face interviews.

Reasons given for not participating in the study. Of 41 superintendents who were contacted to participate in the study, 11 responded. However, three individuals were too busy to participate. One superintendent indicated that “Unfortunately, I will not be able to participate in the study at this time due to my extremely busy schedule.”

Another superintendent's administrative assistant responded on her behalf, writing:

Superintendent X's schedule does not permit her to commit to any new engagements at this time. The district is currently focused on a critical state audit and we do not foresee any openings in her schedule in near the future. She wishes you well.

A third superintendent responded by saying,

I only have Sundays available which I hold sacred to family time. Therefore, I will not be able to participate in the study at this time, but I would be willing to reconsider a time next year as I expect my work load to lighten, but I cannot make a commitment.

A fourth superintendent declined because she was new to the job. She indicated:

I have only been on the job for 4 months and do not believe I can offer your study much depth until I have additional experience. I am just learning my role. Thank you for your invitation to participate, but I will have to decline.

This left seven superintendents who agreed to participate in the study. However, after one of the superintendents agreed to participate, her administrative assistant called and reported that it was necessary for Superintendent X to go on an unexpected leave of absence. “There is no rescheduling available at this time. Therefore, Superintendent X current commitments no longer allow her to participate in the study. She sincerely wishes you the best in your dissertation endeavor.” As a result, six superintendents completed the interviews for the purposes of obtaining qualitative data for this study.

Sample. All six participants in the study were current superintendents who had been in the role a minimum of two years ($M = 8.17$ years, range = 5-12 years) and had professional educational experiences that ranged from 23 years to 38 years. Three participants were in their 50s and three were in their 60s. Five held doctoral degrees in education. At the time of the study, four participants were serving in rural school districts with fewer than 800 students. One was serving in a suburban school district with 2700 to 2800 students, and one was serving in an urban school district with 6700 to 6800 students. Two of the women had served their entire superintendency in one district, and three participants had served as superintendent in two districts. One participant had served as superintendent in three different school districts. Two of the superintendents indicated that the center of their support system is their husband, three that the center of their support system is a mentor, and one mentioned “my husband and the community.”

Instrumentation

Interviewing is an informative and effective method of gaining information. In-depth qualitative interviews allow participants to reveal their experiences and are known

for providing researchers a detailed and descriptive narrative about the experiences of the study participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Additionally, in-depth qualitative interviews afford the researcher the ability to construct a holistic view of a participant's experiences where others can interpret the participant's perspective (Doyle, 2002).

In particular, Cooper and Schindler (2008) state that semi-structured interviews are flexible and so are appropriate for conducting most qualitative research. In-depth semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to provide a rich and comprehensive picture of interest. The semi-structured interview protocol for this study was developed to identify and address experiences specific to African American women superintendents. During the interview I presented three introductory statements and asked 15 semi-structured questions (Appendix D) that were developed based on the study's three overarching research questions and relevant literature. Employing this method of instrumentation made it possible to gather detailed information in a short period of time (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) as participants provided information on their lived experiences as African American female superintendents.

Data Collection

Creswell (2005) indicates that qualitative research data collection, observation, recording, and interviews can be used to gain knowledge of lived experiences of the study's participants. The data collection method in the study involved qualitative interviews. "Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful and able to be made explicit" (Patton, 2002, 117). "Interviews allow the researcher to find out what is in and on someone else's mind and to gather their

stories” (Patton, 2002, p. 341). I was the instrument in this qualitative research study, as Patton (1990) purports that “the researcher is the instrument” (p.14).

When the participants were initially contacted and before the interviews began, I obtained a signed consent form (Appendix C) from each participant. The consent form disclosed the nature of the study and affirmed the confidentiality of the participants. Once participants were selected and had given informed consent, I conducted audio-recorded face-to-face interviews with each participant in a quiet and confidential office agreed upon by both the participant and myself, the principal investigator of the study.

According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007), social-science researchers suggest that a researcher should specify the process of data gathering and how it was recorded. Interviews are usually recorded on a tape recorder or a video camera (Greenbank, 2003). I used a hand-held digital electronic voice recorder to record each interview. I conducted face-to-face interviews lasting 60 to 90 minutes. I also wrote notes in a journal log of observations of the participants’ surroundings and body language. The log and tapes were locked up and destroyed after the tapes were transcribed and all data were analyzed, within one year after the study began. I transcribed the tapes, and at no time was the actual name of the participant mentioned in the recording or in the researcher’s log. I exemplified professionalism and care for the sake of the participants’ confidentiality and the accuracy of data being collected throughout the study. In a qualitative research analysis, the researcher must rely on the collected data to be as accurate as possible.

Seidman (2006) advised that waiting until interviewing is completed “avoids imposing meaning from one participant’s interviews to the next” (p. 113). Therefore, I waited to analyze the data until all interviews were conducted and transcribed.

According to Neuman (2008), a researcher must always guarantee the protection of a research participant’s anonymity and information. Signed participant consent forms were stored in a secure location that was accessible only to the researcher. The consent form was retained in accordance with Ohio University’s IRB policy. Additionally, every possible precaution was taken to ensure that participants’ information was treated with the utmost confidentiality, including assigning pseudonyms. Any information obtained by the researcher while contacting or interviewing the participant that may have compromised the participant’s identity has been intentionally excluded from this dissertation, e.g., a board member’s name, the name of the superintendent’s school district, and/or the city in which she is or has been employed or has lived.

Data Analysis

The phenomenological data analysis used in this research study allowed the researcher to understand the philosophical perspectives of individuals by studying experiences with the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). Qualitative data analysis focuses on analysis of specific statements and themes (Creswell, 1998), organizing data to reveal common themes in the collected information (Creswell, 2007). The primary purpose of the analysis process in a qualitative research study is to examine lived experiences from the perspective of those who share such experiences—that is, from a first-person point of view rather than through the view of another (Hycner, 1985). It is during this process

that the researcher reviews the interview transcripts to determine themes and identify information stated in the interview that is relevant to the research question or the phenomenon being studied (Hycner, 1985). Additionally, the researcher continues to review information stated in the interview for natural units of relevancy and frequency (Hycner, 1985). Consequently, themes begin to emerge into patterns or relationships and data are synthesized.

Qualitative research involves the use of descriptive statements and extensive fieldwork that focuses on a process rather than outcomes (Merriam, 1998). Such research allows for development of concepts, theories, and hypotheses from details, thus making meaning of how people and their experiences shape their existence (Merriam, 1998).

Data analysis in qualitative research is comprised of the preparation and organization of data for analysis, then reducing the data into themes through a process of coding and condensing (Creswell, 2007). A qualitative study involves the researchers' serving as the primary instrument for question formulations. The analysis and conclusions from the data collected in a qualitative study can be endless and the measurement tends to be subjective (Creswell, 2009).

Patton (1990) determined that the focus of phenomenology rests in the descriptions of what individuals experience and how they experience it; the goal of phenomenology is to identify commonalities of shared experience and give light to variations within the experience so as to yield a rich, thick description of the phenomenon. Cooper and Schindler (2008) also stated that during a qualitative data analysis, the researcher uses content from participants' recorded information on their

lived experiences, behaviors, and observation and traces evidence from the physical environment.

According to Glesne (1999), identifying patterns and themes is referred to as coding: “a progressive process of sorting and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose” (p. 135). After gathering data and transcribing each tape, I determined themes and patterns through repetition of words and ideas, and sorted, coded and highlighted based on the questions and responses provided by each participant. I coded the responses by categorizing each in cut scripts. I used various colors of highlighters and post-its for sorting purposes.

I listened carefully to each tape multiple times. The first time was to compare the tapes to the transcriptions for accuracy. The second time was to listen for key issues, events or categories of participants’ responses. The third time was to listen for the tone of voice of the participants when giving responses. To conduct a member check, I also sent a copy of my findings to each participant to the email or postal address preferred by the participant, and then made a follow-up phone call to confirm receipt of the document and clarify any aspects of the transcribed recording. If participants provided any written clarifications, I added these in my log and in the updated findings.

Credibility and Trustworthiness

When conducting qualitative inquiry, it is noteworthy that the data collected and conclusions inferred from the data have a strong sense of credibility and trustworthiness. Maxwell (2005) discussed the importance of credibility when conducting a scholarly study. He mentioned that the term *validity* is most often associated with the quantitative

paradigm and is not the best term to use in a qualitative study. Because data generated in the qualitative paradigm involve the lived experiences of individuals, Maxwell prefers the term *verification*, as it implies that qualitative methods can have necessary rigor while still preserving the individual's valid experiences. The researcher can only assume that the participant is forthright in responding to questions posed.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed that credibility is a critical criterion that ensures that the study measures or tests what is actually intended and is one of the most important factors in establishing trustworthiness. Credibility is "obtained from the discovery of human experience as they are lived and perceived by informants" (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). Moreover, because "the researcher is the instrument in qualitative research" (Patton, 1990, p. 14), the credibility of the researcher is based on the skills, honesty, and integrity of the research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), there are multiple areas to ensure credibility and trustworthiness within a study, including (a) triangulation, (b) tactics to help ensure honesty in informants, (c) the researcher's reflective commentary, (d) background, qualifications and experience of the investigator, (e) member check, (f) thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny, and (g) the examination of previous research findings.

In this study, triangulation was employed. I conducted face-to-face interviews and observed the participants' surroundings and body language. I also remained transparent throughout the study. Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants were employed by making certain that each participant understood they had the option to decline participating in the study at any time. This ensured that the data collected only

involved participants who genuinely desired to participate in the study. Additionally, no compensation was offered for participation. The background, qualifications and experience of the investigator were revealed by the researcher, the instrument of data in this chapter, under Delimitations and Limitations.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), member checks are the single most important provision that can be made to bolster a study's credibility. In this study, tapes from the recorded interviews were transcribed with care and accuracy. A copy of the findings was given to each participant as a member check. I confirmed the findings with each participant and that what they conveyed was in fact what they actually intended. I listened to the tapes multiple times for accuracy, voice tone and emerging themes. Thick description of the phenomenon under scrutiny was employed in the study as the researcher provided detailed description to convey the phenomenon investigated.

Limitations of the Research Study

There are some limitations to this research study. It purposely focused on a small population: African American female superintendents of K-12 public school districts or those who have been superintendents of K-12 public school districts in the past three years to gain insight into their recent lived experiences. Male African American superintendents, non-African American female superintendents, and those in other educational leadership positions in public schools were excluded from the study.

It is also noteworthy that three of 11 responding superintendents were unable to participate due to extremely busy schedules, which may suggest why other superintendents did not respond. Further, it is unclear why the fourth superintendent who

had originally agreed to participate had suddenly to take a leave of absence. It is known that her schedule was full and she would not be rescheduling for the cancellation being made. The lack of available superintendents to participate in this study suggests the critical need to understand the demands of superintendency and the underrepresentation of African American females within the role of superintendency. For superintendents who did participate, it was a challenge to schedule interviews due to the participants' work and personal schedules and their location in different cities.

Another potential limitation of the study was the potential for researcher bias, since the principal investigator of the study is also an African American female in an educational leadership role. Patton (2002) asserts that in order for research to be considered credible, the researcher must remain neutral while conducting the study; however, the role of the researcher is more than just being an objective observer. As a researcher, it is essential to consider biases and preferences brought to the study. In order accurately to identify the lived experiences of the participants, it is the responsibility of the researcher to identify and understand his or her own biases and their role in the research process. I acknowledge that my experiences and perspective as an African American female may influence interpretation of the data. To safeguard against this, participants received a copy of the findings to confirm accuracy, and I remained transparent throughout the study to ensure its credibility and trustworthiness.

Lens of the Researcher

When qualitative studies are conducted, the researcher is the instrument of data collection (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008): data are mediated through this human instrument,

rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines. In order to properly reveal that information on the human instrument, the qualitative researcher should describe “relevant aspects of self, including any biases and assumptions, expectations, and experiences that qualifies his or her to conduct such qualitative research” (Greenbank, 2003, p. 87).

My career path in education can be described as one of continuous progression. I have held several positions over 15 years in the field of education, in locations ranging from Minnesota to Mississippi, from the U.S. to Africa, and from suburbs to inner-city public school districts. I began my career in education as a substitute teacher, and then returned to college to obtain a teacher’s license for grades 9-12. I returned to college once again to obtain a second teaching certification for K-12 Intervention Specialist and later a Master’s degree. I have held positions as building special education consultant, a district transition coordinator, leadership intern and secondary assistant principal, prospectively. At present, I am charged with division middle-school principal responsibilities in a large inner-city school district. Currently, I hold no desire to be a superintendent. I plan to pursue upper-educational leadership positions that support the role of superintendent and the growth of public-school education in our nation.

My lived experiences have contributed to my success and development of persistence, a strong work ethic and solid credentials. I have not necessarily worked in schools with experienced principals or school districts that easily afforded opportunities to gain experience or programs to develop my professional growth. I have consistently found it necessary to overcome barriers in order to obtain positions. I have completed

three years of doctoral-level course work to prepare for the current qualitative study. My experience and educational foundation support my commitment and intention to contribute to trustworthy social science research.

Chapter 4: Results and Analysis

Van Manen (1990) suggests that “from a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings” (p. 5). This chapter presents comprehensive findings from interviews with six African American female school superintendents across the United States. Van Manen says, “In order to make a beginning, the phenomenologist must ask: What human experience do I feel called upon to make topical for my investigation?” (p. 41). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of African American female K-12 public school superintendents. The participants’ lived experiences were intended to inform education and policy and to give aspiring African American female superintendents insight about perceptions and strategies to consider when obtaining and maintaining the position.

Each superintendent was given a pseudonym to protect her identity. Additionally, any information obtained by the researcher that may have compromised the participant’s identity has been intentionally excluded from this dissertation.

Superintendent Profiles

Table 1 gives an overview of the six African American female superintendents in this study. Each participant selected her own pseudonym based on one word thought to reflect her overall interview and lived experiences as a superintendent. This word or adjective is used as a pseudonym for this dissertation only. All participants in the study were current superintendents who had been in the role a minimum of two years. Five of six superintendents had obtained a doctoral degree, and one was considering pursuing her

doctoral degree. Although superintendents participating in the study represented varied school districts (rural, urban and suburban), the majority were leading predominantly rural, poor and underperforming school districts. In contrast, F. Brown (2005) implies that African American leaders are generally leading urban school districts.

Table 1

Participating Superintendents' Profiles

Pseudonym	Highest degree earned	Type of District	Years of experience	# of districts as superintendent	Support system
Superintendent Focus	Ed.D.	Inner-city	6	2	Husband
Superintendent Knowledge	Ed.D.	Rural	8	2	Mentor
Superintendent Change	Ed.D.	Rural	11	3	Husband
Superintendent Contract	M.Ed.	Rural	7	2	Mentor
Superintendent Persevere	Ed.D.	Rural	12	1	Husband, Community
Superintendent Innovate	M.Ed.	Suburban	5	1	Mentor

Responses to Research Questions

Few studies have examined the underrepresentation of female superintendents and especially African American female superintendents (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999). Through their voices, the six African

American female superintendents who participated in this study yielded findings significant to the current limited literature. They described being a public school superintendent as a never-ending job where they constantly had to prove themselves due to emergencies, demanding schedules, or events that required immediate attention and often rapid decision-making and communication. The range of questions asked prompted superintendents to share challenging situations and strategies on how they overcame them. Superintendents gave diverse responses as they described personal circumstances, obstacles, and responses to obstacles that involved racial bias, adults' abuse of power, personal attacks and public scrutiny. Strategies used in these situations were not always consistent but demonstrated a pattern of endurance, motivation and perseverance. The superintendents used prior professional experience, personal faith, self-selected support systems and well-grounded educational attainment to obtain and maintain their positions. Below are a set of detailed findings collected from participants related to each of the three research questions.

Research question 1: Perceptions and experiences. Research question 1 asked: How do African American female superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as public school superintendent?

A demanding job. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study described being a K-12 public school superintendent as a demanding job. "My experiences have been a true test of my personal and professional skill set. This job is not for everyone. It requires a keen perceptive and sharp focus" (Superintendent Focus).

It requires a 24-hour commitment. Being a superintendent is a day-in and day-out job. No matter where you go, what you do, what you look like, you always have to remember that you are the superintendent and you are on the clock all the time. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

When I get up in the morning, I think about how I've got to get to work because the work must continue. I think about how there's always someone that can continue after you. But while you're in the position, you're always thinking about how to keep the work moving. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Recognizing people's ability, doing what needs to be done to get rid of them, and knowing how to move forward, and still make logical decisions....My experiences are primarily political. You are constantly in the eye of the public. The role of the superintendent is not full-time, it is all the time. I believe the key to student success is providing appropriate instruction for teachers and that's in the back of my mind. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Another superintendent mentioned, "Ups, downs, trials, triumphs, failures and successes; my experiences of a superintendent have been nothing short of what I would compare to that of a journey to the road of Damascus" (Superintendent Persevere). Experiences of a female African American superintendent were also described as, "Challenging and educational both personally and professionally; I have had the privilege to see leaders at the top of the educational ladder who are effective and who are inept" (Superintendent Innovate).

Proving yourself. The participants also reported how they believed their experiences as an African American female superintendent differed from that of a White male superintendent. "It differs because women have a more natured demeanor. For me I listen more before talking, I'm very discerning in this role" (Superintendent Focus). However, participants also said they had to work hard to prove themselves in their roles.

Recently, I started to notice something major that is shaping my perception of the superintendent's position. Early in my career I didn't pay much attention to it.

And that is the opportunities and who they are really intended for. I have applied for a large district. I have been told straight out that they are not looking for a woman, or they had an African American female before and it did not work out. I can't imagine them saying that to a White man. People say things to me that I am sure they would never say to a White man in my position, like "You speak well, you are very articulate," or maybe comments about my appearance, like "You are so pretty." I am quite sure that a White man would not have those experiences. It's as though they are surprised that I actually do speak English well and that I look nice and presentable. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

I've worked in predominantly White environments and predominantly Black environments. What I've learned from both experiences is that the White male in general comes to the job with an air of superiority and confidence. The community and those working with him are more apt to get right on board to support him when they come into their positions. Whereas, I've noticed with me as an African American female superintendent, I've had to prove myself before they get on board. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Well, the one thing your placement or position you obtain is impeded a little is to do with your experiences and expertise. The Black woman in this state will end up in a rural district provided low-performing [students]. You must be knowledgeable of the state laws, multi-faceted info, people skills a must, know the district you are applying to. I am a believer of children at the center, effective at oral and verbal communication. I have good people skills, but I'm not a politician, not because I can't be but because I think when you have the mindset of a politician, it can impede your decisions in this role. You have to keep children at the center of your decisions, not popularity or even the majority of a vote. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Superintendent Persevere added, "Acceptance as opposed to White male, generally White men are accepted more easily with less fight. I can't say what other African American women have experienced, but that is what I have experienced."

Being an African American female I have had to "prove" myself at every step of my journey where I have seen other male Caucasians and female Caucasian superintendents not have to do anything other than literally show up, know someone, or was just there as a principal, then get the job.

As superintendent, I have always had to show my "stats," like bring how much I raised test scores, increased enrollments or increased the graduation rate significantly to gain acceptance into the club. Many superintendents come from districts that have very low performance and still get high-level; high-paying

positions and their “stats” are never discussed. I know of one superintendent who had terrible communication skills, while principal test scores fell and the community was upset about her getting a job as a superintendent without prior performance being an issue. Many times I am left out of many loops of inside information because of being African American. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Determined to persevere. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study reported how those differences affected their daily experiences and responsibilities as superintendent. Common themes included staying alert and persevering. “I’m simply aware that there are differences. I don’t let them prevent me from making the decisions that have to be made, but it’s just smart to be aware of obvious differences” (Superintendent Focus). “I don’t allow the ignorance to impact my responsibilities” (Superintendent Knowledge). “It gives you a feeling of instability to always stay on top of your toes, never get too comfortable and always be ready for anything, because anything can happen without notice” (Superintendent Contract). “It just makes me stronger, more determined to persevere” (Superintendent Persevere).

Each day I have to be aware of how my district is performing, engage in professional development and networking just so I can stay informed. Every day I know that I must keep aware of current information in education so I will not be left out. If I appear to be left out my colleagues are quick to label me “ignorant” unfortunately this is the cross minority leaders have to bear. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

In particular, Superintendent Change gave a detailed response to this question.

You are continuously trying to hit home runs, so that people will realize that what you say is what you mean and that you’re willing to put your teeth into it, and all the strength that you have to support what you believe is right for children. I’ll give you an example: I’ve taken on some huge challenges in this job. Some that have gotten me into big criticism, even some legal battling because of the decisions I’ve made.

As superintendent, no matter whether you are male or a female, what you should be looking at is the needs of the children in the community for which you

serve. Not the needs of the parents. Not the needs of the good ole boys or those who are more affluent. You are looking at the needs of the children that you serve. And so, coming here...one of the surveys that I did with the community and my children, I learned that my children lacked exposure, and that was because of a lack of resources. So, I had to look at the funding sources that I had and compare that to what was needed, and to look at how could we take the funding that we have and restructure it so that we are getting 50% of what the children need at this point, and then set benchmarks each year to try to reach that 100%.

So, bringing in a non-profit group that had no affiliation with anyone here in this area, they came from X University. What they helped me to understand is that 20 years ago or 15 years ago, they had done a research project in this area when the schools were about to be built. This district is a part of the court of shame, and the court of shame consists of 10 school systems in this area that filed a lawsuit to make certain that children of high-poverty areas in rural systems were getting the proper resources that they needed to be given a quality education. So, what they did about 10 years now is they decided the community [needed] to build better schools, because the schools in this arena were deplorable, sewage backing up into the building, constant leaks, mold and mildew. It was just a disgrace to think we had children in the 20th-century at that time attending schools in that kind of environment.

With that being said, the south end of this district is where all the retirees are coming, because of the beaches and the sunshine, they are growing leaps and bounds on the south end. Unfortunately, the north end is where the children are growing. So if you think about it, if you have more retirees on the south end, but you have most of your children on the north end, you really need to take another look at that, because what folks tend to get confused with equality, is it equality, or equity is a better word, equity is not giving everyone the same. It is giving what is needed, and that's a decade-old argument. People still don't get it now, that's if they give you five dollars; they need to give me five dollars. I may not need the five dollars and you may need eight dollars and I only need two dollars. That is equity. Folks don't get that equity should be based on need, not on trying to make us feel good, that you did the right thing because you gave both of us the same amount. Well, that's what I inherited here.

So, in having this separate non-profit come in, they recommended that because of the district being so small, we only have about 3000 students. We really did not need two small high schools and two small middle schools, and that's what we had. We had the school on the north end, which is right up here, overcrowded, cramped, where they could not breathe, and the school on the south end with more room than they needed, under-populated. So, the move was to merge them like they were years ago, where you have one middle school and one high school. You would keep your K-5 in each community, because those children are too young to try to travel across the district.

You would have thought that the majority of the parents would have been elated with that, as well as public officials. I caught more "hades" then I have in

my entire career. I had to second-guess whether this was what I wanted to do. However, I knew it was right for children, because it was going to combine the resources of the students and provide more opportunities for them. This decision was made 3 years ago. Only the second year into my job, I realized that I could not give those two middle schools exactly what they needed or the two high schools, because they were too small. One high school had 400 students. One high school had 190. One middle school had 450 students and one middle school had 270.

So now that I have consolidated those schools, the sky is the limit. We don't have everything but it is so much better for our children in terms of the stability, maintaining teachers longer, offering more curriculum choices, more extra curriculum opportunities and more exposures for our children in K-12. We currently have one high school with 760 students. We have one middle school with 625 students. We have two elementary schools. One elementary school has 670 and the other elementary school has 925. But what I'm proud of is that now each division has dedicated space. They don't have to restructure their cafeteria servings or their gym time or their extracurricular activity to try to meet the needs of two separate divisions in one building. It was chaotic, and we had a lot of inappropriate interactions between our boys and girls, because of middle and high together in the same building, intermingling and you couldn't keep up with them.

Coupled with that, who would ever think that someone would build a community would build over 40 million dollars in schools and not put in a security system. So that was another cultural shock for me: brand-new buildings without a security system, so computers, televisions and other personal items would just walk out and nobody knew what happened to them. So, I inherited two big, big monsters that I tackled and it's under this administration that we realized we needed: (1) to consolidate for resource purposes, (2) we needed to put in a security system to protect the district's assets. Both of those projects were done, this is going into the third year, because I did it the second year of my administration. We have benefited greatly from both of those projects. We almost have zero to no stealing now, because they know, "You're on candid camera!" (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Getting and maintaining the job of superintendent. The six African American female superintendents also shared what factors affected their obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent, especially the role of knowledge and relationships.

There was a mentor that I knew. She put me in a position of leadership as secondary director of special education, a significant difference from being an elementary principal. While I was in that position, I begin to realize there was a possibility of being in superintendence. (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

For me, this is a multi-faceted role that requires an individual to be highly skilled in so many areas: a finance manager, facilities manager, instructional leader, you have to be an attorney, a community liaison and so much more. You have a large responsibility to make informed decisions. Never be ill-informed. Always stay knowledgeable to maintain your position.

I have to build relationships with the board. I have no opinion of my board other than a positive one, because I have positive relationships with each one of them. It is essentially like having eight bosses. So I learned what makes them operate more efficiently, one of them may want a phone call once a week, another one may want a regular emails throughout the week. You have to figure out what makes your board tick. Your knowledge on this is powerful and key to keeping your job. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

You have to know your state laws, be multifaceted, have strong people skills, make sure you know everything about the district that you are applying to work in and without question, let your contract be your professional bible, know it like the back of your hand. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

The only way I can maintain my position is to be consistent with keeping my district at the top of the student-performance chart. I know I cannot let the ball drop or I will be replaced. Most superintendents do not have this concern. I feel immense pressure since I have a high-poverty school that is high-achieving. I replaced an African American woman when I got this job and many have identified her as “big hat, no cattle;” in other words the only thing she brought to the table was a new suit. The school was under-performing, however, she was hired at low pay, with no educational experience. When I was hired it was to close the school. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

However, Superintendent Persevere commented, “For me it’s a little different.

The district felt I could lead in this role. They knew me and what I was about. People knew what my values were. I already had buy-in.”

Superintendent Change described needing fortitude in maintaining her role:

One thing is you’ve got to have fortitude in this role as a superintendent, but even more as a female. You have to learn how to put your emotions in check. When I cry, my tears are never publicly unless it’s on purpose. When I want to show my passion for the work, that’s a different set of tears than the tears of crying because your feelings are hurt, because you’ve been insulted or attacked.

I’ve had some rogue things done to me as a female superintendent. Let me give you another example: I’ve had folks take my district car and put it up on

cinder blocks and strip it down completely to the bare metal, right outside in that parking spot. They tore everything off of the car, even the rims and left nothing but the bare metal, like it just came out of the factory. It was up on cinder blocks and my chief operation officer called me and he said, "You won't believe this and I don't want you to be in shock!" I said, "What?" He said, "You won't believe what they did to your district car!" I said, "What did they do to it? Burn it up?" He said, "No, they stripped it down to the bare bones!" I laughed and I said, "You're kidding me? Well, I'm not going to cry over that, guess what? They don't know!" He said, "What?" I said, "That's taxpayers' money!" He started laughing and said, "Boss, you are on it!" I said, "You're going to contact the public information officer and that's how she's going to roll that up! Taxpayers will have to refurbish the superintendent's district car that was vandalized."

That was done right out here in the open. The sheriff told me, what they probably did was to back up a big truck. If you put that truck elongated, you really can't see around it to drive around that corner and come around. He said, that was somebody that was a mechanic. They knew what they were doing, and I suspect my board member had something to do with that, because he is ready for me to go and he has gone through great lengths to destroy me and my leadership. They were going around saying, "She should get the message from that! That oughta teach her!" So I would come back and I trained my staff to say it, "Well, you know taxpayers have got to put that back!" Once we got it refurbished, \$2,500, I made sure everybody knew, including the board members. "Now, that's your taxpayers that refurbished the superintendent's car, thank you very kindly!" I heard no more about that vehicle or the news media didn't cover it! Nobody touched it, because that was the first step in trying to intimidate me.

The second was, the current county council chairwoman was on this board. We didn't get along then. So, what do you think happened when she went on county council? Pay back! Revenge! Didn't care anything about the children. She got a couple of the parents from her community to file a lawsuit, to have me and the board reverse the consolidation...put it back the way it was and the judge threw it out. So that was another "yes"! The car got replaced. Yes, to the consolidation. What that did is, it got the devil angry and he just kept stroking that fire. They had to continuously think of ways they could get me out, because they realized after the car situation, that I wasn't going to walk away like that.

They're expecting us to fall apart and that is truly the nature of women in general. We are human. We are the bearers of children. So, if we could bear the pain of having children, we have to remember that taking these jobs are just like birthing a child. When I think of that...it's only temporary. You're not in pain for 12 months. When you birth a child, it's even a few seconds you go through that labor process and then it happens, boop! There comes the baby. It's the same analogy I used to compare females taking on the superintendency. You can think of that analogy. You go through a lot of labor pains, but you don't get up off that table and say, "I don't want this baby! Get it out of me!" You just hang in there and you do those breathing exercises. You take whatever, if they give you a

spinal tap. But whatever, you hang on in there. It's the same identical analogy. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Self-perceptions as leaders who care about children. The six African American female superintendents also responded with how they perceive themselves as superintendent. "I perceive myself as someone who takes charge, a leader, providing direction, a hard worker, a person that has to get the job done at the very least, an initiation" (Superintendent Persevere). "My perception is I am a positive and motivating leader that sets the tone and paints the picture of how my district is viewed" (Superintendent Innovate). "I perceive myself as confident, knowledgeable and focused" (Superintendent Focus). "I believe my board would give me a grade of a B, there is always something more they want. When it comes to keeping your job, your board's perception is the only one that matters" (Superintendent Knowledge).

Very firm. Determined. Committed, but frustrated...because you just make the assumption as a superintendent, that everyone else should want what you want for the children. But you forget there is this political arena that cares about the money! What if there was a donor that would just give this district 27 to 28 million to operate? You would hear nothing from those folks, because it's all about the money. They think that it's too much money going into educating children and the public system, so they have to create privatizing it for the mere purpose of dismantling it for their own personal gain. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

I am a believer of children; every decision has children at center, effective at oral and verbal communication, good people skills, not a politician. Otherwise it will impede decisions, not because I can't be but because I choose not to. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Table 2 summarizes the participants' experiences of their roles as Black female superintendents as compared to White male superintendents, their self-perceptions in the role, and descriptions of the role. Quotes are used to illustrate.

Table 2

Perceptions and Descriptions as Perceived by Participants

Participant	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Superintendent Focus	Perceives there is a difference	...I'm simply aware that there are differences. I don't let them prevent me from making the decisions that have to be made, but it's just smart to be aware of obvious differences...I perceive myself as confident, knowledgeable and focused.
	Perceives self as competent	
Superintendent Knowledge	Perceives role as 24 hour commitment	...requires a 24 hour commitment. Being a superintendent is a day-in and day-out job. No matter where you go, what you do, what you look like, you always have to remember that you are the superintendent and you are on the clock all the time...I noticed something major that is shaping my perception of the superintendent's position. Early in my career I didn't pay much attention to it. And that is the opportunities and who they are really intended for. I have applied for a large district. I have been told straight out that they are not looking for a woman or they had an African American female before and it did not work out. I can't imagine them saying that to a white man... When it comes to keeping your job, your board's perception is the only one that matters.
	Perceives opportunities for others as opposed to African American females	
	Perceives that the board's is the only perception that matters	

Table 2 (continued)

Participant	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Superintendent Change	Perceives White males as having an advantage	...the White male in general, comes to the job with an air of superiority and confidence. The community and those working with him are more apt to get right on board to support him when they come into their positions. Whereas, I've noticed with me as an African American female superintendent, I've had to prove myself before they get on board... You are continuously trying to hit home runs, so that people will realize that what you say is what you mean and that you're willing to put your teeth into it...you've got to have fortitude in this role as a superintendent, but even more as a female.
	Perceives African American female superintendent has to prove herself	
	Perceives female superintendent needs greater fortitude than male counterparts	
	Role as all-time job	
Superintendent Contract	Perceives that your expertise is not aligned to placement	My experiences are primarily political. You are constantly in the eye of the public. The role of the superintendent is not full time, it is all the time... Well the one thing your placement or position you obtain is impeded, little is to do with your experiences and expertise. The Black woman in this state will end up in rural district provided low performing.
Superintendent Persevere	Opportunities intended for white male counterparts	Ups, downs, trials, triumphs, failures and successes; my experiences of a superintendent have been nothing short of what I would compare to that of a journey to the road of Damascus... Acceptance as opposed to white male, generally white men are accepted more easily with less fight. I can't say what other African American women have experienced, but that is what I have experienced... I perceive myself as someone who takes charge, a leader, providing direction, a hard worker, a person that has to get the job done at the very least, an initiation.
	Perceives self-driven and self-initiator	

Table 2 (continued)

Participant	Perception	Quotes from Interview
Superintendent Innovate	Perceives African American female has to prove herself first versus White male counterpart.	Being an African American female I have had to “prove” myself at every step of my journey where I have seen other male Caucasians and female Caucasians superintendents not have to do anything other than literally show up...I have always had to show my “stats” like bring how much I raised test scores, increased enrollments or increased the graduation rate significantly to gain acceptance into the club...If I appear to be left out my colleagues are quick to label me “ignorant” unfortunately this is the cross minority leaders have to bear...I am a positive and motivating leader that sets the tone and paints the picture of ...my district....”
	Perceives African American female superintendent has to demonstrate connectedness to avoid being viewed as ignorant.	
	Perceives self as a positive and motivating leader.	

Research question 2: Racial and gender impact. Research Question 2 asked:

What experiences, if any, have African American female superintendents lived where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as a public school superintendent?

Race and gender barriers in attaining the job of superintendent. Most of the six African American female superintendents who participated in this study reported barriers experienced when obtaining the position of superintendent. Superintendent Persevere, however, responded, “I didn’t experience major barriers when I sought this position, because my roots and performance had already proven itself.” However, most participants mentioned having to overcome race bias and gender bias to show they could be “the face of a superintendent.”

A barrier would be a political white male figure who thought he should be the next superintendent because of years of experience in this district. He most likely also believed he would be more likely to get the position because of his race and gender. (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

Although there is small percentage of African American female superintendents, people do not openly discuss it, but when I walk in a room, I know I am one of a few. I am not the picture of a superintendent. The sheer numbers is a great barrier and the sheer fact that no one is really talking about. You have to know who you are and you have to know that you can be the face of a superintendent. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

Barriers can be disguised as qualifications. At one district I worked at, I inquired about going into administration and was told you had to have a Master's and so many years in the classroom. When I was in the teacher's lounge another teacher was sharing that he was going to be an administrator and did not have a Masters or many years in the classroom. When I looked around I realized there were several administrators who did not seem to have the same qualifications as me....

On a different example, my Special Education Director who I worked with prior to my superintendency who's White..., people will say things to her that they will not share with me not knowing she comes back and tells. The situations she shares are very racially charged. I recall one state meeting where both she and I attended, she was dressed very casual and I was wearing a business suit. People automatically assume that she is the superintendent. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Superintendent Innovate also mentioned being “out of the loop” and lacking opportunities or knowledge about opportunities.

I also was left out of many loops that could have saved me time and money. One teacher who was part of the inside group, I know took a class at Ohio State and never had to attend because one of the principals was teaching the class and knew her. Where I had to take the class and could not miss a day. When one is a minority it is the exclusionary factors of who you know, where you live and inside information that creates barriers and can prevent professional opportunities from being accessible. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Superintendent Change also mentioned that she knew only two African American superintendents who had come up through the ranks in their school districts, and advised being flexible in looking for jobs.

One of the things that we have to remember as female superintendents, of particularly African Americans, we need to be flexible. When I say flexible, willing to relocate to obtain the job, because locally the barriers are real, do you get promoted from within as an African American female superintendent? When I think of all the female superintendents that are currently in place, I only know of two that I've worked with that actually came up through the ranks. They were a teacher, principal. They were born and raised in that community. I only know of two. One was retired and the other one, last year, they terminated her, but now she's reinstated in another job in another rural district.

So, you need to be flexible and not afraid to make a move. With females, we tend to in general, but even more so with African American females, we are so maternal. Not just maternal in dealing with our own children, but just our church family and the sorority, and all these other things. When you think of motherly love, we smother ourselves with an attitude of "We don't want to give that up!" Whereas, men have a tendency to pack it up in a suitcase and take it with them.

And so, it was a learning experience for me. I had to start looking at the map. I would put out a map and look at it and say, "Now, where do I think I could live?" And then, I started looking for vacancies in those areas. I looked for nothing up north, because I knew I wasn't going to Chicago, New York, Montana or North Dakota, those cold climates. That was out! But, I may have considered the Midwest, may have. I love the south and the southeast. So, I started looking and I actually had an offer in Arkansas, and I decided that I would stay a little closer to home for my first superintendency. I'm only 2 hours away from home. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Race and gender barriers in maintaining the job of superintendent. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study also described race or gender barriers they experienced while serving as superintendent.

I've experienced resistance just for my appearance of being a Black female superintendent that only someone would know if they have experienced it. Sometimes it's just the unspoken tension when you walk into a meeting that wasn't there just prior to you entering. You have to know inside that you can be the face of a superintendent. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

A major barrier is just the constant need to prove yourself over and over and realizing that your gender and your race are the reasons. I may not have a problem with either of these and I realize that neither negatively impacts my performance, but I do constantly deal with people who see it differently. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Even after I was selected for the position, the opposition was apparent. I was probed and probed for simple questions; something that did not happen with the person in position prior to me. I was asked to prove my decisions over and over. (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

Most [barriers] would fall under inside information. Many superintendents golf at country clubs and share professional information during personal outings. In education, like all professions, there is a lot of nepotism. I have lost count years ago of how many times I have been out of the loop because I was not invited to weddings or other social gatherings and found out information years later.

For example, I [previously] took a job as principal at a school and did not realize it was a low-paying position; although the pay was average, there were no benefits included. A couple of years down the road a friend from another state looked at my contract and told me that benefits should be standard. I was embarrassed I did not know and humiliated that many others knew it. When I brought it up at a board meeting not one board member looked me in the eye. I later found out that the treasurer helped another principal get a fully inclusive contract but would not help me. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

It is very difficult. I have cried many tears. I have confidantes that I talk with, because you can't speak to everybody. Some of them are back home. Some are right here in this community, but I pray a lot! My husband is my best friend. That's another critical piece for us as female African American superintendents. If your spouse is not on board, that really extends the emotional pressure. I got buy-in from my husband early. Part of that would be because I kept nothing from him. As we move up what I call the corporate ladder of leadership and education, you need to make sure that your house is in order, because that's your stability! When he said to me that he was willing to relocate because he could find work in his line of work anywhere, I knew it was time for me to take the next step. That's kind of how I deal with it. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Superintendent Persevere also mentioned barriers in a small rural community.

One barrier is that my community is a small and rural. Poverty, resources, community, materials, innovation and on so forth are real problems. Every dream needs money. A lack of industry, a lack of jobs, and no tax base... young talented educators are just not attracted to that. (Superintendent Persevere, Interview, April 1, 2015)

Dealing with barriers. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study shared how they dealt with those barriers. Superintendent Focus

remembered, “I stayed focused. I did my job 150%, kept the board informed and communicated to all stakeholders. I knew that as a Black woman, my job was harder.” Superintendent Knowledge also said, “I had to learn not to say ‘no’ to a position before I applied. I am not a person looking for barriers, I know they exist, I just choose to be a person who overcomes them.” “You just keep on moving,” Superintendent Change said. Superintendent Persevere also commented, “I haven’t stopped dealing with it. I have not overcome it. I worked with it. We have to move forward. I can’t make industry come to me. When somebody finds the answer, please let me know.”

In some cases you don’t, I already knew I was African American and female before becoming a superintendent. I do not see it as a barrier, rather a fact. I stick with facts and data in this position. I stick to what’s right for children, then I can move forward. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

I have trained myself to keep moving forward regardless of the barriers, to not let these barriers consume me, to think too much about the negative is to give in and admit defeat. I try to network with other superintendents; attend as many meeting as possible, also read all newsletters and communications from state department of education. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Reasons for low numbers of African American superintendents. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study also described what factors they believe contribute to low proportions of African American superintendent compared to their white counterparts. “I believe there are multiple factors including the idea the African American women are less, which is simply not true,” Superintendent Focus said.

Historically, people have not seen females in roles of leadership. I hear that more females are more emotional. I think its passion. Either way, the board doesn’t want an emotional superintendent. I maintain an even keel. I learned not to take it personally, not to be emotionally invested. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

Well, I think in America in general, the African American female has always been seen as the child-bearer, the housekeeper, the madam-fix-it. We have this huge maternal stretch. It's like folks turn to us for everything, except leadership. They even see us as a sex object, so we have been seen as all of those things, but not as leaders. I think it took folks a long time to accept us in that role. When you think about even the presidency of the United States, you don't hear much about any serious African American females? Even if they're in leadership, we don't hear about them as much. If you think about that, we hear about the Black males. We hear about the White females, and I am sure the President has some strong African American females aside from his wife and his cabinet, but you just don't hear about them. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

I already knew I was African American and female before becoming a superintendent. I do not see it as a barrier, rather a fact. I stick with facts and data in this position. I stick to what's right for children, and then you can move forward. A factor that contributes to the low number of Black females doing this is the huge role that boards play. The Black relationship is not productive, nor is the female relationship productive. It's simply getting down to doing what is right. The board is the only thing that truly impeded the board and it's who hires and fires the superintendent. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Prejudice is as real today as it was 100 years ago, it just looks and sounds different and that's a real issue when a Black woman decides she want to become a superintendent. I believe there are only a few African American female superintendents because of fear of not succeeding, they are often overlooked, because of the prejudice and bias, because the world is run by White men and oftentimes the color of skin within the African American race is our biggest stop sign. (Superintendent Persevere, Interview, April 1, 2015)

Lack of support up the ladder, not being made privy to possible upcoming positions and not having the grooming to be "qualified" for professional opportunities. By grooming I mean knowing which "clubs" to join. When one has support and is guided to volunteer to be the advisor for the Young Scholars program instead of doing tardy table because an administrative opening is coming up and being an advisor for young scholars looks better on a resume, this inside information can make a difference even if another candidate has more qualifications. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Advice for overcoming barriers. The six African American female

superintendents who participated in this study also described the barriers aspiring African

American female might anticipate facing, and advised that they be prepared for bias and be ready to participate in the politics of their jobs so as to win.

The aspiring African American female superintendent is going to face barriers with communications. No matter how much you communicate, they want more. It's very, very political game and you will have to be up to not just playing the game but winning. There is an implicit notion that African Americans are less, even when you are qualified. (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

“She will experience race and gender bias. That's just a mere fact,” Superintendent Knowledge said. “Every possible barrier that I have told you and many more.”

Superintendent Change emphasized, adding:

There are just processes you follow when you are in this position. Do your research on the district. Know as much as possible. Know the board. The board that hires you may not be the board you work for. Be sure you understand your contract. Know your due process.” (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

She will have to endure barriers of bias and prejudice. The struggle is not over. Loretta Launch is still not approved. She will have to face everything your forefathers faced, everything your parents faced, the Black woman entering this journey will face issues that others will not. They just look different today and you are just smarter and sharper. No one can just hand you wooden nickels. (Superintendent Persevere, Interview, April 1, 2015)

Stereotyping based on media images of the sassy, finger-snapping, girlfriend character one sees on TV of women of color. On my first day as executive director, a secretary came into my office and said “Girl, I am glad you are here I know you will get this shit together, because these folks been messing up!” This was an African American female. She spoke with an attitude and assumed that I fit a certain stereotype. But I knew I could not come in with that attitude because the people above me didn't look like me. It was interesting that she was Black and I was Black yet she had formed and contributed to the very stereotype that we both fight every day. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Table 3 summarizes race and gender impact as perceived by the participants.

Table 3

Race and Gender Impact as Perceived by Participants

Participant	Supporting Quotes from Interviews
Superintendent Focus	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "...a political white male figure who thought he should be the next superintendent because of years of experience in this district. He most likely also believed he would be more likely to get the position because of his race and gender." 2. "I knew that as a Black woman, my job was harder." 3. "I believe there are multiple factors including the idea that African American women are less, which is simply not true." 4. "The aspiring African American female superintendent is going to face barriers with communications. No matter how much you communicate, they want more... There is an implicit notion that African Americans are less, even when you are qualified."
Superintendent Knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "I am not the picture of a superintendent." 2. "I've experienced resistance just for my appearance of being a Black female superintendent that only someone would know if they have experienced it." 3. "...people have not seen females in roles of leadership. I hear that more females are more emotional. I think its passion." 4. "She [aspiring African American female superintendents] experience race and gender bias. That's just a mere fact."
Superintendent Change	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. "as female superintendents, of particularly African Americans, we need to be flexible...willing to relocate to obtain the job, because locally the barriers are real? ...men have a tendency to pack it up in a suitcase and take it with them." 2. "My husband is my best friend. That's another critical piece for us as female African American superintendents. If your spouse is not on board, that really extends the emotional pressure." 3. "the African American female has always been seen as the child bearer, the house keeper, the madam fix-it... It's like folks turn to us for everything, except leadership. They even see us as a sex object, so we have been seen as all of those things, but not as leaders..." 4. "When you think about even the presidency of the United States, you don't hear much about any serious African American females? ...we hear about the black males. We hear about the white females, and I am sure the President has some strong African American females aside from his wife and his cabinet, but you don't hear about them."

Table 3 (continued)

Participant	Supporting Quotes from Interviews
Superintendent Contract	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A major barrier is just the constant need to prove yourself over and over and realizing that your gender and your race are the reasons. I may not have a problem with either of these and I realize that neither negatively impacts my performance, but I do constantly deal with people who see it differently. 2. "I already knew I was African American and female before becoming a superintendent. I do not see it as a barrier, rather a fact. I stick with facts and data in this position."
Superintendent Persevere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prejudice is as real today as it was 100 years ago, it just looks and sounds different and that's a real issue when a Black woman decides she want to become a superintendent. I believe there are only a few African American female superintendents because of fear of not succeeding, they are often overlooked, because of the prejudice and bias, because the world is run by white men and often times the color of skin within the African American race is our biggest stop sign. 2. She will have to endure barriers of bias and prejudice. The struggle is not over...everything your forefathers faced, everything your parents faced, the Black woman entering this journey will face.
Superintendent Innovate	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When I was in the teacher's lounge another teacher was sharing that he was going to be an administrator and he did not have a Masters or many years in the classroom. When I looked around I realized there were several administrators who did not seem to have the same qualifications as me. 2. When one is a minority it is the exclusionary factors of who you know...that create barriers and can prevent professional opportunities from being accessible. 3. People will say things to [white colleague] her that they will not share with me not...The situations she shares are very racially charged. 4. Stereotyping based on media images of the sassy, finger-snapping, girlfriend character sees on TV of women of color. On my first day as Executive Director a secretary came into my office and said "Girl, I am glad you are here I know you will get this shit together, because these folks been messing up!" This was an African American female.

Research question 3: Strategies for success. Research question 3 asked: What strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as public school superintendent?

Strategies for success. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study responded with strategies, if any, that their professional mentor(s) shared with them to help overcome barriers in their positions. One key theme was getting support. “They encouraged me. I wanted to improve upon what they had done,” Superintendent Persevere said. Superintendent Innovate commented, “I have had one superintendent from another state that told me to build my own team and never go into a new district without my team.” Superintendent Contract also noted, “Have a support system that will help you during difficult times. My position is such a public position; the person you speak with has to be of that caliber to help you process information with confidentiality.”

Dr. X is in another city, he was the previous superintendent and when he left, he took all the materials that have helped me get started as the new superintendent. I had to figure it out. They didn’t leave me with supports to be successful. I had to talk with other people in the county to figure them out. So someone who wants to be a superintendent, especially someone that might have challenges that others will not, such as an Black female, will have to be very resourceful and decide to focus on the job, not the obstacle. (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

Another message that superintendents heard was the importance of showing integrity.

I remember one person telling me to make sure I have integrity, make sure that I never give anyone an opportunity to question my integrity. Don’t ever let people have the perception that your integrity is being questioned. Always be present in the job you have, if you have to constantly look at the next thing, it’s difficult to

be present on the thing you are working on. (Superintendent Knowledge, Interview, January 13, 2015)

Well, one of the strategies I've learned from my mentors and from my mother is, you've just got to stand tall when you know that what you're doing is right. You cannot become cowardice and throw in the towel, when you have to find ways of just working around that.

I think what has helped me to extend my time here is, believe it or not, the public have never seen me lose it. They've never seen me publicly lose it. There's a commercial that says, "Never let them see you sweat." That is really true for female superintendents. I've had some mean things said and done to me. I've had people to form rallies. When you Google me, you are going to find so many controversial things, if you haven't already.

You'll learn as superintendent, it's better to have you a private phone. You have all the immunities, but you don't want to have shown on your superintendent phone. I have my personal phone and I have my private phone. There is nothing that prohibits me from taking personal calls, and I have on my superintendent's phone, but for the most part, I don't make that a practice. I have my personal phone and my district phone. And that I learned from my mentor.

I also learned the value of monitoring spending on your district credit card. You have to be very careful, and that comes with having a certain level of integrity. You have \$14,000 dollars a year to spend at your disposal. Do you max out the card for that, just because you have it? I think each year I spend no more than maybe \$6,000 for travel and for different things. I try not to abuse my privilege just because I can. I'm very cautious about what I put on a card. If you would like to have a glass of wine, and even though they say to you that they don't have a problem with you having a glass of wine, don't you have it on your district card! Take your own card and pay for your wine. Pay cash, because I assure you, one day it will come back to haunt you. So you learn to discipline yourself when you have a district credit card. You learn to monitor and put in criteria for your staff, so they won't abuse the card.

We collect all receipts. This may be different for some superintendents, because they say, "Well that's what you hire a finance guy for." Yes, but you still need to be on top of that. So, I sign every piece of document in the district. All of it comes to me. I have only a small portion of things that do not come to me. If it's stuff that's pretty regimented, that comes every month, even before I allow my secretary to put my stamp on it, I eyeball it. Just so that I have an idea of what it is, because it goes before the board. If it's anything over \$5,000 dollars, I want to make sure that I'm on top of it! (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Learning from failure. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study also described results of their failures as superintendents.

Superintendent Knowledge commented, “The result of my failures, I don’t know if I would call them failures as much as challenges that I have overcome and as a result of overcoming them, I am more knowledgeable and more capable in my role.” Similarly, Superintendent Contract said, “My failure has made me. They have not broken me. My failures have been my biggest successes, because I came out on the other end of them and didn’t stay and die in the center of them.” Superintendent Persevere also remembered, “I learned to get up. I learned to not stay down, if you stay down, they will kick you. Stay focused in all that comes around. Persevere through the storms, they won’t last for long.”

The result of my failures has been greater successes, because I learn from each one not to repeat them again. There are a lot of things you might fail at, but there are a lot more that you are good at.” (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

Failures to me would be, not finding a way to reach the masses in the community when it comes to relationships across race. If I had a magic wand, I would love to find a way to recruit my white children to come back into the school, and I realize that this was done way before my time and that school was built as soon as the feds said that there was mandatory integration in America. The school went up within a year and it has remained a focal point in this community. So much to the point, that when businesses come into the area, they only talk about the private school. They don’t talk about the public school.

So, I have worked extremely hard with my public relations person to try to improve our image and that’s the area for me that I feel that I’ve failed. Some said to me, they have seen that that’s my greatest contribution. So, I think I’m really hard on myself for that, because I’m used to really bringing folks on board, but a lack of diversity in a community is very difficult to overcome.

If I had to do it all over again, I may have thought of another approach or something. I’ve even diversified my staff for that purpose. My finance director is the first white male ever in the history of the district since integration, to serve as chief financial officer. My public information officer is Caucasian. So, there are some arenas that I have purposely put folks in to try to demonstrate that I want us to work together and make it better for the children, but this has been a hard nut to crack!

And so, it has led to a huge stress sore for me and in closing I will say, the district has been under a federal investigation for one year, and it’s all because of those people in power who wanted me to leave. They couldn’t push me out.

They couldn't evaluate me out. So they figured the only way to get me out was to create this fictitious misappropriation of funds, and that's another stressor that they used on superintendents in general, but on African Americans particularly. We are always seen as liars and thieves. Had I not had the level of integrity, that I told you about, with the telephone, with the credit card, you would probably fall into that trap, but when they came in on us, the politics of it. You knew it was political, because really does the federal government, FBI, IRS or any of them, they always make appointments to come in and talk with you professionally, if they think it's something to gain from it. But, to try to intimidate me and my staff, they came in on us like gang busters and treated us like we were drug dealers. They just pop up in here, like kicking the doors in. They didn't kick them in, but it was like that and showed up at my home! Like, what would I have at my home? So, I've learned that that's an attack. That's a strategy too, you know, like at war. The art of war, surprise attack!

For me the saving grace was at the time I had an injury to my back. My husband was well then and he would not allow them to come into the home. They didn't have a warrant. They just said to him, they wanted to talk to me, and he asked them if they had an appointment, and they said, no. That's been going on for 10 months and it's not over yet. So all of that to say, "Get out! We don't want you!" (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

I was not in a professional network and believed it was all about job performance-wrong! Although it would be nice to believe this is true I lost a lot of money and benefits believing this. Now that I have developed a network I feel this has helped me feel less stressed and more empowered. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Life experiences promoting success. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study also described life experiences that equipped them in being successful as superintendents.

My mother, the strength of her is in me. There is nothing that anyone can do to break me. She raised eight children. I was convinced that she was getting what she needed. We all went through the heart of the race riots. The community didn't do a good job of educating me. I had to go back and get it. I started in special education and continued until I finished my doctoral degree. Everything I experienced made me stronger. (Superintendent Focus, Interview, December 19, 2014)

My mother used to tell me "You have to be at work 8 hours, do whatever you are told, do not complain and make your job feel you give more than you receive." I

have approached many job opportunities this way and these experiences have served me well. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

Throughout my life, I have experienced much, some that have normally taken the average out of commission. It was God and my husband that continued to remind me that I was cut out to push past challenges and do the harder thing. My life was never easy, even as a child. I had to work hard helping in and around the house and there just wasn't an excuse that my mother would accept. That developed perseverance. (Superintendent Persevere, Interview, April 1, 2015)

My childhood groomed me. I learned how to work hard and overcome challenges early. I learned to forgive; I get over it and move forward. Professionally, I am a product of this district. My kids are the product. I was assistant principal, elementary school principal and executive director and I live in this community. I have multiple perspectives to help me in making wise decisions as superintendent. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

I have a mentor and my mentor is the interim that was here when I came. He and I worked. I was superintendent elect, which is an excellent model for a district. Superintendent elect and interim superintendent, worked together for six months. He was not envious of me, jealous of me and I listened to him! I wasn't a know it all. So therefore, we became very close and he checks on me on a regular basis. He comes down occasionally and visits. We email, call, write. So, that has been very helpful. You need that in the superintendency. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Superintendent Knowledge also credited "My marriage of 34 years, the influence of my son and friends, all of them tell me truth. This has been a huge influence on who I am today and I respond to life."

Advice for succeeding as superintendent. The six African American female superintendents who participated in this study also offered strategies for success for the aspiring African American female superintendent. "Be fearless, be skilled, be still, be quiet and stay focused," Superintendent Focus advised. Participants also mentioned self-knowledge. "Know who you are before you become superintendent so the position doesn't change you," Superintendent Knowledge said.

You have to know who are. Don't let anyone define you. No one will see me struggle, so they will go after you harder. You must have faith. There is a level of trust you can't have with anyone except in faith. If you don't have faith, you better go out and get it now. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Similarly, Superintendent Persevere commented, "Know who you are. Regardless of what I have to face, I always remember who I am." Superintendent Change also mentioned having a good sense of the job role.

One strategy I would offer them is, whatever job you are currently in, do well at that job. Don't take a job and try to perform like the superintendent. That's not your role. If you are an assistant superintendent, perform that role and do it to the best of your ability. Always respect the person that's in charge of that division, and if you find yourself in a very awkward position, find a way to move on and get out of it, because if you stay sometimes and destroy your credibility, you can't recover sometimes from that. So, I say in the job that you have, whatever it may be principal, director, assistant superintendent do that job and do it well! Don't try to become a superintendent in that job. That is the job that will help you to become the superintendent, when it's your time. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

Superintendent Change also advised "spiritual grounding" and finding a mentor:

"Close relationships with experienced superintendents. Making sure you have a mentor."

Superintendent Innovate also suggested, "Get a mentor or three, join professional networks, make sure you go into a district with at least one person you bring, understand you are a role model."

Participants also mentioned views of the most valuable strategy for obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent. "Listening," Superintendent Focus said.

Bringing to the district a person I brought from Florida! Many days I had to discuss with her what she thought the issue was versus what I thought the issue was and between the two of us I felt we were able to come to a solution or plan. (Superintendent Innovate, Interview, April 25, 2015)

“Always be present in the job you have. If you are constantly looking at the next thing, it’s difficult to be present,” Superintendent Knowledge commented.

So, in the superintendency, the key to staying in the job, are the people that hired you! Right now, I have a majority OK. Even though it’s not a wide majority, it’s still the majority. The majority is the majority and the majority extended my contract last week for another year. You might have read that in the paper. And they gave me 12% annuity for my retirement budget, and everything else remains the same. I have been at the same salary without any raises for as long as I have been here. But, I don’t quarrel about that, because there are so many other perks that go along with the superintendency. You pick your battles. So, do I want to battle with them to give me a couple of thousand dollars on the salary, or do I just like keep my car allowance, my annuity and increase my travel freedom? That to me is more powerful than arguing and quivering about a few dollars added to my salary. To stay in the job, it’s all about the board members that brought you here.

Secondly, in every superintendent’s job, the board members that typically hire you, you will end up many, many times with those board members changing. And so, my style of building relationships with new board members, I invite them in to have a one-on-one with me and I spend as much time as they want answering questions. I usually present them with a booklet of my work over a period of time. Now this was my evaluation for 2013 and 2014, and this is how I put the booklet together with test scores. I do the same thing to board members, coming on board. I put a booklet like that together for them with information. I provide them with test data over the year, with accomplishments, with the goals, that kind of thing. They can sell you on paper, but when you get before that board, it’s between you, them and the Good Lord! So, it’s up to you to make sure that you say what they think they want to hear, in terms of what their district needs are.

Also, do your research. When I came here, I had a booklet like that. I made up my own and I was able to tell them strategically what I would do for each area. I knew the history of the community, the fight about the building of the schools, all of that. I knew how long some of them had served on the board. I could call them by name in talking to them. I read articles about the community, some of the issues that they would have, and I would have that in my binder and talk about that. I left out nothing. (Superintendent Change, Interview, February 27, 2015)

“Faith, without a doubt you must have faith,” Superintendent Contract said. “Prayer, go to your Help for help. Don’t stop praying and don’t stop persevering,” Superintendent Persevere reflected. Table 4 summarizes the strategies the superintendents mentioned.

Table 4

Strategies for Aspiring African American Female Superintendents

Interviewee	Strategies	Quotes from Interview
Superintendent Focus	Stay focused Be resourceful	“Be very resourceful and decide to focus on the job...Be fearless, be skilled, be still, be quiet and stay focused.”
Superintendent Knowledge	Demonstrate integrity Be mentally present	“...never give anyone an opportunity to question my integrity...be present in the job you have.”
Superintendent Change	Possess perseverance Have a private phone Monitor district spending Maintain self-discipline Be conscientious	Stand tall when you know that what you’re doing is right...Never let them see you sweat...have you a private phone... monitor spending on your district credit card...have a certain level of integrity... discipline yourself when you have a district credit card...Take your own card and pay for your wine... anything over \$5,000, I want to make sure that I’m on top of it...whatever job you are currently in, do well at that job.
Superintendent Contract	Access support system Have faith	“have a support system that will help you during difficult times... Faith, without a doubt you must have faith.”
Superintendent Persevere	Stay self-aware Pray	“Know who you are. Regardless of what I have to face, I always remember who I am....Prayer; go to your Help for help. Don’t stop praying and don’t stop persevering.”
Superintendent Innovate	Get a mentor Join professional networks, Build a team Be a role model	“Get a mentor or three, join professional networks, make sure you go into a district with at least one person you bring, understand you are a role model”

Summary of Findings

Interviews of six female superintendents' revealed experiences and descriptions of work as public-school superintendents were consistent with F. Brown's (2005) findings that African American leaders are inundated with obstacles, such as lack of resources, lack of quality teachers, lack of funding and poor student achievement. Two participants perceived that superintendency as a "24-hour job." All six participants in this study perceived a difference between their own experience and that of White male counterparts, as when Superintendent Change commented, "The white male in general, comes to the job with an air of superiority and confidence. The community and those working with him are more apt to get right on board to support him." In contrast, three out of six participants perceived that African American female superintendents have to prove their work first: for example, Superintendent Change added, "Whereas, I've noticed with me as an African American female superintendent, I've had to prove myself before they get on board...You are continuously trying to hit home runs." Participants mentioned perceptions of self as competent, self-driven, self-initiator, positive, and a motivating leader. However, Superintendent Knowledge also perceived that the board's perception "is the only perception that matters."

All six African American female superintendents described one or more experiences where race and/or gender had affected their ascension to superintendency, as well as one or more experiences where race and/or gender continued to affect their current work as public-school superintendents. One participant reported:

A major barrier is just the constant need to prove yourself over and over and realizing that your gender and your race are the reasons. I may not have a

problem with either of these and I realize that neither negatively impacts my performance, but I do constantly deal with people who see it differently. (Superintendent Contract, Interview, March 21, 2015)

Another participant reported that “I’ve experienced resistance just for my appearance of being Black female superintendent that only someone would know if they have experienced it” (Superintendent Knowledge).

Based on their lived experiences, study participants suggested strategies for the aspiring African American female superintendent. Three said it was essential to have a mentor and/or join professional networks. Three participants also reported strategies related to positionality, i.e., “...be present in the job you have” (Superintendent Knowledge). Two participants also reported faith and prayer as a strategy. Other strategies reported were having a private phone, monitoring district spending, demonstrating integrity, maintaining self-awareness, and drawing on informal support. Implications of these findings are described in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

Restatement of the Purpose of the Study

Chapter 5 presents the findings, implications, and recommendations for implementation and actions, and suggests future research based on the results of the study. Given the research questions asked in this study, it was most fitting that it be a qualitative study. The most profound rationale for a qualitative study is

...heightening awareness for experience that has been forgotten or overlooked. By heightening awareness and creating dialogue, it is hoped that research can lead to better understanding of the ways things appear to someone else and through that insight lead to improvements in practice. (Barritt, 1986, p. 20)

This study was focused on one major phenomenon: “There is a paucity of research available on blacks in the superintendency and even less on Black women in the superintendency” (Alston, 2005, p. 675). However, research indicates that public school superintendency remains the most male-dominated position in the U.S. (De Santa Ana, 2008), and that underrepresentation of female superintendents continues (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999).

The primary focus of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore similarities and differences in the lived experiences of self-identified African American females in the position of K-12 public school superintendency as a way of informing policy makers and superintendent preparation programs. The three research questions were:

Question 1: How do African American female superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as public school superintendent?

Question 2: What experiences, if any, have African American female superintendents lived where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as public school superintendent?

Question 3: What strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as public school superintendent?

Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of African American female superintendents, and provided insight into why women (and especially African American women) are still underrepresented as public school superintendents. During the interview each of the six African American female superintendents participating in the study was asked to answer 15 questions derived from three overriding research questions relating to (a) perceptions and experiences, (b) race and gender and (c) strategies for aspiring African American female superintendents.

Perceptions and experiences. The first research question was how do African American female superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as a public school superintendent? The five sub- questions were: Describe your experiences as a K-12 public school superintendent? How, if any, do you believe your experiences as an African American female superintendent have differed from that of a White male superintendent? How do those differences affect your daily experiences and responsibilities as superintendent? What factors have affected your obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent? How do you perceive yourself as superintendent?

Participants in this research study cited perceptions that: (a) White males have an advantage, (b) opportunities are intended for non-African American females; (c) the school board is key to obtaining and maintaining one's position; (d) African American female superintendents have to prove themselves first, and (e) the female African American superintendent perceives herself as a driven, competent, positive and motivating leader.

Given these perceptions, it is appropriate to consider gatekeepers: the individuals who control access to the superintendency—i.e., school board members (Chase & Bell, 1990). Gatekeepers must evaluate recruitment and hiring practices. In 2008, Handy conducted a qualitative study examining the process utilized to select female superintendents from the perspective of gatekeepers. Data were collected from documents and from interviews with superintendents, school board members, and search committees. Findings showed that superintendents were hired based on three major factors: work-related traits, professional factors, and character traits. Factors that impeded superintendency appointments included criteria, beliefs, language, and process.

Chase and Bell (1990) asserted that candidates need to understand gatekeepers and their perceptions of superintendents. The researchers' qualitative study noted that gatekeepers have an integral role in assisting women in acquiring superintendent position and that perceived constraints included school district demographics and sexism involved in the superintendent hiring process.

Tallerico (2000) suggested that utilization of headhunters is crucial for extending equitable opportunities to qualified African American superintendent candidates. School

districts often contract headhunters to interview potential candidates, identify candidates' strengths, and research professional experiences. The use of headhunters opens more gates in the "flow channels leading to the superintendency" (Tallerico, 2000, p. 21) and allows African American women more opportunities to enter into superintendent positions. Due to the limited number of African American women entering superintendency and the increased utilization of gatekeepers or search consultants, the implications of the selection process are immense.

Racial and gender impact. The second research question asked: what experiences, if any, have African American female superintendents lived where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as public school superintendent? The five sub-questions asked during interviews were: Tell me about some of the barriers, if any, that you have experienced when obtaining the position of superintendent. Please share any barriers, if any, that you have experienced while serving as superintendent. How do you deal with these barriers? What factors do you believe contribute to the low proportions of African American superintendents compared to their White counterparts? What barriers do you believe the aspiring African American female might anticipate facing?

For African American women who aspire to superintendency, it is essential to identify racial and gender barriers to the superintendency. Each study participant revealed that in obtaining and maintaining her position, she had encountered personal struggles, public scrutiny and private pain. Participants indicated that they faced race and gender challenges that may have affected their superintendency placements.

Studies addressing the barriers that generally hinder women from obtaining superintendency (see especially Brunner & Peyton, 2000; Jones, 2003; McLean, 2006; Meyerson, 2001) have also addressed a variety of barriers that apply to African American women, including: (a) perceptions of administrative roles, (b) traditional ideas of leadership, (c) gender discrimination and sexism, (d) educational research and policy, (e) expectations of women, (f) lack of professional development and training, (g) organizational structures, and (h) personal responsibilities. In particular, African American females tend to be placed in school districts that have a lack of resources, lack of funding, lack of support and lack of quality teachers (F. Brown, 2005). These challenges and the lack of means to overcome them have a direct effect on the tenure of African American leaders (F. Brown, 2005).

Glass et al. (2000) also found that women were typically hired as change agents, and once the changes occurred, women left the districts in which they were hired. Women left due to problems balancing family and work, expanded job demands and time commitment to the job, or a changing school board. Female superintendents in rural areas (similar to the majority of the participants in this study) also cited physical remoteness, lack of support systems, lack of professional development, and overwhelming demands of the job (Glass et al., 2000). Glass et al. further reported that female superintendents believe that gender is a barrier to obtaining the position of superintendent.

Alston (1999) also studied a sample of 45 Black female superintendents to identify barriers (including those of gender and race) and attributes they encountered

when obtaining the role of superintendency. The average age range of the respondents was 50-54 and the majority held doctoral degrees. Additionally, in terms of professional background, the average study participant had spent more time in the classroom than her male counterpart. A large portion of the women had pursued the traditional pathway, from classroom teacher to the central office en route to superintendency. Additionally, most of these African American superintendents surveyed resided in an urban school district. Alston's research findings resemble those of this study, where participants were in their 50s and 60s, with all but one holding doctoral degrees. While it is unclear if participants in this study had spent more time in the classroom than their male counterparts, each participant had begun as teacher and held central office positions before becoming superintendent. Yet, in contrast to Alston's study, most participants in this study were superintendents in rural school districts.

Alston's (1999) study further identified job performance barriers involving race, gender and sponsorship, as well as ways to overcome each. While the respondents of this study consistently revealed that they had experienced race and sexism, these did not hinder their job performance as superintendent. However, an absence of sponsorship and a lack of role models were among the top barriers reported by the women in the study. To overcome these barriers, the respondents said they (a) developed positive, productive relationships with school board members, (b) developed a qualified cooperative team and (c) developed acceptance by non-black employees as beneficial experiences.

Strategies for success. The third research question asked: what strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as public

school superintendent? The five sub-questions were what strategies, if any, have your professional mentor(s) shared with you to help overcome barriers in your position? What has been the result of your failures as superintendents? What life experiences have equipped you with essential strategies in being successful as superintendent? What strategies might you offer the aspiring African American female superintendent? What would you say is the single most valuable strategy to you in obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent?

Each participant indicated that she accessed specific strategies and support systems including her spouse, prayer and mentors to get through challenges. Mendez-Morse (2004) defined a mentor “as someone who actively helps, supports, or teaches someone else how to do a job so that she will succeed” (p. 561). The research stated that another barrier for women were gatekeepers who tended to hire or recommend hiring people with the same background as them. These historically have been white males, thus limiting the opportunities for qualified females (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

Brunner (1998) indicated that while there is a large amount of research on the superintendency, literature has neglected gender-related strategies. Women are completing superintendent programs, but often do not acquire the position. Researchers have suggested strategies are needed to attract African American women to the role of superintendent (Alston, 2005; Grogan & Brunner, 2005). According to Celestin (2003), African American women should utilize the strategies of professional positioning and networking, which is considered integral to improve positioning. Celestin’s qualitative study examined the professional positioning and socialization of five African American

female superintendents interviewed in the Midwest. The researcher concluded that professional positioning and networking were the most effective strategies and most valuable components to the women's success. The limits of the study included the ethnicity of the participants and geographic location of the study.

Emergent themes. During data analysis, three themes emerged from interviews: (a) stereotypes, (b) positionality and (c) mentorship relationships. These themes provided insight into the women's personal and professional experiences as public school superintendents.

Stereotypes. The first theme revealed was stereotypes. Noting stereotypes of gender and race that they have encountered in their quest to superintendency, the women in this study reported that they must continuously prove themselves to their school board members, community constituents and colleagues. Similarly, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, described one experience as former superintendent:

I've always had to make sure that at every moment, I'm at the top of my game, at every meeting, I feel as if I'm going into the courtroom prosecuting or defending someone, and I'd better have an airtight case. (as cited in Gerwertz, 2006, p.1)

In this study, participants reported that they were often asked to justify specific decisions, a noticeable difference from their White male counterparts. Further, participants experienced gender and racial stereotypes as having a negative impact on their ascension to superintendency or on their current work performance. One participant (Superintendent Contract) reported that stereotyping by gender and race "is a real issue that some simply do not want to discuss."

Each participant noted having developed strategies to overcome such stereotypical discrimination. The women perceived themselves as competent, knowledgeable, qualified, motivated leaders who were not hindered by stereotypes about gender and race and did not allow the effects of negative stereotypes to deter them from attaining and maintaining their position of superintendent. "...The work continues," Superintendent Focus said. Collectively, the superintendents unanimously reported perceiving their leadership to benefit the school districts in which they serve, in spite of stereotypes.

Based on this study's findings, stereotypes appear to be a significant barrier to the advancement of the superintendency. Once an African American woman applies for this education leadership position, decision making members' prejudice may change how they relate to minorities and thus who they recommend for leadership roles in education, particular the superintendency (Dovidio & Gaertner, 2000, p. 18). Steele and Aronson (1995) coined the term *stereotype threat* to describe the effect of these subconscious thoughts. *Stereotype threat* occurs when one uses a stereotype about a group to rationalize group members' positive or negative performance. The prevalence of a *stereotype threat* is higher when the task is difficult or when ability is being measured. As reported by Inzlicht and Benzeev (2003), the *stereotype threat* is not explicit in nature, yet when a job candidate is in the minority, this may heighten majority members' sense of which group the job candidate identifies with.

Goodwin and Fiske (2001) indicated that aspects of sociability and competence underlie stereotyping, such that groups are often stereotyped in terms of skills related to

their performance. Women of color also face stereotypes relating to their identity (F. Brown, 2005). The level of influence that *stereotype threat* has on women and minorities in leadership is unclear. Yet as evidenced by study participants' responses, stereotypes propel race and gender discrimination and are barriers in the selection process, even though laws have been passed to prevent discrimination.

Jackson and Harris (2007) conducted a study where perceived barriers of African American women who aspire to college presidencies were investigated. Forty-three African American female college presidents cited barriers to advancement en route to their presidency, and especially being excluded from men's non-professional networks. Also, 35 of the study's 43 participants cited having being stereotyped. Most women in this study also cited experiences dealing with racial and gender stereotypes.

Turner (2002) also interviewed 64 faculty members of color to investigate African American women's experience of barriers to leadership attainment. The consensus among the faculty women of color was that being both minority and female hindered their journey to their current leadership position in some way. Other barriers included experiencing little respect and being overused, such as being asked to manage menial tasks. Most women in this study also cited lived experiences where being minority and female also had a negative impact on their role in superintendency.

Positionality. The second emergent theme revealed in this research study was positionality, which refers to the placement of individuals within society as it relates to gender, race, and economic status. As a group, women are oppressed (Johnson-Bailey and Tisdell (1998), a circumstance that is perpetuated by various positions (Latimore,

2009). Black women have a disadvantage in positionality due to their status as black and female (Johnson-Bailey, 1999). One study participant cited positionality as a factor in obtaining the position of superintendent. Three other participants also shared lived experiences where positionality was critical to attaining the position.

It has been suggested that affirmative action is disproportionately benefiting White women and males by increasing their presence and status, thereby contributing to a disadvantage in positionality for African American women given their race and gender. In the hierarchy of positions within our social structures, historically White males have positioned themselves at the top of the hierarchy whereas Black women have been positioned at the bottom (Alfred, 2001). Because Black women are typically positioned outside of organization power structures, their participation in networks that could provide opportunities for progression is limited.

Mentorship relationships. The third theme revealed in this research study is mentorship relationships. Study participants indicated the need for individuals entering this role to have mentoring relationships that would provide support, especially of the African American female superintendent. One participant shared her experience of needing to join a network of other superintendents in order to be successful. Five study participants identified their informal mentor relationships as support systems that had been critical to their success as superintendents.

Each of the six participants indicated the need for support and reported having created her own support system, i.e., spouse, self-selected mentor, or faith. The women viewed these support systems as crucial for breaking into this male-dominated position

and helpful in maintaining the position. Four participants implied that being a superintendent is a non-stop position. Two of the study participants indicated that being a superintendent is a 24-hour-a-day job, and that in order to make it through such demands, one must have a mentoring relationship. Alston (2005) also identified constraints that Black female administrators encounter when obtaining the position of superintendent, including: (a) absence of support systems, (b) absence of knowledge on organizational structure, and (c) few role models to gain knowledge. Indeed, Alston (1999) contended that insufficient mentoring relationships are the most common hindrances for African American candidates for superintendency.

Brunner (1998) suggested strategic mentoring programs as a means to support women who aspire to superintendent positions. Current superintendents need to identify potential educators to extend support as they aspire to similar leadership roles. Through the use of mentorship relationships, women candidates can better develop their roles as leaders. Findings from McLean's (2006) qualitative study of five women superintendents in California also concluded that mentoring and establishing relationships were essential to their roles as superintendent. Based on the responses rendered by study participants, African American women need to develop support systems when deciding on attaining educational leadership positions, especially that of superintendency.

Putting findings in theoretical context. In terms of this study's theoretical context, findings from this study were consistent with critical race theory (Bell, 2000) and its discussion of the ways in which the causes, consequences, and manifestations of race, racism, and inequity affect people of color. However, the study also disrupts certain

ideology and causes for reflection on others, including that of social reconstruction. Consistent with Black feminist theory (Collins, 1986), African American women in this study defied the nature of oppression and stereotypes to be effective change agents in society. Alston (2005) also indicated that African American women superintendents have been effective change agents who are able to transform school systems. Bandura's (1986, 1997) ideas about self-efficacy were also evident throughout superintendents' responses. Each woman demonstrated an admirable degree of belief in her ability to complete tasks and reach goals when faced with adverse circumstances. Participating superintendents accepted that there are challenges to rising to superintendents but did not cease in obtaining the position.

Implications and Recommendations for Practice

This study has several implications and suggests recommendations for practice that should be explored by aspiring and current African American women superintendents, search consultants, superintendent preparation programs, school board members and other gatekeepers. Since research findings showed that gender and race are factors that affect the acquisition of superintendent positions, curricula in superintendent-preparation programs should be designed to address issues of race and gender. The findings also showed that aspiring African American superintendent candidates lack mentors. Therefore it is recommended that both school boards and professional preparatory programs provide opportunities for African American women superintendents to serve as mentors for those who aspire to the superintendency.

Additionally, because African Americans are often unrepresented as superintendents and in other upper-educational leadership positions, school boards need to consider every qualified candidate including African American women superintendents. School boards also need to seek superintendent candidates who reflect the school district that is being served. Search consultants should seek aspiring candidates by developing relationships with African American professional organizations. In general, gatekeepers must practice fair selection processes and be aware of the impact of race and gender stereotypes. For example, African American women are often hired to lead rural or urban school districts, unlike their White male counterparts, who have a better chance of being offered suburban jobs.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that “women of color were twice as likely as White women to wait four or more years for a superintendency” (p. 113). The research indicated that women of color serve in several administrative areas (as many as six) before becoming superintendent as compared to White women who held four positions before becoming superintendents. This study’s participants also appeared to have had delayed career trajectories when ascending to superintendency. Study participants advanced traditionally to their positions, first holding such roles as teacher, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and other district-level positions. Research indicates that women in the superintendency experience gender bias (Blount, 1998). In this study, women may have experienced gender bias in the form of higher expectations for them as compared to their male and White counterparts. Grogan and Brunner (2005) found that women of color are hired to be instructional leaders and change agents. It is

recommended that alternate pathways should be considered to create additional opportunities for minorities to enter into the role of superintendency.

Finally, it is recommended that policy makers, the United States Department of Education, each state department of education and local school boards design adequate and fair selection processes and support systems to attract and retain African American female superintendents. There should be mandated ongoing meetings and professional development and training for new superintendents, with training in budget, law, personnel, evaluations, and facility management to help ensure continued success.

Future Research

Based upon the current literature and the findings of this study, several issues need to be explored for future research. This study should be replicated and expanded to include African American women superintendents located in other geographic regions in the United States. Previous literature has also focused on public-school superintendents in rural and urban settings, yet few studies have been conducted on those serving in suburbs or charter- and private-school settings. The inclusion of additional study participants may yield results that can be generalized to the population. Due to the lack of literature depicting information about African American women superintendents, future research that collects data through their voices is also essential. African American women superintendents need to tell their stories, as current literature focuses primarily on demographic information. In this study, identifying African American female superintendents to participate in this study also proved difficult due to the

superintendents' lack of availability. Future research is undoubtedly needed to further understand such underrepresentation.

According to Tillman and Cochran (2000), more research is also needed in areas of racial and gender equity as these can be extracted from the experiences of African American superintendents. This study also revealed how school boards are critical to African American females' obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent. Future studies should also study the way that school boards and professional preparation licensure programs affect aspiring minority superintendents, to include consideration of (1) point of entrance, (2) alignment of coursework and internships, (3) support systems and (4) alternative routes to obtain licensure. Further research should determine how African American women can continue to gain other educational leadership positions that often lead to superintendency, as well as the factors that empower and support African American women who desire superintendency so as to "provide guidance and support for women in the superintendency" (Brunner, 1998, p. 178).

Conclusion of the Study

This phenomenological research study was conducted to investigate the lived experiences of African American female public school superintendents. Six participants presented perceptions and stories regarding their lived experiences as public school superintendent. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect qualitative data to analyze the participants' lived experiences regarding their perspectives on the superintendency, perceived impact of gender and/or race on their role, and strategies utilized to be successful. The following overarching themes emerged regarding the

African American female superintendents' lived experiences: (a) stereotypes, (b) positionality and (c) mentorship relationships. Although the study was limited to six participants, it provided a comprehensive examination of how African American females understand their experiences as public school superintendents, the impact of race and gender on their role, and strategies to be successful. As a result, the study provides a rich understanding of the context within which African American female superintendents obtain and maintain the role of superintendent, and can provide guidance for African American women aspiring to the superintendency. While this study is particular to African American females, it has overtones for all women. Finally, from this study we can conclude that being an African American female and aspiring to be superintendent means you can and will indeed make great achievements, but not without barriers. The path is not direct, but the journey is yours to travel.

Epilogue

After conducting this research study, my perception of the superintendency position has broadened tremendously. This journey has demanded continued reflection and as a result my capacity and territory has enlarged. The interviews that I have been privy to conduct with six amazing African American female superintendents have been humbling and exceptional. This study was intended to fulfill partial requirements for a doctorate degree, yet has also provided priceless personal and professional growth. Each superintendent who entrusted me with her lived experiences made the qualitative data for this study possible. The process has also shaped a clearer vision of my career and future educational leadership positions; yielding a more efficient and effective leader.

Consider this; the experiences of the six superintendents shared in this research study are just a few in comparison to the multitude that are experienced every day. African American women face tremendous obstacles. Many others do as well. The question is, how will you respond when you are faced with adversity? The women in this study responded by plowing past stereotypes, conquering positionality and building mentorship relationships. They plowed past statistics that said “no,” history that said “not yet” and society that said “wait your turn.” Yet because these women and so many before them have refused to accept anything other than moving forward, our nation and our world are better. They pushed past the pressure, the pain and providence of anyone who did not believe in them. Their mission was simple: to do better: a better community, a better education for the students they were serving, a better legacy for themselves and their families, a better school district, a better salary; they wanted something better than what they could see, touch, taste and experience. We are better because of these women. Their experiences have contributed to a healthy foundation for future African American women leaders who too will continue the journey of better to best. Their battles, sacrifices and successes are resonant with my own experiences. Similar to the women in this study, I faced “no” early but refused to not move forward. In the relevant words of Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (n.d., para. 1), distinguished professor of law and a founder in the intellectual movement of critical race theory, “It’s not about supplication, it’s about power. It’s not about asking, it’s about demanding. It’s not about convincing those who are currently in power; it’s about changing the very face of power itself.” I encourage each you to be the best you and this alone will make everything better.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval Form**14E340**

Office of Research Compliance
RTEC 117
Athens, OH 45701-2979

T: 740.593.0664
F: 740.593.9838
www.research.ohiou.edu

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 2 - research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior

Project Title: The Experiences of African American Female Superintendents

Primary Investigator: Patrese Ann Mason

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Yegan Pillay
(if applicable)

Department: Educational Studies

Robin Stack
Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator
Office of Research Compliance

Dec. 10, 2014
Date

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.

Appendix B: Email Text Sent to Participants

Dear [*African American Female Superintendent*]:

I am currently a doctoral student in the Educational Studies Department at Ohio University. Under the guidance of Dr. Yegan Pillay, my dissertation chairperson, I am conducting a study on the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. This study is being conducted because of the persistent underrepresentation of African American female superintendents in K-12 public school districts.

Currently, there are few empirical studies surrounding the lived experiences of the African American female superintendents, particularly being conducted by an African American female educational leader. I am inviting you to participate in this study. By participating, you have an opportunity to contribute to the scholarly work about the actual lived experiences as an African American female superintendent. Your participation is voluntary.

Should you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form to participate in a 60 to 90 minute audio recorded face to face interview in a quiet and private office convenient for you. Confidentiality will be maintained throughout this process. Data collected from the interview will be kept private and participants will be given pseudonyms. Recordings will be destroyed by December 2015.

After the audio-recordings have been transcribed, you will have an opportunity to review the findings prior to submission of the final draft of my study. This will ensure that I have accurately represented your comments as well as to correct any direct quotes. Findings will also be reviewed by dissertation committee prior to final publication.

I sincerely hope that you will consider contacting me to express your interest in participating in this study. If you would like to participate, please contact me no later than [*Date 1 week after date of email is sent*] by replying to this email and consent form will be emailed to you.

Kindly,

Patrese A. Mason
Doctoral Candidate, Ohio University

Appendix C: Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: The Lived Experiences of African American Female Superintendents

Researcher: Patrese A. Mason

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Explanation of Study

This study is being conducted because of the persistent underrepresentation of African American female superintendents in K-12 public school districts. The study will explore and seek to understand (a) how African American female perceive and describe their lived experiences as a public school superintendent, (b) what, if any, experiences have African American female lived that where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as a public school superintendent and (c) what strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as a public school superintendent?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 60 to 90 minute audio recorded face to face interview in a quiet and private office. You should not participate in this study if you are not African American, female and a K-12 public school district superintendent or if you have not been a K-12 public school district superintendent in the past three years.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no anticipated risks or discomforts you might expect to experience in this study.

Benefits

This study is important to science and society because it will provide policy makers, potential superintendent candidates and stakeholders insight on preparation, obtaining and maintaining the role of superintendent while gaining insight on the phenomenon of the persistent underrepresentation of African American female superintendents.

Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by providing a pseudonym. All audio

recordings will be destroyed by December 2015.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- * Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- * Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU.

Compensation

No compensation will be provided to participate in this study.

Contact Information

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Patrese Mason, Principal Investigator at _____ or Dr. Yegan Pillay, Advisor _____.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Dr. Chris Hayhow, Director of Research Compliance, at Ohio University, at _____, or email (hayhow@ohio.edu).

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature _____ Date _____

Printed Name _____

Version Date: 12/05/14

Appendix D: Interview Protocol Questions

1. Please tell me about your professional background.
2. Please tell me about your qualifications.
3. Please tell me about me about your support system.

Based on Research Question A: How do African American female superintendents perceive and describe their experiences as a public school superintendent?

- 1a. Describe your experiences as a K-12 public school superintendent?
- 2a. How, if any, do you believe your experiences have differed as an African American female superintendent from that of a white male superintendent?
- 3a. How do those differences impact your daily experiences and responsibilities as superintendent?
- 4a. What factors have impacted your obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent?
- 5a. How do you perceive yourself as superintendent?

Based on Research Question B: What, if any, experiences have African American female superintendents lived that where race and/or gender have had an impact on their role as a public school superintendent?

- 1b. Tell me about some of the barriers, if any, that you have experienced when obtaining the position of superintendent.
- 2b. Please share any barriers, if any, that you have experienced while serving as superintendent.
- 3b. How do you deal with these barriers?

- 4b. What factors do you believe contribute the proportions of African American superintendents to the white parts?
- 5b. What barriers do you believe the aspiring African American female might anticipate facing?

Based on Question C: What strategies have African American female superintendents utilized to be effective in their role as a public school superintendent?

- 1c. What strategies, if any, have your professional mentor(s) shared with you to help overcome barriers in your position?
- 2c. What has been the result of your failures as superintendents?
- 3c. What life experiences have equipped you with essential strategies in being successful as superintendent?
- 4c. What strategies might you offer the aspiring African American female superintendent?
- 5c. What would you say is the single most valuable strategy to you in obtaining and maintaining the position of superintendent?



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