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The Lived Experiences of Female Superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia

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THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN ALABAMA,

FLORIDA, AND GEORGIA

by

RUTH DENETTE ODUM

(Under the Direction of Brenda Marina)

ABSTRACT

Although women actively seek advancement and constitute the majority of teachers in American public schools, they do not occupy many of the decision-making, administrative, or superintendency positions in education. This paper presents a perspective on the problem of women's lack of progression from entry-level positions of leadership through superintendency. A qualitative, phenomenological methodology is used to illuminate the lived experiences of 16 women who were active in the position of American public school superintendent during the 2008-2009 academic year. The superintendents were of varied age, race, and family/marital status. The researcher describes the voice of women superintendents and their personal experiences through semi-structured, in-depth interviews.

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of female superintendents who gave descriptions of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, in order to determine how female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were successful in obtaining their positions. This was accomplished through a series of interviews in three southeastern states with female

superintendents who were either African American or Caucasian. Barriers to leadership opportunities for women and resilience factors were examined to help describe some of the reasons women continue to be underrepresented in the role of superintendent nationally and in these three southeastern states.

Although gender discrimination affected most of the superintendents at some point, findings indicate that the most frequently stated barrier was conflicting career and family demands, and the most frequently stated strategy for success was networking. The interviews yielded insight into the actual experiences and commonalities of the females in superintendent positions. All female superintendents interviewed reported high job satisfaction, and all except one agreed they would make the decision to seek leadership and superintendency again. Each of the superintendents expressed having strong support systems; all 16 had mentors who encouraged them along the way, and they stated those relationships were vital for success at each stage of their career. Most stated that collaboration was the most effective style of leadership unless the situation required an authoritarian approach. Other important leadership characteristics included communication, vision, problem-solving, critical thinking and risk taking.

INDEX WORDS: Superintendents, Female superintendents, Lived experiences, Glass ceiling, African American female superintendents, Barriers, and Resilience.

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FLORIDA, AND GEORGIA

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DEDICATION

To my guardian angel . . .

First, I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my deceased father, Dr. Eugene Elmore Christian. Although he was not here to see me finish, he saw me start, and I know he was watching over me. Daddy, I hope you are looking down proudly from the heavens. I hear your voice in my head and heart all the time, and it helps me do better. Thank you for being a wonderful role model, raising me to love God, and reminding me that, "Through Christ I could do all things!" You will forever be my hero. I love you!

To my mother, Ruth M. Christian, you are and will forever be my greatest tower of strength. You are a survivor. Thanks for passing that on to your "knee baby." You told me to calm down and take one step at a time. You kept telling me I could do it. Guess what Mom? I did it! If God never does another thing for me, he did his greatest work in giving me you. I love you!

Thanks beyond description go to my understanding family who have patiently provided me with support and love throughout this process. My brothers and sisters, Paula, Eugene, Joseph, Clorinde, Kathy, Clinton, Robert, Franklin, and Chanda, who believed in me and always had faith that your sister could be the next. Thanks for the love. To my nieces and nephews, you are the people in my life whose unconditional love is forever present, you always help me find my purpose. Auntie is back.

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attempts gave me the inspiration to develop this topic and paper. I have to know that God knows best. I promise I will continue to work as hard as I can.

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To anyone that I failed to thank personally, thank you! Amen!

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The superintendency is a key position of power and influence in United States public school districts. According to Grogan and Brunner (2005), superintendents have many responsibilities as the chief leader of their school districts, including the challenge of understanding and explaining the importance of school reform in school environments that are becoming increasingly diverse. Research indicated that only 20% of the school districts in the United States are led by women (Grogan & Brunner, 2008). What makes this percentage perplexing is that the field of education has been historically a female-dominated profession except on the administrative level. Some of the reasons for female dominance in teaching and male dominance in the superintendency include family commitment, stereotyping, male networks, the attitude of the gatekeepers, lack of mentoring, and limitations of essential work-related experience (Blount, 2003).

Unfortunately, there is a glass ceiling barring the way to the pinnacle leadership position in the public school districts, the superintendency (Shakeshaft, 1989). Lack of qualified applicants and stereotyping should no longer be used as excuses for underrepresentation of women in educational administration and superintendency. A preponderance of evidence presented by researchers indicates that women are capable resilient leaders, effective teachers and administrators, hard workers, knowledgeable, and interested in the professional development of leadership positions (Grogan & Brunner 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico & Tingley, 2001). However, in a female dominated profession, female leaders have generally not ascended to the superintendency. The

African American and Caucasian women who have broken through the glass ceiling have experiences to share (Jackson, 1999).

History of Superintendents

The first superintendent was appointed in the early 1800s, and in the 19th century, superintendents began to rise in popularity. However, no professional development or training took place to prepare these individuals for the tasks and responsibilities of their newly acquired administrative positions. Individuals were appointed to these authoritarian roles because of their propensity for management, their instinct, and simply because they were men (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993). Teaching had become a woman's profession that was controlled by men, and educational administration was becoming recognized as a legitimate field of study and practice (Grogan & Andrews, 2002). As opportunities for men increased in the arena of school administration and superintendency, schoolmasters began leaving the teaching to women (Blount, 2003). The need for school superintendents arose when larger cities spawned larger, more complex educational organizations. Typical duties of the inaugural superintendents included coordinating educational programs among district schools, managing resources both systematically and efficiently, and allocating funds (Kowalski & Reitzug).

In the 1990s women comprised about 80% of the elementary teaching force and held about half of the jobs in secondary education; yet, they have been less successful in entering the ranks of school superintendency (Shakeshaft, 1990). For a brief time, women held the majority of elementary school principal positions, but as the position became professionalized, they lost ground to men (Biklen & Branningon, 1980). By the mid-

1970's women represented only 13% of all public school principals in the United States (Jones & Montenegro, 1985).

Men have traditionally held more leadership roles in schools than their female counterparts, and during the early to mid-20th century, many claimed that men were more suited to the superintendency because of their natural, authoritative manners. Male leaders were comfortable with employing the top-down approach to leadership, thus making direct, concrete decisions with little regard for the opinions and input of subordinates (Eakle, 1995; Montgomery & Growe, 2003). By the mid 1980s, the managerial, directive styles of leadership were being questioned, and much thought was being given to alternate leadership styles. In the wake of the effective schools movement, much regard was given to transformational leadership, instructional leadership, and the ideas of shared governance. Inherent in some of these leadership styles are the very characteristics that set female leaders apart from their male colleagues (Glass, Björk, & Brunner, 2000). The collaborative, site-based approaches to leadership, therefore, may have provided women with the necessary vitality to take their stand in the male-dominated field of educational administration. The nurturing personalities of women became increasingly recognized as strong attributes in leadership and seemed to work better with the collaborative style of leadership (Anderson, 2000; Eakle, 1995).

In terms of the pathway to the superintendency, high school principals ultimately become superintendents more frequently than elementary school principals, and this pathway of secondary principalship is followed more often by men than women (Kowalski & Reitzug, 1993). Prospects for women in the school superintendency gradually improved from 1990 to 2000. In 1993-94, a total of 79,618 principals worked

in public schools across the United States; of that total, 52,114 were men and 27,505 were women. Women held 34% of the school principal positions and 41% of the assistant principal positions in the nation's public schools (Montenegro, 1993; National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). By 1996, women comprised 83% of the elementary and 54% of the secondary teaching populations, and constituted 52% of the principalships in elementary schools and 26% in high schools (Henke, Choy, Geis, & Broughman, 1996).

Female Superintendents

Ella Flagg Young became the first woman superintendent of the Chicago schools in 1909 (Blount, 1998). Women had progressed from having few means of employment outside the home to dominating teaching, and they accounted for 70% of teachers by the early 1990s. However, it was not until 1980 that the next woman, Ruth B. Love, was appointed to the superintendency position of Chicago Public Schools (Blount). There were several men in superintendent positions, but more than 70 years transpired between one female superintendent and the next, with little change in the demands of the superintendent job (Shakeshaft, 1989).

The gender of school administrators is a subject of considerable debate in many studies (Chapman, 2001). A historical analysis of leadership roles of women in education reveals that few females traditionally held the office of superintendent (Alston, 2005). In a 10-year study of 2,262 superintendents, Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) discovered that the number of female superintendents declined for several decades, from the 1970s to the 1990s. The number of female superintendents in public school education, kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12), has changed during the last 15 years (1992-2007), from 6% to 13% then 20% (Glass et al., 2000; Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

Female superintendents, on average, spend a longer amount of time in the classroom than male superintendents (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000). Glass noted that females are earning doctorate degrees at comparable rates to male candidates, but only 10% of these females are becoming superintendents. Chapman (2001) stated that possession of a doctoral degree appeared to be an important factor in the entry of females to the superintendency, and that by the time most women enter a leadership position they have completed or almost completed their doctorate degree. Despite policies that address equal opportunities for employment, there are still fewer females than males in leadership positions (Brunner, 2000).

In a study of 27 women in top education leadership positions, Grogan (1996) stated that there are many reasons for the underrepresentation of women in leadership. The study revealed that women saw themselves as having to maintain resilience as they negotiate a series of obstacles on the way to superintendency, and some women may not want to go through those obstacles. The participants in the study discussed the lack of sponsorship or mentors, the limited number of women in leadership positions to model, the inability to separate home and work lives, the difficulty of obtaining certain kinds of on-the-job training, and not being able to participate fully in the old-boys networks or networking systems. The author also found that the male leadership style was less collaborative and more top down authoritarian; women, on the other hand, practiced a more collaborative style of leadership. Brunner (1999) found that successful women superintendents are not necessarily co-opted into adopting the male use of and definition of power in their work.

Public school districts across America have experienced a slight growth in the number of women administrators at the district office level; however, this growth has not reached the superintendency (Brunner, 1999). The role of 21st century leaders of public school districts at the central office level are being filled by a significant number of females, from executive directors and directors of various programs to superintendents and associate superintendents. Unlike the growth of female central office-level administrators, however, there are still fewer women than men who hold the title of school district superintendent (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

Careful preparation for leadership is essential for gaining access to the superintendency (Tyack & Hansot,1982). Grogan (2000) found that the career path for many female superintendents involves education from more prestigious universities than their male counterparts. Also, the author stated that female superintendents have experience ranging from site administration to central office administration, but many of their male counterparts do not have the same experience. In order to succeed in the superintendency, women have to politically position themselves for advancement more than men (Brunner, 1999). Among Alabama, Florida, and Georgia school districts, there were 14 African American and 85 Caucasian female superintendents (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

Female Superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia

Alabama superintendents, like most state superintendents, have to have 5 years of educational work experience in order to assume the office of superintendency. County or city superintendents of education, whether elected or appointed, need not be residents or qualified electors of the county in which they serve. There are 133 superintendents in Alabama for approximately 745,753 students. There are 89 Caucasian male, 10 African

American male, 25 Caucasian female, and 9 African American female superintendents (Alabama Department of Education, 2009).

There are currently 67 school districts within Florida responsible for the education of more than 2.5 million students (Hoffman & Sable, 2007). Florida statutes define the general powers of the superintendent as well as provide the statutory duties of this office. According to Florida Statute 1001.49, the general powers of a school superintendent include general oversight of the district in regard to problems, needs, and improvement of the education of Florida's school aged children. Of Florida's 67 district school superintendency positions, currently 44 are elected while 23 are appointed. Of those, 48 are male and 19 are female; but, there are no African American female superintendents in the state (Florida Association of School Superintendents, 2008).

Although males accounted for almost three-quarters (71.8%) of the superintendents, the number and percentage of female superintendents has steadily increased since FY02 in Georgia (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2008). In 2006, there were 147 Caucasian superintendents and one Native American male superintendent. In FY08, there were 113 Caucasian male, 23 African American male, 42 Caucasian females, and 5 African American female superintendents (Georgia Professional Standards Commission, 2008).

African American Women and the Superintendency

Jackson (1999) recognized that African American females are living examples of human adaptability, strength, and accomplishment when granted opportunities to serve in the role of superintendent. Before discussing the struggles of the African American female superintendent, the researcher discussed the historical perspectives of African

Americans and their suppression and oppression in education before and after they became leaders (Bell, 1995). The continued growth of school systems across the United States generated an increase in the number of administrative positions at the school district level for women, and African American women could potentially benefit from this growth (Lomotey, 1987).

Since the days of slavery and long before the days when they could teach or think about leadership, African Americans have struggled and overcome incredible odds to become educated. By 1860, 5% of the slave population had risked injury and death to become literate (Anderson, 1988). Bell (1995), addressing gender consciousness, asserted that African American women were placed in two minority positions, first as females and second as African Americans, creating double barriers to their access and mobility within the profession (Jackson, 1999; Bell). This is one of the many challenges African American female superintendents faced that Caucasian women did not face (Jackson, 1999). Shakeshaft (1987) pointed out that there is more information in print on African American women than all other ethnic groups combined. Not until 1974, when the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission started collecting data, were national statistics kept on the racial and ethnic background of school administrators.

Caucasian women are likely to be hired as public school superintendents in rural or small-town districts, but African American women sometimes become superintendents in urban school districts where failure has permeated the culture. Both are tough places for women (Jackson, 1999). In rural districts, for example, the superintendent is often the only central office administrator and must function in a variety of roles, ranging from transportation director to buildings and grounds manager and director of curriculum and

instruction (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). In 1937, funds were established to provide money for the education of destitute children, African American children, and African American master teachers. In this new millennium, African American female school superintendents are the quintessential servant leaders. As they have been viewed historically as the "messiah or scapegoat" (Lomotey, 1987, p.17) for school districts, servant leadership has become their calling and part of their philosophical and practical fiber.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) conducted a comprehensive nationwide study on women in the superintendency and women in central office administration positions. The study was commissioned by the American Association of School Administrators and surveyed 2,500 women superintendents and 3,000 women in central office positions. Grogan and Brunner noted that African American women do not obtain the position of superintendent as quickly as their Caucasian counterparts: 56% of African American women were hired within the first year of actively seeking a superintendency compared with more than 70% of Caucasian aspirants. Moreover, 25% of African American women reported waiting 5 or more years to obtain the superintendency compared to only 8% of Caucasian women. Eight percent of African American women superintendents, compared to 3% of Caucasian women, believe they were hired to be either community or instructional leaders. In addition, African American women superintendents were twice as likely as Caucasian women to say they were hired as change agents and twice as likely as the general population of superintendents to say they were brought in to lead reform efforts. African American women generally believed they shouldered the burden of having to prove themselves over and over (Grogan & Brunner).

Judy Alston (1999) identified the barriers and the supports that African American women experience in route to the superintendency. She found that women in her study ranked the following five factors as either moderate or great barriers in their pursuit of the superintendency: (a) absence of old-boy network support systems or sponsorship; (b) lack of awareness of political maneuvers; (c) lack of role models; (d) societal attitudes that African Americans lack competency in leadership positions; and, (e) no formal or informal method for identifying African American aspirants for administrative positions. The author went on to state that these barriers are different from those faced by their Caucasian counterparts (Alston).

Statement of Problem

This investigation involved a phenomenological study of female superintendents serving public school districts in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. One of the main educational issues was a concern over disproportionately fewer female superintendents. Even though there has been a small reduction in the gap between the number of female and male superintendents, female leaders in the nation's public schools are in a position to identify strategies for obtaining their positions (Bolman & Deal, 2003). The intent of this phenomenological research study was to investigate the personal and professional experiences of females who attained the position of superintendent. Additionally, the research study adds to the scholarly literature that currently exists by providing a better understanding of female superintendents in public education.

There is not a substantial body of literature on women superintendents from the perspective of their success and the barriers that exist in public schools, and in some instances, the existing research is outdated (Konnert & Augenstien, 1995). There is

research on the leadership styles for women versus men, but there is less research and adequate review on women who beat the odds and became superintendents. Thus, there was not a vast reference base for the researcher to consult concerning similar research data. Despite their underrepresentation, women do aspire to become superintendents and the special concerns they face remain significant.

This study found that various personal choices are involved in the development of an individual's administrative career leading into superintendency. The study also provided insight into common experiences of selected female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. Female administrators who aspire to pursue the superintendency might benefit from the common leadership strategies found in the personal and professional experiences of the respondents in this study.

In this study, the researcher explored the lived experiences of female superintendents in three southeastern states. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of several women superintendents who gave rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, and to determine how female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were successful in obtaining their positions.

Barriers are frequently categorized as personal, societal, or organizational (Shakeshaft, 1989). Personal or internal barriers cited include low self-confidence, lack of assertiveness, lack of work ethic, family commitments, lack of preparation, and lack of mobility (Shakeshaft, 1989). Shakeshaft posited that internal barriers were inadequate explanations for the inequities and stated that the social structure of society was the root cause. Societal barriers include gender stereotyping, glass ceilings, and lack of

opportunity. Kanter (1977) presented the thesis that it was neither gender nor an individual's personal characteristics but organizational structure that limited the opportunities of women. Organizational barriers include male networks, the attitudes of gatekeepers, and the limitations of essential work-related experience that could lead to the path to superintendency (Jones & Montenegro, 1985).

<div align="center">Research Questions</div>

Throughout this study, the researcher addressed the following overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of female superintendents, including career paths and resilience to glass ceilings? The following sub-questions were also taken into account:

1. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia?

2. What commonalities exist among the experiences of female superintendents?

3. What challenges and barriers do African American and Caucasian women face and circumvent as they attain the superintendency?

<div align="center">Procedures</div>

Research Design

Permission to complete the study was obtained from Georgia Southern University and from each district participating in the study. Data collection included structured and open-ended interview questions; most interviews were conducted face to face.

This is a qualitative study which utilized the phenomenological approach to research selected female superintendents' leadership (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Creswell, 2003; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003). Glesne (1999) succinctly stated, "A

phenomenological study focuses on descriptions of how people experience and how they perceive their experiences of the phenomena under study" (p. 7). According to Creswell, researchers who employ the phenomenological approach identified the essence of human experiences concerning a phenomenon. Participants themselves describe their experiences as they relate to a particular phenomenon. According to Merriam (2002), qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed; in other words, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world. This understanding is an end in itself.

In beginning the development of this research study, the research question and sub-questions were developed. Next, a review of the literature was conducted in an effort to determine findings from previous research. The researcher created a questionnaire. The study proposal was submitted to the Georgia Southern University Institutional Review Board for approval. When the Institutional Review Board approved the study, the researcher contacted the respondents and scheduled the interviews at the convenience of the respondents.

Population

Eighty female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were contacted by email. The nineteen who could not be reached by email or who did not reply to the email were sent a letter by postal mail to introduce the researcher and briefly describe the research project. This letter included a response card with consent information that, when returned by mail to the researcher, indicated a superintendent's interest in being considered for the study. The female superintendents who consented to participate in an in-depth interview were identified and interviewed. The ethnicity of all female

superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia was either Caucasian or African American. Employment as a superintendent for the 2008-2009 academic year in one of the three states was a requirement for participation. The product resulting from this qualitative study is richly descriptive and involved a small purposeful, nonrandom sample.

The researcher conducted in-person interviews or interviewed each respondent by telephone initially. All follow-up questions were answered by phone or email. An alternate plan was for all interviews to be conducted by telephone or email.

The overall criteria for sample consideration included: (a) female superintendents who indicated a willingness to participate; (b) female superintendents whose districts were within Alabama, Florida, or Georgia; and (c) female superintendents who were currently employed as superintendents. In order to consider the effect of situation on the behavior of the superintendents, women considered for the study represented diverse population settings, including rural, suburban, and urban areas. In case no African American female superintendents were available for interviews in any of the three states, an alternative study would have included all Caucasian female superintendents. There were no African American female superintendents in Florida, so the interviewees for Florida were all Caucasian.

Instrumentation

The researcher conducted the interviews and was aware of body language and gestures while interviewing; therefore, the researcher was the instrument. Interviews were conducted with female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. The interview

questions were based on information revealed in the review of literature and the research question and sub-questions (Appendix E).

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological approach to research the lived experiences of selected female superintendents' leadership. Phenomenological research is the type of research where the researcher brackets his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the respondents in the study.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and during the interviews the researcher asked a series of open-ended questions. Most initial interviews were face to face and were followed up with a phone call and/or email. The researcher based selection of the superintendents on the states where their districts were located. The number of participants was based on the number of superintendents who responded to an interest card or email for participation. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used letters instead of names. Also, all tape-recorded responses were kept in her home before and after the responses were transcribed. Each respondent was given a "Consent to Participate" letter (Appendix B) which outlined assurances that the respondent's information would remain confidential and secure. The researcher personally signed each request.

Data Collection

Sample selection was based on the available population that met the criteria set forth in the study. The theoretical orientation of this research informed the data collection techniques (Creswell, 2003). This approach questions the nature of reality and realizes that respondents' reality is subjective and has multiple meanings. The reality of the respondents was uncovered utilizing multiple methods (Creswell).

Interviews

Semi-structured, open-ended interviews were utilized. Interviewing is a common means of collecting qualitative data (Merriam, 2002). The most common form of interviewing is the person-to-person encounter in which one person elicits information from another. The questions and interview topics were formulated based on the results of the literature review. In-depth interviews permitted the researcher to get closer to the respondents' perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). In addition to specific open-ended questions that could be followed up, probing questions were used. Multiple questions, leading questions, and yes/no questions were not utilized, thus minimizing confusion and poor responses.

The researcher collected data through scheduled, in-depth interviews with the 16 Alabama, Florida, and Georgia female school superintendents. The interviews were recorded via audio tapes and transcribed by Kara Humphrey, a trained business transcriptionist. To ensure anonymity, the researcher assigned letters to all participants and removed all references to actual people, schools, and locations from the transcripts. The researcher read and coded the transcripts looking for common themes and patterns. Qualitative research is naturalistic in nature and does not necessarily strive for validation as much as it does quality; therefore, there is no validation of coding for this research. An interview log was maintained to supplement the taped interviews, but the tapes and log were ultimately destroyed by the interviewer.

Data Analysis

Extensive observational data was collected in natural settings, such as board offices, after, before, or during working hours. Data analysis was inductive and iterative. The

methods utilized in this study included corroboration and collaboration with participants, juxtaposition of data sources to each other, and analytic coding of the narratives (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003). The data was coded and organized by emergent themes into taxonomies and categories. Continuums were constructed based on those same emergent taxonomies and categories. Data was managed and organized with a shorthand designation (e.g., word, phrases, numbers, or combinations of these) based on the conceptual framework and research questions of the study.

Significance of the Study

The intent of this study was to unveil the knowledge constructed from the lived experiences of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, and to identify common threads of career paths, educational empowerment, and gender pride manifested in respondents' success as school and system leaders. The lived experiences may highlight certain barriers that may have marginalized women in the educational system. The experiences of female superintendents were illuminated through the use of in-depth conversations, reflective journals, and observations. The information gained may help mentor future female leaders who may want to pursue the position of superintendency.

Researchers have conducted studies which indicate an increase in female superintendents; however, that increase is not representative of the population of females in education. Statistically, women hold 20% of the public school district superintendent positions nationwide. In education women are outnumbered by males in higher positions such as principals and central office personnel. By examining the challenges and barriers women have experienced in the quest for the top educational positions in secondary

education, patterns were identified to assist females in the pursuit of the superintendency (Glass, 2000).

Understanding why some females have been successful in achieving the superintendency while others have been unsuccessful is a prerequisite to understanding and achieving a reversal of the underrepresentation of females in educational administration and superintendency. Knowing the different career paths females chose and that led to the position of superintendent will be important to this researcher as an aspiring educational leader. This study may show a path that future female educators can take to successfully attain the position of superintendent.

Laws and policies passed to eliminate discrimination have been beneficial to females seeking administrative positions; however, these laws and efforts still have not substantially increased the percentage of women holding a superintendency position when compared to the number of women qualified to hold this position. Women continue to represent the minority in educational administration, and further research may substantiate the policies for Affirmative Action and Title IX. The researcher examined the leadership styles and career paths of several women to see whether their potential success was influenced by race, gender, and power variables.

<div align="center">Delimitations of the Study</div>

The following delimitations were considered as this study was conducted:

1. Only female superintendents are studied in this research. The study involved full-time sitting superintendents.

2. This study was limited to only female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, their career paths, their lived experiences, and their perceptions of

barriers, in order to help other women predict and project success in becoming superintendents.

Limitations

The following limitations were considered as this study was conducted:

1. While the findings of this study cannot be generalized, the rich descriptions that result should enable women in similar positions in educational administration to recognize something of themselves in the accounts that follow.

2. The truthfulness of the information relies on the respondents.

Definition of Terms

Some of the following terms have been specifically defined by the researcher for the purposes of this study; others are defined as they appear in the literature, and those sources cited.

Buddy system refers to a system in which men refer other men to jobs.

Central office administration is any administration dealt with on the central office level.

Central office is the office that serves as the administrative center of a school system. It is a place of business where professional or clerical duties are performed for the entire system as opposed to just an individual school.

Change agents are the persons or things which help bring about change.

Demographic context includes the vital and social statistics associated with a district or specific region.

Discourse, as defined by Grogan (1996), is the use of sets of commonly shared words, phrases, and symbols to communicate.

Educational context refers to all the educational structures that support and enhance instruction, learning, and training.

Feminine skills are those leadership skills associated with the feminine leadership model described in the literature. These skills are identified by a reliance on emotional as well as rational data, interaction, power-sharing, and enhancement of other people's self worth. These skills may be demonstrated by either the masculine or feminine gender, but are stereotypically associated with women as the result of the socialization of children in American society (Loden, 1985).

Glass ceiling refers to an upper limit to professional advancement imposed on women, but is not perceived or acknowledged openly (Webster, 2008).

Intraracial discrimination is internal racism within a racial group.

Leadership behaviors include making administrative decisions, anticipating and surviving political conflicts, planning and presenting the budget, managing personnel decisions, and interacting with the school board, peers, teachers' unions, subordinates, key community figures, and the media (Blumberg, 1985).

Lived experiences include the experiences unique to an individual.

Political context is the bureaucratic structure that guides governmental decision making in the local and state arena.

Professionalized means to give a professional character or status.

Quintessential leaders are people who represent the perfect example of a leader.

Resilience is the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in ways that provide the individual with more protective and coping skills than the individual had prior to the disruption (Richardson, Neiger, Jenson, & Kumpfer, 1990).

Semi-structured interviews occur when interviews are flexible, allowing new questions to be brought up during the interview in response to what the interviewee says. The interviewer in a semi-structured interview generally has a framework of themes to be explored.

Site administrator is a professional who is in charge of managing the daily operations of an organization (Webster, 2008).

Societal obstacles are the acts or thoughts of society that impede progress or achievement.

Superintendents are the chief educational leaders and spokespersons for school districts and the ones who direct and manage school systems or organizations (Webster, 2008).

Superintendent's leadership circle includes members of the administrative team or selected central office administrators, the immediate support staff, and the members of the board of education (Garfinkel, 1987).

Traditional skills are those skills described in the literature as generally associated with male leaders and attributed to successful leadership. These skills are stereotypically associated with male leadership, but they may be displayed by either gender. For example, according to Haslett, Geis, and Carter (1992), being task-oriented is a traditional leadership skill.

Underrepresentation is a disparity between the percentage of participants in a category based on its proportion of the defined population and the actual percentage that exists.

Assumptions of the Study

The study was based on the following assumptions:

1. The subjects answered the questions honestly and without regard to answers that were possibly expected.

2. This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological approach to research the lived experiences of selected female superintendents' leadership.

3. Phenomenological research is the type of research where the researcher brackets his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the respondents in the study.

4. To ensure confidentiality, the researcher used letters instead of the names of the respondents and kept all tape recorded responses in her home.

5. The researcher signed the consent to participate letter which outlined the respondents' assurance of confidentiality.

Organization of the Study

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter I includes the introduction to the problem, history, purpose of the study, overview of informing literature, design and scope, research questions, definition of terms, and limitations. Chapter II provides an overview of the literature relevant to this study. Chapter III details the setting, research methodology, data collection, and analysis used in the study. Chapter IV presents the findings of the study through descriptive narratives and analysis of the data. Chapter V describes the conclusions and recommendations for future research.

Summary

This is a qualitative study which utilizes the phenomenological approach to research female superintendents' leadership. The key concern in this study was to understand the work of the superintendent from the respondents' perspectives. The researcher was the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Since qualitative research employs inductive research, which builds abstraction, concepts, or theories, the researcher did not test a preconceived notion of how each female leader defined her space.

The product resulting from this qualitative study is richly descriptive and involved a small purposeful, nonrandom sample. During the research process, the researcher spent a substantial amount of time in the natural setting of the study, the school districts. The researcher based selection on the location of the district and the number of women who agreed to participate in the study. Included in the study are only female superintendents who were employed as superintendents in Alabama, Florida, or Georgia.

Data collection included semi-structured and open-ended interviews, observations, and documentation. Sample selection was based on the available population that met the criteria set forth in the study. The theoretical orientation of this research informed the techniques of data collection as well as what constituted data in this research. Reality was uncovered by utilizing multiple methods to understand the reality of the participants in this study.

The largest part of the interview was guided by prompts related to contemporary or historical issues that affected the respondents' career paths or issues to be explored. The same open-ended questions were asked of each interviewee. The interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed for analysis, and interview logs were maintained to supplement

the taped interviews. The data was coded and organized by emergent themes into

taxonomies and categories. Continuums were constructed based on those same emergent

taxonomies and categories.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of 16 women superintendents who gave rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, and to determine how these female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were successful in obtaining their positions. This research addresses the commonalities for female superintendents and reviews how they face challenges and barriers that male superintendents may not normally face.

Support for this approach in studying female superintendents is found in three fields of literature: (a) research on the K-12 public superintendency with a historical perspective; (b) research on women superintendents; and, (c) research on the challenges faced by women superintendents. These three fields of literature were used to guide this research.

The first section of this literature review begins with an examination of research on how the public K-12 superintendency is defined. This defining research began with the historical development of the office. Understanding this development aids the researcher in comprehending the present expectations placed on those who occupy the position. Unfortunately, a detailed historical account of the superintendency is not available, perhaps due to the evolution of the position as a result of growth in the education arena (Konnert & Augenstien, 1995). The first part of the examination of superintendents concludes with an overview of the superintendency in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.

The second section of this literature review provides an overview of research specifically on women superintendents. This review begins with a national perspective of women in the workforce and funnels down to women administrators in the public school setting. Next, the review provides an analysis of research on female superintendent percentages in the United States. The final section of this literature review examines the experiences of the African American female superintendent and the challenges faced by female superintendents. As previously indicated, this research is collected from a combination of three informing fields of research.

The K-12 Public School Superintendency

According to Webster (2008), a school superintendent is one who directs and manages a school system or organization. While many people recognize the position within our public education system, few can eloquently explain the function and responsibilities of the modern superintendent. To understand this office it is important to review the superintendency in a historical perspective. Thus, the first part of this section of the literature review examines this office from a historical perspective, specifically the development of the superintendent through seven stages.

These seven stages describe the office of the superintendent not from an evolutionary standpoint but rather the development of responsibilities along a continuum. In viewing the office from this perspective, researchers are able to create a paradigm that evokes the need to take a different view of the office. Research of this nature lends itself to what Grogan (2000) describes as a reconceptualization of the office due to existing paradoxes. Examination of this reconceptualization is provided in the second part of this

section. The final part of this section provides a snapshot of the office as defined and operationalized within Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.

The Meaning of Superintendent

The first informing body of research for this study is on defining the superintendency in the public K-12 education setting. "History is an unending dialogue between the past and present" (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995, p. 3), and knowledge of the history of the superintendency helps one comprehend the present. Existing expectations placed on those who hold this office are, to some extent, a product of this history.

Brunner, Grogan, and Bjork (2002) identify seven discursive stages of development in the office of the superintendency. These discursive stages are unique in that these stages do more than chronicle an evolution of the superintendency. Rather, these stages represent the responsibilities, priorities, and activism of those who occupy the office of the superintendency. Thus the discussion that follows, for the most part, is a direct reflection of an analysis utilizing the discursive stages approach.

Stage one occurred in the early 1800s when the local school committees found they could no longer handle the intricate administrative responsibilities of day-to-day operations. The first local superintendents were established in Buffalo and Louisville around 1837 (Konnert & Augenstein, 1995). However, some local school committees were reluctant to turn over supervision of the schools to one individual. Thus administration of these early school districts was shared between the board, the superintendent, and sometimes a business manager who each independently reported to the board.

By the Civil War, 27 large eastern and mid-western cities had established a superintendent as the chief administrative officer. These boards decided they needed a person apart from board members to fulfill administrative responsibilities. With few exceptions, early superintendents were men since single women typically stayed in the classroom. In the 19th century, married women were rarely allowed to teach in American public schools (Hoffman, 2003).

While the duties of the early superintendents varied from district to district, their primary responsibility during this period was as a clerk to the school committee. Education discourse is based on religious ideology with schools viewed as a force for national unity (Brunner et al., 2002). Thus, many early superintendents resembled circuit-riding preachers, traveling far away from their cities and school districts to preach the gospel of free public education (Chapman, 1997). The lay board members, sensitive to local taxes, usually handled the budget and finances of the schools. Fiscal affairs, school building construction, and maintenance became normal superintendent responsibilities after the early 20th century (Sharp & Walter, 1997). Common school ideology advocates promoted the notion that individual schoolmen were to serve schools while collective bodies of citizens were to govern the schools (Brunner et al., 2002).

Stage two was the time period when increasing diversity in the nation led to debate over the religious focus of public education. Tyack and Hansot (1982) indicate that the debate was seen most in urban areas where priests and party bosses sought to dampen the controversy by eliminating all religious teaching from the schools. Horace Mann's speeches about public education helped soften the debate by highlighting the benefits of public school in eliminating delinquency and crime. The superintendency shifted from

one that reflected Protestant morals to one that strongly reflected patriotism and governmental agendas. Most superintendents maintained concerns about furthering national education goals.

In 1870, a group of superintendents formed the Department of Superintendents as part of the National Education Association. Papers presented at their first annual meeting indicated that the efforts of the superintendents should focus on acquiring enough power to be an effective executive within the education organization. Thus, at the turn of the century, superintendents themselves believed that business management and instructional supervision of the school system should be controlled by the superintendents, which constituted a reform for school boards. As a result, superintendents gained executive power and credibility while boards shifted more into policy-making bodies less concerned with school management (Brunner et al., 2002). Some of the early superintendents soon found their way into university teaching and founded departments of education administration (Tyack & Hansot, 1982).

In the early 1900s, stage three of the development of the superintendency, the position was established and legitimized with school boards and the public, and the first female superintendent was appointed (Chapman, 1997). World War I increased federal government involvement in business and industry, which impacted the nation's education system. Superintendents and principals were recognized as the education experts of local school districts and were seldom challenged unless a political question was at hand (Brunner et al., 2002). By the 1930s most states had statutory language defining the roles of local school superintendents and local boards of education. Codification clearly drew

lines of authority, making the superintendent responsible to the local board and specifying the organizational form for modern school districts (Chapman, 1997).

Stage four began in the 1950s when the public began to express dissatisfaction over declining student achievement. Political challenges placed new pressures on superintendents to respond to external demands for social justice. These challenges broadened the superintendent role to district spokesperson and community advisor. Although superintendents are expected to be responsive to the community, the rhetoric that superintendents be communicators gave them the positional power to decide what and when information would be delivered (Sharp, 1997).

In the 1960s, professors of education administration changed the training of school administration from the world of real life to the theoretical bases of sociology and psychology. Many of these professors had no previous experience as superintendents. By the 1970s, these professors dominated the education administration professorate (Chapman, 1997).

Stage five occurred in the 1970s when superintendents came under pressure to respond to public demands for accountability for the education of all children within public education. Superintendents were under fire from special interest groups and state legislatures, which were assuming more control of education. It was during this stage that the composition and focus of school boards shifted. Many board members came into their roles bearing special interest platforms. In previous decades, school boards were generally comprised of businessmen and professionals interested in public education for the general welfare of the district. However, beginning in the 1970s, more blue-collar workers, homemakers, and others were elected as single-issue candidates intent on

changing the system (Chapman, 1997). The superintendent's vulnerability to the political agendas of school boards increased during this stage, changing the landscape of this leadership post (Candoli, 1995).

In 1983, stage six, the report, *A Nation at Risk*, was released, resulting in heavy focus by politicians on educational programs that would improve the quality of public education. The waves of reform that followed were large-scale and systemic. As a result, the definition of the superintendent's role became one of formal management. Previous emphasis on organizational efficiency was replaced with management issues concerning student learning, teacher professionalism, and decentralization. Superintendents had to improve learning while generating broad-based community support. Political strategies for superintendents became less about maintaining positional power and more about personal survival (Brunner et al., 2002). Significant control of public education moved into the hands of state and local bureaucracies. According to Glass (1992), the policy-making pendulum swung between the superintendent and the school board in regard to what constituted policy-making and what constituted management. Most researchers on the superintendency favored a model of the superintendent as chief executive officer, a concept partially borrowed from the corporate world (Candoli, 1995).

During stage seven, diminished power and the need to respond to external pressures moved the role of superintendent toward reforming schools in ways that supported the learning of all children. School districts required systemic restructuring of schools to decrease administrative bureaucracy and increase involvement of teachers, parents, and the community in education leadership (Brunner et al., 2002). Political and moral dimensions of the leadership role of superintendents in changing the nature of schooling

took precedence over the conventional management practices of the past (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000).

Recent discourse emphasizes the need for superintendents to focus on improved learning through the school community while building community capacity to enhance learning in schools. Superintendent leadership is perceived as working with and through rather than commanding others. Distributed leadership must draw on individual skills, knowledge, and expertise for the guidance and direction of the organization to achieve the notion of shared goals. The notion of leadership has become one of creating a shared culture with a common set of values binding the group together (Brunner et al., 2002).

<div align="center">The Superintendency in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia</div>

Moving from an overview of the superintendency and reconceptualization of the position, this section addresses the superintendency in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. Superintendents in Alabama must have 5 years of education work experience in order to assume a superintendent position. County or city superintendents of education, whether elected or appointed, need not be a resident or qualified elector of the county in which they serve. There are 133 superintendents in Alabama for approximately 745,753 students. There are 88 Caucasian male, 10 African American male, 25 Caucasian female, and 9 African American female superintendents (Alabama Department of Education, 2009).

There are currently 67 school districts within Florida responsible for the education of more than 2.5 million students (Hoffman & Sable, 2007). Florida statutes define the general powers of the superintendent and the statutory duties of this office. According to Florida Statute 1001.49, the general powers of a school superintendent include general

oversight of the district in regard to problems, needs, and improvement of the education of Florida's school-aged children. Of Florida's 67 school superintendent positions, 44 are elected while 23 are appointed. There are 48 male and 19 female superintendents in Florida. None of the female superintendents in Florida are African American (Florida Association of School Superintendents, 2008).

Georgia aligns its school districts along its political county lines. There are 182 school superintendents within Georgia responsible for the education of more than 1.65 million students (Hoffman & Sable, 2007). Georgia statutes define the general powers of the superintendent as well provide the statutory duties of this office (Georgia School Superintendents Association, 2008). A brief discussion of these powers and functions is necessary to better understand the day-to-day functions of the superintendent. In addition, the Georgia Constitution outlines the qualifying attributes of those who hold the position.

While the superintendent's general powers enable the incumbent to function as a public servant in education, it is the statutory duties found in Georgia Statute 20-2-101 that give a detailed description of the day-to-day job. The present Georgia Constitution established the qualification criteria for school district superintendent in Article VIII, Section III, which states that, as a result of this constitutional provision, Georgia's district school superintendent positions are all appointed on the individual county or city level, but the state-level superintendent is elected (Georgia School Superintendents Association, 2008). In the case of an appointed superintendent, the local district school board may prescribe specific educational background qualifications. Furthermore, only one statutory provision specifically addresses this position and it addresses salary. The statute requires each district to pay the school superintendent a reasonable annual salary that takes into

account such factors as size of the district, educational qualifications, and professional experience of the candidate. For school year 2008-2009, there were 135 male and 46 female superintendents in Georgia. Five of the female superintendents in Georgia are African American (Georgia School Superintendents Association, 2008).

The three states are similar in many ways. In the case of an appointed superintendent, a local district school board may prescribe specific education background qualifications, but the Florida Supreme Court ruled more than 45 years ago that state-mandated licensure/certification of superintendents was unconstitutional. Furthermore, any attempt by the legislature to place additional qualifiers on individuals seeking this public office, such as residency requirements, is beyond the boundaries set forth both in the Florida and Georgia Constitutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). While some states are considering non-licensure as a solution for the lack of superintendent candidates, others are relaxing their certification requirements to expand the pool of qualified applicants for an ever-increasing number of superintendent vacancies. Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, like other states, are wrestling with projections that more than 40% of the present superintendents may retire by 2013 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007).

The following overview captures the essence of the responsibilities of this position in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia:

A superintendent has the duty to:

- preside over board meetings;

- enforce laws and rules of the school board;

- be the custodian of school property and supervisor of instruction;

- monitor the work of district employees and the human resource component;

- maintain proper attendance accounting of children;

- recommend textbooks, plans for transportation, and plans for facilities;

- coordinate action between government entities;

- attend department of education conferences;

- recommend tax levies, prepare annual school budget, and submit monthly financial statements;

- recommend systems of improvement and accountability;

- visit schools and suggest improvements; and

- inform the general public about programs, needs, and objectives.

The next section of this literature review examines the research on women superintendents within the broader framework of women administrators in the public K-12 system. Specifically, this section examines women superintendents from a broader perspective of women in education leadership. This section ties this research into a paradigm that guides research on women in education administration and specifically guides this research design.

<div align="center">Research on Women Superintendents</div>

The previous section of this literature review provided an overview of research on the superintendency. This was accomplished through an overview of the development of the office using an historical emphasis and included research on how the office has become reconceptualized, in large part due to the paradoxes of demands placed on the office holder. The section concluded with informing research on how the office is defined in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. As previously stated, approximately 40% of

superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia may retire in the next several years, so it is best to examine an untapped pool of potential superintendents, the current women in education administration. To understand the importance of this untapped pool, it is best to begin this examination with a national perspective of women in the workforce and then move to a discussion of women in education administration.

To learn and understand more about the superintendency when occupied by women, McCabe (2001) surveyed female superintendents in 45 states. The women were asked to complete the statement, "A superintendent is . . ." (p. 27). More than half of the created metaphors mentioned leadership, and more than one-third of the responses referred to the superintendent as facilitator. Thus, many female superintendents described the traditional views of leadership, but placed an emphasis on empowerment of others as well.

National Perspective of Women in the Workforce

Women have made great strides in the workforce at the national level. The following are highlights of statistics in 2008 on women in the U.S. workforce (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008):

1. With a labor force participation rate of 59.2%, women represented 45% of the total U.S. labor force.

2. Women are projected to comprise 47% of the total labor force in 2014. They will also account for 51% of the increase in total labor force growth between 2004 and 2014.

3. There were 65.8 million employed women in the U.S. in 2007. Seventy-four percent worked full-time while the remaining 26% worked part-time.

4. The largest percentage of employed women (38%) work in management, professional, and related occupations, while 35% work in sales and office occupations.

5. Undergraduate enrollment has been higher for women than men since 1978. More than three-quarters of degrees in health, education, and psychology went to women. In addition women earn the majority of bachelor's degrees in business, biological sciences, social sciences, and history.

6. Women account for about half the enrollment in professional programs such as law, medicine, and optometry, up from 22% a generation ago.

The U.S. population is 51% female, the same as it was three decades ago. Legal and cultural barriers have fallen during that time period, creating unprecedented opportunities for women (Institute of Women's Policy Research, 2006). Women have become knowledgeable about boosting their income for themselves and their families by recognizing the value of an advanced degree. Ironically, as more women are pursuing advanced degrees they are still underrepresented in full-time faculty jobs in higher education, especially in fields such as physical science, engineering, and math (Institute of Women's Policy Research).

<div align="center">Overview of Women in Education Administration</div>

In examining the women in the superintendent's office, the accounting of historical percentages are at best suspect. Blount (1998) pointed out that the number of women reported in the superintendent's position differed by source. What was at first thought to be careless scholarship turned out to be a lack of reliable, uniform data collection. This

lack of data collection lessened the reliability of any counting system. Blount refers to this as a conspiracy of silence and insinuates that it could hardly have been unintentional.

Table 2.1 gives an overview of the percentage of women superintendents in the United States for the years that researchers have documented with some reliability. According to Shakeshaft (1990), at the end of the 1980s, only 7% of the school superintendents in the United States were women. However, at the start of the new millennium, that percentage appears to have increased to 20% (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

Table 2.1

Percentage Overview of Women Superintendents in the United States

Author	Year	% of Women Superintendents
Blount (1998)	1910	9%
	1930	11%
	1950	9%
	1971	1.3%
Shakeshaft (1990)	1990	7%
	1992	6.6%
Glass (2000)	1999	13.2%
Grogan & Brunner (2005)	2001	18%
	2005	20%

The lack of data on women in leadership from the early 1900s through the 1970s is due in part to the fact that the gender of school leaders was not systematically collected during this period. For example, Blount (1998) found in researching women superintendents from 1873-1995 that employment statistics were based on limited surveys rather than comprehensive tallies. She attributes this lack of statistical reporting to what Tyack and Hansot (1982) labeled as a conspiracy of silence. There is also a lack of historical data on the selection of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and

Georgia. Table 2.1 shows the fluctuation in the percentage of women superintendents in the United States from the early 1900s until 2005.

Women in Education Administration from 1980-2004

In this section, the researcher provides a review of the current research on women in K-12 administrative positions within the U.S. with a focus on the questions and issues that remain unresolved in the gender imbalance. Various gender equity laws impacting elementary and secondary education have been enacted to open the door to women. The first federal law that directly impacted women in the workforce was the 1963 Amendment of the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to include what is commonly referred to as the Equal Pay Act (EPA). The EPA mandates that equal wages must be paid to women and men for equal work on jobs which require equal skill, effort, and responsibility, and which are performed under similar working conditions. The EPA was subsequently incorporated into Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Dardaine-Ragguet, Russo, & Harris, 1994). Title VII prohibits employment discrimination based not only on gender, but also on race, religion, and country of national origin. Title VII was quickly followed by Executive Order 11246 (1965), which was aimed at eliminating gender-based discrimination in programs associated with the federal government. Title VII was amended in 1972 to extend coverage to educational institutions. Regulations by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) significantly strengthened the rights of women, especially in higher education, to include prohibition of sexual harassment (Dardaine-Ragguet et al.).

Title IX of the Civil Rights Act, adopted in 1972, prohibits discrimination based on gender in any educational program or activity receiving federal financial assistance

(Dardaine-Ragguet et al., 1994). Athletics have created the most controversy regarding Title IX, but its gains in education and academics are notable. Before Title IX many schools refused to admit women or enforced strict limits.

With so many constitutional or legal guarantees and protections, why do so few women attain positions as high school principals or district superintendents? According to Bell (1995), the analysis of gender-equity policy suggested that it has not yet achieved the status of morally legitimate policy. Dardaine-Ragguet et al. (1994), state that policy-makers have failed to see that placing the burden of change on the organizational systems does not constitute a promising approach to achieving gender equity, and it appears that boards of education do not assume responsibility for implementation of policy written for the promotion of gender equity. The generations of gender-equity policies and suggestions for implementation are significant to women aspiring to attain positions in administration (Dardaine-Ragguet et al., 1994).

The conclusion of the 1980s brought a call for a change in the focus of education research in the leadership field. Barriers were identified and labeled, and the acceptance of norms was questioned. Laws were put in place to provide remedies for overt discrimination. Women were able to enter professions previously reserved for men. Education was losing its best and brightest women to other professions such as engineering, law, and medicine (Shakeshaft, 1994).

Research in the 1990s was about giving the female perspective a voice. Previous research documented the number of females in leadership positions and the barriers in place that restricted large numbers from succeeding (Shakeshaft, 1994). These barriers were not isolated to education. The nation would come to recognize in this decade the

concept of the glass ceiling and its impact on the promotion of women into positions of power.

Little (1993) documents that male power brokers had negative perceptions of female administrators. Men received encouragement from board members to advance to administrative positions while the same encouragement was withheld from women. Men in teaching positions received more recommendations for positions in school-level administration. Women were denied access to the well established male networks (Little, 1993).

Gupton and Slick (1996) indicate that more women were pursuing advanced degrees in administration but staying longer in the classroom. That meant women were older than most men upon entering the ranks of administration, thus leaving less time for professional leadership experience. This lack of professional experience was used by school systems to merit lower pay for women. Furthermore, women overwhelmingly occupied positions that wielded less political power and carried less financial weight in the overall scheme of the profession. Women did not command the high-level salaries offered in larger school districts. The problems women now faced were not the formal, tangible barriers, such as education or certification, but the intangible ones that required an aspirant to be accepted as *one of us* by those already at the apex of the organization (Shakeshaft, 1994).

The 1990s was a decade about the legal destruction of overt discrimination. Along with this great stride came the voice of the women's perspective. Women were gaining in numbers but were not necessarily welcomed with open arms from those in power within the system. The voices revealed the backlash of a system based on tokenism. These

voices support Kanter's (1977) theory on power and tokenism. Women developed mechanisms of survival to fit into the established power structure. Success for women, at this point, meant more than just getting a job but rather getting it, flourishing in it, and staying in it for years to come. Women still needed access to hiring networks, support systems, and mentoring (Gupton & Slick, 1996).

The new century opened with the knowledge that women had made great strides in the workplace during the previous years. The number of women in leadership positions at the elementary and middle school levels as well as in the central office was increasing. One possible explanation for the continued imbalance in the percentage of women versus men in the top seat of the nation's school districts, however, is that society still wants women as the teachers to take care of the students.

According to U. S. Department of Labor (2008):

1. Women earn only 77 cents nationally for every dollar earned by men.

2. Female high school graduates earn 34% less than male high school graduates.

3. Female college graduates earn 33% less than male college graduates.

In 2007, female secondary principals had a total of 15.1 years of teaching experience, whereas the corresponding statistics for their male colleagues was 13.4 (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Evans (2003) produces evidence in her research that women are most likely promoted based on their performance as teachers, while men are most likely promoted based on their potential. The author contends that women, on average, perform a job for 10 years before they are promoted because they have to prove they know how to do it. Men, on the other hand, are promoted in less time with less evidence of successful leadership (Evans).

The structural and organization argument still retains prominence in the explanation of the gender imbalance in education leadership. In addition, Braverman's Labor Process Theory (Hahnel & Albert, 1990) supports the idea that a job is structured in such a way to explain continued discrepancy. However, some of the structures have changed; namely women are being groomed and promoted into leadership positions. Organizations, such as the American Association of School Administrators, now have support mechanisms targeting women and minorities in order to overcome the structures in place that have caused the imbalance.

The imbalance in gender is not fully explained by Labor Process Theory, Discrimination Model, or Organization Argument. Perhaps the real reason runs deeper than these perspectives can conjecture. Perhaps the reason for the imbalance is as Chetkovich (1997) recognized: it is in the construction of identity surrounding the job that lies at the heart of the issue. When a person in this society is asked to describe the typical leader in the K-12 education system, what comes to the forefront is that a male must fill the position. The concept of K-12 leadership embracing a female has yet to bear fruit. Only when the identity construction is disproved and destroyed will women gain positions of power. Schools are human enterprises, nothing more and nothing less, and, therefore, the relationships in them are complex (Barth, 1990).

<center>African American Women in the Superintendency</center>

In a study of six African American women in supervisory positions, Robinson (2004) identifies two barriers: isolation and intraracial discrimination. Scholarly records indicate that women, in general, and particularly African American women eventually penetrated the male-dominated school superintendency and began receiving appointments

to the top position in public school education (Blount, 1998; Jackson, 1999). However, African American women assumed the role long before records began. Revere (1987) reveals that it is very likely the first Black woman superintendent in our country was Velma Dolphin Ashley, 1944-1956, but Barbara Sizemore was the first Black woman to lead an urban district. Her service area for superintendent included Washington, D.C. and Chicago, Illinois (Jackson, 1999). It was not until the 1970s that women, in general, and Black women, in particular, started receiving appointments to the school superintendency (Jackson, 1999) (Table 2.2).

Table 2.2

The Number of African American Women Superintendents in the United States

Year	# of Districts	# of Women Supt.	Percent*	# of African American Women Superintendents
1910	5,232	329	6.26	N/A
1970	10,380	71	0.68	3
1981	13,751	241	----	11a
1983	N/A	N/A	----	16b
1985	16,000	----	----	25c
1989	11,007**	284	5.6	14d
1991	10,683**	424	7.1	19g
1993	14,000***	800***	7.1	20e
1995	14,000***	800***	7.1	45f
1996	14,000***	800***	7.1	33h

* percent of all superintendents

** Chase and Bell (1994) used only K-12 districts in their studies

*** Approximate figures

a (Arnez, 1981), b (Anderson, 1988), c (Revere, 1987), d (Bell, 1995), e (Chase & Bell, 1994), f (Alston, 1996), g (Banks, 1995), h (Jackson, 1999)

Jackson (1999) states in a study of 32 African American superintendents, "African American female superintendents constitute a small but determined lot who have gone virtually unnoticed and unchronicled", (p.141). Likewise, Bell (1995), addressing gender consciousness, asserts that African American women are placed in two minority positions, first as females and second as African American, creating double barriers to their access and mobility within the profession (Jackson; Bell). This is one of the many challenges they face that Caucasian women do not face (Jackson). Jackson dedicated a chapter in her book to the double barriers of African-American women school superintendents to "correct this oversight" (p.141). Jackson recognizes that African American females are living examples of human adaptability, strength, and accomplishment when granted opportunities to serve in the role of superintendent. She notes that until her 1999 study, the most recent study of African American female superintendents was conducted 10 years earlier by Revere. Jackson's study serves as a much needed update, and she notes that, as of the date of her study, there is not an accurate and complete compilation of data on African American women superintendents. Jackson is another author who reiteration of Hanson's and Tyack's 1982 claim of a silent conspiracy.

Though the figures are dated, it is relevant to note that in 1978, there were only five African American female superintendents in the United States; in 1982, there were 11; 16 in 1983; 29 in 1984; and a decrease to 25 in 1985 (Arnez, 1981; Revere, 1987). Alston (1996), states that in 1993 there were 1,960 Caucasian female superintendents compared to 20 African American female superintendents.

Brunner (2000) reports that in a national study of school superintendents, of the 2,262 superintendents responding to the study, African American women accounted for a mere 5.1% of the sample with 15 respondents. Alston (1999) cites Brunner and Peyton-Caire's study (2000) which revealed that 91.6% of female superintendents in the U.S. were Caucasian compared to 5.1% African American. Alston (2005) reveals that only 2.2% of the nation's superintendents are African American in 2005. Brunner (2000) believes the percentage of minority superintendents has probably not increased at the same rate as the percentage of African American students. Presentation of these important data is necessary to accurately portray the scarcity of the African American female in the senior education leadership position, the superintendency. Alston (2000) argues the African American woman's involvement in school leadership is minimal due to the paucity of research on African American female superintendents, which makes it challenging to collect data on the role (Jackson, 1999; Tallerico, 1999). Jones (2003) suggests that in an effort to understand the experiences of a group, interested persons often have to analyze numerous fragments from existing sources to extrapolate data.

Today, African American women leaders in education are more apt to serve in urban districts with predominantly African American populations (Banks, 1995; Gewertz, 2006; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Tallerico, 1999; Tillman, 2004). However, women of other races are typically appointed to small school districts (Jackson, 1999). Grogan and Brunner (2005) contend that African American women superintendents believe they have the challenge of proving themselves. Grogan and Brunner state that an African American woman always has to do a better job, and there is little room for error. Also, the authors contend, the actions of African American female superintendents are watched and

evaluated more closely, and the expectations are higher. This is unfair considering that the tools are not as readily available as they are for their Caucasian counterparts (Grogan & Brunner).

Alston (1996) cites five constraints African American female administrators encountered en route to the superintendency, including the absence of networking and support systems. It has only been within the last 20 years that African American female superintendents were included in the scholarship and research on the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Brunner, 2005; Tallerico, 1999). The number of African American female superintendents continues to be unsteady.

<div align="center">Challenges Faced by Women Superintendents</div>

This section reviews barriers and challenges faced by female superintendents. Resilience, which helps women overcome barriers, is discussed in this section. The superintendent's job is very complex and continuously requires all challenges to be met effectively. Female superintendents have more difficulty in successfully overcoming barriers and meeting challenges (Shakeshaft, 1989, Grogan, 1996; Blount, 1998).

Barriers for Women Superintendents

A peek into the main office of most public schools in the United States will probably reveal that they are crumbling with poor leadership, but run by a White male principal (Shen, Wegenke, & Cooley, 2003). As the previous section points out, women have faced barriers on their journey to education administration. This section reviews current research addressing barriers specific to women superintendents.

The superintendent position is still overwhelmingly dominated by Caucasian males. In 2005, 20% of school superintendents were women, whereas 80% were men (Grogan &

Brunner, 2005). While historically this percentage represents the highest percentage achieved by women, they still deal with issues of gender when seeking the position. Many studies raise the issue of lack of mobility as a barrier for women in attaining a superintendent's position (Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996; Chase & Bell, 1994). Women report they have a more difficult time relocating for career advancement than do their male counterparts. This was primarily due to their families and marriages. In fact, Grogan (2000) found in her two-year study of a woman superintendent, that marital difficulties may have rendered the superintendent less capable of dealing with political conflicts within her district.

Many researchers documented lack of mobility as a barrier for potential female superintendents (Grogan, 1996; McCreight, 1999; Brunner, 1999) as well as gender discrimination by gatekeepers of the position, namely search consultants and school boards (Chase & Bell, 1994; Sharp, Malone, Walters, & Supley, 2000). Furthermore, women aspiring to the superintendency may find restrictions in larger districts. Three differing opinions have been formulated in regard to restriction by size of districts. McCreight (1999), reports that vertical job advancement for women in smaller districts is more difficult, because there are fewer job openings which translates into fewer opportunities. She maintains that women have a better chance of moving up in larger districts because more opportunities exist. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) found in their national superintendents survey that women are more likely to obtain a superintendency in a smaller school district. Conversely, Sharp et al. (2000) report that the respondents of their study did not feel restricted in terms of the size of the district.

Sharp, Malone, Walters, and Supley (2000) indicate per their survey that 9.9% of the female superintendents reported that male board members seemed supportive, 11.3% reported that female board members were supportive, and 78.9% said that they are the same. The authors posit that gender role and gender discrimination constrain access to the superintendency for women. However, Skrla (1998) states that gender plays a role in all aspects of the relationship and defines three levels in which gender constructs operate. The author states that the three operating levels are on the personal level, in the community, and in the society, and that the conflict of constructs makes it difficult for board members to support female superintendents even though superintendents are typically hired by board members. Brunner (2000) states that women superintendents are expected to act in a particular manner and if they behave contrary to this expectation, they are labeled negatively by the board, colleagues, peers, and subordinates.

Researchers attest that gender-related issues are not addressed in training programs for public school administrators. Skrla (1998) points out that none of the superintendents she studied received training on gender-related issues. Furthermore, school board members do not receive training on gender-based issues. According to Sharp et al. (2000), the state superintendents' organizations provide training in this area. Skrla (1998) indicates that superintendent preparation programs need to provide training for aspiring superintendents on gender issues in superintendent/school board relations.

Tallerico (2000) states that in the culture of school administration, mentors, role models, and networks serve a very important function. It appears that women have a difficult time breaking into organizational networks; therefore, mentors are needed who will encourage, supervise, and promote them. Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2000)

write specifically about the need for mentoring women aspiring to the superintendency and those writings arrive at some of the same conclusions as Tallerico (2000): role models and networks are important.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) surveyed the perceptions of individuals who aspire, those who do not aspire, and those who were seated superintendents on barriers to the position. What the researcher expected to find was that those who aspired and those who were seated to the position would respond that barriers were not important factors. However, these researchers conclude that a larger percentage of aspirants over non-aspirants reported that barriers were important factors in attaining the superintendency. In other words, non-aspirants did not believe the barriers to be as important.

In response to the public education leadership crisis, Grogan and Brunner (2005) surveyed 723 superintendents and 472 central office administrators to get the pulse on what is happening in the field. Results from this research produced some interesting findings. Their research indicated that 40% of the women they surveyed aspired to the superintendency; furthermore, 74% had either earned or were working toward their certification. Not surprisingly, 58% of the women held undergraduate degrees in education and were more likely to be appointed from outside the district than promoted from within. Women had a better chance than men of being hired through professional search firms. Both men and women superintendents cited interest in and focus on instruction and curriculum as beneficial for advancing career opportunities for women. Most women superintendents believed their boards hired them to be instructional leaders or change agents (Grogan and Brunner).

It is the research completed by Grogan and Brunner (2005) that sheds the most light in this area. The traditional pipeline for the superintendency has been the ascension of Caucasian males from teaching to assistant principal to principal in a high school to the superintendency. However, currently the majority of educators are women, and women comprise at least half of the students in education leadership programs. Of those in the superintendent's position, research indicates that the women are successful and enjoy their work. Thus the issue of low representation is not due to a low number of women in the pipeline. Rather these researchers point to the tradition that women have not been considered seriously for the superintendency. Coursework in leadership still presents the traditional male model of leadership, which often stresses managerial efficiency over instruction and community engagement. Furthermore, women are not often encouraged to think about the superintendency as a career goal (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

As more women serve as superintendents, individuals within the organizational culture of the public education system may begin to consider the office of superintendent less as a male-occupied position. School boards may begin to view women with backgrounds in curriculum and instruction as highly attractive candidates in an era of high-stakes testing and accountability (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Furthermore, as more women occupy this position, other aspiring women will see these occupants of the office as role models. But as these researchers point out, occupying the role is not enough. Women must engage in networking, mentoring, and support systems to ensure success. Since there is more of a shortage for African American female superintendents, this statement holds especially true for African American women aspiring to and occupying

this position. The public education system in the United States is a direct reflection of the society at large (Blount, 1998).

The next section of this literature review describes the study of leadership within an organization. The percentage of women superintendents is growing amid reports of superintendent shortages and concerns about equal opportunity. At the same time the field of research about women in the superintendency is growing. While some may argue the demands of the position have shifted, making the position less desirable to men, others maintain the position has not changed; rather women are better positioned to break into a predominantly male-dominated field.

Gender Stereotyping

The public school district superintendency is the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Glass, 2000). School administration programs now enroll more women than men, but there remains a comparatively low number of women employed as school leaders, indicating that for women aspiration is not the issue, opportunity is. Challenges to women's advancement, not competence, are of primary concern when it comes to increasing the number of women in school administration preparatory programs. Gender prejudice is one of the top challenges (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Regardless of the efforts of women, legislative and statutory developments, governmental or institutional acts, and affirmative action, the increase in the representation of women at the superintendent level in schools continues to be minimal (Blount, 1998). The author goes on to state that in U.S. public schools, women are the teacher workforce and men occupy nearly all leadership positions. Active gender-role

stereotypes become barriers to equity because they reinforce discriminatory practices (Bolman & Deal, 2003). One gender-role stereotype is the woman as family and home caregiver. Often women are expected to be the primary family caregivers and men are expected to be the financial providers for their families. Along with those ideas come a host of related gender-role expectations that create potent stereotypes of women interested in moving into leadership positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Gender roles are powerful discriminators, and they are established, taught, and reinforced within a culture. The role for women to provide excellent care for and teaching children has great value, but the equity issue is that allowing these and other gender-role stereotypes to influence decisions for employing women is discriminatory (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). The authors go on to state that frequently women candidates for school superintendents are asked if their spouses will be moving to the district with them. What the employing agent should want to learn about is the knowledge, competencies, disposition, and performance that the female candidate might bring to the position. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2004) explain that discrimination continues to plague women, not only in terms of salary, but also in terms of access to administrative positions and sexual harassment once they make their way into the administrative hierarchy.

Women have more years of teaching experience than men and are older when appointed to administrative positions. Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) describe how experienced female educators at age 55 or 60 were out looking for a first superintendency when males were retiring at 55. The authors contend that it is difficult for a board to consider replacing a superintendent who is retiring at 55 with someone who might be 58 and who has never been a superintendent.

Skrla (2000) notes that in the same way the U.S. has constructed the superintendency as male-dominated, it has created a package of norms about femininity and female behavior. The author describes that package as consisting of "dependence, passivity, fragility, low pain tolerance, nonaggression, non-competitiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation, empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, subjectivity, yieldingness, receptivity, inability to risk emotional liability, and supportiveness" (p. 83). The author contends that these descriptive terms can become part of the culture of the communities. School board members are not appointed by the superintendent; instead, they are elected by the voters or appointed by the mayor. The majority of the board members are men (Hess, 2002), and the board members usually represent the ideology of the culture and subcultures as well as the values and politics of the communities from which they come (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

The Glass Ceiling

Glass walls and ceilings are systematically constructed as a consequence of our cultural attitudes, behaviors, and practices. Awareness of this fact is witnessed by the passage of the 1991 Civil Rights Act, which created the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission to conduct a study and prepare recommendations concerning barriers and opportunities for women (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was designed to combat gender-based discrimination in the workplace. A study conducted by the Glass Ceiling Commission offered ways in which women and minorities could be given greater representation in management and decision-making positions. The study and subsequent recommendations focused on barriers and opportunities in three areas: filling management and decision-making

positions; developmental and skill-enhancing activities; and compensation and reward systems (Dardaine-Ragguet et al., 1994).

In her study of nine superintendents in three Midwestern states, Katz (2004) describes how often women were enthusiastic and reported high job satisfaction once they obtained the position of superintendent; but, in many cases women did not apply for fear of the glass ceiling. Women had begun to subconsciously discourage themselves. The glass ceiling has been virtually impervious and presents challenges that are preventing many qualified females, especially minority women, from assuming administrative roles. The author points out that it is not just the ceiling that holds women back; it's the whole structure of the organizations in which we work, the foundation, the beams, the walls, and the very air (Katz, 2004).

According to the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995), glass ceiling refers to artificial barriers to the advancement of women and minorities. Further, the Commission notes that the glass ceiling is the "unseen yet unbreachable barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements" (p. 4). Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, and Vannemen (2001) assert that labor market inequality as well as labor market discrimination are indicators of the presence of the glass ceiling effect. Meyerson (2004) simply states that the term glass ceiling is actually a metaphor that explains the "paucity of women in upper management" (p. 5).

Various empirical research studies and the media's widespread use of the term glass ceiling leads to much ambiguity concerning the understanding of this phenomenon (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Therefore, researchers find it essential to

clearly understand the concept before considering whether it represents a clear, distinct disadvantage for women in the workplace (Cotter et al., 2001). The glass ceiling may be a genuine obstacle that women must face in education, as well as in business, if they wish to reach the pinnacle of the education profession. They must overcome barriers innate to their gender, such as family responsibilities, lack of mentors, and lack of mobility (Dobie & Hummel, 2001). Thus, many of the attributes positively associated with motherhood and homemaking, women's traditional cultural roles, are viewed negatively in the arena of education leadership and contribute to a negative bias against female leaders.

Lack of Opportunity

Frequently the power structure has a conditioning effect on women's access to positions of power, and women leaders are viewed through the lens of male leadership and face confounding biases toward them when they use the power of position or expertise (Tannen, 1990). The author contends that there are many kinds of evidence that women and men are judged differently even if they sound the same when speaking. This tendency makes an interesting discussion of women, men, and power. One strategy used by a woman can be seen as powerless, but used by a man can be seen as powerful. Bell (1995) reviews how the negotiations of authority between women superintendents and school board members were handled, and discovered that the gender ratios, gender-related expectations, and male dominance of power structures further created challenges of authority in the relationships.

<div align="center">Resilience</div>

The study of resiliency is relatively new compared to other areas of social science. Brown (2004) states, "Forty-five years of wisdom tells us that resilience makes a

difference in the quality of life…." (p.11). Resilience may well play an integral role in the success of people in general, and for female superintendents in particular. It seems appropriate to first review resilience theory followed by a few resilience models.

There has been an increased interest in the concept of resilience in recent years. Investigators and researchers from multiple disciplines, such as child development, pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and education, engage in studies of resiliency (Werner, 2000), whereas most of the earlier resilience research focused on children and adolescents. Increasing numbers of studies on the resilience of adults who are exposed to personal and work-related stress are beginning to surface. Henderson and Milstein (2003) indicate that observation from their own work along with observation of the work of others reveals that the process of resiliency building is similar for children and adults. Accepting that premise, it is critical to review the theoretical findings of resiliency studies on children that may in turn be applied to adults (Brown, 2004).

While there is no universally accepted definition of resiliency, most definitions are similar. Richardson et al. (1990) defines it as " the process of coping with disruptive, stressful or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event" (p. 34). Similarly, Higgins (1994) defined resilience as the "process of self-righting and growth" (p. 1). Wolins and Wolins (1993) defined resiliency as the "capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship, and to repair your self" (p. 5). Wolins and Wolins continued to explain the use of the term resilient as opposed to other terms used to describe the phenomenon, such as invulnerable, invincible, and hardy, saying that resilient recognizes the associations of pain, struggle and suffering.

Resilience is often associated with risk; however, resilience is distinct from risk orientation (Brown, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). While risk carries a negative connotation, resilience "evolves into a strengths-based approach to a global view of the whole (person), not a given point in time per se, but long term, as it evolves over one's life" (Brown, p.20).

<div align="center">Summary</div>

The role of the school superintendent has changed drastically since inception of the position. Indeed, the role has grown to include many responsibilities in addition to manager of the school system. Women generally have more teaching experience but less administrative experience. With a large number of male superintendent retirements predicted, it might be best to examine an untapped pool of potential female superintendents.

Since the first female superintendent in the U.S. was named in 1909, the presence of women in the superintendency has remained sparse. The stereotypical, cultural identity of females, coupled with real but invisible barriers, such as the glass ceiling, may have been responsible for the lack of representation of women. Because of under representation of women in the position of superintendent, many researchers conclude that female school superintendents may have a different type of resilience from that of male superintendents.

Throughout this review of the literature, the researcher attempted to define the paradigms for both barriers and resilience. Because there are so few women in the superintendency, women have a much smaller number of people with whom they can network. Ultimately, some researchers conclude that this fact, along with exclusion from the good old boy network, leaves female superintendents more isolated. To successfully

continue in their post as superintendents, these women employ strategies to help them cope with their isolation. Researchers suggest that finding good mentors, networking with other female superintendents, and journaling are a few ways that women can achieve a sense of connectedness in their positions as superintendents.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of female superintendents who gave descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, and to determine how female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were successful in obtaining their positions. To gain a clearer understanding of the lived experiences of the female superintendents in the three southeastern states, 16 female superintendents were interviewed. The ideas used to inform the research questions were developed through the literature on the history of the superintendency, women superintendents, and challenges for superintendents. This chapter details the following: (a) research questions; (b) research design; (c) site, population, and sample description; (d) research procedures; (e) protocols; (f) credibility and trustworthiness; and (g) risk, benefits and the ethical considerations of this study.

A number of studies have focused on the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency (Alston, 1999; Bell & Chase, 1994; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1996; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989; Sharp et al., 2004; Tallerico, 1999). Yet, given the known qualifications of female candidates, it is apparent that the underrepresentation is due to other factors, factors related to the social phenomenon of the selection process itself and the values and beliefs of the gatekeepers. Few empirical studies have examined this phenomenon from the perspective of the superintendent. Some of the goals of this study were to examine a selection of female

superintendents from their own perspectives using qualitative methods and to understand lived experiences of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.

Qualitative methods are effective when a researcher seeks to understand the process by which events and actions take place (Maxwell, 1996). Merriam (2001) stated that qualitative researchers in education "simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (p. 11). According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), qualitative researchers "study things in the natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (p. 3). Qualitative methods are also used to obtain "intricate details about a phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). The researcher, using this method, acted as the human instrument of data collection and analysis (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 2001).

In addition to gaining a personal perspective of the values and beliefs of female superintendents, the qualitative method allowed the researcher to develop a framework that was thorough, concise, systematic, manageable, and flexible. The parameters considered included setting, actors, events, and processes (Creswell, 1998) of the leadership experiences of female superintendents. Maxwell (1996) stated that the strengths of qualitative research are that it allows the researcher to identify processes rather than outcomes, and it focuses on situations and people, with an emphasis on words rather than numbers.

Research Questions

Through this study, the researcher addressed the following overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of female superintendents, including career paths and resilience to glass ceilings? Also, the following sub-questions were addressed:

1. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia?

2. What commonalities exist among the experiences of female superintendents?

3. What challenges and barriers do African American and Caucasian women face and circumvent as they attain the superintendency?

Research Design

The researcher's primary purpose was to understand and illuminate the lived experiences of female superintendents. Throughout the study, the researcher examined the unique stories which make up the life-world of each participant. Because the nature of this study was dependent on the respondents' descriptions of their years as superintendents, the researcher utilized a qualitative research model. Creswell (2003) defined assumptions of the qualitative paradigm "as 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" (pp. 1-2).

Merriam (2002) reported that the five types of qualitative research methods commonly found in education are basic or generic qualitative, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study. The author also reported that there are six characteristics of qualitative research. The following is an explanation of the characteristics as described by (Merriam):

1. Qualitative researchers are concerned primarily with process, rather than outcomes or products.

2. Qualitative researchers are interested in meaning – how people make sense of their lives, experiences, and their structures of the world.

3. The qualitative researcher is the primary instrument for the data collection and analysis. Data are mediated through this human instrument, rather than through inventories, questionnaires, or machines.

4. Qualitative research involves fieldwork. The researcher physically goes to the people, setting, site, or institution to observe or record behavior in its natural setting.

5. Qualitative research is descriptive in that the researcher is interested in process, meaning, and understanding gained through words or pictures.

6. The process of qualitative research is inductive in that the researcher builds abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories from details.

The concept of phenomenology helped identify the essence of the phenomenon (the lived experience of a female superintendent). Phenomenology connects well with cultural studies, because it focuses on how meanings are made within everyday life and how those meanings are developed through social interactions (Creswell, 2003). Resting on the assumption that there is structure and focus in shared experiences that allows individuals to be understood in relation to a more general worldview (Meriam, 2001), a phenomenological study attempts to "understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular situation" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005, p.139).

Consistent with the purpose of this study and the specific research questions that guided the study, phenomenological inquiry was used to conduct the research. "A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experiences for several individuals about a concept or the phenomenon" (Creswell, 1998, p. 51). In a phenomenology study, the researcher strives to understand on a personal level, the motives and beliefs behind people's actions, attempting to see things from other people's point of view (Taylor & Bogdan,1998). As DeMarrais and Lapan (2004) describe, the phenomenological interview is the essence of a lived experience. This essence emerged from interview data as participants described the particular aspects of the experience of superintendency as they have lived it. The researcher considered the respondents to be experts on their experiences who were willing to share their experiences.

The primary sources of data came from individual interviews with superintendents from several school districts. Patton (1990) explained the following in a discussion on qualitative research:

We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe. The issue is not whether observational data is more desirable, valid, or meaningful than self-reported data. The fact of the matter is we cannot observe everything. We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions. We cannot observe behaviors that took place at some previous point in time. We cannot observe situations that preclude the presence of an observer. We cannot observe how people have organized the world and the meanings they attach to what goes on in the world. We have to ask people questions about those things. The

purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to discuss the other person's perspective. (p. 196)

Population

The researcher identified all Alabama, Florida, and Georgia public school superintendents listed within the Alabama Public Education Directory (ALSDE), Florida Public Education Directory (FLDOE, 2008), and the Georgia Public Education Directory (GADOE, 2008). The lists within the aforementioned directories contain the name, address, telephone number, and email address of each superintendent within each state. The current 34 female superintendents in Alabama, 19 female superintendents in Florida, and 46 female superintendents in Georgia were used to gather information regarding public school superintendents' demographic information. There were 14 African American superintendents initially contacted in the study: five in Georgia, nine in Alabama, and none in Florida.

The school superintendent is the highest ranking administrator within a public secondary school district and is responsible for all district operations. Superintendents report directly to the school board (Kowalski, 1999; American Association of School Administrators, 1993). The superintendent is expected to provide leadership by developing, planning, implementing and evaluating district goals, objectives, and policies. According to Gay (2000), educational research clearly indicates the first step in sampling is definition of the population.

Sampling

Gall and Borg (2003), state that usually researchers cannot investigate the entire population of students or educators in whom they are interested. The larger group they

wish to learn about is called a population, and the smaller group they actually study is called a sample.

Initially, the researcher attempted to contact all 99 female superintendents in the three southeastern states by email. For those who did not respond or could not be contacted by email, a letter was sent introducing the researcher and briefly describing the research project. Superintendents indicated their interest in being considered for the study by responding to the email or returning a response card to the researcher. The female superintendents who consented to participate in an in-depth interview were identified and interviewed. Current employment as a superintendent in Alabama, Florida, or Georgia was a requirement for participation. The product of this qualitative study was richly descriptive and involved a small purposeful, nonrandom sample.

In Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, female superintendents are either African American or Caucasian; therefore, all study participants were either African American or Caucasian. Utilizing data from the department of education of each the three states in the study, the researcher interviewed six Caucasian female superintendents from Alabama and Florida along with four Caucasian female superintendents from Georgia. In addition, for each Alabama and Georgia, three African American female superintendents were interviewed. All superintendents who were interviewed had more than 5 years teaching experience and had been assistant principals or principals.

During this study, the researcher spent time in the participants' school districts, and follow-up questions were answered by a second phone contact or email. The alternative plan was for all interviews to be conducted by telephone. The overall criteria for sample consideration included: 1) those female superintendents who indicated a willingness to

participate in the questionnaire; 2) those available female superintendents whose districts were within Alabama, Florida, or Georgia; and 3) those female superintendents who were currently employed as superintendents. In order to consider the effect of situation on the behaviors of superintendents, the women considered for the study represented diverse population settings, including rural, suburban and urban areas, in each of the three states. The ethnicities of female superintendents in the three states in the study were Caucasian and African American. Alternative interviews would have included Caucasian rather than African American female superintendents, since there were a limited number of African American female superintendents to interview.

<div align="center">Setting of the Study</div>

During this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted at the superintendents' school districts, and follow-up questions were answered by phone or email. The interviews were recorded, but to ensure confidentiality, the researcher used letters of the alphabet instead of names and kept all tape recorded responses and notes in her home except while they were being transcribed by Kara Humphrey, a trained transcriptionist. The interviews were taped recorded and transcribed for analysis, and an interview log was maintained to supplement the taped interviews.

<div align="center">Instrumentation</div>

The researcher conducted the interviews and analyzed the body language of the interviewees; therefore, the researcher was the instrument. In order to ensure validity, the researcher for this research dissertation reviewed the questions and gathered data to determine themes and patterns. The interview questions were developed based on information revealed in the review of literature as well as the research question and sub-

questions (Appendix E). Multiple questions, leading questions, and yes/no questions were not utilized, thus minimizing confusion and poor responses.

After IRB approval, all Alabama, Florida, and Georgia female school superintendents were sent introduction letters by email (Appendix A) detailing pertinent information about the researcher and the research. For those who did not respond or were unreachable by email, a letter was sent via the U.S. Postal Service (Appendix B). A reply postcard was enclosed with the letter (Appendix C) on which potential participants checked whether they were willing to participate in the research. The permission to record form (Appendix F) and a brief information sheet were sent (Appendix D) to respondents who agreed to participate in the study. The information sheet served a twofold purpose: it provided the researcher with quickly-obtained information that aided in the interview process, and it provided demographic data for sampling purposes.

Information sheets were returned only by superintendents who planned to participate in the study. Items included on the information sheet that helped the researcher construct a sample included data such as age, ethnicity, geographic location, size of school district, pathway to the superintendency, and marriage and children. Having this information enabled the researcher to compile a sample. All superintendents who responded with interest in the study were interviewed.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours, and during the interviews the researcher asked a series of open-ended questions. Most initial interviews were face to face and followed up with a phone call and/or email. The researcher based participant selection on the state where the district was located. Sample size was based on the number of superintendents who returned the interest card indicating their willingness to

participate. The researcher signed the respondents' consent which outlined the respondents assurance of confidentiality.

The instrumentation for this study involved semi-structured interviews that incorporated direct as well as indirect questions (Creswell, 2003). The researcher developed interview questions that reflected several available research literature sources for female superintendents and that answered the research questions (Appendix I). Marshall and Rossman (1999) describe interviewing as "conversations with purpose" (p. 108). By employing this method, the participants were able to express their views and the responses were valuable and useful. Also, the researcher was able to obtain a large amount of information in a short period of time (Marshall & Rossman, 1999).

Procedures

The researcher identified all Alabama, Florida, and Georgia public school superintendents listed within the Alabama Public Education Directory (ALSDE), Florida Public Education Directory (FLDOE, 2008), and the Georgia Public Education Directory (GADOE, 2008). Each of these directories contains the name, address, telephone number, and email address of each superintendent in that state. Current employment as superintendent in Alabama, Florida, or Georgia was a requirement for participation. The product of this qualitative study was richly descriptive and involved a small purposeful, nonrandom sample.

The researcher conducted an in-depth, semi-structured interview based on a research protocol developed from the available research literature, the overarching questions, and sub-questions (Appendix E). The first interview started April 24, 2009 after IRB and district approval, and the final interview occurred January 25, 2010. An

interview guide was used to consistently ask the same questions and to control the direction of the interview. Transcribed interviews were analyzed using open coding and content analysis. To consider the effect of obstacles and other circumstances on the behaviors of the superintendents, the women considered for the study represented diverse population settings, including rural, suburban, and urban areas.

In addition to specific open-ended questions that could be followed up, probing questions were used. The interview was taped recorded with a digital electronic recorder and transcribed by a professional transcriptionist for analysis by the researcher. An interview log was maintained to supplement the taped interviews. The data was coded and organized by emergent themes into taxonomies and categories. The codes and themes were established based on the questions and common answers to the questions. According to Glesne (1999), identifying patterns and themes is referred to as coding: "a progressive process of sorting and defining and defining and sorting those scraps of collected data that are applicable to your research purpose" (p. 135). Continuums were constructed based on the emergent taxonomies and categories. The interviews were recorded and transcribed for analysis by the researcher in such a way as to provide maximum anonymity for participants. An interview log containing notes and respondent codes for identification of the superintendents was maintained to supplement the taped interviews, and the tapes were ultimately destroyed by the interviewer. The anonymity of all participants was assured by assigning participants pseudonyms for reference within the study. The researcher examined data in the transcripts to identify recurring themes and patterns.

Concerns for the Study

This qualitative study utilized the phenomenological approach to research the lived experiences of selected female superintendents' leadership. Phenomenological research is the type of research where the researcher brackets his or her own experiences in order to understand those of the participants in the study. During the interviews, the researcher asked a series of open-ended questions and bracketed her personal experiences as she translated and analyzed the responses. Since qualitative research employs inductive research, which builds abstraction, concepts, or theories, the researcher did not test a preconceived notion of how each female leader defined her space or role in leadership. Qualitative research is an umbrella term that has numerous variations or levels of research. Depending on the writer, such variations may be called traditions, genres, or strategies of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher employed the phenomenological variation for this study.

The researcher collected data through scheduled, in-depth interviews from 16 female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. The interviews were recorded electronically via audio tapes by the researcher and transcribed by Kara Humphrey, a trained business transcriptionist. To ensure anonymity, the researcher assigned letters of the alphabet to all participants and voided all transcripts of any references to actual people, schools, and locations. The researcher read and coded material looking for common themes and patterns. Qualitative research is naturalistic in nature and does not necessarily strive for validation as much as it does quality; so there is no validation of coding for this research.

All interview tapes were securely stored in the home of the researcher after they were transcribed. To ensure accuracy, the researcher gave participants the opportunity to read and review the transcripts to identify any inaccuracies that may have been present or to clarify their comments. Further, respondents were offered the opportunity to delete any information from the transcripts after they completed their reviews. This was done during an additional meeting with the interviewee after all transcriptions were completed. At that point, the approval of the transcript (Appendix G) was signed by the respondents.

Data Analysis

The fieldwork stage of the research began April 24, 2009 and continued through January 25, 2010. Actual time spent by the researcher at each site varied from one to two hours and was determined by the availability of the superintendent interviewed. Tesch stated, "the process of data analysis is eclectic; there is no right way" (Creswell, 1998, p. 153). Because qualitative data are eclectic, the researcher is able to open possibilities and alternative explanations. According to Marshall and Rossman (1999), "Alternative explanations always exist. The researcher must search for identity, describe them, and then demonstrate how the explanation offered is the most plausible of all" (p. 157).

The data were categorized into major themes which included "setting and context codes, perspectives held by subjects, subjects' ways of thinking about people and objects, process codes, activity codes, strategy codes, relationship and social structure, and pre-assigned coding systems" (Creswell, 1998, p. 156). The researcher attempted to get the respondents to tell their stories in a way that would answer the research questions. Commonalities were derived through interview statements. Once all respondents in the study were interviewed, the data was transcribed and reviewed. Additionally, the

researcher kept a detailed audit of personal reactions, notes regarding new learning, connections, and contradictions. The notes were numbered by line, coded for intriguing phrases and possible patterns, and marked for later retrieval.

Summary

This chapter focused on the procedures that were followed for this study. The following research question was answered: What are the lived experiences of female superintendents, including career paths and resilience to glass ceilings? Also, the sub-questions were answered. The qualitative research design was the research method chosen for this study. This design was chosen, because it allowed the researcher to thoroughly examine the data and categorize the data in a manner that was useful and replicable. The population for this study consisted of African American and Caucasian female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.

Although the African American female superintendents experienced racism, the barriers and resilience factors are some of the ties that bring these women together. This sample was chosen because it was convenient and accessible. Also, the ethnicity of the participants was chosen because, in the three states studied, all female superintendents were either Caucasian or African American. The sample participants possessed the knowledge, understanding, and experience that the researcher needed in order to conduct a meaningful study. The instrumentation for this study was semi-structured interviews. After completing the review of literature, the researcher constructed a list of questions for use in the interviews with participants. Raw data collected from the interviews was reviewed and categorized into themes.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of 16 female

superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia who gave descriptions of the various

aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, and to

determine how these female superintendents were successful in obtaining their positions.

This chapter presents the findings for the overarching research question: What are the

lived experiences of female superintendents, including career paths and resilience to glass

ceilings?

The 16 superintendents in the study were serving as superintendents during the

2008-2009 school year. Data collection and analysis of the interviews was done over the

course of nine months (April 24, 2009-January 25, 2010). The study's researcher had

some general knowledge about the underrepresentation of women in educational

administration and school superintendency, but the purpose of this study introduced

questions that reflected a desire for more knowledge on the topic.

Literature on the leadership behaviors of women, the history of women in education

and the rest of society, and the changing status of the female superintendent was used as a

framework for this study. The ideas used to inform the research questions were developed

based on historical literature on the superintendency, women superintendents, and

challenges for superintendents. The historical framework was developed as a guide for

this study and was based on themes that emerged from the review of literature.

Considering the underrepresentation of women in education administration, the

researcher wanted to know why some women were successful in obtaining and keeping their positions. The historical literature served as a guide and posited that women encounter barriers, specific to their gender, that limit access to the position of superintendent. Women have developed and used strategies to overcome gender-specific barriers. There were several commonalities among the women in the study, but many of the factors reflecting how women gained their offices were different.

In this qualitative study, an interview guide was developed based on information revealed in the literature review, research question, and sub-questions (Appendix E). The interview guide was used to consistently ask the same questions of interviewed superintendents and to keep the interview focused and bounded. The researcher used probe questions for elucidation and in-depth explanation, description, and interjection by the interviewee. Multiple questions, leading questions, and yes/no questions were not utilized, thus minimizing confusion and poor responses (Appendix E).

<div align="center">Research Design</div>

Initially in April, 2009, the researcher attempted to contact all 99 female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia by email. Eight superintendents replied by email within one week; but for those who did not respond or could not be contacted by email, a letter was sent introducing the researcher and briefly describing the research project (Appendix B). This letter included a response card (Appendix C) that, when returned by mail to the researcher, indicated a superintendent's interest in being considered for the study. Within two weeks, there were 12 responses. An additional four response cards were returned after follow-up phone calls requesting clarification of the study, yielding a total of 16 respondents.

Several of the original letters generated no response even after repeated attempts by the researcher to contact the superintendents. Four of the respondents indicated they were interested in the project and wished to receive an abstract; several respondents indicated they were not interested in participating in the project during the time frame; and 41 recipients indicated they were not interested in the project at all. Thirty-seven superintendents did not respond to the email or letters. Sixteen superintendents agreed to be the primary source of study, and another five agreed to be an alternate in case some of the 16 could not participate. The unique district situations and the varied student population figures provided a diversity of settings for cases in this study.

The female superintendents who consented to participate in an in-depth interview were identified and interviewed. Current employment as a superintendent in Alabama, Florida, or Georgia was a requirement for participation. Six African American and 10 Caucasian female superintendents were interviewed for the study. The products of this qualitative study were richly descriptive and involved a small purposeful, nonrandom sample.

The researcher arranged a dialogue with those who had in some way indicated an interest in the study. The four respondents who requested an abstract received a follow-up letter which included an agenda with a proposed research timeline and an abstract. No superintendent of a district with more than 64,000 students was willing to participate. According to Glass (1992) in a study on the superintendency, school districts can be classified in three categories based on the number of students in the district: small town/rural (300-3,000 students); suburban/rural (3,001-25,000 students); and suburban/urban (25,001-55,000 students). A large number of respondents were from

districts with student populations between 300 and 3,000 students. The researcher first contacted the interested superintendent of the smallest, most contained area. After this, further contacts were made with other interested superintendents. Alternates were chosen in all categories to serve if an emergency caused one of the primary superintendents to withdraw.

Data Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the data collected through in-depth interviews that were conducted with 16 female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. The researcher employed the qualitative research approach to discover more information about the personal, lived experiences of the Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, female school superintendents. The categories of the interview questions are listed in Table 4.1. During the original contact with potential participants, the researcher guaranteed their identity would be completely anonymous and they would be assigned letters of the alphabet instead of using their names. Furthermore, the researcher edited research content to eliminate any reference to actual school districts, cities, counties, and any other material that might reveal the identity of any superintendent. Ellipses were used by the researcher to omit unrelated phrases and information, and brackets were used to add clarifying words or phrases.

To establish a foundation for analysis of the data, the researcher organized the responses to the interview questions according to the three research sub-questions. The researcher analyzed the transcripts and identified common themes, behaviors, and patterns that gave insight into the participants' lived experiences. This chapter reflects how female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia responded to questions in

the interview guide. Through this study, the researcher addressed the following
overarching research question: What are the lived experiences of female superintendents,
including career paths and resilience to glass ceilings? The following sub-questions were
also taken into account:

1. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Alabama,
   Florida, and Georgia?

2. What commonalities exist among the experiences of female superintendents?

3. What challenges and barriers do African American and Caucasian women face
   and circumvent as they attain the superintendency?

The interview questions (Appendix E) were based on the research question, sub-
questions, and the literature review. After an initial review, the responses to the interview
questions were arranged in categories. Table 4.1 displays the connections between the
sub-questions as they relate to the questions and the 10 categories.

Table 4.1

Sub-Question Categories for Interview Questions for Female Superintendents

Sub Question	Category	Interview Question
1	Personal Profile	1
1	Professional Profile	15
1	Personal Support System	12
2	Positive Experience	2
2	Pathway to Superintendency	4, 9
2	Relationships	6, 8
2	Strategies for Gaining Access	11, 12, 14
3	Gender Stereotyping	10, 3
3	Family Commitment	13
3	Administrative Experience/Employment	5, 7

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

The following sub-question was answered: What are the demographic profiles of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia?

The first interview question invited respondents to enlighten the researcher on their personal background. Further, it was designed to make the superintendent feel comfortable with the interview, and sought to establish a rapport between the researcher and the interviewee. Answers to this personal and demographic question led to the foundational basis for the analysis of other responses, and it served as a frame of reference for other issues including relationships and strategies. Additionally, the first interview question provided information for personal and professional demographics.

Such information was compiled and reported by the researcher in the form of profiles of the female superintendents who were interviewed.

The 16 women interviewed in this study held the position of superintendent during the 2008-2009 school year. Twelve of the female superintendents were appointed and four were elected. In this section, a brief description of the 16 Alabama, Florida, and Georgia superintendents participating in the study and the school districts they lead will be provided. Approximate population estimates of the school districts are presented because the boundaries of the school districts of the superintendents participating in the study often were blended between city and county populations.

Superintendent A of District A

Superintendent A is an African American in Georgia who is completing her 17th year in education. She began her career as a private elementary school teacher, became assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, chief of staff, and has been superintendent for a few months. She holds a doctorate in leadership. At the time of the study she was serving as interim superintendent. Her growing suburban district, with 49,000 students, was one of the largest in Georgia represented in the study. Respondent A is a native of her district. She is married and has a daughter who is a teacher and one other child. This is the first superintendency she has held.

Superintendent B of District B

Superintendent B is age 57, Caucasian, in Georgia and serving in her first superintendency. She has been married 30 years and has three children. The current superintendency represents her first, and at the time of the study she was completing her 1st year of a 4-year contract. She was a teacher for 13 years, then assistant principal for 5

years, and principal for 7 years. She finished her doctorate degree in education policy in 2005, and she holds a bachelor's degree in health and physical education, a master's degree in middle grades education, and a specialist degree in leadership.

Superintendent C of District C

Age 62, Superintendent C is a Caucasian who just completed her 5th year in her first superintendency position. Other than one previous interim superintendent, she was the first female superintendent to serve in the position full-time in District C. She spent 14 years as a teacher before going into leadership. She served as Title I director, special education director, elementary assistant principal, and assistant superintendent. Superintendent C and her husband have been married for 7 years. Superintendent C's district is comprised of 3,125 students. It is located in a rural area of Georgia.

Superintendent D of District D

Married for 29 years, Superintendent D, age 61, has been a superintendent for 8 years. She is located in Georgia and is Caucasian. She has three children: a daughter and two sons. Superintendent D obtained a doctorate degree and has been superintendent in her current district for 2 years. There are 3 years remaining on her contract. She was not a native of the district. Prior to becoming superintendent, she served as an assistant superintendent for several years in another area of the state. Superintendent D's district, comprised of 5,000 students, is in a rural area of Georgia.

Superintendent E in District E

At age 50, Superintendent E was working as a superintendent for the first time. She is a Caucasian who obtained her doctorate in leadership in 1996. There are nine schools in her rural Florida district, comprised of 3,200 students. In her first career, she sold furniture and cars, and later became an educator. Superintendent E and her husband have

been married for 30 years, and they have three sons. She was a counselor and career specialist before she became a superintendent.

Superintendent F in District F

Superintendent F is married with two children and one granddaughter who live with her. She is Caucasian and holds a doctorate in education leadership. Superintendent F entered the superintendency from a central office position, but she previously held a high school principalship where she was the only female in South Alabama who held the position at the time. Currently her district is comprised of 2,100 students, and this superintendency represents her first.

Superintendent G in District G

Age 58, Superintendent G had completed her 3rd year of her first superintendency at the time of the interview. After leaving the classroom, she became an assistant principal, principal, and special education coordinator before becoming a superintendent. She is African American and has been married 34 years. She is a native of her district, and holds a doctorate in leadership. District G has 2,090 students and six schools. It is located in Alabama.

Superintendent H of District H

Superintendent H is an African American superintendent in Georgia who has been married for 34 years and has 1,878 students in her district. At the time of the interview, she had completed the 4th year of her contract with 2 years remaining in her first superintendency position. Her teaching experience lasted 16 years; later she became an assistant principal, then the federal program director before becoming superintendent. She was the first female superintendent in her district.

Superintendent I of District I

District I was the largest school system in the study from Alabama, and comprised more than 12,000 students. Although she was the second female superintendent in District I, Superintendent I was the first African American woman to lead her school system. She has one daughter. She served as superintendent of her current system 8 years and as deputy superintendent for 2 years. She served as assistant superintendent of a different county for 7 years. Prior to her superintendency, she served as a principal and teacher in the both of the two systems for 35 years totally. She holds a bachelor's degree, a masters degree, an education specialist, and a doctorate in education.

Superintendent J of District J

A superintendent for 7 years, superintendent J has been married for 38 years and has two children. In her education career, she served as a teacher, counselor, career technologist, and principal before becoming a superintendent. She holds a bachelor's and a master's degree, and serves a district with 2,520 students. This Caucasian superintendent was working in her first superintendency. District J is located in Alabama.

Superintendent K of District K

A superintendent for slightly more than 9 years, Superintendent K is Caucasian and had been married for 5 years and has two children. In her education career, she served as a high school teacher for 16 years, a high school assistant principal and a principal before becoming a superintendent. The current superintendency represents her first. She holds an educational specialist in leadership and serves a Georgia district with 1,350 students.

Superintendent L of District L

An African American, age 56, Superintendent L has completed 4 years in the superintendency. She is a native of her district, where she taught for 14 years, served as special education coordinator, director of special curriculum supervisor, and at-risk coordinator before becoming superintendent. She has one son and one daughter, both of whom were educated in District L. Her daughter became an educator in another district and her son became an engineer. She recently became a grandmother. Superintendent L and her husband have been married for 7 years. She holds a doctorate degree. Located in Alabama, her rural district is comprised of 4,200 students. Her current position represents her first superintendency.

Superintendent M of District M

A superintendent for 10 years, Superintendent M is Caucasian, has been married for 48 years, and has two sons. In her education career, she served as a teacher, principal, adjunct professor, deputy superintendent, and chief of state before becoming a superintendent in Florida. The current superintendency represents her second. She has her doctoral degree and serves the largest Florida district represented in the study with 64,000 students. She has been in administration since 1975 and was the first woman in many of her positions.

Superintendent N of District N

Age 56, Superintendent N is a Caucasian who has completed her second year in the superintendency and spent 19 years as a middle school science teacher. She has been married for 35 years and has two daughters, ages 31 and 19. Her oldest daughter is a pediatrician and her youngest is a full-time student. Along with teaching during her

education career, she served as an assistant principal of a high school, and a principal for both a middle and high school before becoming a superintendent. She holds an elected superintendency position. The current superintendency represents her first. She holds a doctorate degree and serves a district with 29,000 students in Florida.

Superintendent O of District O

Age 61, Superintendent O is of African American and Native American decent and, at the time of the interview, had recently married. She has two daughters, both of whom entered the education profession. In her education career, she served as high school teacher, high school department chair, university department chair, education manager, central office administrator, director of high school principals, think tank administrator, assistant superintendent, and deputy superintendent before becoming superintendent. The current superintendency represents her third, and she has been a superintendent 12 years. She has her doctorate degree and serves a Georgia district with 2,200 students.

Superintendent P of District P

A superintendent for slightly more than 4 years, Superintendent P has been divorced for 16 years and has three grown children. In her education career, she served as assistant principal, principal for three different high schools, then superintendent. The current superintendency represents her first. She holds a doctorate degree and serves a district in Alabama with three schools and 1,680 students. She turned age 58 on the day of the interview.

Table 4.2 summarizes the demographic information associated with each superintendent. The number of students enrolled in the districts in the study ranged from 1,350 to 64,000. Twelve of 16 (75%) of the female superintendents in the study were

superintendents in counties where the student population had 12,000 or fewer students enrolled. Comparison of the data revealed that 32% of the three southeastern states in the study had more than 7,000 students in their districts, while only 20% of the female superintendent's districts in the study had more than 7,000 students (Alabama Department of Education, n.d.; Florida Association of School Superintendents, 2008; Georgia School Superintendents Association, n.d.; Hoffman & Sable, 2007).

Most female superintendents in the study were in their first year of superintendency. On average, the participants were 57 years of age with the youngest being age 50 and the most senior being age 69. The average age of first-time male superintendents in the U.S. is between 40 and 45 years (Brown, 2004). The oldest superintendent (Superintendent M, Age 69) in the study plans to continue after her current term is up. Age does not seem to be a major barrier for women in the study.

Schuster and Foote (1990) in a study of school superintendents found that three-fourths of the women versus two-thirds of the men had more than 5 years of teaching experience. Of the participants, one superintendent had 3 years of teaching experience and one had 7, but the others all had more than 10 years of teaching experience. Also, 36% of the women superintendents in the study entered the superintendency after age 46. Comparatively, 14% of male superintendents in the U.S. enter the superintendency after age 46 (Schuster & Foote). The authors stated that accepting a superintendent position after age 46 may be difficult, but getting an opportunity to be superintendent is even more difficult.

Table 4.2

Demographic Profiles of Female Superintendents for Alabama, Florida, and Georgia

Supt	State	Race	Age	Teaching Years	Supt Years Experience	Schools	Enrollment
A	GA	AA	57	9	0.3	60	49,000
B	GA	C	57	13	1	7	6,800
C	GA	C	62	14	5	7	3,125
D	GA	C	61	6	8	6	5,000
E	FL	C	50	15	1.5	9	3,200
F	AL	C	58	7	1	6	2,100
G	AL	AA	58	25	3	6	2,090
H	GA	AA	52	16	4	4	1,878
I	AL	AA	59	12	8	16	12,000
J	AL	C	61	10	7	6	2,520
K	GA	C	53	16	9	3	1,350
L	AL	AA	56	14.5	4.5	15	4,200
M	FL	C	69	3	10	75	64,000
N	FL	C	56	19	2.5	41	29,000
O	GA	AA	61	12	12	5	2,200
P	AL	C	58	14	4	3	1,680

Note. AA indicates African American and C indicate Caucasian.

According to Brown (2004), often female superintendents are divorced or on their second or third marriage due to the strain placed on family life. However, this is not consistent with the participants in this study. Table 4.3 displays family data on children and marital status for female superintendents. Most were married for the first time and had been in their current position for 1 to 2 years. Nine were married for the first time, six were married for the second time, and one was divorced or single. Also, 11, or 69%, of the superintendents had at least two children.

Table 4.3

Female School Superintendents' Marital Status and Number of Children

Marital Status	N=16	Percentage
Married-First Time	9	56%
Married-Second Time	6	38%
Divorced-Single	1	6%
Number of Children		
0	0	0%
1	5	31%
2-4	11	69%

Summary of Superintendents' Personal and Professional Backgrounds

Through the inquiry, the researcher discovered that the interviewed female superintendents represented a demographic variety. Of the 16 interviewed female superintendents, six were African American and 10 were Caucasian (Table 4.2). They ranged in age from 50 to 69 years (Table 4.2). The majority (56%) of the superintendents were married for the first time. Thirty-eight percent were married for the second time. One-hundred percent of the superintendents had children. Professionally, 80% of the

superintendents reported having a doctorate degree while 20% had specialist degrees. One superintendent held a master's degree. She had completed her specialist coursework and would be awarded her doctorate pending approval of her dissertation.

The professional lineage of the female school superintendents varied somewhat. Most began their careers as classroom teachers, but one sold cars and furniture before becoming a teacher. Another changed her major to education after she had an excellent experience with a college professor but wished she had decided to go into college with the idea of being an educator. While most of superintendents had spent time as building administrators in at least one school system, one person did not have this experience. One superintendent in the study served as a system-level administrator without ever serving as building administrator. The researcher analyzed the demographic data to discern and identify patterns of personal and professional background that impacted the superintendents' resilience and ability to become superintendents against the odds. The researcher analyzed their commonalities as well. However, the researcher found no single variable or combination of variables that appeared to influence their abilities to become successful superintendents.

Commonalities Among Superintendents

The following sub question was answered: What commonalities exist among the experiences of female superintendents?

The first section describes positive experiences of the superintendents. The participants were asked to respond to the question: "What are some of your greatest experiences?" All superintendents responded affirmatively that they indeed found great experiences in their positions. Some noted that the superintendency rewards them with

lifetime memories. The superintendents in the study were consistently committed to the interests of young children and youth, and most expressed that their greatest moments dealt with somehow helping students directly or indirectly. The following narratives are from discussions about positive experiences.

> Although I usually have to influence the board to make things happen, I like the fact that I have the ability to influence outcomes for children. I help to start a Dual Language and Math Middle School. I'm able to make good things happen. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

> I got all the six schools in my county accredited within 3 years. This was with the help of a strong community base. Community help is always good when you are trying to get things accomplished. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

> You're going to laugh. We were over at the Macon Coliseum. I saw a little girl crying for momma. And she stopped and saw me. And finally, she said, are you Mrs. (. . .)? I said, yes, I am. And she said [indiscernible]. Yes, I am. She said my little girl wanted me to meet you. She knew who you were. She was . . . no, more than second grade. And I, you know, bent down/knelt down, and I just hugged her and I said I am so proud of you. That's what I want. I want them to remember me. I don't want them to be afraid of me. And, that was really neat. We've made significant change in changing the culture of the system from teacher-centered to student-centered. We've implemented only research-based . . . not fly-by-night research. We do focused strategies. My greatest experiences involve helping the students in this county. So all I can do is fight for the children. And, if other things go along with it, then I can go to the hilt . . . I'm not threatened by the politics or anything else. I mean, I respect the politics, don't get me wrong; but I want to do what's right for the children. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

> I enjoyed providing a vision in leadership and a plan for improvement. (Superintendent D, 6/22/09)

> I love making decisions that can truly benefit kids. Well, the thing I like most about it is the reason I ran for the position. I feel like I can truly make decisions that will benefit students. Um as you can see I've worked a variety of positions that um even with the curriculum resource teacher I did a lot with struggling students. (Superintendent E, 6/29/09)

> Regaining SACS accreditation was my greatest moment. Being able to effect positive changes for the benefit of the students is always great. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

District Accreditation, and beginning new programs have brought me the greatest moments. (Superintendent K, 5/23/09)

My greatest experiences have involved watching student learning occur over time. (Superintendent M, 7/15/09)

I enjoyed making a breakfast program for the children in the county. Also, I enjoyed the play offs and other programs involving awards. I enjoy letting others know they can make a difference for children. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

I enjoy most of the aspects of being superintendent that bring me in touch with students, families, and employees. My greatest experiences involve working with my colleagues to increase the performance of students. I enjoy the challenge of developing and aligning curriculums that meet the needs of students of all ability levels. My special interest is in Closing the Gap and expanding science, math, and technology programs in the district. (Superintendent N, 6/17/09)

(. . .), don't allow anyone to tell you that you can't be a superintendent, now you get that hogwash out of your head, and the quicker you can get that out of your head then you'll be able to see the rainbow. My greatest experiences occurred when I could see clear of others' opinions of what I could do, then I was able to encourage my administrative team. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

I was in a poor county, one of the poorest in Alabama, and I know it probably had something to do with my being Black and a woman—I just didn't have time to cry about it, and I brought the county out of the red. I'm proud of it. (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

My greatest experiences involve watching children grow. I have seen them grow in many ways over the years, then when I see them later, I become proud. It is rewarding to see this. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

I had two great experiences that made me very proud. We have a high poverty school that no one had hope in and our team made it a torch bearer school. They became 80% proficient on the standard test. Another thing that made me proud of this district is when we had four girls killed and staff and students rose to the occasion. It was both an emotional and proud time for the district. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

My greatest experiences involve any thing where I can directly deal with the children instead of telling others what to do with them. They inspire me. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

There was one new superintendent who had been in her position briefly; so, she was

still waiting for her greatest moments to occur.

I don't know that I've had one yet. I guess surviving the first year as superintendent has been great. I became a superintendent, because (. . .) I was principal and close to retirement and then our (. . .) superintendent was fired suddenly last summer—well it happened suddenly. (Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

Pathway to the Superintendency

With three exceptions, all the women stated that they had not planned to become a superintendent. One superintendent stated she became interested in being a superintendent after she started her doctorate, but had not planned on it in the early stages of her career. "I just wanted to teach school" was the sentiment of most of the women. The personal situations of the women or characteristics of their districts were factors that persuaded the women to seek the position of superintendent. One of the women from a district with a very small population stated that she was the only qualified candidate in the district who met the certification and residency requirements. The following quotes are from discussions about the pathway to superintendency.

Yes. I planned it. I got into leadership right off the bat, then I went off into a rural town. It had been a while and I kinda thought I wasn't gonna get the chance to become superintendent. I said, look, I know the process of this county; I'm going to go back down to my special ed. office and you won't ever hear another word out of me. I said don't worry; I'm not suing you or anything else. And then—and that's why I didn't even apply for this job. We were at a retreat, and I got a phone call to come down there. And I thought, oh, my God, what have I done . . . what have I done . . . what have I done? And I walked in, and they said the board says Mr. (. . .) is out and we're going to name you interim superintendent. I about fainted. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

By the time I started my doctorate, I had made it a planned goal. I started to find superintendents interesting, because they have so many stories to tell about how many lives they changed. Four years after a principalship, I was called in for a superintendent position. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

I applied three times before I got the assistant principal position and once for principal. I planned this career after I started my doctorate and I got the job of superintendent the first time I applied. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

I went from the classroom to a principal position. From the start, I didn't want to be a superintendent, but I'm pleased that it happened. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

I was always fascinated by the idea, so I planned to be a superintendent. I made my moves so that I would be set up in the right places to move towards that goal. I am excited about the changes I have made. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

Well, when I was appointed principal the first time, I knew I was an interim person for one year. I had no guarantee of coming back and I knew that, but I took the position anyway. But when it came time for the superintendent to make a permanent decision, that's when the parents of that community came and spoke for me and stood behind me. That meant a lot to me. I started to think that I might want to be superintendent one day. (Superintendent D, 7/2/09)

That was always my goal, as a matter of fact my first teaching job, my first principal he told me and I didn't even know when or how . . . I just knew that I wanted to do it. I had no idea what it was about, how to go about doing it . . . none of the above. But, I wanted it. He said to me, "you are a gonna make a good superintendent" and he had a very deep voice, but that was my very, very first job. He told me that standing in the hall one day. I asked him why, and he said he saw something in me. I must have applied for an assistant principalship a gazillion times . . . . I never wanted to be a principal, and I never was one. But I was willing to do what I needed to do to position myself for the experience, and God blessed me that principalship didn't have to happen. I went right into superintendency, so my old principal had the right idea. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

I didn't have this as a plan but leadership came after me. I taught 9 years and was a happy teacher. Two years after I was an assistant, I became principal. There were definitely more men in my classes at the time, but now I think there are probably more women getting there certification in leadership. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

My program had about three to one men to women, but we were not discouraged. I had been assistant principal for 5 years and principal for 7. I was fine with what I was doing, but people saw that I was a good leader. They asked me to become superintendent. (Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

I used to sell cars, then furniture. I taught for about 15 years, and I applied about three times for a principal position. I finished my doctorate in '96 and I decided that I wanted to go into superintendency. (Superintendent E, 6/29/09)

There were 12 in my class, one Black man and one Black woman. Of the 10 Whites, there were about four White women. I never applied for anything that I didn't get. As I moved into education and saw how it worked, I decided I wanted a superintendent position and I got it. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

This was not a planned career goal for me, but I observed those who were superintendents, and I knew I could do it. I held four different leadership positions, and I knew I could do this one. My position was an elected position, and for elected positions you have to fight in a different way to get votes. Many voters and decision-makers are men. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

I was a teacher for 16 years, assistant principal 3 years, principal 3 years, then I became superintendent. I only attempted to go into leadership once and I got the position. By the time I became superintendent, I held a specialist degree. This was not a planned career goal for me. (Superintendent K, 5/24/09)

This was not a planned career goal, but once I decided, I applied twice before I got the position. I was special education coordinator, director of curriculum, and at risk coordinator before becoming a superintendent. There were more women and more Whites in my last program. (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

I've been in administration since 1975. This was not a planned career goal. My class had about one-fourth men, and in some classes there were only women. I was a principal, assistant superintendent, deputy superintendent, then superintendent. I always wanted to make a difference in the lives of children, and I'm in a position where I can. This is why I accepted this position. (Superintendent M, 7/15/09)

When I became superintendent, I had my doctorate. Becoming a superintendent was never a planned career goal. I became assistant principal (. . .). My passion is curriculum and instruction. I applied for three or four jobs before I obtained the assistant principal job. I returned to my old school in 2003 as principal, and I was elected as superintendent in 2006, but I had never attempted to become superintendent prior to that time. (Superintendent N, 8/15/09)

Relationships

In several cases, the long hours, high stress situations, and confidential nature

of most situations are contributing factors in the superintendents' lack of satisfaction.

While many superintendents recognized the great opportunities they have had in their

tenure to make a difference in their districts on a broad scale, others felt disconnectedness

to children and the day-to-day educational process that once lured them into leadership

roles. Most agreed that their leadership styles were collaborative unless another style was

necessary, then it would have to be authoritarian. One superintendent stated that her style

was transformational. The following narratives occurred during discussions about

relationships and leadership styles.

> The atmosphere has been good, and in order to keep a good atmosphere, you have to keep high quality people working with you. Here, there's no patience for inefficiencies. My leadership style is collaborative most of the time, but most leadership should depend on the situation. [Women tend to be more collaborative in leadership]. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

> People don't wanna work for you when you push them around and they are not dedicated to you or any of your goals or visions; but, when something involves the law or hurting children directly or indirectly, I become authoritarian. Authoritarian seems pushy if you do it all the time, and I just don't like the idea of pushing people around, cause that's not how I've ever wanted to be treated. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

> Um, I like to think that I am transformational. I have a goal to get everybody on board, go that direction, you know, and kind of direct the ship, pretty much let them do their own thing. But to be honest with you, I've kinda come in and I find that um that I have to direct a little more than I had planned too. But, it is basically because of the past leadership, um pretty much the past leader allowed the schools to do what they wanted to do, you know. Uh a little more laxed; now, you know, we have to be more goal-oriented. I try to get close and involved with the students, 'cause this position can be distant from the people who matter the most if you let it. I let them help with decisions, but I lean towards what's best for the children. (Superintendent E, 6/29/09)

> I try to use collaboration whenever possible. Once in a while, someone has to make the final decision. I gather information, look at data, consult my senior staff, principals, and teachers, and then make my decisions. I attempt to be very inviting of input from all parties (especially the school board) before making crucial decisions. The authoritarian style leadership is not successful in my district. (Superintendent N, 6/17/09)

> I find myself democratic most of the time, but honestly sometimes it's just easier to tell people what to do—especially in cases like code of conduct or parent advisory situations. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

> Collaborative is more challenging because it is more time consuming and can sometimes be more difficult to come to a consensus. I think superintendents should be a combination of these. I like collaboration and gathering of all the facts/details/suggestions, but the superintendent must be the final authority and decision-maker. (Superintendent K, 5/24/09)

I try to be collaborative, but it's hard sometimes. I believe the principals want you to just be authoritarian, but it's hard to be a change agent and be authoritarian. Every position I've ever had I was and expected to be a change agent. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

Good leaders have to have a balance. With board members I have had to be more authoritarian. It's a way of getting my point across. With principals and central office staff, I find collaboration to be the best approach. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

Starting out . . . working through systems and getting them rolling, I like collaborative. But, now I've had to put my foot down a time or two and tell them either get it together or the state will take over.(Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

Collaborative is the leadership style I like, because it's easier. When you want your team to work as a team, you lead by example. Politicians don't like it when you hand down a decision and you say that's what my team and I decided, but I don't care. I do what's best for the children. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

People around here are excited and working hard on the issues. Inclusive decisions work best, but I always let the team know the direction we're trying to go to first. I think collaboration is best for morale. (Superintendent D, 6/22/09)

Teachers and other staff members are excited about the many issues that are going on in professional development. Middle Schools That Work is new to our system. The collaborative model works best, but often I have changed my style to the population. I had to really get firm to get the budget in line. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

I am the first female superintendent in the system, and this is an amazing system to work in. I have about every style you can think of depending on the situation, and I think people should stop locking themselves into a style per se. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

The staff here is excited about the new things happening here. We have a new President, so some of us are more excited about more new changes that will occur. I practice more collaboration than anything else. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

We have a few new principals and most of the workers in this district like my presence, so we have people who are very excited. I am truly an authoritarian, but I try hard to practice collaboration. I usually know what I want and tell people when and how to do it. I believe some people like to be told; that way you know whether it's right or wrong when you get it done. [I give clear objectives and deadlines].
 (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

People in the district are excited and I am excited. We bought T-shirts with Team (. . .) on the back of them. We are ready to work as a team this year. That's why

my favorite leadership style is collaboration, because you have to work as a team when using this style of leadership. This leadership style respects the value of each person. (Superintendent M, 6/16/09)

Strategies for Gaining Access

All of the women superintendents were asked what strategies they used to attain their position or what strategies they would recommend to aspiring women administrators. Responses discussed included preparation, work ethic, networking, mentoring, gaining a variety of experiences, and leadership characteristics. Considering the emphasis on mentoring and networking as strategies in the review of literature, if the women did not mention these techniques, the researcher asked if the women superintendents used these techniques. Nearly every interviewee made a comment at some point in time during the interview that few women aspire to the superintendency because of the time and commitment required of the position.

Preparation

All of the interviewees commented on the importance of being educationally prepared for administrative positions when they become available. They felt that women must have higher degrees and certification than male applicants if they want to be considered for administrative positions. The following narratives are from discussions about strategies for gaining access and preparation.

> I'll tell you this, I think women are going to have to have a doctorate to get into the superintendency. I think the state is moving in that direction anyway, and again, I think women are going to have to be as qualified or more qualified than men. (Superintendent E, 7/2/09)

> Women have to work harder to become qualified. No one is saying it, but we know it. Women have to be more qualified than anyone else, especially African American women, if they want the job. It's not fair, but in many cases it's true. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

Many women don't want to put in the hours away from family required for this job, but when they do, they are going to have to do everything better than a male to even be considered equal. I was up for a pay raise, but I didn't take it. [I can't say whether or not a man would have taken it, but I'm dedicated to the system and the budget]. I think women are naturally drawn to children since we give birth to children or maybe it's another reason . . . I'm not sure. I think men think about advancing quickly and more often than women. (Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

Work Ethic

Statements were made by almost every respondent that women have to work harder

than men to prove they can do the job. One woman said:

I think women have to work twice as hard to prove themselves as men do. Statistics show that most people don't work to their ability anyway, so it's really not that hard to work twice as hard as everybody else. I don't know what the research states, but I know that those positions are not as open to African American females as they are for others. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

Many women may not think they have the ability to become a superintendent. It's more work than my last job. I think doing above and beyond the call of duty and volunteering for extra jobs is what makes a difference. I don't have a lot of respect for people who don't have a strong work ethic. (Superintendent D, 6/22/09)

Still another superintendent said:

I think probably the most important thing females can control is proving that they are competent, efficient and effective at what they want to do, that they have goals for that school or district and they want to be the leader. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

One superintendent replied:

You have to be willing to work the long hours. Men don't work those long hours just because. Well, because they don't have to prove themselves as much, but women do. Women are working and watching the clock. Women tend to have to watch the clock, cause they have kids or other commitments at home. Sometimes I work 12 hours, and I see male superintendents working from 8 to 4. Whatever is not done, or done they go home at 4. And, those comments . . . some of the comments the board members make to us during interviews, I know they wouldn't make to a White male. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

Mentors and Networking

The need to be active in professional organizations was repeatedly mentioned by

many of the interviewees. However, the statements about networking generally referred

to involvement in networking after they assumed the position of superintendent. For example, one stated, "Almost weekly I get in contact with another superintendent. It's hard to survive without a network."

One comment suggested that networking, and hence professional involvement, was a way to let your board of education know your worth to other people. She said:

> One thing about this position is that you get to meet lots of folks, and what I try to do is let my board know that I can possibly do things like get grants and such for the system through the connections. (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

> Networking is probably one of the most important things you can do in this business. That's how you find out about openings. When you find out there's an opening, you should apply. Even if you find that you are not getting the job, keep applying. Something will eventually happen. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

> Some women are afraid to apply and they have not done the networking necessary in order to get the position. Make sure you want the job of superintendent before you go for it. This job involves a lot of work. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

> There are a group of superintendents that I meet with once a month. Networking is vital to this position. You should always be smarter than men, but don't let them know you are smarter. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

> I have had several administrators throughout my career that I have watched and learned from . . . some I aspire to become like and some not. Some women have fear of the job and lack of confidence in their ability to be successful. Networking is not vital, but it's nice. For aspiring superintendents I recommend: take emotion out of decision-making, stay in control at all times, be prepared, don't be intimidated and don't try to intimidate others, take gender out of the mix and do the best you can, and always keep the best interest of students as your guiding force. (Superintendent K, 5/24/09)

> There is often a perception that women are not as effective, but many times women don't aspire to become superintendents. In order to get into and stay in the position, networking is vital. Women need to build strong relationships in positions of influence. (Superintendent M, 7/15/09)

> I try to meet with a mentor as often as we both can. Networking is vital for success in this position. Potential superintendents should always learn as they watch and pick up as much information as they can. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

I became superintendent and I was assigned a mentor. I never was associated with him because he never called me or offered any advice the 1st year I was in office. After a year I was assigned another mentor, a very smart female who called, emailed and visited often. She was an excellent mentor who had been a superintendent and school board attorney. I communicate with her monthly. Her name is (. . .) and her husband is a current superintendent. Women are not interested in administration any more. You can make more money as a teacher than an assistant principal and that is normally the path to principal and superintendent. Why would someone give up tenure, job security and take a pay cut to work longer hours and put up with the hassle from parents and employees that principals must face? The reason being superintendent was very attainable for me is that I had spent a lot of time volunteering in literally dozens of community and civic organizations. I was a known commodity. (Superintendent N, 6/17/09)

Most of the references to networking were made for existing superintendents and not for aspiring superintendents, but a recommendation was made for aspiring administrators to get into leadership roles or committee appointments in professional organizations. Several of the women stated that networking with all women's organizations was not the best approach for women. Their belief was that networking through professional organizations and state department of education organizational meetings was the preferred method. Other superintendents made positive comments about the value of networking as a strategy for gaining access to the superintendency.

I think that professional organizations play a big part in one's development. You have to have contacts and build networks. You need to get in there with all those men. We need to keep adding numbers to the organizations that already exist, that are mostly male. This how we find out about getting the big contracts the men are getting; this is how we learn what to negotiate for in order to get equal pay. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

Society as a whole sees women as needing to be barefoot and pregnant, so we have to get in there and network to find out what you can about the system. Plus you have to get your name out there for future positions, and you can do this while networking. Always do your homework and know everything there is to know about any position you are interviewing. Know which system made AYP and why and what kind of things they are doing instructionally. Oh yeah, network and find out what you can about the budget, 'cause some will think you can't do it just 'cause you're a woman. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

Summary of Commonalities

Frequently, the greatest experiences involved situations where there was a difference made for the children. Repeated sentiments of how the superintendents saved the children rang out in several places during the interviews. During one such experience, one superintendent had tears as she explained getting accreditation for her district. She felt emotional because the teachers and the students were better off.

Most superintendents stated they did not have the superintendency as part of their planned career goal, but they originally wanted to make a difference with students through teaching and holding building-level administrative positions. Later, the superintendency became more of a reality. Five of the respondents were principals before becoming superintendent, and 11 were all working as central office staff before their superintendent assignment. All the women were asked what strategies they used to attain their position or what strategies they would recommend to aspiring women administrators. Nearly all interviewed superintendents recognized that networking was an important factor that existed in the circles of the superintendency.

They all reported they indeed saw networking as an important strategy, particularly among the male superintendents. While networking with other superintendents can be a positive experience with one superintendent looking out for another, most interviewed superintendents focused primarily on the all-male networking system that permeates the superintendency. Also, they discussed mentoring as a major component of success in obtaining and keeping the position.

Challenges and Barriers

The following sub question was answered: What challenges and barriers do African American and Caucasian women face and circumvent as they attain the superintendency?

There were three types of barriers described by the interviewed participants. The first could be described as stereotyping or career role socialization. The opinion surfaced that the higher levels of administration, such as the superintendency and high school principalship, were considered to be male roles. The second category of barrier included the restrictions experienced by women with children or other family responsibilities. Finally, the lack of certain types of administrative experience, such as experience in managing budgets, facilities, and personnel, was mentioned as a barrier for women. The next sections deal with the women superintendents' opinions about the existence of barriers and the categories of identified barriers.

Barriers Do Not Exist

Three superintendents stated that there were no barriers. Two of the three qualified their statements by adding that they personally had not experienced any barriers. One superintendent stated that the only barriers women encounter are those they impose on themselves. She felt that barriers exist only to the extent that women imagine they are there. Still another superintendent stated that limits exist only in one's mind. She qualified her statement by adding, "If we believe in ourselves, we can do whatever we want." One of the women said, "Women can achieve on their own merit." Another superintendent stated that being female was, in fact, in her favor when she presented herself as a candidate for superintendent. She felt that because she is a woman, she

probably gave the impression of being a caring person who had been in the classroom and understood the needs of students.

Each of the three superintendents who said there were no barriers was then asked how she accounted for the low percentage of women in higher levels of school administration. One superintendent stated that women put limits on themselves as females by not applying for positions such as the superintendency. She said, "It is not that society necessarily is putting limits on us, that we put limits on ourselves." She perceived women felt that because males have traditionally dominated the superintendency and the secondary principal positions, the male will get the job. This opinion was affirmed by two other superintendents. One stated that women are not competing for the positions. A general consensus of those who denied the existence of barriers was that women generally do not want the job of superintendent because it demands so much time and commitment. One stated that it takes a person who can dedicate 12 to 14 hours a day to the job and that she does not think many women want that kind of job, because they give priority to family commitments.

Barriers Do Exist

Barriers exist that limit the access women have to the higher levels of school administration was the opinion of 13 of the 16 women superintendents interviewed. One superintendent stated, "Certainly there are barriers." Another stated, "Look at the amount of women versus men in the superintendency. This proves that there are barriers." The barriers described by the women superintendents were grouped into categories that emerged from the interviews and analysis of the data.

Gender Stereotyping

One superintendent had known women who wanted access to a superintendent's

position for some time but could not get a responsible position at the local central office

level. She concluded that women can obtain positions as curriculum directors because

they know children and they know curriculums. Few women become assistant

superintendents because the attitude exists that personnel and finance are for males.

> People think men are supposed to be in administrative positions, but I don't let that change what I think or what I do. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

> I think the public perception is still that men are the ones supposed to lead. I think that public perception is changing, but I think it will take some more time. I don't think women are applying for the position. (Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

> I fired two my 1st year. And I have released—well, I've released four and moved one. There are plenty of teachers and anybody else who will not teach my children. So, I'd like to tell you first we're going to do everything we can to get you up to where we want you to be. We have high expectations in my classrooms. But, after all we do, if we don't see any change, you're toast . . . you're just flat out toast. And let me tell you, when I arrive at the schools, they start—I go, whoa, whoa, whoa . . . conversation's over. You should have had this conversation with your principal. Here's the deal: I'm here, you're terminated; you have the right to resign, and if you do I want it right away. I'll give you until 8:00 tomorrow morning. If the principal doesn't have the letter, I'm moving to terminate you. I have taught the principals how to document correctly. It doesn't take a long time. I never let them think that 'cause I'm a woman I can't be firm. I operate just as well or better than any man. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

> The media is at the board meeting recording every word, and sometimes they throw things out that may not be positive. It has been a challenge dealing with the media. I don't think the size of district matters either. When you look at that website you might be able to look at it a little closer or actually look at the numbers and look and see [which district has] a woman or a man. I don't think the size and location played a part in my election at all. (Superintendent E, 6/29/09)

> I was the only female high school principal in (…) for a time, and this was a challenge, but I don't think the size of the district makes a difference in whether or not a male or female is hired. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

> My biggest challenge has been recruiting and maintaining highly qualified teachers. Those are barriers. Some women are fortunate in the situations they find themselves

in, but, generally, administration is protected by males, for males. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

Another woman stated that she felt that being female had delayed her access to superintendency. One woman stated that she felt her gender played a bigger role than any other factor. Her superiors admitted she probably should have gotten the promotion because she was doing all the work. This incident led her to believe that she was expected to do the work, but when it came time for a promotion, she was not considered.

> The most challenging issues involve the unfair politics, and I guess it's everywhere. Males are probably quite slow to appoint women to the superintendency, and boards of education are still predominantly male, but race is always a prevalent issue from my experience. I think the politics and the make-up of the community has more of an effect on whether or not a female is hired than the size of the district. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

> I don't know what the research states, but size, definite size, race, and gender matter especially in Alabama. There are fewer women in charge of the larger districts. I was the first Black woman and the second woman superintendent in my district. There are many who have a hard time when strong African American women are in charge. It was hard at first, but it became easier with time. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

> I believe the smaller more rural areas allow the community to know you better, so women have a better chance of getting hired from what I have witnessed. My most difficult challenges have involved board members who don't understand their roles. I think race is an issue, and my most difficult issue was with a White board member. I have not had issues with other races. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

> One of my biggest challenges was getting the stakeholders to see that Rome was not built in a day, and the other was managing the board. If you can't run with the big boys, stay on the porch. They threw lots of curve balls my way, and I knocked them out of the field. I think women are more apt to serve as superintendent in small and rural areas. (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

> The greatest challenge I have faced as a superintendent the past 2 1/2 years is the budget deficit in Florida created by the slumping economy. [I want to both balance the budget and maintain a level of service critical to our district]. I don't think the size of the district matters. I am superintendent in a medium sized district that is very diverse. It is a Republican stronghold due to two large military bases located here. (Superintendent N, 6/17/09)

There are things that are said that I know that if I were a male people would not say to me. And there are decisions that I make that I know that would not be questioned if I were a male superintendent. I do know that there are challenges that I have, and I'm talking about challenging my decision, that just wouldn't happen if I were a male. It just wouldn't happen. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

One of the elected women superintendents stated that Alabama might have a higher

percentage of women superintendents than the national average because of the election

process for superintendents. Another woman stated that she felt she had a better chance

of becoming a superintendent with a vote by the populace than appointment by a board of

education. Another superintendent purported: "Women have a greater chance of being

hired in a larger district. Removing staff and construction projects were my greatest

challenges." (Superintendent K, 5/24/09)

One of the interviewees stated:

I interviewed lots of times before I got my first job. I know for a fact, that I did get my very first job because someone had mentored me and looked after me and gave me that opportunity. And once I did, it was up to me to prove myself. At that point, it didn't matter what my gender was. It does come to a point in many cases where those issues of gender and race become irrelevant. (Superintendent D, 7/2/09)

I think that if men are threatened by you or what your goals are, you have a problem. Race and gender are always the elephants in the room. They are big, hard to ignore issues. (Superintendent O, 7/2/09)

Another superintendent purported:

We have to remember that many women don't aspire for positions of superintendency or other such leadership positions. Most of the board members have been males. I think males tend to appoint males, especially because a lot of males are seen traditionally as being the stronger of the two, that females are weaker and can't make decisions as thoroughly and effectively as the male. (Superintendent M, 7/15/09)

Family commitments

Lack of mobility or having to move with a husband whose job changes were two

other barriers mentioned that can be categorized under family commitment. Mobility to

enhance advancement is not an option for many women. Also, having to move because a

spouse moves can be a problem. Nearly every interviewee made a comment at some time

during the interview that few women aspire to the superintendency because of the time

and commitment required of the position.

One interviewee contended:

I think it all goes back to the devotion and dedication that mothers have to their homes. They feel the responsibility for the children. While men are building and making contacts and gaining experience, women are concentrating on their children. Well, people enter teaching, if they enter for the right reasons, because they love children. The biggest thing I think is the family factor. If you have children, women—at least in my generation and maybe people right under me— spend more time teaching while they're raising their children. It's just—it sticks better. And, then they might go into administration. Now that's changing. I hope— I'm watching the younger women, just a lot of them fast tracking just like the men have done. (Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

My husband washes, dries, and irons. I would not be where I am without him. Most people have some sort of support system. It's almost as if your entire family has to commit to this position. It's hard for women to commit without the family support. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

The husband may have to attend numerous district and school events as the superintendent's escort, and he becomes the topic of public opinion and attention from time to time. Husbands share their wives with positive and negative publics and relinquish opinion when negative people voice disparaging opinions. I never wanted to force my husband to do any of that if he didn't want to. I let him be him and that's why we're together. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

I'm on my second marriage with my first love, and he gives me lots of support. I would not want to be superintendent in another town, so I guess I'm limited for right now. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

My husband is very supportive. I will have been married 29 years July 10th. We've raised three children. Finishing my doctorate degree was the key in getting me my appointment. The first superintendency I had was in Connecticut. I left and went to Georgia near (…) as director of curriculum. I did that for 5 years. And that's when I got my doctorate degree. I ended up getting the job in the New England area. That was interesting but the district that I went to was just perfect for me. It's almost as if every position I've been in, I've been right for the position and the position has been right for me. And I think that's just so important. Most importantly, my husband stuck with me through all my transitions, but I don't know of any other

woman who has done this, and I think women are hesitant to travel for positions. (Superintendent D, 6/22/09)

We eat out a lot. If my husband was not on board with this and didn't support me when I worked Saturdays and when I didn't cook, I don't know what I would do. It was bad enough before, but now if it wasn't for that, I don't think I could do it. I suppose for some men it would be a problem with your marriage, but my husband is very supportive and my children supportive; so, I think I have it made in that way. In my opinion, you have to have the support in order to have the commitment. (Superintendent E, 6/29/09)

I keep my family separate from the job. I have lots of events that I go to, but my family is not involved. They support me, but I like stability, so I don't want to move around for a position because of them and/or because of me. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

I rely on a good personal friend for support, and I wouldn't object to moving around depending on the position and the time in my life. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

I have a daughter and a few professional friends that I go to for support. I have moved in the past and I am willing to move again depending on the situation. Women have to be as flexible as men if they want to be as competitive as men. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

This is not the job I would want to have if I had small children. I have two children, and I have been married for 38 years. They are all supportive, but I wouldn't want this job if my children were small. It would take too much time away from them. My son, husband, and daughter helped me with the campaign each afternoon. They were very supportive. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

My husband is a retired administrator who [understands] the time demanded for my position. He has been very supportive. (Superintendent K, 5/24/09)

You have to have some sort of personal support in order to meet the demands of this job. My husband, children, and second assistant superintendent are my backbones. They help me make it through. Right now, I would not be willing to relocate, but maybe in the past I would have. Men tend to be more willing to become mobile for a job than we are. (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

My husband supported my inspirations to become a superintendent. We have been together 48 1/2 years, and he has been 100% supportive. I don't think I could have or would have done it without him. (Superintendent M, 7/15/09)

My personal support in my current career is from my family, friends, and faith. I value the employees in the district. My assistant is amazing and she provides a great deal of help to me professionally. My senior staff, especially the CFO, board

attorney, quality assurance chief, information services chief, and the two deputy superintendents are valued friends and advisors. Many of the employees and teachers in this district have known me over my 36-year career and I believe they respect my work ethic and commitment to kids. I also have a good relationship with the local media and respond to them whenever needed. (Superintendent N, 6/17/09)

It's just me, and it comes from within. It's lonely, and it has to be satisfying to you personally. I can't imagine going through all this for some other reason than this is what I want to do; it's not worth it. If I wanted another position, I would be willing to move. I tend to ignore barriers. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

For a married woman to pursue a superintendency, the husband must have mobile employment or be retired. He must be willing to take over most of the household chores, spend much time alone, live in a fishbowl, and assume the identity of the superintendent's husband. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

Administrative Experience

Lack of experience in areas pertaining to personnel management, facilities, management, financial planning, and the budgeting process were cited by some of the interviewees as possible barriers for women. Still another interviewee stated that women should become involved in the different operational aspects of the district. She said, "I think when a board of education looks at a female candidate for superintendent, they think she doesn't really understand budget, transportation, and maintenance and facilities." A superintendent for one of the larger school districts, however, thought that teaching experience was more valuable because someone else in the central office could attend to budget matters. The superintendents from smaller school systems made more comments about the importance of budgeting experience. Smaller school districts generally have smaller administrative staffs, and superintendents are directly involved in the budgeting process. Others stated that their biggest problem involved biased board members, since many of the women in the study were the first female superintendents in the position.

I could do what needed to be done. I was very knowledgeable about urban education, socioeconomic issues, and micro culture education. I worked well on the school level, but I don't think people realized that I—that I could—I could run the business side of it. And, I know if I'd been a man, they would have thought I could do more. I think that's the biggest concern with women . . . the finances. (Superintendent B, 6/16/09)

I used prayer as my strategy. The only person you need to know to get a job is the man above. You have to wait on his timing and don't worry about anything else. I've had people tell me "you have to know someone." I knew no one, I had absolutely no one to speak on my behalf . . . I'm telling you, no one. If that was the case, do you think I would have completed a gazillion applications? I don't know about you? I have gone on 19 gazillion interviews for AP—(19 gazillion) I was a perfectionist. You could interview me at 3:00 in the morning and I could answer any question at any angle you can throw at me . . . I was so heart-broken. Experience comes in multi-colors, so why color it with AP. I have to be a principal of a middle school, and elementary school. I have to be a principal at all these different levels, then I have to get an assistant superintendent somewhere, then I have to work that for 24 hours and then, bingo! I'm qualified. I'm ready. It's really crazy when you think about it. (Superintendent H, 6/29/09)

I overcame the barriers by being well qualified and effective. I was definitely hired to keep the district from continuing to slip. I wanted to become a superintendent to make a huge difference for the children. (Superintendent I, 7/7/09)

There was only one female superintendent in the past and this is a small district. Many of the citizens don't value females and what they have to offer. I was elected, and I overcame the barriers by going door to door every day after work with my son, husband, and daughter. I was hired because I was perceived as being more honest and open, and I had more contact with principals and parents. (Superintendent J, 7/1/09)

I was hired because I am fair, hard working, and a good decision-maker. I keep students' best interests first, and I am a good communicator who gets along well with others. I don't experience gender or racial barriers. Or if so, they are minimal. There had never been a female superintendent in this district. (Superintendent K, 5/24/09)

I got this job after preparing for it. I was hired as a change agent, but they wanted an experienced superintendent, and I had the experience. I wanted to show not that every student can learn, but every student will learn, so I came up with the slogan 'Team (…).' (Superintendent M, 7/15/09)

One challenge of campaigning was that I had a full-time job as a principal and we were building a multi-million dollar stadium at the time. My daughter was a senior in high school, and being a full-time mom, working, and campaigning is not easy. I

believe that discourages some women. I did not see my gender as a barrier in this race at all. I worked hard and had proven my leadership in this community. I believe my district was ready for a change and I was someone who knew education both regular and special education and all grade levels including elementary, middle, and high. I was entrenched in the community from north to south and had experience as a teacher, counselor, assistant principal, and principal. (Superintendent N, 6/17/09)

Racial barriers are a challenge we have always had. Usually, there's a White man who taught 3 years, and they start to surround him, then put him into a position he really wants. Who is gonna do this for Black women? There are racial barriers. White men usually watch them (Black women) for a while to see if you are an angry Black woman, so I usually reach out to them and make them feel important. Soon as they feel safe around you, they make sure you are protected, and at that point they'll become dedicated. Also, Black male superintendents can be subject to bullying by their school boards and communities. Blacks try to represent their race to White people, especially if they're the first. They just don't have the margin for screw ups. (Superintendent O, 8/15/09)

I have not had any overt biases, but every job I have ever had was a change agent job. (Superintendent P, 8/19/09)

I had a superintendent who was my mentor. We were joined at the hip. He had focused strategies and initiatives. And, he knew that if he got somebody in from the outside, that it might change. He strategized, and I had added to that the missing component. I just breezed right in there. I would not have gotten the job without his help. Budget, budget, budget . . . . Most people don't think women can do budgets. (Superintendent C, 6/17/09)

[They had to hire someone different in my case, 'cause they had just had a man, and the board wanted a woman to fix things. I was definitely hired as a change agent.] I have a variety of experiences in leadership, so I was qualified for the job. (Superintendent A, 6/1/09)

Women naturally gravitate toward the curriculum area as they gain experience in school administration. They generally come to the next step with little background in personnel management and financial management. (Superintendent D, 6/22/09)

I wanted to become a superintendent to help students in my own in my home county; I lived here all my life. Our system had gotten so bad. It's discouraging to know what our school system had been in the past and to know it could be better, so that's why I ran. I think I was elected because I am different, not a politician, I am an educator, because people felt like I would do what's best for our school system, not the good old boy system it's been in the past. I think I was elected as a change agent. I have people call and say, we stood on the road and held signs for you, we'll

never vote for you again. There are lots of other things that I have to ignore too. (Superintendent E, 6/29/09)

I just happened to be there and it was time for a change. I had all the resumé requirements. Be ready when your challenge comes. (Superintendent F, 7/5/09)

I had a strong community-based background, and I had been coordinator of curriculum. I was definitely hired to change things. (Superintendent G, 7/9/09)

Even though we talk about the principal or the superintendent as instructional leaders, the people who are hiring those folks are looking for someone who can manage, and that still means financial management, people management, caring for the building, and those kinds of things. Some Black female superintendents experience their gender as more of a barrier than their race. (Superintendent L, 7/2/09)

<div align="center">Summary of Challenges and Barriers</div>

Various answers were given when women superintendents were asked if they perceived challenges or barriers related to gender that made female access to higher level positions in school administration more difficult. Three of the 16 women superintendents quickly replied that there were no barriers due to gender. The other 13 had perceived barriers, if not for themselves, then for other women. The barriers described by the superintendents were stereotyping, family commitments, and lack of administrative experience.

According to four of the respondents, many male and female educators held opinions that higher levels of administration, such as the superintendency and high school principal positions, were considered to be male roles. Also, many male gatekeepers, such as boards of education, responsible for the selection and appointment of administrators, held those opinions. Family commitment and responsibilities at home and work may be partially solvable through paid help, but a lack of mobility to achieve job advancement may be a tougher barrier to conquer. Most women did not want to disrupt home and

family for a career move. This was often a personal barrier for women with children. Lack of certain types of administrative experience, such as managing budgets, facilities, and personnel, were barriers for women.

Summary

All of the 16 women superintendents serving in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia during the 2008-2009 academic year who responded with interest were interviewed for this study. The interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed for data analysis. Data were also collected from materials published by Alabama, Florida, and Georgia to develop a profile of the districts where women were superintendents. Most of the interviewees had a background in elementary education. Nine of the 16 worked in the central office of their school districts before attaining the position of superintendent. The superintendency was not a planned career goal for most superintendents; but, in most cases, it became clear less than 5 years prior to their attaining the superintendency.

Thirteen of the interviewees acknowledged that barriers for women exist and hinder their access to positions in school administration. The three that denied the existence of barriers for women used descriptive terminology that the review of literature categorized as barriers. The categories of barriers described by the women superintendents were stereotyping, priority of family commitments, and lack of certain types of administrative experience. The recommended strategies for attaining positions in administration included being well-prepared, working harder than colleagues, and gaining a variety of administrative experiences.

Conventional wisdom dictates that a candidate must survive the classroom as a teacher, usually engage in some sort of a certification process, and take on at least one

intermediary administrative position before ascending to the superintendency. The types

of positions assumed determine the experience gained, which in turn adds to or detracts

from an individual's marketability as a viable superintendent candidate. Much of the

research on women in the superintendency suggests that they take a different path to that

position than White males, which could hamper their chances of gaining the

administrative and leadership experience deemed necessary by boards and search

consultants.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

At the apex of a community's secondary educational hierarchy is the superintendent. The chief executive officer of the secondary school system is constantly under fire from students, educators, parents, community leaders, politicians, and other policy-makers. This stress, coupled with the confidential nature of most issues, can create an artificial barrier between the superintendent and others before and after female superintendents obtain their positions. The field of school administration has become a profession occupied by men rather than women despite the fact that women hold most of the teaching positions. Persistent barriers denying women the position of superintendent and educational administration are well documented (Shakeshaft, 1987). Various studies offer aspiring women administrators recommendations for strategies that will enhance their opportunities.

Summary

The role of the superintendent has expanded from its inception in 1837. While the primary role of these inaugural superintendents was to lead instruction in a task-oriented fashion, their responsibilities may have varied slightly from district to district as high schools came into existence and systems grew (Sharp & Walter, 1997). However, superintendent duties have continued to grow in gargantuan increments since the beginning of the 20th century. Responsibilities of superintendents have grown to include fiscal affairs, school building construction, maintenance of schools, and more recently, policy mandates and political affairs (Sharp & Walter). These immense responsibilities,

combined with the culture of the position of superintendent, have left many superintendents feeling stress from having to deal with the challenges (Sharp & Walter).

Considering the underrepresentation of women in educational administration, the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of women superintendents who gave rich descriptions of the various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, and to determine how female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were successful in obtaining their positions. The subjects for this study were 16 women superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia serving during the 2008-2009 academic year who responded with interest in the study. Four of the women attained their positions by election by the populace, and 12 were appointed by a district board of education.

The review of literature addressed several themes or concepts that emerged from an approach to synthesizing qualitative studies. The literature stated that women are competent administrators, are obtaining the necessary credentials, and are seeking positions in educational administration. The researcher employed an instrument consisting of 15 open-ended, in-depth interview questions that were used to guide inquiry and ultimately address the overarching research question and sub-questions. The qualitative study was descriptive in nature and investigated the perception of superintendents through the lived experiences of the selected superintendents. The researcher took great care to gather a demographically and geographically diverse sample. In order to accomplish this, an email was sent to all of the 99 female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. When cards or email replies were returned indicating the superintendents' willingness to participate, they also returned

information sheets providing scant amounts of information. The participants were 16 female superintendents from Alabama, Florida, and Georgia, out of the initial population of 99, who responded with interest in the study. They represented a diverse demographic group: 10 were Caucasian and six were African American. Age, size of school system, and years of experience as a superintendent also varied.

The researcher collected data through scheduled, in-depth interviews with the 16 school superintendents. The interviews were recorded via audio tapes and transcribed by Kara Humphrey, a trained business transcriptionist. To ensure anonymity, the researcher assigned letters of the alphabet to all participants and voided all transcripts of any references to actual people, schools, and locations. The researcher read and coded transcripts looking for common themes and patterns. Qualitative research is naturalistic in nature and does not necessarily strive for validation as much as it does quality; therefore, there was no validation of coding for this research.

The researcher used the findings to draw conclusions regarding the overarching research question as well as the research sub-questions from the study. The overarching research question was: What are the lived experiences of female superintendents, including career paths and resilience to glass ceilings? The three research sub-questions were:

1. What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia?

2. What commonalities exist among the experiences of female superintendents?

3. What challenges and barriers do African American and Caucasian women face and circumvent as they attain the superintendency?

Discussion of Findings

The researcher's purpose in this study was to understand the lived experiences of several women superintendents and various aspects of their work lives, including their resilience and the obstacles they faced, and to determine how female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were successful in obtaining their positions. The qualitative research design allowed the researcher to delve into the personal, lived experiences of the superintendents through an in-depth interview process. The responses to interview questions were analyzed and reported. In the present chapter, the researcher uses the findings related to research sub-questions to draw conclusions and to consider implications of the study.

The analysis of the women in the study provided insights into the leadership typologies revealed through their participation in the research. By participating in this research, the female superintendents in the study have provided aspiring female superintendents with the knowledge that women can and will be superintendents. They have provided the field of educational leadership with important insights into their profiles, characteristics, critical styles and skills, administrative strengths, personal insights, character, creative abilities, communication styles, motivational strategies, and commitment to doing the best for the children.

Research Sub-question 1

What is the demographic profile of female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia?

The researcher recognized the important role of demographics in this tri-state study. Shakeshaft (1987) cited that the experiences of female superintendents were a complex

social phenomenon. Data from the study supported the argument that no single demographic variable was linked to the predisposition of superintendents to lived experience. The participants were chosen through a nonrandom sampling method, and the researcher considered the demographic backgrounds of the participants in order to give a more varied perspective. In particular, the researcher considered race, age, marital status, size of district, and state. Respondents' age span was broad, but age was not identified as a detractor from what they wanted to achieve in life. However, older participants revealed more of a reluctance to move their residence in order to attain the superintendency.

All superintendents expressed a great deal of pride in their systems, and whether or not education as a vocation seemed to be an innate family trait, all indicated they knew that the field of education was where they were supposed to be. To further prove their devotion to education as well as their school systems, the researcher noted that three of the interviewed superintendents had already retired from another state, yet fate seemingly guided them back into the superintendency. None of the superintendents planned to exit her post at the end of the school year.

Some individuals indicated that having children was a disadvantage for women serving as a superintendent (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004); others indicated that having children was an advantage (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). The female superintendents in this study stated that having children was an advantage because of their love and support, especially during the campaigns of the elected superintendents. All of the superintendents were married or had been married and had children. Marital status, however, proved to be a disadvantage in individual circumstances when relocating could wreck havoc on personal family life.

These findings are supported by Brunner (1999) who suggests that failure to follow the dominant career path may be a serious impediment to the advancement of women, especially women in appointed superintendency positions. Little research exists that considers how the method of selection of superintendents impacts women (Brown, 2004). Also, this author purported that elected superintendencies were more favorable to women.

Other conclusions from previous literature include pertinent information about the amount of teaching experience for men versus women. Female secondary principals had a total of 15.1 years of teaching experience prior to obtaining the superintendency, whereas the corresponding statistic for their male colleagues was 13.4 years (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Evans (2003) produces evidence in her research that women are most likely promoted based on their performance as teachers, while men are most likely promoted based on their potential. This author contends that women, on average, perform a job for 10 years before they are promoted because they have to prove they know how to do it. Men, on the other hand, are promoted in less time with less evidence of successful leadership (Evans). For the respondents in this study, 12.84 years of teaching was the average before they gained leadership positions. According to Evans, this is 2.26 years less than the average years of teaching for female superintendents in the U.S. before gaining a position in leadership.

<center>Research Sub-Question 2</center>

What commonalities exist among the experiences of female superintendents?

Observed commonalities among the interviewed women superintendents emerged during the process of conversation and data analysis. These women were dynamic,

confident, and assertive. They either campaigned for election or applied for and attained positions in a male-dominated profession. They were competitive, whether elected or appointed. The researcher expected the interviewees to have those characteristics considering the success in achieving a position of superintendency is held by so few women. Lacking confidence would never be used to describe any of the female superintendents interviewed for this study.

Most of the women voluntarily stated, at some point during the interview, they felt isolated since assuming the position of superintendent. One superintendent advised aspiring women administrators to do a lot of soul searching before seeking the superintendency. One advised to make sure you have breakfast or lunch when meeting to take care of superintendent business instead of dinner, so that rumors don't start. She said, "The rumors start quick and easy when you're a woman."

All interviewed superintendents discussed the importance of mentors. The Alabama, Florida, and Georgia association of school superintendents each maintains the practice of assigning every new superintendent an experienced mentor superintendent. This practice, along with the more personal means of procuring mentors and mentor relationships, helped superintendents feel more comfortable when faced with difficult decisions.

The superintendents interviewed all strongly emphasized the importance of communication with administrators, teachers, and staff members. During the interviews, they discussed how communication should and should not occur. Most had personal experiences that had forced a change or improvement in how they communicated. Building a bond with community stakeholders was noted as important by all the

superintendents. The participants knew they were not able to lead the school systems alone. Most of the collaborative efforts with internal stakeholders shared by the superintendents revolved around the question, "What will the results be for the students?" Most participants tended to believe that the superintendency was not a man's territory. Most did not feel that power meant dominance for men and collaboration for women.

Most superintendents come to their position through an assistant superintendency and/or high school principal position (Evans, 2003). As a result, women are often told to seek these positions if they desire to be superintendents. The women in the study were asked to state the position they held just before becoming a superintendent for the first time. In all three southeastern states, most of the female superintendents had central office experience immediately before becoming superintendents the first time.

Other findings supported by the literature included information on the differences for African American and Caucasian superintendents. African American women superintendents were twice as likely as Caucasian women to say they were hired as change agents and twice as likely as the general population of superintendents to say they were brought in to lead reform efforts. African American women generally believed they shouldered the burden of having to prove themselves over and over (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). For the participants in this study, all African Americans except one believed they were hired as change agents.

Research Sub-question 3

What challenges and barriers do African American and Caucasian women face and circumvent as they attain the superintendency?

Most African American female superintendents stated that they have had to work twice as hard to arrive at and maintain the position of superintendent. At least half of the female superintendents in this study called their professions a family commitment. Most did not feel restricted by their family situations in applying for superintendent jobs. These participants stated that they discussed time commitments with loved ones before they undertook their superintendent positions. Because of the time demands placed on these superintendents, most admitted to becoming more protective of quality time with their family members. Siblings and parents were strong support structures for participating female superintendents. Two superintendents recognized these extended family members not only as sounding boards but as coping strategies in their own right.

Brunner (1999) stated that there are two primary focus points for female superintendents: relationships and the well-being of the children. Superintendents in this study overwhelmingly noted that they indeed did all that they could for the children. They had fervor for young people and educational excellence; and, in their responses, they continually hailed their schools' strong points as would the proud parent of a child. All superintendents remarked that they enjoyed going into the schools and classrooms, and they agreed that doing so was an activity in which they participated when feeling overburdened. One of the interviewed superintendents indicated that she clearly did not see the superintendency as her avocation. However, she, too, admitted a passion for young people and education.

The value of varied experiences in the field of school administration was acknowledged by nearly all of the interviewees as important preparation for the position. This advice is understandable, considering that lack of administrative experience was described as a barrier. One participant stated she thought she was uniquely qualified by being a curriculum director, but really wished she had been a principal as well. Another stated the principalship alone was not adequate preparation and central office experience was important. Second to getting along with boards, most superintendents cited the budget as one of the biggest challenges.

Brown (2004) purported that women tend to remain in teaching positions longer than their male counterparts before trying to attain an administrative position from which to ascend to the superintendency. Boards of education tend to have more male members than female, and superintendents are hired by boards of education (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Most of the participants in this research study obtained the superintendency when they applied the first time, but they struggled getting their first job in leadership.

The respondents' discussion of age for female superintendents was supported by the literature. At the time they entered the superintendency, most study participants were older than the average age of males when they originally entered the superintendency, but younger than the average age of females when they first attained positions as superintendents. Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) describe how experienced female educators at age 56 or 60 were looking for a first superintendency when males were retiring at age 55. These authors contend that it is hard for a board to consider replacing a superintendent retiring at age 55 with someone who might be 58 and has never been a superintendent. The average age of participants in this study was 52. Besides the fact that

they are usually older, women generally have more teaching experience but less administrative experience when competing against their male counterparts for the superintendency,

Conclusions

The intent of the researcher in this study was to explore and expose the lived experiences of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia. The design of this phenomenological study afforded the researcher with findings about the experiences of female superintendents in these three states. Since women fill less than 20% of the superintendent positions in the country, there is still much progress to be made in securing adequate female representation in the superintendency. Women continue to experience conflicts between their domestic lives and professional lives, while men experience few conflicts between home and work.

The women in this study stated that making connections with others was an essential leadership skill. They voiced that, as professionals, networking was an imperative form of relationship building, although initially many of their connections were made in informal networks. Formal connections initially revolved around the commonality of work then turned into personal life-long friendships. Mentors were equally important as they provided a contact for advice throughout the women's careers. The women were cognizant of the importance of these relationships and still call upon their mentors for advice on occasion.

The predominance of male gatekeepers, such as boards of education, continues to be a barrier for women. Most search consultants are former superintendents. Since the majority of superintendents are Caucasian and male, search consultants are generally

Caucasian and male and often hold traditional ideas of male dominance in the top position. Also, the majority of school board members are Caucasian and male. School boards are still very reluctant to hire women to administrative positions, particularly for the superintendent position.

Some female superintendents agreed that male and female superintendents are more alike than they are different. While there are differences between male and female superintendents, their paths to the position, some of their challenges, and some of their support systems, there are probably many more factors just as important that are the same for both men and women.

Additional conclusions include:

1. Personal and professional support systems can be effective in lessening the degree to which superintendents may face barriers. Personal and professional support systems may include a spouse or a member of the immediate or extended family as well as mentors and predecessors the superintendent may approach for advice.

2. The researcher concluded from all participants in the study that time constraints are one of the main components of stress.

3. The superintendents noted the importance of balancing both their personal and professional lives.

4. The researcher found that establishing and maintaining relationships in professional experiences gave insight as to how the women were successful.

5. Central office experience is important for the career paths of aspiring women superintendents, and conditions are more favorable for aspiring women

administrators to gain access to the superintendency from within the school system where they work.

6. Conditions are more favorable for aspiring women administrators to gain access to the superintendency in small school districts in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia.

7. Family responsibilities and commitments are considered by several women to be the main barrier for women.

8. Aspiring women administrators need to obtain higher educational degrees; secure varied administrative experiences, in particular, non-traditional female experience such as budgeting; and work harder than their male counterparts.

Implications

This study contributes to the knowledge base of educational administration by documenting the experiences of 16 female superintendents. The information presented analyzes the passage of these individuals through their career paths and documents the barriers present for female superintendents. An important finding of this study was that disadvantages clearly existed for the female superintendents interviewed. For those women in educational administration who aspire to the superintendency, this suggests that they should concern themselves with addressing the disadvantages within their careers and strive to acquire advantages that will assist in balancing out the disadvantages. Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made by the researcher:

1. Policy-makers should explore developing means to promote school board stability in order to promote stability in the superintendency. This would

improve equity in hiring and provide female role models for potential female superintendents.

2. Alabama, Florida, and Georgia should continue the formal mentor program for new superintendents.

3. Those who aspire to be superintendents should recognize certain barriers and aspects of the profession that can cause superintendents to experience stress and identify strategies to decrease the associated emotional strain.

4. University leadership programs should develop coursework detailing the barriers and glass ceilings. Such coursework should focus on managing these phenomena in order to address the barriers.

Dissemination

Current school superintendents and those aspiring to be superintendents could benefit from the results of this study. The participating superintendents provided significant insight into the real requirements of the superintendency. In so doing, they were able to pass on both advice and inspiration to others. Thus, the culture of the superintendency was addressed fully by the study respondents, and others may be further inspired by the various coping strategies that these superintendents shared.

Board of education members and county or city central administrators should review the findings in order to become fully aware of the barriers for women involved in the superintendency so as to prevent biases in the hiring process. Graduate program coordinators in educational leadership departments should review the findings of this study in relationship to fine tuning coursework for educational leaders. Essentially, the findings could help teachers, building administrators, and coordinators better prepare to

become superintendents. The employer of the researcher and each respondent in the study was sent a copy of the finished study to read and retain for their purposes.

Recommendations

After a thorough examination of the data collected from this study, the researcher recommends that the following studies are worth consideration:

1. Replicate the qualitative study with more female school superintendents from states other than the states in the study to determine their lived experiences. This would broaden research to other states.

2. Employ a quantitative study to compare the lived experiences among all Alabama, Florida, and Georgia school superintendents. The questions may be shorter and in a survey format. This approach would be different from the study of female superintendents in that it would collect responses from all superintendents in each state involved in the study.

3. Conduct a qualitative study examining the lived experiences among Alabama, Florida, and Georgia school superintendents including male and female superintendents. Conducting a qualitative study would allow insight from the male perspective on their experiences compared to the female experiences.

Concluding Thoughts

The researcher's purpose in undertaking and compiling this dissertation was to describe the lived experiences among a select group of Alabama, Florida, and Georgia female school superintendents. The qualitative study, through 15 open-ended interview questions, was designed to relate the personal and professional lived experiences of 16 interviewed Alabama, Florida, and Georgia female school superintendents. Such lived experiences relayed feelings that the participants had experienced. Furthermore, in addition to identifying the lived experiences, participants cited strategies they had employed to cope with barriers.

Perceptions of a superintendent's behavioral characteristics include aggressiveness, assertiveness, and competitiveness, all of which are not perceived to be positive attributes in females. Marriage and family augment a male's credentials, yet these very attributes tend to hinder a woman's career. Issues such as parenting are commonly addressed with female candidates during interviews while men are rarely, if ever, questioned about such matters.

Some superintendents mentioned that there is still discrimination against women in the workplace despite all the employment laws covering gender discrimination. One of the places this discrimination occurs is in job interviews where employers are concerned that a woman applicant may want time off work for maternity leave or to look after dependents. The superintendents have learned how to avoid responding to discriminatory questions during interviews.

According to the previous literature, some states are considering non-licensure as a solution for the lack of superintendent candidates; others are relaxing their certification

requirements to expand the pool of qualified applicants for an ever-increasing number of superintendent vacancies. In case of mass retirements, severe shortages may occur with superintendents. These shortages can be addressed if an increased number of qualified female applicants are allowed through the glass ceiling. One important aspect of the current crisis in the superintendency is the underrepresentation of women. Further research is needed to understand the root causes for gender and racial underrepresentation in the nation's schools and school systems.

Many Caucasian female superintendents obtained their positions more quickly and with less teaching experience than African American women. Another major difference between the two races of women was that Caucasian women were more likely to state that there were no barriers. In fact, there were no African American women who stated that there were no barriers in getting or keeping the position of superintendent. One Caucasian woman thought that many of the barriers were self-imposed and could be ignored so they would go away. The type of barriers experienced by the two races were different in that Caucasian women had more problems with board members.

African American women had more problems with institutional barriers that were rooted in societal discrimination practices. Twenty percent of the superintendents in the U.S. are women, but only 5% of the superintendents are African American women. They rarely have a chance to become part of the mainstream of leaders in public education. The nation's 14,000-odd school superintendents are overwhelmingly Caucasian and male. Educators and scholars disagree about whether being African-American and female influences the way a superintendent is perceived. But, anecdotal evidence provided by most of the African American women superintendents interviewed for the study suggests

that it does. As a doctoral candidate who just obtained her first leadership position, the researcher wondered if this double-edged sword will still be present as she continues her journey toward superintendency.

There were not vast differences in the experiences of the superintendents from state to state other than the state requirements for the position. Across the three southeastern states and both races of women, the research showed that balancing work and home demands was an issue. Equally important, many of the respondents reported they believe it was their choice, rather than a barrier, to defer, delay, or deny career aspirations for home and family responsibilities.

Throughout the interviews, the researcher became increasingly aware of the immense sacrifices that the superintendents had made to become female leaders at the pinnacle of their profession. Each superintendent was under extreme stress and pressure from all stakeholders in public education: students, parents, teachers, legislators, community leaders, and taxpayers. Sometimes colorful, sometimes funny, often sad, yet always personal stories led the researcher to more fully understand the roles these female superintendents maintained, as well as the responsibility that the superintendency holds. Although the participants often felt entrenched in the stress of their personal family lives and burdened with responsibility, they seemed charged and empowered to truly make a difference in the lives of young people.

This experience allowed the researcher the opportunity to climb into the skin of each woman, finding that most superintendents remain satisfied with their careers. It was enlightening and emotional to hear the superintendents talk about how their resilience helped them through the struggles of misunderstanding, transparency, community

involvement, and student success. From this body of knowledge, the researcher realized that she, too, can be a successful superintendent if properly prepared with the advice of the new superintendent mentors obtained through this study. In this study, the powerful and impassioned female school superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia all wanted to make a difference.

Collaboration, where decision-making was a group effort, was essential for all the women. Gathering the necessary resources to make informed decisions was crucial. The necessary resources included collecting expert opinions and research data. The women saw themselves as parts of a whole system. No one part was greater than the sum of all the parts. The ability to see the big picture was fundamental to being a successful superintendent; therefore, success as a superintendent relied on the ability to communicate, implement, and modify the vision of the school district as needed.

The personal experiences of the 16 women gave insight into the lived experiences of female superintendents. They were scholars as demonstrated through their personal drive and determination. All the women received advanced degrees at various times in the lives while continuing their careers and family lives. Based on the conversations and interactions with the women in the study, the researcher concluded they are avid life-long learners, as each stayed informed of current educational trends, organizational changes, and future projections for education. All the women spoke with one voice of resiliency as they refused to see gender barriers as excuses for not doing great work for children.

They chose to turn obstacles into opportunities. Their lived experiences and leadership behaviors made them who they are today: cooperative, compassionate, bold, insightful, and visionary. These characteristics were the women's essence. They brought

these characteristics with them to this study and left a marked impression on the researcher. Women have to fight harder, wait longer, and survive more scrutiny to become a superintendent. The lived experiences of female superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia were seen clearly in this study by the researcher.

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APPENDIX A

RESPONDENTS' CONSENT LETTER BY EMAIL

Ruth D. Odum
P. O. Box 741205
Riverdale, Georgia 30274

Superintendent's Name
Superintendent's Address

April 17, 2009

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Ruth D. Odum, and I am a graduate student enrolled in the doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. My dissertation topic involves the phenomenon of the lived experiences of superintendents as seen and experienced by Alabama, Florida, and Georgia female school superintendents.

I am requesting your participation in gathering the necessary information for my study. Your experiences can be critical to the study. I sincerely hope that you will find it possible to take to two hours out of your busy schedule to allow me to interview you. This may include a few follow up questions that can be answered by phone or email. The target time frame for the interviews is between April 24, 2009 and January 25, 2009. During most of this time frame, I will have a leave of absence from work, so interviews can be arranged during the day or afternoon for your convenience.

You may reply to this email to indicate whether or not you would be willing to share you experiences with me in an open-ended, in-depth interview. Not only will I be taking sporadic notes during the interview session, I will also be tape recording the session to insure accuracy and to allow me the opportunity to listen and respond to your comments. All interview tapes will be securely stored in my home. You may review transcriptions for any inaccuracies that may be present. In the written dissertation, you will be referred to by pseudonym to assure your anonymity.

Thank you for your participation and assistance in this study. If you have any questions regarding this research study, you may contact me at home, 770-907-3575, cell 404-775-6417, or at work, 404-362-3865. The coordinator or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, 912-478-5465, may also be of assistance should you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Ruth D. Odum

APPENDIX B

RESPONDENTS' CONSENT LETTER BY POSTAL MAIL

Ruth D. Odum
P. O. Box 741205
Riverdale, Georgia 30274

Superintendent's Name
Superintendent's Address

April 30, 2009

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Ruth D. Odum, and I am a graduate student enrolled in the doctoral program at Georgia Southern University. My dissertation topic involves the phenomenon of the lived experiences of superintendents as seen and experienced by Alabama, Florida, and Georgia female school superintendents.

The purpose of this letter is to request your participation in gathering the necessary information for my study. Your experiences can be critical to the study. I sincerely hope that you will find it possible to take two hours out of your busy schedule to allow me to interview you. This may include a few follow up questions that can be answered by phone or email. The target time frame for the interviews is between April 24, 2009 and January 25, 2009. During most of this time frame, I will have a leave of absence from work, so interviews can be arranged during the day or afternoon for your convenience.

Please indicate whether or not you would be willing to share you experiences with me in an open-ended, in-depth interview between by checking the appropriate statement on the enclosed postcard.

Not only will I be taking sporadic notes during the interview session, I will also be tape recording the session to insure accuracy and to allow me the opportunity to listen and respond to your comments. All interview tapes will be securely stored in my home. You may review transcriptions for any inaccuracies that may be present. In the written dissertation, you will be referred to by pseudonym to assure your anonymity.

Thank you for your participation and assistance in this study. If you have any questions regarding this research study, you may contact me at home, 770-907-3575, or at work, 404-362-3865. The coordinator or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs, 912- 478-5465, may also be of assistance should you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant. Again, thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Ruth D. Odum

APPENDIX C

RESPONSE CARD

Please read the following and mark the appropriate box.

I have read the letter detailing the proposed dissertation study concerning
The Lived Experiences Alabama, Florida, and Georgia Female Superintendents.

☐   At this time I **would be** willing to participate in
study.

☐   At this time I **would not** be willing to participate in
this study.

☐   I am interested in participating in this study, but I would like to arrange a time
different from the time frame you have listed for your study.

Signed _____

Please print your name_____

Email Address_____

Telephone number _____

R. D. Odum, Ed.S.
P.O. Box 741205
Riverdale, GA 30274

R. D. Odum, Ed.S.
P.O. Box 741205
Riverdale, GA 30274

APPENDIX D

INFORMATION SHEET

Name _____

School System _____

What is your current age? _____

What is your ethnicity? Please circle.

Black Hispanic White other _____

Are you married? Please circle. Y N

If yes, how long? _____

Are you divorced? Please circle. Y N

If yes, how long? _____

Are you widowed? Please circle. Y N

If yes, how long? _____

What was your age at your first superintendent appointment? _____

Number of years as current superintendent _____

Number of total superintendency years _____

How many schools are in your district? _____ students? _____

List administration positions held before superintendent (professional lineage)

_____

Number of years as a teacher _____

Number of districts as a superintendent _____

Years remaining on current contract _____

Is your immediate subordinate male or female? M F

APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Tell me some information about yourself personally and professionally.

What is your marital status? Do you have any children? What degrees do

you hold? What teaching experience do you have?

2. Please share what you like most about being a superintendent. What are some of your

greatest experiences?

3. Please share some of your most challenging experiences about being a superintendent.

Please state whether or not those challenges or barriers relate to gender or race.

4. Tell me about your pathway to superintendency. How many times did you attempt to

go into leadership before you actually obtained a leadership position? What was your

highest degree held by the time you became superintendent? Was the superintendency a

planned career goal? What strategies did you use to obtain the position of

superintendency?

5. Tell me about some of the challenges you experienced in obtaining the position of

superintendent. Does race or gender play a role in those challenges? If not, how do you

account for the low percentages of women in the superintendent and high school

principal positions? Did you experience any gender or racial barriers once you obtained

the position? If you experienced barriers, what strategies did you use to overcome those

barriers?

6. Tell me about your leadership style during your tenure as superintendent. Do you

consider yourself one who operates the under authoritarian or collaborative leadership

styles? Which of these seem to be more of a challenge to you?

7. Why did you want to become a superintendent? Why do you think you were hired?

8. Describe the atmosphere for the central office and other staff in your county. How does the quality of your relationship with county level administrators relate to your leadership behavior?

9. Do you remember the amount of men versus women in your last certification program?

10. Do you think the size of the district relates to whether or not a woman has a greater chance of working as a superintendent? What about location?

11. Do you have a professional mentor? If so, who is it? How much assistance do you receive from this person, and how often do you speak with this person?

12. Can you think of a reason why there are such a low percentage of female superintendents compared to the number of classroom teachers? What experience did you encounter that made the superintendency more accessible? Is networking with other superintendents vital for your success?

13. What type of personal support do you have for your professional career?

14. Do you consider yourself a mentor to other aspiring superintendents? What strategy recommendations would you offer women aspiring to the superintendency?

15. If you were beginning college again, would you pursue the same career?

APPENDIX F

PERMISSION TO TAPE RECORD

Permission to Tape Record

Name of Superintendent _____

    I give permission for Ruth D. Odum to tape record an interview which will be used for

research for a doctoral dissertation at Georgia Southern University. I am guaranteed that

neither my name nor the school system name will be used in the written dissertation

report.

_____

Signature of Superintendent

_____

Signature of Researcher

APPENDIX G

TRANSCRIPT APPROVAL FORM

Ruth D. Odum

P. O. Box 741205

Riverdale, Georgia 30274

Please sign below if you give your final approval for the transcripts to be included in Ruth D. Odum's research entitled: The Lived Experiences of Female Superintendents in Alabama, Florida, and Georgia:

I give final approval for the transcript of my interview to be used in the research study. I understand that neither my name nor any identifying features will be used in the research study.

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

_____ Yes, I would like to receive a copy of the dissertation.

APPENDIX H

LITERATURE MATRIX FOR FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS

Table H.1

Literature Matrix for Female Superintendents

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
Brunner (2000)	Swindler's settled discourse theory involving events or episodes of inequality	Qualitative; Interviews (12 women superintendents)	There are five topics that relate to the inequalities for female superintendents. Those topics are power, silence, style, responsibility, and people.
Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia,& Vannema n (2001)	To use four specific criteria to determine whether or not a glass ceiling exists	Qualitative Panel study of Income Dynamics – Men & women 25 – 39 in the civilian labor force	Identifies a partial list of factors that may contribute to a glass ceiling – job ladders, personal policies, limited enforcement of employment laws, and employer discrimination
Dobie & Hummel	To examine the gender imbalance	Qualitative: Interviews 2 female	Interviews proved positive in that

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
(2001)	in the top administrative positions in Texas	superintendents in Texas	they reveal a number of strengths and characteristics that women possessed. Through the study the researchers have concluded that gender bias exist in the position of superintendent.
Garfinkel (1987)	Examine how both men and women superintendents define and select their administrative teams.	Qualitative; Interviews (5 men and 5 women)	Men are selected and perceived as administrative leaders more often than women.
Glass (1992)	Defining the stressors for male and female superintendents	Quantitative surveys (18 beginning superintendents)	Two of the main stressors for new superintendents were deciding who to trust and lack of people in whom to confide.
Glass,	To define the role	Quantitative;	Superintendents

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
Bjork, & Brunner (2000)	of superintendents	Surveys (2,262 Superintendents- 1,953 male, 309 female, and 114 minorities)	have two dominant roles: professional advisor and decision maker. There is a rank-ordered for the five most important influences on superintendents' socialization, including: non-university training, outcomes, university-based graduate education, relations, and practice.
Grogan & Brunner (2005)	The number of female superintendents	Qualitative; Interviews (723 superintendents, 473 central office workers, and three search firms)	Females are discouraged from preparing for superintendency. School boards do not often hire women.

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
Guptill (2003)	To examine the effects of professional support on the longevity of superintendents in New York State	Qualitative: Interviews- multiple case study design 8 female superintendents from New York state	Respondents believe that informal mentoring was necessary for female superintendents, that networking was valuable, that family support was necessary to success. Rural superintendents admit to being geographically isolated and state that they rarely attended conventions and meetings.
Gupton (1996)	The Success for Women Superintendents	Qualitative; Interviews (15 successful administrators)	System-wide practices of status quo can be battled. Stereotypes can be overcome by building support systems,

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
			nourishing crucial desires for success, and setting up networks.
Hall & Klotz (2001)	To gather descriptive data on female and male superintendents involved in a mentoring relationship and to examine the perceived helpfulness of career and psychological mentoring functions as provided by their mentors in regards to career advancement	Quantitative: Survey – (two part questionnaire) The study included public school superintendents from South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi.	There were no statistically significant differences found between same-gender and cross-gender mentor/protégé groups scores for helpfulness on career and psychosocial mentoring functions with the exception of sponsorship, friendship, and exposure.
Jackson (1999)	Career paths for African American Female Superintendents	Qualitative; Interviews (32 African American Female Superintendents)	African American female superintendents are examples of human

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
			adaptability, strength, and accomplishment.
Katz (2004)	The perceived leadership skills and job satisfaction	Mixed Method; Surveys and Interviews (8 Caucasians, 1 African American)	Women are comfortable and enjoy their leadership roles. Often women wished they had pursued the superintendency earlier in their career path, and they would pursue the same path if they had to do it all over again.
McCabe (2001)	To learn more about the role of superintendent when occupied by women	Mixed Methods Quantitative: Survey Qualitative: Interviews (273 of 735 superintendents completed surveys 218 of 735 superintendents completed the metaphor portion of	The four roles women assume most often include leadership, facilitation, versatility, and visualization.

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
		the study)	
Polleys (1999)	Investigate the career advancement of female superintendents	Quantitative: Survey 300 female superintendents	Determined the glass walls around which professional women must maneuver: shortage of mentors, need for mentoring from powerful men, sexism, the conflictual nature of ambition, self limiting behavior, family concerns, gender stereotyping, and highly developed personal characteristics such as risk-taking.
Robinson (2004)	Barriers for African American Women	Qualitative; Interviews (six African American Women)	Gender is a major obstacle to the progress of women. Isolation and intraracial

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
			discrimination are two major barriers.
Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley (2000)	To investigate female superintendents' perceptions about forms of discrimination they faced, help they received from professional organizations, University programs, or informal networks	Quantitative: Survey (female superintendents in Illinois, Indiana, and Texas -118 responding)	Superintendents recognize a lack of professional network as a barrier, did not feel restricted to a particular sized school district, and did not feel restricted because of spouses' jobs.
Schuster & Foote (1990)	To investigate the years of teaching and age of female superintendents versus male superintendents	Quantitative: Survey (female and male superintendents- over 1000 respondents)	Three-fourths of the women versus two-thirds of the men had more than 5 years of teaching experience before entering administration. Thirty six percent of the women superintendents

STUDY	TOPIC/PURPOSE	METHODOLOGY/ PARTICIPANTS	OUTCOMES/ CONCLUSIONS
			entered the superintendency after age forty six compared to fourteen percent of the men.

APPENDIX I

REVIEWING OF LITERATURE TO ITEM ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW

QUESTIONS

Table I.1

Reviewing of Literature Pertaining to Item Analysis of Interview Questions

Interview Question	Literature	Research Question/ SubQuestion
1. Personal Profile	Guptill (2003), Henke, Geis, & Broughman (1996), Hoffman & Sable (2007)	SQ1 Demographics/Personal Profile
2. Career Decisions and Hiring	Grogan (1996), Grogan & Brunner (2005), Gupton & Slick (1996), Kowalski & Brunner (2005)	SQ2 Positive Experience
3. Challenges/Barriers	Brown (2004), Cotter, D. A., Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman (2001), Warshaw, & Barlow (1995), Werner (2000)	SQ3 Gender Stereotyping
4. Career Pathway to Superintendency	Bell (1995), Gewertz (2006), Glass (2000), Skrla (2000), Tallerico (2000)	SQ1 and SQ2 Relationships
5. Resilience to Challenges and Barriers	Alston (2005), Anderson (1988), Banks (1995), Cotter, D. A.,	SQ3 Administrative Experience

Interview Question	Literature	Research Question/ SubQuestion
	Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman (2001), Gewertz (2006), Glass (2000), Henderson & Milstein (2003), Higgins (1994), Kamler & Shakeshaft (1999), Konrad & Bronson (1997), Sharp & Walter (1997), Tillman (2004)	
6. Resistance to Glass Ceilings	Garfinkel (1987), Glass (2000), Hall & Klotz (2001), Katz (2004), Konnert & Augenstein (1995)	SQ2 Relationships and Leadership Style
7. Employment of Female Superintendents	Barth (1990), Gewertz (2006), Glass (2000), Hall & Klotz (2001), Hess (2002)	SQ3 Employment
8. Superintendent Atmosphere Relationship to Staff and Colleaques	Blount (1998), Grogan (1996), Gupton & Slick (1996), Jones & Montenegro (1985) Kowalski (1999)	SQ2 Relationshiups/Leadership Style
9. Gender Certification	Blount, (1998), Glass (2000), Sharp & Walter (1997), Shen, Wegenke,	SQ2 Pathway to Superintendency

Interview Question	Literature	Research Question/ SubQuestion
	& Cooley (2003), Shakeshaft (1989), Tannen (1990)	
10. Gender Leadership	Chapman (1997), Chapman (2001), Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt (2001), Garfinkel (1987) Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) McCreight (1999) Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2000)	SQ3 Gender Stereotyping/District Size
11. Professional Mentor	Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan (2000)	SQ1 and SQ2 Strategies/Mentoring
12. Gender Percentages	Evans (2003), Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan (2000 Grogan & Brunner (2005)	RQ1 Strategies/ Networking
13. Personal Support Systems	Chase & Bell (1994), Dobie & Hummel (2001), Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan (2000)	SQ1 and SQ2 Family Commitment
14. Aspiring Superintendents	Brunner (2000), Gardiner, M., Enomoto, E., & Grogan M. (2000)	SQ1 Strategies/Mentoring
15. Beginning Career Path	Grogan (1996), Grogan & Brunner (2005),	RQ1 Professional

Interview Question	Literature	Research Question/ SubQuestion
	Guptill (2003), Henke, Geis, & Broughman (1996), Kowalski & Brunner (2005)	Profile/Career Decisions

APPENDIX J

HISTORY OF SUPERINTENDENCY

STAGE	TIME FRAME	EVENT	LITERATURE
ONE	EARLY 1800's	The first local superintendents were established in buffalo and Louisville's.	Connect and Augustine (1995)
ONE	1850	Women had very few means of employment outside the home, but they began to teach.	Blount (1998)
TWO	1861	Twenty seven large eastern and mid-western cities established superintendencies. Horace Mann's speeches occurred.	Hoffman (2003)
TWO	1870	Department of superintendents was formed as part of the national education association.	Brunner, Grogan, & Bjork (2002)
THREE	1909	The first female was appointed as superintendent. Seventy percent of teachers were women.	Chapman (1997)
THREE	1930	The role for the local school superintendent and local board of education became clear for most states.	Chapman (1997)
THREE	1944-1956	The first African American woman superintendent in our country was Velma Dolphin Ashley.	Revere (1987)
FOUR	1950	The public expressed dissatisfaction over declining	Sharp (1997)

STAGE	TIME FRAME	EVENT	LITERATURE
		student achievement. Superintendents became more responsive to the community.	
FOUR	1960's	College professors change the training to sociological and psychological.	Chapman (1997)
FOUR	1963	Amendment of the fail labor standard act of 1938. This is referred to as Equal Pay Act (EPA). Equal pay must be paid to women for requires equal skills.	Daidaine-Ragguet, Russo, & Harris (1994)
FOUR	1965	Execution order 11246 issued by President Lyndon Johnson was aimed at doing away with gender-based discrimination on programs associated with the federal government.	Daidaine-Ragguet, Russo, & Harris (1994)
FIVE	1970	The political agendas become increasingly more important.	Candoli (1995)
FIVE	1972	Title VII was amended to extend coverage to educational institutions. This strengthened the rights of women in higher education and included sexual harassment.	Daidaine-ragguet, Russo, and Harris. (1994)
FIVE	1972	Title IV of the civil rights Act was implemented. This was before title IX many schools refused to admit	Daidaine-Ragguet, Russo, &

STAGE	TIME FRAME	EVENT	LITERATURE
		women.	Harris (1994)
SIX	1983	Ideas were borrowed from the cooperate world, so the waves of reform were large-scale and systematic. (A Nation At Risk)	Glass , Bjork, & Brunner (2000)
SEVEN	1990	Superintendents support reforming schools in ways that all children can learn	Dardaine-Ragguet, Russo, & Harris (1994)
SEVEN	1991	The Glass Ceiling Act of the Civil Rights Act of 1991 was designed to combat gender based discrimination in the workplace.	Brunner, Grogan, & Bjork (2002)
	2000	Improved learning through the school community to enhance learning.	Glass , Bjork, & Brunner (2000)

APPENDIX K

IRB APPROVAL LETTER

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Georgia Southern University
Office of Research Services & Sponsored Programs

Institutional Review Board (IRB)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Phone: 912-478-0843</td><td></td><td>Veazey Hall 2021
P.O. Box 8005</td></tr>
<tr><td>Fax: 912-478-0719</td><td>IRB@GeorgiaSouthern.edu</td><td>Statesboro, GA 30460</td></tr>
</table>

To: Ruth Denette Odum
P.O.Box 741205
Riverdale, Georgia 30274

Brenda Marina
P.O.Box 8131

CC: Charles E. Patterson
Associate Vice President for Research

From: Office of Research Services and Sponsored Programs
Administrative Support Office for Research Oversight Committees
(IACUC/IBC/IRB)

Date: April 15, 2009

Subject: Status of Application for Approval to Utilize Human Subjects in Research

After a review of your proposed research project numbered:**H09242** and titled **"The Lived Experience of Female Superintendents in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, and Tennessee"**, it appears that (1) the research subjects are at minimal risk, (2) appropriate safeguards are planned, and (3) the research activities involve only procedures which are allowable.

Therefore, as authorized in the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to notify you that the Institutional Review Board has approved your proposed research.

This IRB approval is in effect for one year from the date of this letter. If at the end of that time, there have been no changes to the research protocol; you may request an extension of the approval period for an additional year. In the interim, please provide the IRB with any information concerning any significant adverse event, **whether or not it is believed to be related to the study**, within five working days of the event. In addition, if a change or modification of the approved methodology becomes necessary, you must notify the IRB Coordinator **prior** to initiating any such changes or modifications. At that time, an amended application for IRB approval may be submitted. Upon completion of your data collection, you are required to complete a *Research Study Termination* form to notify the IRB Coordinator, so your file may be closed.

Sincerely,

Eleanor Haynes
Compliance Officer