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SUPERINTENDENT IN ACTION: A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF

AN AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALE SUPERINTENDENT

by

Janice M. Kennedy, B.A., M.A.

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
LOUISIANA TECH UNIVERSITY

March 2008

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ABSTRACT

Remarkably few females hold the position of superintendent of schools; although, there are capable women in the educational field who are qualified and interested in obtaining the position of superintendent of schools. Researchers proposed many reasons for this disparity, including the lack of studies regarding females in the superintendency. This research study sought to determine how one African-American female entered the male dominated executive position to become superintendent of a large school district in a southern state.

The following research questions were used to determine how this African-American female constructed her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity: (a) How does the participant define and construct an understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as a school district leader?, (b) What are the benefits and advantages, as well as, the complexities and problems, faced being an African-American female school district leader?, (c) How were the encountered barriers addressed and overcome during the quest to obtain the superintendency?, (d) What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of a practicing African-American female superintendent?, (e) How do the expectations from the school board members and the schools'

communities impact the decision making process?, and, (f) What political, educational, and demographical contexts of the schools and communities framed leadership behaviors?

The purpose of this study was to identity and describe, through a case study, how one African-American female superintendent constructed an understanding of her leadership role through the lenses cultural experiences, gender and ethnic identity. Data were collected from the participant by conducting semi-structured, in-depth participant interviews, observing the participant in a natural setting, and completing the Leadership Practices Self Inventory. These data were transcribed and coded using Qualrus software. Common themes emerged through analysis of interviews, observed situations, and interpretation of data collected. Focusing on the personal experiences of one female superintendent, the five overarching themes which emerged from this phenomenological qualitative study were (a) her socialization, (b) her determined work ethic, (c) her persistence to attain the superintendency, (d) her strong religious beliefs, and (e) her concern for student achievement.

The underlying themes, revealed by this research, have implications for women considering the superintendency. The findings of this study indicated how one African-American female overcame barriers, from childhood to adulthood, to achieve the top executive position of a large school district. In her own words, a comprehensive understanding of the road one African-American female traveled to secure the superintendency was told.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the wonderful people in my life who supported me from its inception to the conclusion. My loving parents, Brodie and the late Annie J. Bell Kennedy for instilling in me that with God, all things are possible and that education has it own subtle rewards. They constantly reminded me that the road less traveled is filled with obstacles, which can be overcome through much prayer, patience, and persistence. In addition, my siblings: Derrick, Stephanie, Sandra, Terry, Pat, Alix, Eric, and Shaun, offered encouragement and support by reminding me to laugh often and to value the time spent with family.

Most importantly, I am most grateful for my son, Jason, who through his angelic presence motivated me to complete this task. I truly love each of you for the contributions made through support, prayers, and love. Each of you is very precious to me and may God's richest blessings be yours!

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deeper respect was gained for her tenacity to fulfill a childhood promise.

Throughout our dialogue, this superintendent constantly reminded me and others

that it is not where one came from, but where one desires to go. One must learn to

sacrifice if success is to be achieved. It is leaders like this who inspire others to

accept the challenges ahead.

To the wonderful LEC professors who were instrumental in the attainment

this terminal degree and to the participant of this study, I am deeply humbled to

have had the privilege of sharing the educational experience. Through your

knowledge, leadership, and support, a fellow person became a better person.

Continue inspiring others to achieve their dreams.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the early 1900s, women have played a significant role in the workforce and currently make up nearly half of the workforce (Blount, 1999). With such a large number of women represented, it could be expected that women should also constitute a large number of administrative positions. However, over the years women have struggled to overcome barriers, both external and internal, as they have attempted to attain higher level administrative positions. It was noted by Celestin (2003) that women educators, in general, and African-American female educators, more specifically, were not placed in professional paths to secure the superintendency. Consequently, when the superintendency is attained, the African-American female must continually prove herself capable and competent.

An Overview of the Problem

The United States public school superintendency has been shown to be one of the most gender-stratified executive positions in the country (Bjork, 1999), with men 40 times more likely than women to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in the school district (Skrla, 1999). Therefore, from the perspectives of the relatively few

women who inhabited a leadership position, it should have been evident that a research-based understanding of the inequitable situation was needed (Skrla & Reyes, 2000).

Women have been underrepresented in the superintendency of public schools Amedy, 1999; McCabe 2001; Rogers, 2005; Shakeshaft, 1989). According to Grady and Wesson (1994), although women in education comprised the majority of professional employees and received the majority of advanced degrees, the superintendency had been elusive for many of them. Shakeshaft (1989) noted that this had been the norm since the creation of the educational hierarchical structure. Because there had been few women in the role of superintendent, until recently, studies on the characteristics of those who became superintendents focused primarily on men. Researchers (Glass, 1992; Grogan, 1994) reported that male superintendents have been studied as to (a) demographic make-up, (b) stresses, (c) career paths, (d) personal opinions, (e) leadership traits, (f) relations with the community and school boards, and (g) indicators of success.

Literature suggested that the school districts in the United States are experiencing, or will in the near future, a shortage of qualified applicants for the superintendent position (AASA, 1999; Brunner & Grogan, 2005). A national study conducted by Cooper, Fusarelli, and Carella (2000) indicated that the nation's superintendents are concerned about recruitment and retention of strong, qualified superintendents. Of the superintendents surveyed, 88% reported that a serious crisis in leadership of American education is forthcoming due to a shortage of applicants. In addition, 92%, of those surveyed, were concerned that the increased rate of superintendent turnover created a problem as the need to retain strong leaders in the

superintendent role increases. State legislators and administrative organizations such as the National Association of Elementary School Principals, the National Association of Secondary School Principals, and the Educational Placement Consortium reported that there was a "steadily growing shortage of school leaders" (Young & McLeod, 2001, p. 46). In addition to a shortage of candidates, those who were highly qualified often did not want the job (Cooper et al., 2000; Cunningham & Burdick, 1999). Under representation of women in the superintendency compounded the problem. Current pools of administrative candidates came from practicing teachers (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner 2000; Kowalski, 1999), and the majority of teachers were women. Yet few women were found in the superintendency. Of the 2,262 superintendents responding to a 2000 American Association of School Administrators (AASA) superintendent survey, only 297 (13%) were women (Glass, et al., 2000). In a regional study of superintendents in Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington, only 13% of the 522 superintendents who participated were women (Wolverton, Rawls, & MacDonald, 2000).

Female superintendents were deeply affected by strong cultural and gender stereotypes, as well as, by overt gender-discrimination. Stereotypes have helped to create perceptions of inadequacy, low self-image, lack of confidence, and lack of motivation or aspiration (Clay, 1997).

Justification for the Study

Research studies (Amedy, 1999; Cunanan, 1994; Glass, 1992) have shown that few females, compared to males, attained the position of superintendent of public schools, although there were women who have been prepared to advance into the

position. The literature offered some insight into why female candidates constituted only small percentage of the superintendent population, including the subsequent lack of role models in higher administrative positions in education. Additionally, data concerning the characteristics of gender and its relationship to leadership had recently become available on female education leaders and these findings differ regarding the behaviors displayed by females in leadership roles in education.

Women have dominated the field of the profession of education as teachers, elementary school principals, and as central office employees (Hall & Koltz, 2001). However, there remained a disparity among men and women serving in the capacity of superintendent. According to Alston (2000) women represented less than 5% of more than 15,000 chief executive officer positions and 25% of the principals across the country. The research of Grewal (2002) indicated that California has a higher percentage of female superintendents than the national average; however, disparity between men and women still existed. Even though females in general were progressing to more powerful positions in education and other professions, they were still a seriously underrepresented minority; the African-American female represented an even greater minority.

Because the female superintendent was rare, and the African- American female superintendent was even more difficult to locate, this qualitative study served to identify reasons and to expand the understanding of how an African-American female achieved superintendent status. Furthermore this study identified how she understood her responsibilities as superintendent of a large school district in a southern state.

Theoretical Framework

In an effort to determine how one African-American female constructed an understanding of her leadership roles and became superintendent of one of a large school districts in a southern state, a qualitative study was conducted. This phenomenological study provided an understanding of being a female superintendent from the perspective of the participant. This researcher also sought to understand how the superintendent constructed an understanding of her duties and responsibilities by employing a constructivist perspective in an effort to comprehend her daily undertakings based on experiences. The constructivist approach recognized that the viewer created the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed (Charmaz, 2000). Furthermore, according to Charmaz (2000), constructivism aimed toward interpretive understanding of subjects' meaning. Analysis of in-depth interviews permitted this researcher the opportunity to construct meaning from the data collected and to add to the field of knowledge of how an African-American female superintendent understood her duties and responsibilities.

The critical theorist approach was also implemented to determine how the experience of being a superintendent is influenced and conceived through the perspective of gender and ethnicity. Guba and Lincoln (1994) insisted that virtual reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and ethnic values shaped over time. It was these prevailing values which assisted in establishing the core belief system of individuals.

Another critical area upon which this study was based was the feminist perspective. The feminist perspective, according to Charmaz (2000) and Shakeshaft

(1981), was an essential component in the paradigm for research on women in educational administration. Using a feminist lens allowed the researcher to investigate the disparity that exists in a male dominated occupation (Gossetti & Rusch, 1995). From this research, an informed view was constructed in an effort to better understand the participant perspective of her role. Feminists viewed gender as a basic organizing principle that profoundly shaped and mediated the concrete condition of one's life (Lather, 1992). Furthermore, feminists challenged the invisibility and distortion of women's experiences and sought to understand how power in school employment had been structured unequally by gender (Blount, 1998).

This study also incorporated the constructivist approach. The constructivist approach "recognizes that the viewer creates the data and ensuing analysis through interaction with the viewed" (Charmaz, 2000, p. 523). Charmaz further stated "constructivism aimed toward interpretative understanding of subjects' meanings" (p. 510). Analysis of the in-depth interviews permitted the researcher the opportunity, through the constant comparative process, to construct meaning from collected data to add to the field of knowledge about the undertakings of a female superintendent in a large school district in a southern state.

Research Questions

In order to ascertain how the female superintendent, identified in this study, constructed an understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity, the guiding research questions are listed below. However, as this phenomenological study developed, guiding questions were based on emerging themes and inquiry.

1. How does the participant define and construct her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as the school district leader?

2. What are the benefits and advantages, as well as, the complexities and problems, faced being an African-American female school district leader?

3. How were the encountered barriers addressed and overcome during the quest to obtain the superintendency?

4. What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for the leadership behaviors of a practicing African-American female superintendent?

5. How do the expectations from the school board members and the schools' communities impact the decision-making process?

6. What political, educational, and demographic contexts of schools and communities frame leadership behaviors?

Definitions

In an effort to understand how an African-American female superintendent defined and understood her role as school district leader and to identify the benefits and advantages, as well as the complexities and problems faced by the participant, the following terms have been specifically defined for the purpose of this study:

Case study – a detailed examination of one setting or single subject (Merriam, 1988; Stake, 1994)

Confirmability – The naturalist's equivalent to objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Constructivist- The process of gaining information by connecting or constructing knowledge based on experiences (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998)

Credibility- The naturalists equivalent to internal validity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Critical theorist- One who believes that virtual reality is shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, and ethnic values that have been shaped over time (Guba & Lincoln, 1994)

Dependability – The naturalists equivalent to reliability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Feminist approach- the use of gender issues to construct the content of research (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998)

Fieldnotes- written account of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998)

Gatekeeper- That person or persons "from whom one needs acceptance in order to gain access to the setting and its participants (Schwartz & Jacobs, 1979, p. 53)

Grounded theory – Theory that emerges from data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

Member check- Confirmation from those who provided information that the "report has captured the data as constructed by the informant" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 256)

Phenemological approach- The ability to understand ordinary events from different perspectives based on the responses of the participant (Bodgan & Biklen, 1998)

Politico – an individual or group who exerts a major influence on decision

making processes which in turn influences the affairs of the organization

(Morgan, 1986)

Superintendent- The chief executive officer of a public school district, who is

charged, under the Board of Education, with all aspects of administration of the

school district's daily operations which focuses on providing instructional,

organizational, and community-wide leadership to the school district (Clisbee,

2004)

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The complex role of modern superintendents has been addressed by several researchers. Carter and Cunnigham (1997) emphasized the importance of the superintendency, stating "the American school superintendent is being called upon to take up the challenge of totally rethinking and fundamentally improving American education" (p. 242). Superintendents are asked not only to be chief executive officers of districts overseeing and spending millions of dollars, but also to be leaders, change makers, and lobbyists for the cause of education. Blumberg (1985) emphasized the superintendency as a position of conflict based on the number of individuals with whom the superintendent must work. Konnert and Augenstein (1990) considered the number and complexity of the roles superintendents must play. However, despite the more than two decades of research, many questions remain unanswered about the under representation of women as chief executive officers in public school systems.

As more women prepare themselves to be school leaders, it is of interest to explore the position of superintendent of schools as a career goal for women administrators. According to a ten year study of the American school superintendency, conducted by Glass, et al. (2000), women were in charge of about 13% of school

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districts in the United States. The percentage of women superintendents of schools has

. (1989) and to 6.7% reported by Glass (1992). According to Glass, et. al. (2000) and

.Gewertz (2006) in 2000, 15% of superintendents were women. Almost all school

.increased from 1.2% reported in 1982, to approximately 4% reported by Shakeshaft

superintendents come from the teaching profession, according to Glass (1992).

According to McCabe (2001) several factors assist women in determining whether their

aspirations should include becoming a superintendent of schools. These factors include:

(a) knowledge of the role of superintendent, as experienced by women; (b) satisfaction

of the position; and (c) knowledge of the problems associated with the superintendency.

Power and Role of the Superintendent

Power enables leaders to achieve the goals which have been communicated by

the school board and the community. The power of the superintendent may enable him

or her to sustain positive action or progress in school organization (Clay, 1997).

According to Bennis and Nanus, "power is the reciprocal of leadership and is the basic

energy to initiate and sustain action translating intention into reality, the quality without

which the leaders cannot lead" (1985, p. 15).

Acknowledging and utilizing power is critical if one is to survive in the position

of superintendent. Many researchers assert that the superintendent has legal power to

make decisions and the organizational power to allocate resources and to impact

personnel. The superintendent also has the power to control communication and

information. Due to the political nature of school systems, it has become imperative that

school superintendents balance the relationship between (a) the school board, (b) the

political office holders, (c) the teachers, (d) the union, (e) the building administrators, and (f) the community. Political power is dependent upon power relationships that control decisions, processes, and coalitions (Yukl, 1989). Therefore, many researchers argue that superintendents must use their power at the appropriate time to initiate and implement informed and conscious decisions based upon knowledge of the power of certain community leaders and school board members. Superintendents must also be able to predict voting patterns among board members, anticipate conflict, and act accordingly. In addition, Chapman (1997) stated that external political influences can create highly visible pressures on superintendents and school districts. Superintendents must be aware of community power structures that involve individuals, groups, or organizations that attempt to exert undue influence over the school system (Norton, Webb, Dlugosh & Sybouts, 1996). Surviving as a superintendent means manipulating and exercising organizational power (Blumberg, 1985).

Morgan (1986) used the term "politico" to describe the role of the superintendent. He defined this term as an individual or group who exerts a major influence on decision making processes which in turn influences the affairs of the organization. The "politicos" manipulated hidden agendas to create desired outcomes. Furthermore, the "politicos" controlled decisions by influencing how and when they are made, who was involved in the process, the rules for decision making, and the issues or objectives to be addressed. Lutz and Mertz, as cited in Clay (1997), maintained that a "politico" superintendent is able to act as an expert educational leader and is also capable of operating as a representative of the people and the board.

Conflict and the Superintendent

Conflict arises wherever interests collide. Morgan (1986) asserted that conflict may be personal, interpersonal, or among rival groups and coalitions. As a result, organizational conflicts occur on an ongoing basis and are evident in structure, rules, and regulations of an organization (Morgan, 1986). In school settings, politics resulted from the divergent and competing interest of groups or individuals for power and leadership, with each entity trying to advance its own agenda. Power is the medium that resolves conflicts.

The school superintendency is a position of politics (Tallerico, Burstyn, & Poole, 1993). Researchers have stated that superintendents must understand the possible relationships that groups and individuals may have with one another, their sources of power, and their potential influences (Blumberg, 1985; Clay, 1997; Morgan, 1986). Blumberg (1985) stated that success and survival in the superintendency depends on the "ability to sense the character of competing interests in a situation and to behave in ways that keep these interests and themselves in balance" (p. 67).

Morgan (1986) proposed three different frames of reference in viewing conflict in an organization: (a) unitary, (b) radical, and (c) pluralist. The unitary manager regarded conflict as rare and transient, and when conflict did occur, it was usually attributed to deviants and troublemakers. Conflict in the organization could be removed through appropriate action by the leader. This meant the leader must actively address the source of the confusion without hesitance and not become complacent to a more passive leadership style. Power, leadership, and control tended to be preferred means of guiding the organization toward achievement of common interests.

A radical manager viewed the organization as a battle ground where rival forces such as management and union strive for achievement of compatible ends. Organizational conflict was inevitable and resulted from a wider class conflict characterized by deep social and political divisions. The interests of the disadvantaged groups could only be satisfied by radical changes in the structure of society that removed those currently in power. Power was viewed as the key feature in the organization, but was unequally distributed (Clay, 1997; Morgan, 1986).

The pluralistic manager regarded conflict as inherent in organizational affairs and also recognized that conflict can be positive and functional (Morgan, 1986). Conflict could encourage forms of self-evaluation that challenge conventional wisdom and current theories, and as a result, according to Clay (1997), conflict could be an important part of innovation. To the contrary, the absence of conflict could cause conformity. The pluralistic manager also recognized that there are several sources of power and numerous power holders. Power was the variable through which conflicts of interest are removed or solved (Morgan, 1986).

Different strategies for resolving conflict were utilized by leaders in a variety of ways. Morgan (1986) outlined five different styles of conflict management: (a) avoiding, (b) compromising, (c) competition, (d) accommodation, and (e) collaboration. A leader who avoided conflict ignored it and hoped it would vanish. Avoiding could also be used when the potential disruption outweighs the benefits of resolution or when it is determined that others could resolve the conflict more effectively than the leader. The choice could be made to place the conflict on hold or to act slowly in an effort to

stifle or squelch the conflict. Avoidance was also used to let people cool down so they can regain perspective.

Compromise was used by leaders when it is necessary to arrive at an expedient solution under pressure. It involved negotiating and enacting deals and trade offs until an acceptable solution was found. A leader could compromise when the goals are important but not important enough to disrupt the entire organization. This approach could also be used to reach a temporary settlement to complex solutions (Clay, 1997; Morgan, 1986).

When a leader wanted to create a win-lose situation, a more competitive style of conflict management may be implemented. According to Morgan (1986), with this style of conflict management, the leader used rivalry and power plays to resolve the situation and to force submission. Competition was often used against people who use a non-competitive stance or in situations where unpopular decisions need to be implemented.

Morgan (1986) stated that a more accommodating style of conflict resolution may be used when cooperation, harmony, and stability are important. In addition, this style may be used when the leader chose to satisfy others, when the leader is wrong, or to minimize losses. Accommodation could also be described as submission and compliance.

Collaboration was a problem solving stance that helps to confront differences and to share ideas and information. The focus was to locate situations where everyone can win by searching for integrative solutions and to gain commitment by incorporating

concerns into a consensus. This approach, according to Morgan (1986), was helpful

when it is necessary to work through feelings which have interfered with relationships.

Collaboration assists to create win-win situations.

Morgan (1986) further stated that, although a leader may have a preferred style

of conflict management, different styles may be effective, depending upon the

situation. The leader must have the ability to examine and analyze the situation,

understand conflicts, and explore the power relationships so that the situation can be

"brought under a measure of control" (Morgan, 1986, p. 191).

Representation of Women in Education

According to Ginn (1989), men dominated the teaching profession from colonial

times until the twentieth century. Women gained access to the profession by teaching

the younger students in the summer session because these jobs were easy to obtain.

However, the salary for all teachers was extremely low and when the school terms

lengthened and the standards for certification rose, men began to look elsewhere for

work. As the demand grew for literate, moral teachers at such low wages, women began

to monopolize the teaching profession. Ginn (1989) wrote the women were accepted as

teachers because they were thought to work well with children. Even though both

genders left the teaching profession at equal rates, women were seen as transient or

waiting for marriage. Therefore, Ginn (1989) concluded women remained segregated to

the classrooms teaching while men, perceived to be more reliable managers, moved into

the supervisory positions. For male administrators, marriage did not conflict with their

careers.

Furthermore, Ginn (1989) also found that sociological and political factors contributed to the minority representation of women in educational administration. Men were assumed to be supporting a family, while women were assumed to be supporting only themselves. Therefore, economic hardships after World War II forced great numbers of men to take advantage of funds available to veterans to enter school administrative degree programs. These funds, known as the G.I. Bill, helped expand higher education and lead to unprecedented growth in educational administration as a field of study (Amedy, 1999; Ginn, 1989). Ginn (1989) noted this phenomenon and its effect: "Male teachers increased markedly during these post-war years, but did not enter the public school classrooms planning to remain there throughout their careers...In the decades of the 50s and 60s career ladders were abundant for men" (p. 7). However, during those same decades, "family demands caused few women to attack the powerful institutional sexism which still persisted" (p. 7).

Historically, women have dominated the educational workforce. Blount (1999) found that in 1910, approximately 9% of the school superintendents were women and this increased to 11% in 1930. This period is referred to as "a golden age for women in school administration" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 34). Women had won the right to vote in 1920, and feminist groups were promoting equality for women, thus encouraging women to assume educational leadership roles. However, "like their teacher counterparts, women administrators sometimes attained their positions by default either because no men were available or because women were a bargain as they were paid less than men" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 38).

During this time period, superintendents throughout the United States were selected through county elections (Blount, 1999). Because many of these county districts had male superintendents who were corrupt and used dishonest financial and administrative practices, women were elected to replace many of the men who had previously held these positions. The victories of these female superintendents were sustained by honesty, credibility, and success in their roles (Blount, 1999). By 1930, Blount (1999) noted that women held nearly 28% of the nation's superintendencies. In a move to remove women from these high ranking positions, male superintendent groups began a national political effort to have school superintendents appointed instead of elected. (Blount, 1999) These powerful men did not want women to retain their elected positions as superintendents and argued that superintendents should not be elected in public elections that were politically charged. According to Blount (1999), voters failed to see through the political ruse and agreed to the appointment of school superintendents instead of an elective process. Because the people who were set up to appoint the superintendents were all men, the number of women who previously held the superintendencies began to decline. Thereafter, males were appointed to nearly all of the superintendent's positions across the nation. As a result, female superintendents all but disappeared in the United States after several decades of progress had been made.

Another contributing factor for the decline of women in the superintendency was the return of men from World War II military service with the enactment of the G.I. Bill. According to Blount (1999) and Shakeshaft (1989), "...men were encouraged to

become teachers and administrators, women were encouraged to remain at home"

(p. 46). The consolidation movement caused schools to become larger, and

administrative procedures became more complex. "The 1950s and 1960s witnessed a

revival of the prejudices against women that had hindered their advancement into

administration from the colonial period onward" (Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 48). These

prejudices included the perception that women could not manage a large school, much

less a school district.

The struggle in the twentieth century for all women in the United States, but

particularly for those in education, was to find their individual and collective voices in

order to proclaim their significance (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Voices once silenced

began to be heard as more women that ever before began to seek leadership roles in

American public schools. Although the number of women in superintendent positions

has increased, female leaders at all levels continue to be constrained in many ways as

they strive to become successful school administrators. Research studies regarding

women in educational administration reveal many critical problems in entering and

being successful in administrative careers. In spite of the difficulties regarding entry

into educational leadership, however, female educators enter the field of administration

regardless of the continued discrimination in hiring and promotion and other barriers,

both internal and external (Edson, 1988). Charmaz (2000), Olsen (2005), and

Shakeshaft (1989) identified internal barriers as those that can be overcome by

individual change, whereas, external barriers require social and institutional change.

Internal barriers, according to Charmaz (2000), Olsen (2005), and Shakeshaft

(1989), focused on issues that would prohibit the female from advancing. These could

include socialization and gender stereotypes which were viewed as guiding forces for

behavior. These barriers could be seen as an outgrowth of a social context in which

White males held power and privilege over all other groups. Females' lack of career

advancement had been associated with inadequacy and low self-image and lack of

motivation and self-confidence (Amedy, 1999; Shakeshaft, 1989). According to

Schmuck (1975) these barriers have prohibited women from considering school

administration as a career option.

Leadership and Gender Considerations

Leaders established and transmitted organizational standards, represented the

organization to both subordinates and external publics, and made key policy and

procedural decisions. According to Hardebeck (1997), most superintendents saw their

role as being the implementor of public policy. They differed in how this task was

accomplished, some being facilitators and others developers (Amedy, 1999).

Facilitators were enablers and communicators. Developers were those who establish

ways for others to accomplish their goals. Given the difficulty of the task, some

believed leadership is problematic to women. Literature indicated that concerns

regarding the leadership abilities of women relate to several major areas. Those areas

included (a) stereotypical beliefs (Haslett, Geis, & Carter, 1992); (b) gender role

socialization (Gilligan, 1993; Powell, 1988); (c) ownership of real power (Tavris &

Wade, 1984); (d) conflict responses (Haslett et. al., 1992); (e) values (Loden, 1985); and

(f) differences in preferred management styles (Helgesen, 1990; Shakeshaft, 1989).

While attitudes toward women were changing, stereotypes still existed where men and

women behaved in the same way, but their actions were perceived in different ways.

Haslett, et. al (1992) identified several stereotypes that interfered with women being accepted as leaders. These included (a) the belief that women were less intellectually competent and rational, (b) that women should not have more power or higher status than men, and (c) that there was something inappropriate about women who display self interest instead of working solely for the group's success.

According to Amedy (1999) and Shakeshaft (1989), there was no guarantee that any person's actions will be determined in all situations by their gender. However, Amedy (1999) and Shakeshaft (1989) noted that it is a common perception, by men and women, that men and women are different in abilities, interests, and mentality. These gender stereotypes can be damaging to both genders. Amedy (1999) and Shakeshaft (1989) depicted these stereotypes as including negative images of men being (a) remote, (b) authoritarian, (c) sexist, (d) aggressive, and (e) too focused on procedure. Women's negative images included being (a) too centered on people, (b) emotionally demonstrative, and (c) not assertive enough. Positive images of men included being (a) egalitarian, (b) efficient, and (c) organized. For women, positive images included being (a) relaxed, (b) humorous, (c) able to separate work from social roles, and (d) able to utilize an independent work style. Amedy (1999), Rogers (2005), and Shakeshaft (1989) confirmed that the stereotypically informed message for female leaders is clear, being female in work situations is to be associated with powerlessness and whether actual or perceived, powerlessness is a disadvantage to work mobility.

According to Edson (1988), women who entered the field of school leadership do so because they wish to meet the challenges inherent in leadership roles and believed that they can provide children with more positive educational experiences than they see

being provided. Although the literature regarding female leaders in education showed that more women than ever before are entering administrative roles, "There is still much we do not know about sex discrimination, about female career patterns, about women leaders, and about inclusive conceptualizations of managerial and administrative theory" (Dunlap & Schumck, 1995, p. xi).

Research studies regarding female administrators in leadership positions in education indicated that they differ not only by gender, but also lead quite differently. The leadership styles of women indicated that they are perceived by others as (a) change agents (Wesson & Grady, 1995); (b) users interactive leadership (Funk, 1998), (c) those who practice transformational leadership (Aburdene & Naisbitt, 1992), and (d) ones who provide a leadership advantage through webs of inclusion and nurturing (Helgesen, 1990). Furthermore, female administrators exhibited (a) empathy, (b) sensitivity, (c) caring, (d) support, (e) compassion, (f) patience, (g) organization, and (h) attention to detail, (Funk, 1998). With regard to the need for more women in school leadership positions, Shakeshaft (1989) indicated that women are more often than men identified as highly successful principals.

Leadership Styles

Educators have articulated the need for a paradigm shift in educational leadership, according to Wesson and Grady (1994). This dialogue began with the educational reform movement initiated in the 1980s. Due to the complexity of the issues and the need for a systematic approach to the problems in education, the reform movement called for leaders to move away from the traditional, hierarchical, control-

and-command environment (Wesson & Grady, 1994). According to Wood (1990),

educational leaders tended to:

> ...take for granted that our schools are communities, when, in fact, they are
>
> merely institutions that can become communities only when we work at it. But,
>
> with proper attention to all individuals within the school, we can create an
>
> experience for students that demonstrates what it means to be compassionate,
>
> involved citizens. For it is only within a community, not an institution, that we
>
> learn how to hold fast to such principles as working for the common good,
>
> empathy, equity, and self-respect. (p. 33)

Educational leaders in this type of community valued leadership over management and

emphasized collaboration, consensus building and empowerment. Emphasis was placed

on (a) vision, (b) values, and (c) guiding principles (Wesson & Grady, 1994).

For the purpose of this study, the leadership practices framed by Kouzes and

Posner will be the focus. According to Kouzes and Posner (1995), managers and

executives should demonstrate their personal best, that is, the leadership behavior

exhibited by managers and executives when they receive outstanding results. Kouzes

and Posner (1995) described the personal best leadership practices by the following five

practices. Each of which had two attendant behaviors: (a) challenging the process-

attendant behaviors: search for opportunities and experiment and take risks, (b)

inspiring the shared vision- attendant behaviors: envision the future and enlist others,

(c) enabling others to act- attendant behaviors: foster collaboration and strengthen

others, (d) modeling the way- attendant behaviors: set the example and plan small wins,

and (e) encouraging the heart: attendant behaviors: recognizing contributions and

celebrating accomplishments.

These five leadership practices, along with their attendant behaviors, formed the

constructs of the Leadership Practices Inventory. Challenging the process referred to the

leader's ability to seek and accept challenge and willingness to take risk. Inspiring the

shared vision referred to the leader's ability to (a) imagine a future, (b) craft a vision

from the dreams, and (c) enlist people in this vision. Enabling others to act referred to

the leader's understanding of teamwork, defining the structures needed to get the job

done, and consideration for the job well done. Modeling the way referred to the leader's

ability to lead through example by defining or initiating task structure. Encouraging the

heart referred to the leader's ability to encourage the constituents to carry on through

dramatic gestures or simple feedback (Kouzes & Posner, 1995).

Gender Based Leadership Differences

Research investigating leadership styles of educational leaders was limited,

especially so for female superintendents. Schmuck (cited in Brunner, 1999), explained

that since schools are gender-based institutions, and since women experience a different

reality than men, "we need to understand women's experience; what has been written

about men superintendents does not necessarily apply to women" (p. xi).

Male leadership was most often described as hierarchical, top-down, and task

oriented. Lewis (1998) described male leaders as high in self-confidence, low in

emotionality. Men used power as a tool to control subordinates through domination

(Grogan, 1996; Rosener, 1990). The male leadership approach was often depicted as

managerial, with strict adherence to bureaucratic systems, using male-exclusive

networks to gain access to social or interpersonal power (Carli, 1999; Ozga, 1993).

The female leadership style was described as collaborative and caring and less

hierarchical than their male counterparts. Blackmore (1999) stated:

> The ethics of care has provided a powerful discourse for women collectively and
> individually because it offers an alternative image of organization and
> leadership premised upon the ethical and moral positions for educational
> administrators, which revalues women's experiences. It recognizes that schools
> should serve the public and private needs of all individuals; it recognizes the
> moral aspect of education in terms of relationships and civic responsibility and
> not just the public needs of men; it fosters caring attitudes in children and
> administrators by prizing kindness, compassion, and commitment; and it seeks
> to organize schooling around long term social relationships, not differentiating
> disciplinary boundaries that serve the economy or the elite (p. 56).

Research also showed that women (a) spend less time on paperwork, (b) spend

more time visiting classrooms, (c) run more closely knit schools, (d) use different, less

dominating body language, (e) employ different language and procedures, (f) are

nurturing, (g) keep up to date with curricular issues, (h) spend more time with their

peers, (i) are better change agents, and (j) sponsor other women (Brunner, 1999;

Clisbee, 2004; Ozga, 1993; Reynolds, 2002). Furthermore, these researchers have

described female leadership traits as (a) emotional, (b) collaborative, (c) flexible, (d)

facilitative, (e) nurturing, (f) sensitive, and (g) cooperative.

According to Brunner (1999) and Clisbee (2004), women tended to be more collegial and men more hierarchical. The perception of power differed, with the male perception as power over others, whereas, the female perception was power with others. Women viewed power as a resource to share rather than to use over subordinates. Likewise, women saw no limit to the amount of power within an organization (Clisbee, 2004; Dunlap & Schumck, 1995; Rosener, 1990).

Effective Practices of School District Leadership

Administration of the modern school system required facilitative leaders who empower others and who valued discourse for decision making (Grogan, 1998, Rogers; 2005). Successful administrators in an environment of school-based decision making and school-site accountability must work well with others and value discussion and value input from stakeholders. Brunner (1998) and Nettles and Herrington (2007) found that women in positions of power tend to practice many of these facilitative characteristics. In an era of accountability for student achievement, instructional leadership became an essential skill for school principals. Research indicated that more women than men administrators focus on instructional issues (Clisbee, 2004; Grogan, 1998).

Barriers to Women in Administrative Positions

Clay (1997) wrote that there was a narrow band of acceptable behaviors for women as leaders: (a) women should take risks, but be consistently outstanding; (b) they should be tough, but not macho; (c) they need to be ambitious, but not expect equal treatment; (d) and they should take responsibility, but follow their male colleagues'

advice. Gender-role stereotypes influenced how women are viewed and created

barriersto access and advancement in leadership positions. A 1993 study conducted by

Tallerico, et al. of 24 female superintendents who had left their positions, found that

these women had been viewed as easily manipulated, passive, and emotional. The

female superintendents also reported that they were highly scrutinized while being paid

less.

Although research results indicated that female administrators demonstrated

different leadership styles from their male counterparts. Many have not been able to

make their intended leadership impact because of barriers that continued to prohibit

them from being selected in key leadership roles. Women with communicative and

integrative leadership styles were needed for successful school reform efforts (Funk,

Pankake, & Schroth, 2002). By utilizing their unique strengths, including (a)

collaborative and transformation leadership, (b) a focus on curriculum and instruction,

(c) inclusion of all clienteles in decision making and empowerment of teachers students,

and parents, and, (d) articulation of new visions of what schools should be, female

leaders of public schools and school districts could make the difference needed to

ensure successful changes in education. However, women continued to be underutilized

by school boards and superintendents who do not utilize the talents of their aspiring and

practicing female school leaders to make real differences in the quality of schooling

(Clay, 1997).

Irby and Brown (1998) noted "it is important that women's current poor

representation in formal school leadership is not necessarily an inherent condition of the

institution of schooling but rather is a result of social interactions that have unfolded in

specific historical contexts" (p. 8). This statement suggested the sociological nature of

some of the problems is embedded within American culture. Those aspects of the

culture must be remedied in an effort to remove these barriers if equity is to be achieved

for women in educational leadership. Similarly, Clay (1997) and Shakeshaft (1989)

noted that only a handful of models have been developed to explain the theoretical

underpinnings of barriers that prohibited or limited the entrance of many women into

leadership positions in education.

According to Funk, et al. (2002), barriers for aspiring women in education were

internal, as well as external, and could originate from psychological factors such as

motivation and self- efficacy. Specific barriers have been identified in recent years, but

details have been limited which outlined the origin of these blockages. The lack of

women in administration had been explained by researchers using the following

models: (a) the Woman's Place Model, which assumed women's nonparticipation in

administrative careers as based solely on social norms; (b) the Discrimination Model,

which drew on the assumption that institutional patterns are a result of the efforts of one

group to exclude participation of another, and (c) the Meritocracy Model, which

assumed that the most competent people have been promoted, and thus, women are not

competent (Estler, 1975; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Supporting research by Hansot and Tyack (1981) discussed three explanatory

models based on literature. The first model focused on the individual woman as

possessing internal barriers which prohibit her from advancing. Socialization and sex

stereotyping were seen as the guiding forces behind her behaviors. This perspective originated from a psychological paradigm, and blames the victim for her lack of achievement in school leadership.

The second approach described an organizational structure that shapes the behaviors of its members. The chief source of male hegemony did not lie in the psychological makeup of individuals, "… but in the structure and operation of organizations. Women behave in self-limiting ways, not because they were socialized as females, but because they are locked into low-power, low-visibility, dead-end jobs" (Hansot & Tyack, 1981, p. 7).

The third approach discussed by Hansot and Tyack (1981) portrayed a world that is male defined and male operated. According to this explanation, it was male dominance that led to conditions that keep women from advancing into positions of power and prestige. According to Clay (1997) and Shakeshaft (1989) this model provided the most satisfactory explanation of the limits imposed upon women in school administration. Not only were all other models subsumed under this male-dominance explanation, but the cause of all barriers to women in school administration can be traced to male hegemony.

Legislative responses to gender equity concerns seemed to have affected women's aspirations far more than they have influenced the employment practices of educational institutions. There was a significant increase in the number of women who were preparing for careers in educational administration, and while gender equity legislation and affirmative action policies were enacted, women continued to be

underrepresented in administrative positions in schools. Women constituted a greater percentage of doctoral students in educational administration; however, that number was not indicative of the number of women in the administrative field (Glass, 2000).

Glass (2000) offered seven reasons why females continue to fall behind in the top district posts: (a) women were not in career positions that normally lead to advancement; (b) women were not preparing for the superintendency; (c) women are not as experienced nor as interested in fiscal management as men; (d) personal relationships limited women; (e) school boards were not willing to hire women superintendents; (f) women entered the field of education for different reasons, and (g) women entered administration at an older age. Women tended to have experience in the central office area of curriculum, but lacked experience in personnel or financial issues. Additionally, school boards still used experience in management of fiscal resources as a key criterion when hiring superintendents. School board members did not perceive women as strong managers, nor did they see women as capable of handling district finances (Glass, 2000; Logan, 2000).

Another contributing factor which posed as a constraint for women seeking the superintendency was domestic relationships. Ramsey (2000) reported,

...parenting issues, more than spouse issues, may play a crucial role in shaping the female superintendency. They can dictate how much time a woman commits to her job, how conflicted she feels about her personal lives, when—and even if—she enters the superintendency at all. (p. 25)

Mobility was also noted as another area of concern, as it may disrupt her family life (Ramsey, 2000).

Barriers which prevented females from reaching top positions, whether in business, government or education, may be described as being subtle or invisible (Coleman, 1997). These barriers were termed the "glass ceiling" (Faber, 1991). According to the 2000 AASA Superintendent Survey, 61% of the female respondents surveyed felt that the glass ceiling existed in school management, thus lessening their chances of being selected (Glass, 2000). Rowan (2006) stated that since the number of African-American female superintendents is small, shattering the glass ceiling becomes more difficult. Additionally, when they reached top administrative positions, African-American females became isolated into a separate group (Rowan, 2006). While women's movement and equity legislation may have positively influenced the attitudes of some individuals, it has not dramatically altered the norms and values that perpetuate the "glass ceiling" concept which limits career advancements for women in the superintendency.

Discrimination

Discrimination may be less visible in the workplace, but subtle forms occurred at every level. When discrimination occurred consistently, patterns of exclusion were created (Coleman, 1997). These subtle behaviors reduced self-esteem and prevented women and ethnic groups from fully participating in organizations. This affected the manner in which people advanced or hoped to advance. Biased behaviors stemmed from prior learned stereotypes that assist in shaping attitudes.

Williams (1982) conducted a study on African-American and Caucasian administrators. The primary goal of this study was to examine the perceptions of practicing African-American school administrators in eight Midwestern states to

determine the influence that factors such as race and years of experience had on the ability of these administrators to attain their positions. Additionally, this study was also intended to discover if African-Americans and Caucasian school administrators perceived a difference between these factors as possible influences on the attainment of administrative positions. As a result of sampling 104 African-Americans and 122 Caucasian central office and building level administrators, it was concluded that no differences were found in the perceptions of these administrators with regards to gender or district size. However, perceptions about the importance of years of experience and race were significantly different. The conclusion of these findings indicated that race was a factor which prevented African-Americans from achieving administrative positions based on self-perceptions of study subjects.

Women in the Superintendency

Women became prominent in administration after 1900, with 1909 and 1910 being history making years for women in educational administration. At this time, Ella Flagg Young was appointed superintendent of the Chicago Public Schools, and was the first woman to be placed in control of a large city school system. At that time, Flagg predicted that other big cities would emulate Chicago in hiring women to the position of superintendent. She stated:

Women are destined to rule the schools of every city. I look for a majority of

big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for

superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in

executive charge of the vast educational system. It is woman's natural field,

and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be

denied leadership. As the first woman to be placed in control of the schools of big city, it will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been made and to show critics and friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man. (Ella Flagg Young, as cited in Shakeshaft, 1989, p. 18)

The number of female superintendents has increased since the 1910, but not to the extent that was indicated by Young. (Alston, 2000)

According to Grogan (1994) and Issacson (1998), women possessed leadership qualities that were of value to the superintendency. Female candidates for the superintendency, studied by Grogan and interviewed by Issacson, displayed strengths in the areas of people skills, reflective practices, and offering alternative perspectives to problem-solving and decision making. These strengths, in conjunction with caring and nurturing skills, transversed into the leadership behaviors which meet the present needs in educational administration.

Shakeshaft (1989) noted that female superintendents are unique in other ways. These ways included (a) how superintendents time was spent in daily interactions, (b) how priorities guide actions, (c) how others perceived the superintendents, and (d) how the superintendents derived from work. Furthermore, Shakeshaft (1989) found female superintendents devote a considerable amount of time in (a) evening preparation, (b) conducting building tours to observe teachers and students, and (c) engaging in community dialogue. Unstructured time of the female superintendent was often spent with curriculum and instruction concerns, rather than discussing politics.

Grogan (1996) stated while there have been several studies regarding the contributions that females can bring to the superintendency, these contributions went

unnoticed unless more women were chosen for the available superintendent positions. Furthermore, Grogan (1996) detailed several findings in her research on the voices of women aspiring to the superintendency that described the discourse that affects those females. The discourse indicated that there had been a vast amount of traditional credibility in order for a female to be considered for superintendency. The women in Grogan's study believed that they had to exhibit enough traditional behaviors to keep their gender from being counted against them because nontraditional leadership was viewed as inherently suspicious. However, Grogan (1996) suggested that female aspirants to the superintendency in her study were also resisting traditional perspectives about the superintendency and making individual contributions for repositioning the discourse to include alternative approaches to leadership, reformed practices, and emphasis on teaching and learning rather than organizational management.

African-Americans in Education

At the beginning of a third millennium, there were greater opportunities for women and minorities in administration. Although women have begun to move into more powerful positions in education and other occupations and professions, African-American women are still underrepresented in the superintendency.

An historical analysis of women's leadership roles disclosed that some women have held the office of public school superintendent. In 1910, women accounted for 8.9% of all superintendents, according to Alston (2005). Furthermore, Alston (2005) stated that by 1930, that number had increased to 10.9%. When the Supreme Court handed down the decision in *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), the implementation of the decision in the 1960s and 1970s would lead to the desegregation of schools and

the loss of many African-American teachers and administrators, both male and female. Men and women who were teaching and leading in all African-American schools found few opportunities to integrate the schools that the children of their communities soon attended. Toppo (2004) noted that in 1954, about 82,000 African-American teachers were responsible for teaching as many as 2 million African-American children, and in the 11 years following the *Brown* decision, more that 38,000 African-American teachers and administrators in 17 southern and border states lost employment. Many who were able to secure employment were in subordinate, non administrative leadership positions. As a result of the *Brown* decision, during the 1970s the number of African-American women in superintendent positions dropped to 1.3% and remained low for nearly a decade (Alston, 2005). Contributing to this decline were (a) desegregation of public schools, (b) the Vietnam War, and (c) culturally entrenched gender and racial biases (Jones, 2003). By the early 1990s, women accounted for 6.6% of all superintendents, and by 2000, that number had increased to 13.2%.

African-American women's involvement in public school administration was quite limited beyond the role of principal. Alston (2000) noted that before 1956, the fact that African-American female superintendents existed was obscure. Velma Dolphin Ashley was found to be the exception to the obscurity of the African-American female superintendent. She headed the Boley, Oklahoma school district from 1944 until 1956. Upon her resignation, her husband was named her successor. By 1978, the number of African-American female superintendents had increased to five. The number of

African-American female superintendents had continued to increase since 1982. The

2000 study conducted by the AASA reported that the number of female superintendents

increased from 6.6% in 1992 to 13.2% in 2000. Furthermore, this study indicated that

the number of minority superintendents increased from 3.9% in 1992 to 5.1% in 2000.

In order for African-Americans to succeed, they must be more knowledgeable about the

economic options necessary to develop their school communities. Efforts to develop

school communities were affected by multifaceted impositions and barriers that were

uniquely linked to society's treatment of African-Americans in leadership positions.

The Evolution of African-American Women in Educational Leadership

A review of the number of women in school administration since 1905

uncovered consistent White male dominance in all positions in the early days of

elementary school principalship (Shakeshaft, 1989). The history of women in school

administration was intertwined with the history of women in teaching. Although

teaching had been identified in the twentieth century as a female profession, teachers

have not always been women. Records indicate that until the late eighteenth century, all

formal teaching was done by men (Shakeshaft, 1989). When women began teaching,

White women dominated the positions. According to Collier-Thomas (1982), African-

American women did not have real teaching status until the late nineteenth century.

However, this did not mean that African-American women teachers were not educators

early on. Despite the odds, they taught (Shakeshaft, 1989).

A more specific inspection of African-American women showed that after 1892,

African-Americans did not relent in their efforts to secure education. Education became

more accessible for African-American women during this time. Schooling for freed

slaves in the South was attempted by the federal government and northern philanthropic

agencies (Shakeshaft, 1989). This need for teachers provided opportunities for African-

American women, as over 9,000 teachers, of which more that half were African-

American women, journeyed to the South to teach (Jones, 1979;

(Shakeshaft, 1989). During Reconstruction, the federal government assisted African-

Americans in the establishment of freedman's schools and to integrate White schools.

However, when Southern Whites regained power, they resegregated the schools, and

African-Americans' educational opportunities were curtailed (Alston, 2005). For

example, in 1910, the average African-American school only operated four months a

year, and no African-American public school in the South offered courses above

seventh grade (Amott & Matthaei, 1991). Women made up the majority of African-

American teachers. Many of the late nineteenth century African-American female

leaders, such as Fannie Jackson Coppin, Lucy Laney, Charlotte Hawkins Brown, and

Fannie Barrier Williams, began their careers as Southern elementary school teachers.

As expected, many of these teachers taught in segregated public schools at below

subsistence salaries (Alston, 2005). According to Alston (2005) other teachers founded

separate private schools from the elementary level to the college level. By 1912, there

were 14 African-American women's colleges.

Although research has been quite limited and none focusing solely on African-

American women, research studies about women in educational administration have

centered on the under representation of females and the barriers which discourage

women from successfully applying for superintendent positions. By examining the

history of hiring in administration, the fact remains that women who aspire to this level still remain at a disadvantage. Gains have been small and slow to accrue, and although there are more women in the workplace, the administrative ranks of most professions still remain predominately male and predominately White, according to Alston (2005).

African-Americans Accessing the Superintendency

The pathway to attaining the superintendency is complicated, at best. Appointments to this position have historically been White male dominated line positions, which included athletic coach or director of the band (Rowan, 2006). Most of the males appointed to the superintendency came from middle and high school positions (Celestin, 2003). However, there had been a slight change in ethnicity with more African-Americans seeking to become the chief executive officer of schools. In order to achieve the status of superintendent of schools, Lee (2000) outlined several strategies which proved beneficial. These strategies included (a) obtaining a doctorate degree, (b) formulating and adhering to a plan of action, (c) enhancing interviewing skills, (d) developing a strong self- concept, (e) learning the characteristics of the school district, and (f) being knowledgeable of the job itself. Furthermore, Lee (2000) concluded these strategies could assist anyone in attaining the superintendency.

Characteristics of the African-American Female Superintendent

The research on the African-American female in superintendent positions was sparse, at best. Jones (2003) noted that the African-American female in the

superintendency is a unique, multifaceted, dynamic individual who devotes untiring

hours to overseeing the operations of the school district. Her demographics included

that she is in her late 40s or early 50s and has been a teacher for 15 to 20 years. It is

very likely that she served as an administrator prior to being appointed to the

superintendency. According to the research of Jackson (1999) and Alston (1999) these

women were prepared for the superintendency based on life experiences " …because of

African-American women's work, family experiences, and grounding in African-

American culture…African-American women as a group experience a world different

from those who are not African-American or female" (p. 80).

Collins (2000) highlighted the concept of duality, as African-American women

not only had to negotiate sexism in society, but they also had to deal with racism. In

addition, some of the increased family responsibilities and leadership skills gained at an

early age allowed African-American females to be more proficient, assertive, and

skilled at the organizational aspects of the environment sooner than their White

counterparts (Jackson, 1999). In African-American communities, many female children

became primary caregivers to their younger siblings. The older female sibling became

the leader, and without any formal lessons, knew what to do and how to care for the

younger siblings (Jones, 2003).

Once afforded the opportunity to lead a school district, these women were often

found in poorly maintained and badly managed urban school districts with high

minority population (Alston, 1999). In addition, the 2000 AASA study showed that

most of the nation's 5.1% minority female superintendents serve in large, urban or

small town, rural districts. More that 50% of minority superintendents serve in districts

with 3,000 or more students. In addition to the 2000 AASA study, Brunner and Peyton-Claire (2000) noted that 5.1% of the superintendents were African-American female. Even in these often difficult situations, African-American female educators and superintendents, regardless of the small number, demonstrated that they were well prepared to lead. This leadership ability, according to Jackson (1999), was what led to doctoral degrees, robust field experiences, and good, strong commitment and connections with the school community.

Strengths of the African-American Superintendent

According to the 2000 AASA study, the number of female superintendents increased from 6.6% in 1992 to 13.2%. The number of superintendencies held by minorities moved from 3.9% to 5.1% during the same time period (Glass, et al., 2000). As more African-American women assumed educational leadership roles, researchers have begun examining the potential benefits of African-American women serving in administrative roles, as well as the various factors that affect the success of these women (Jackson, 1999). The benefits of having African-American women in these positions included (a) serving as role models for culturally diverse students (Dillard, 1995), (b) providing a more humanistic and relational style of leadership (Grogan, 1999), and (c) affording a unique understanding and commitment to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students (Hudson, Wesson, & Marcano, 1998).

Hudson, et. al. (1998) cited four themes that emerged from their study of African-American women superintendents, three of which relate to the strengths that women bring to educational leadership: (a) strength and perseverance, (b) advocacy for all children, and (c) high aspirations for educational leadership. The first theme related

to the strength and perseverance and survival of the African-American women interviewed during the study. The respondents viewed these traits as part of the African-American female legacy in the United States, which was an outcome of racism and the long fight for equal opportunities. The second theme expressed concern for advocacy. Hudson, et al. (1998) noted:

> They spoke of their passionate desire and willingness to address issues of equitable educational opportunities for all children; they were sensitive to racial, cultural, and socioeconomic differences; they challenged the status quo, raising the consciousness of right and wrong; and they confronted incompetence. (p. 47)

The third theme related to the aspirations for educational leadership. The women viewed themselves as role models, as well as, a source of pride in their communities. They realized that both the minority and majority community members were concerned as they performed the responsibilities of the superintendency. The African-American women knew that their successes or failures would affect the future opportunities of other African-American individuals. Furthermore, the respondents stated a willingness to assume the pressures and risks associated with the superintendency due to the increased impact on educational practices.

Factors Contributing to the Success of African-American Female Superintendents

African-American female superintendents have reported several factors that contributed to their success as superintendents (Tillman & Cochran, 2000). These women believed they (a) possessed competence; (b) were industrious, resourceful

individuals who worked diligently toward attaining goals; (c) possessed high self-esteem and were confident in their abilities to lead school districts effectively; (d) persevered amid the pressures and demands of the superintendency; (e) established and maintained positive interpersonal relationships within the humanistic and motivational context of the school systems; and (f) exhibited productivity in exercising authority to effectively enhance the power base. Furthermore, Barrens-Alexander (2000) added (a) spirituality, (b) past successes, (c) mentorship, and (d) time management as contributing factors to the success of the African-American female superintendent. These women were entrusted with power that was used to create positive changes in the education of students and improvements within the communities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this inquiry was to develop a deeper understanding of how one African-American female constructs her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as superintendent of one of the largest urban school districts in large school district in a southern state and how she defined her role on a daily basis. To facilitate this process, this researcher employed a qualitative approach with a narrative report of data collected with consideration given to these research questions.

1. How does the participant define and construct her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as a school district leader?

2. What are the benefits and advantages, as well as the complexities and problems faced, being an African-American female school district leader?

3. How were the encountered barriers addressed and overcome during the quest to obtain the superintendency?

4. What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for leadership behaviors of a practicing African-American female superintendent?

5. How do the expectations from the school board members and the schools' communities impact the decision-making process?

6. What political, educational, and demographic contexts of the schools and communities framed the leadership behaviors?

This chapter outlined the overall research design and rationale that were utilized to complete this research study.

Research Design

Qualitative research, as defined by Strauss and Corbin (1990) is "any kind of research that produces findings not arrived at by means of statistical procedures or other means of quantifications" (p. 17). In addition, the authors indicated that the analysis in this type of research involves a "nonmathematical analytic procedure that resulted in findings derived from data gathered by a variety of means" (p. 18). The collected data are often referred to as soft data, in that it is a rich description of people, places, and interviews that are not easily interpreted through statistical means.

Merriam (1988) identified some fundamental assumptions that of qualitative research. She described these assumptions as:

Qualitative research assumes that there are multiple realities- that the world is not an objective thing out there but a function of personal interaction and perception. It is a highly subjective phenomenon in need of interpreting rather than measuring. Beliefs, rather than facts, form the basis of perception. Research is exploratory, inductive, and emphasizes processes rather than ends. In this paradigm, there are no predetermined hypotheses, no treatments,

and no restrictions on the end product. One does not manipulate the variables

or administer treatment. What one does is observe, intuit, sense what is

occurring in a natural setting-hence the term naturalistic inquiry. (p.17)

The fundamental assumptions of qualitative research that Merriam (1988) indicated

were considered in order to determine how one African-American female

superintendent understood and constructed her understanding of her leadership role

through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity. This design was

appropriate in that the research was designed to provide a broader understanding of how

the participant interpreted her responsibilities and experiences. Also considered in this

holistic view of the superintendent was a description of the superintendent's district and

administrative tasks. This phenomenological study sought to understand the experiences

of being a female superintendent from the perspective of the participant. Qualitative

methods of data collection and analysis allowed the researcher to reach an in-depth

understanding of the complex factors of being an African-American female

superintendent of a large urban school district. The research design employed

interviews and observations in the natural setting. Three theoretical approaches: (a)

critical theorist, (b) feminist, and (c) constructivist, were used as data were collected

and analyzed.

Sample

According to Merriam (1988) a case study is a detailed examination of one

setting, or a single subject, or single depository of documents, or one particular event.

The design of the study was to begin with a broad range of concepts and ideas, with the

researcher seeking ideas and clues about how to pursue the data collected. The design was constantly modified as the researcher determines how best to spend time and what topics to explore during the interview process. As the researcher works to develop the focus of the study, questions are formulated and data are collected and analyzed which develop into emerging themes.

The Louisiana Department of Education reported in 2005-06 there were 68 school district superintendents. Of this number of superintendents, 16 were female, and only 4 were African-American (LA Public School Districts Superintendents, online). The sample for this case study consisted of one African-American female superintendent. The overall criteria for sample consideration included a willingness to participate in the study and an African-American female superintendent. The superintendent, who met the above criteria, was purposefully selected for this study because she was the chief executive officer of the largest urban public school district in large school district in a southern state. As indicated in by 2005 data, the district that she represented had a total of 74 schools: 41 elementary schools (early childhood through fifth grade), 5 elementary/middle schools (early childhood through eighth grade), 10 middle schools (grades 6 through 8), 11 high schools (grades 9-12), and 7 special and alternative schools. The enrollment of these 74 schools totals 45,152 which are indicative of research surrounding the African-American superintendent.

Instrumentation

In an effort to determine how one African-American female constructs her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender,

and ethnic identity as superintendent in a large school district in a southern state, a qualitative inquiry approach was used. Semi-structured, in-depth participant interviews were conducted, with guiding questions directly related to the research questions. Given the complex environment of the superintendency, a qualitative, descriptive, narrative, phenomenological approach was used. In addition to participant interviews, the participant completed the Leadership Practices Inventory (Appendix A) to determine how she viewed her leadership style and ability.

Procedural Details

No data were collected until approval was obtained from the Louisiana Tech University Human Use Committee (Appendix B). After approval was granted, the interviews with the superintendent were semi-structured, person to person, conversations. As suggested by McCracken (1988) the interviews were based on the participant's responses to general superintendency concerns, such as (a) role and responsibility of the position, (b) benefits and advantages, (c) barriers, (d) leadership behaviors and assumptions and (e) school board member expectations. The questions were guided by the researcher to maintain structured interview sessions . Interview questions were crafted to relate to the research questions. The initial interview protocol (Appendix C) was forwarded to the participant prior to the initial interview session. At the conclusion of each meeting with the superintendent, subsequent meetings with the superintendent were scheduled.

McCracken (1988) suggested that the interview format employed prompts or probes which give structure to the interview and permit the participant to use her own voice to relate to experiences in an individual fashion. The interview structure that was

applied in this research permitted spontaneous comments; however, where issues of interest were not spontaneously described by the superintendent, the researcher utilized prepared probes which directed the superintendent toward the issues. This structure allowed the interview participant freedom to connect, correct, and rephrase for understanding, as well as digress to related topics.

The data collection process began with an initial interview with the superintendent. The fieldwork was conducted in the participant's natural setting in an effort to maintain a level of comfort and encourage the participant to confide openly about her role and responsibilities. The researcher contacted the superintendent's executive secretary to schedule interview sessions with the superintendent. Prior to meeting with the superintendent, a copy of the primary interview questions was forwarded to the superintendent. Once accessibility was granted by the superintendent's executive secretary, and the interview session began, general questions were asked in an effort to understand the process used to become superintendent. Subsequent interview sessions were scheduled according to the superintendent's schedule and as frequently as the researcher deemed necessary for the inquiry. Each session was tape recorded and transcribed prior to the next session. At the conclusion of each interview session, the fieldnotes were directly transcribed. A copy of the transcribed interview was provided to the superintendent for member checks. The descriptive fieldnotes were analyzed to identify emerging themes. All fieldnotes collected were kept confidential, and the participant was not directly named in this study.

After the initial meeting, the participant was asked to complete the Leadership Practices Inventory, which was collected at the next scheduled interview session. This

instrument identifies five leadership practices: (a) challenging the process, (b) inspiring a shared vision, (c) enabling others to act, (d) modeling the way, and (e) encouraging the heart. Challenging the process refers to the leader's ability to seek and accept challenges and the willingness to take risks. Inspiring a shared vision refers to the leader's ability to imagine the future, craft a vision from these dreams, and enlists people in this vision who will assist in bringing the vision into reality. Enabling others to act refers to the leader's understanding of teamwork and the ability to accomplish tasks. Modeling the way refers to the leader's ability to lead through example by defining or initiating task structure. Encouraging the heart refers to the leader's ability to encourage the constituents to carry on through dramatic gestures or simple feedback (Kouzes & Posner, 1995). The answers to this instrument were analyzed and used in additional interview sessions.

In addition to the superintendent, the researcher purposefully selected other employees of the school district to be interviewed. These individuals included (a) the executive secretary, (b) teachers, (c) principals and (d) supervisors. These individuals were not included at the beginning of this inquiry, however, during the data collection procedures, it became evident that input from others within the district was necessary.

Validity and Reliabilty

This study sought to understand how an African-American female constructed her understanding of her leadership role as superintendent. Since this study was qualitative, credibility was of essence. Data were collected to establish value based on responses from the participant. According to Lincoln and Guba (as cited in Marshall & Rossman 1989), there are four constructs which reflect the assumptions of qualitative

research. These constructs are (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability. Credibility relates to the ability of inquiry to be conducted in a manner to ensure that the participant is accurately identified and described. Transferability described the process of applying or generalizing the results obtained from one situation to other similar situations, contexts or settings. Dependability identifies the ability to which the researcher accounts for changing conditions in the study and a refined understanding is constantly being sought throughout the research. To achieve confirmability, the researcher remained objective, and permited the data to identify emerging themes. For the purpose of this study, the researcher chose to focus on three constructs: (a) credibility, (b) dependability and (c) confirmability.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), paradigm assumptions undergird the researcher's choice of validity procedures in qualitative research. These assumptions are (a) postpositivist, (b) constructivist, and (c) critical influence. Of the three, this qualitative, narrative, phenomenological, descriptive study encompassed two: constructivist and critical influence, also referred to as critical theorist, for the purpose of this research.

The constructivist approach emerged during the period of 1970 to 1987 (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Creswell & Miller 2000). Researchers using this paradigm believe in pluralistic, interpretive, open-ended reality perspectives. Furthermore, these researchers are sensitive to place and situation. Validity for constructivist research is reflected in trustworthiness, which includes (a) credibility, (b) transferability, (c) dependability, and (d) confirmability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) and authenticity. Authenticity is reflected in fairness and leads to an improved

understanding of others. The constructivist paradigm, according to Denzin and Lincoln (1994) assumes there are multiple intelligences and the participant and the researcher create understandings in a naturalistic setting. Research findings are presented in grounded theory. Grounded theory, according to Guba and Lincoln (1985) is theory that emerges from data.

The critical theorist paradigm emerged during the 1980s (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This perspective holds that researchers should uncover the hidden assumptions about how narrative accounts are constructed and interpreted. Inquiry, based on social, political, and cultural antecedents governs the narrative perspective. Validity is determined by the researcher being reflexive (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

In an effort to validate the data collected, the researcher used member checks. According to Guba and Lincoln (1985), member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Data were collected and interpreted, then returned to the participant to confirm the credibility of the information and the narrative account of the information. The participant and researcher then collaborated on the emerging themes to determine if an accurate and realistic account of the data was being represented. The responses of the participant were incorporated in the final analysis of the data.

To further establish credibility of this study, the researcher described, in detail, the setting, participants, and themes incorporated in the research in rich detail. Denzin (1989) referred to such detail as thick, rich descriptions. Furthermore, Denzin (1989) stated "thick descriptions are deep, dense, detailed accounts" (p. 83). The purpose of thick descriptions is to create statements that produce the feelings that the reader can experience the events being described in the study. By providing rich, vivid detail,

researchers assist readers in understanding that the account is credible. Furthermore, such account enables readers to make decisions about the applicability of the findings in similar contexts (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

According to Kouses and Posner, (The Leadership Practices Inventory, online), the LPI- Self reported reliabilities above .60 were considered good. In fact, the reliability coefficients were between .75 and .87 on the leadership practices indicated on the instrument. Furthermore, it was indicated that the test-retest reliability for the leadership practices was consistently strong, generally at the .90 level and above. With regard to school administrators, the test-retest reliability was reported at the .86 level for superintendents and .79 for school principals.

Validity, which addressed whether or not an instrument truly measured what it purports to measure and whether its scores have meaning for the respondent, can be determined by face validity and empirically. Face validity was determined based on subjective evaluation. The items on the LPI-Self, according to Kouses and Posner (The Leadership Practices Inventory, online), were related to statements participants generally make about their own or others personal best leadership experiences; therefore respondents have reported the face validity to be excellent.

Empirical validity was determined by a factor analysis to ascertain the extent to which the LPI-Self measured common and different content areas. Five factors were measured with values greater than 1.0 and accounted for 60.5% of variance. Stability for the five factor solution was tested by factor analysis of the data from different subsamples (The Leadership Practices Inventory, online).

Overall results of the LPI-Self revealed that the instrument was good and consistent over time. This was sustained across a variety of studies and settings. The five practices of the leadership framework and the LPI-Self contributed to the understanding of the leadership process and in the development of leadership capabilities.

Data Analysis

In order for this researcher to understand how an African-American female constructs her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as superintendent in large school district in a southern state, data were collected through a series of in-depth, semi-constructed participant interviews. Review of the data helped identify benefits and advantages, as well as complexities and problems, associated with being the school district leader. Initial interview protocol and the LPI guided the data collection process.

The interviews were audio tape recorded, which were transcribed and analyzed for emerging themes. Audio taping the interviews allowed the researcher to take notes and guide the participant into areas which required more depth and discussion or to related areas which may become a priority based on the responses of the participant. Immediately after each interview, the researcher reviewed the audio tape and notes taken during the interview to consider what major themes emerged and what needed to be altered in format and content for the next interview session. Statements from the interview sessions were presented in text coded by numbering the interview session and each line of the transcribed interview (e.g. 1:20-22 denotes interview 1 lines 20-22). The researcher kept a reflective journal to focus on learning and adjustments in

data gathering. In an effort to identify the emerging themes, emphasis was placed on developing an understanding from the viewpoint of the participant. As emerging themes developed, a coding system was used in order to accurately analyze the data. Clustering these themes and categories was on-going throughout the data collecting process.

The fieldwork stage of the research was during the spring and summer of 2007. The actual time spent by the researcher conducting interviews varied; however, most interviews lasted at least 30 -45 minutes. Successive interview sessions were scheduled upon conclusion of each interview. This study included a collection of data through interviews. Qualrus, a commercially available software package, was used to manage data collected from interviews. Data were transcribed to Qualrus, organized, and coded into interpretive categories as it was gathered. In addition to Qualrus, the researcher kept a detailed audit in Qualrus of personal reactions, notes, and any deviations from the original research plan. The notes were coded for emerging themes and marked for later retrieval. Data were coded by identifying key words as disclosed during the interviews.

Data Presentation

Findings and conclusions are presented in an extended narrative in Chapter IV, providing a clear statement of the emerging themes, supported by a thick description using the participant's own words. In this way, the voice of the participant was of primary importance in providing insight into the perspectives and understandings of an African-American female superintendent and to develop a clearer understanding of the experience. Recommendations for practice and future research are presented in Chapter V.

Ethical Considerations

After consent was obtained from the Louisiana Tech University Human Use

Committee (Appendix A), general safeguards to the superintendent were used during

the course of the interviews. These safeguards included a discussion of prior

interviews, with transcribed copies provided to the superintendent, and the use of a tape

recorder to ensure accuracy. All information gathered from the participant and the

identity of the participant remained anonymous.

Limitations

This study was limited to one African-American female participant in large

school district in a southern state. Data collected and analyzed originated from this

source. The results of this qualitative study were confined to the responses gathered

from semi-structured, in-depth interviews with the participant.

CHAPTER IV

DATA ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to determine how one African-American female constructed an understanding of her leadership role to become superintendent of one large school district in a southern state. This phenomenological study investigated how this individual defined and made sense of her role as school district leader, and to identify the benefits and advantages, as well as the complexities and problems faced by this superintendent. In order to identify and describe, through a case study, how this African-American female, constructed her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity and how she defined said role on a daily basis, a qualitative approach with a narrative report of the data collected was generated. This approach gave consideration to these research questions.

1. How does the participant define and construct her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as a school district leader?

2. What are the benefits and advantages, as well as the complexities and problems faced being an African-American female district leader?

3. How were the encountered barriers addressed and overcame during the quest to obtain the superintendency?

4. What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for leadership behaviors for practicing African-American female superintendents?

5. How do the expectations from the school board members and the schools' communities impact the decision-making process?

6. What political, educational, and demographical context of the schools and communities framed the leadership behaviors?

Data Collection Procedures

Beginning in Spring, 2007, the researcher contacted the gatekeeper of the participant for the study and scheduled the initial interview session. This session was conducted in May 2007. Prior to this initial meeting, the researcher emailed questions which were to be discussed during the initial meeting. Prior to the May 2007 interview date, a follow-up phone call was made to ensure that no changes had been made to alter the meeting date. Based on the results of this meeting, subsequent weekly meetings were scheduled. Prior to each interview, a phone call was made to the gatekeeper to ensure that the reserved date had not been altered. Upon the conclusion of each interview, the audiotaped session was transcribed, with a copy forwarded to the superintendent and her secretary for member checks. Each interview session began with a review and discussion of the transcription of the prior session. Any desired changes and/or further clarifications were made at that time. A reflective journal was kept by the

researcher which highlighted concerns and interests from interview sessions. This journal served as a guide to subsequent interview sessions and data to be collected by the researcher.

Presented in this chapter were the findings based on data collected during interview sessions, review of artifacts, and analysis of the contents of the reflective journal. In addition to interviews with the (a) superintendent, (b) the executive secretary, (c) principals, (d) teachers, and (e) supervisors, the source of the findings in this section originated from analysis of documents made available to the researcher, (e.g. newspaper and magazine articles) and observations made by the researcher while in the field. The thick description of data collected includes a description of the superintendent and focuses on critical leadership behaviors which assist in defining her leadership style. The results of the Leadership Practices Inventory (LPI) are also discussed in Chapter IV. During the data collection procedures, the participant developed a rapport with the researcher and the length of the interview sessions extended at times, beyond three hours. Therefore, data presented in this section may reflect incorrect grammar; however, that was not the participant's daily manner of speaking the English language. The participant of this study is very educated and articulate. There were instances in which the data collected represented vernacular and improper grammar usages, as indicated by the researcher.

This superintendent represented a large school district in a southern state. With a student population of approximately 45,100 students spanning all grade levels, the district is comprised of 74 schools: 41 elementary schools (early childhood through fifth grade), 5 elementary/middle schools (early childhood through eighth grade), 10 middle

schools (grades 6 through 8), 11 high schools (grades 9-12), and 7 special and alternative schools. The staff that she supervised was comprised of approximately 3,500 teachers, 500 bus operators, 2,500 additional support staff, which includes paraprofessionals, janitors, and cafeteria employees, and 500 permanent and temporary substitute teachers (1:60-62).

Superintendent's Background

This superintendent came from humble beginnings and does not easily discuss her personal history. She describes her childhood experiences as growing up "poorest of the poor". (1:90) She was born and reared on a dairy farm, the 7th of nine children. Her parents were sharecroppers. It was agreed upon by the family who owned the dairy farm and this superintendent's family that as long as the family worked on the dairy farm, they could live on the land. Furthermore, the property owners would assess what they felt was a fair wage, in addition to expenses incurred for living there, then pay the family the remaining funds for working on the land.

Dad worked for Mr. Swain (name changed) out on the farm. We could live on the land as long as we worked for them. It was an agreement; if you no longer worked for them, you couldn't live on the property. And then they would assess what they felt was a fair wage in addition to living there. (1: 85-90)

This superintendent vividly recalled working in the cotton fields. She began going to the cotton fields with her mother and other siblings when she was a young child. They would chop cotton for 10 hours per day, and receive about $3.00 per day for the work

performed. The hard work did not bother her; in fact, she attributed this to the work ethic which she possesses. However, the work experiences she gained on the farm inspired her to want to achieve more out of life. Though she worked hard on the farm, she possessed passion for knowledge. During an interview session, she recalled how she hated when the crops would come in late because she could not attend school until the crops were harvested.

> During the school year, until the crops were brought in, we could not attend school. I would miss school to go to the fields until I got to high school, because school was not mandatory then. So each year when I was in elementary school when school would start, if the cotton was not all in, then dad would not let us go. And I would always cry because I loved school. (1:90-95)

As a result, when she was permitted to attend school, she saw it as her responsibility to complete the schoolwork missed during her absence. Luckily, she excelled at schoolwork and had a voracious appetite for reading. She used her passion for reading to escape her difficult life.

> When I was a child, I always wanted to escape my difficult life, so reading helped me to do that. I'd read anything I could get my hands on. We didn't have books in our home, because that was not a priority for us. But I would read any magazines we could get from the people where we lived. (1:93-97)

Even though she worked tirelessly in school and at home, she could not escape the difficulty associated with excelling academically, as she was attacked by students of her school. She used her fierce love of learning and eagerness to please her teachers as a coping mechanism. Because excelling in school was easy for her, some of the other

students began to resent her. She distinctly recalled an encounter with three students who attacked her for being praised by a teacher.

> Kids are so cruel. One afternoon while walking home from school, I was only eight then. I remember it like it was yesterday. The teacher had praised me for an assignment that was completed. I was attacked by three children who were angry at me because I had been singled out by the teacher and praised for my hard work. Two of them held my hands and the other beat me in my face. They beat me so badly that my whole face was swollen. (1:105-110)

This further inspired her desire to overcome being economically challenged and to make a difference, not only for herself, but for other children, so they will not have to endure abuse from others or inflict unnecessary pain on others because they chose to excel academically.

> Looking back on the incident, our children still suffer that today. I guess that's why I'm so passionate about helping all young people recognize that they can make a difference, and they don't have to resort to that kind of thing. (1: 112-114)

It was her personal quest to help all young people realize that they can make a difference in their lives, "if they are willing to sacrifice" (5:372).

From poverty to contending with bullies at the school, this superintendent experienced yet another difficulty in her life: a physically abusive father. During an interview session, she recalled how her father would beat her for defending her mother. She painfully described how he would beat her for "sticking up for her mom" (2:175).

I didn't have a good relationship with my dad. I never really knew what made him tick. He used to really beat me because I would stick up for my mom. One time, he knocked my head through a window. Those were some really bad times. I just really didn't understand it. For a long time, I thought I hated my dad. (1:110-115)

Furthermore, she asserted:

At times, he was so abusive and so cruel to my mother. And when I tried to protect her, he'd beat me, too. But I had to do that for my mother. Because she loved us so much, and she took all that for us. Some days when I go home, I'm really upset with him, and I keep asking myself, and I've prayed about it, when am I going to get through this. (2:177-181)

Even though as a child, she endured abuse from her father, today she provides constant care for him, as he resides in a nursing facility. She attends to his daily needs, which include hygiene needs, purchasing clothing, and visiting him.

I pay somebody to do his laundry, hang his clothes up, and check on him every week. I provide everything he needs. I buy all of his clothing, his hygiene needs. When it's all over, he knows that I will be there for him. (2:181-184) But when I go home, a lot of nights, I feel guilty if I go past the nursing home and did not get to see my dad. I didn't get to see him this morning at 7:00, so I will go tonight. And he'll put me on a guilt trip. So I've got to sit there and listen to him. I'm the child he used to beat all the time, but I'm the child who's got to go see him everyday. (2:173-176)

This superintendent felt strongly that having endured abuse from her father and her impoverished upbringing contributed to her strong leadership style and sense of commitment. "He made me what I am. I've never shunned any challenge. Your character comes from your experiences. He made me tough" (2:201-203). As for her decision to become a teacher, her mother was very instrumental in that decision.

> When I was about 10 years old, my family was chopping cotton and talking with the mother of a neighboring family. Incidentally, this mother was the mother of the children who had beaten me up on the way home from school. This lady was bragging about her children. They didn't like school that much, but they always liked to brag about how tough they were when it came to embarrassing people or fighting people. So she was bragging about a fight her daughter had gotten into—which I thought was very, very poor for a parent—and my mom was really quiet. She was just a quiet person, worked hard, and did not brag or boast about her family. This particular day my mom just said "My Angel (name changed to protect the identity of the participant of this study) is going to be a teacher someday." This lady was very, I thought, cruel in her response. She said, "I don't know if she's going to be a teacher or not. I know a lot of girls who go off to school, and they get pregnant and never become anything." The hurt that I saw on my mother's face at that moment caused me to make a promise. I promised myself that day that I would not let my mom down, that I would become a teacher. (2:210-225)

With this as her goal, she continued to make excellent grades throughout her school years and was named valedictorian of her graduating high school class. For

accomplishing this milestone, she credited the teachers that helped her at various points during her high school career. "My teachers really made a difference for me in my life. Besides my mother, my teachers had the greatest impact on who I am today (2:230-232). Furthermore, her tumultuous past and the inspiration from her mother and teachers, laid the foundation to assist other young people recognize they can make a difference. The belief that she can make a difference was motivation for her. "I've worked myself to death, trying to make a difference, because somebody did it for me" (5:142-143).

Attending college was yet another obstacle that this superintendent faced. Being reared in a poverty stricken environment, finances were not readily available for her to attend college. In an effort to make a difference, this superintendent realized that she must seek alternative means to attend college. Coming from humble beginnings, she earned a scholarship in order to attend college. As with everything else in her life, obtaining the scholarship was no easy task. Due to her low self esteem, she did not excel in the scholarship interview, but on the written test, her scores were the highest.

I had to go to the university one weekend to take this test and to be interviewed. Because my self-esteem was so poor, I didn't do well in the interview. Taking the test was relatively easy for me, but doing the interview was hard. (1:92-94)

As a result of the remarkable scores on the written test, the judges decided to award her the national merit scholarship, which was used to attend college.

Even after receiving the scholarship, she was constantly faced with challenges. If being successful in life was her plan, she had to maintain the scholarship which was awarded. To accomplish this, she immediately recognized that she could not attend the

social functions with some of her friends who were not in a similar situation. "I would

stay in my room studying or in the basement when they would turn the lights out—in

the washroom studying" (5:379-380). There was a young man from high school who

wanted to enter a relationship with her, but after realizing he lacked independence, she

relegated the relationship to good friends. This young man shared with this

superintendent's father that she did not want to go out with him.

> He came home and said all I did was study. I would not go to the movies with
>
> them. I would not go to the student union with them. He tried to get me to go
>
> with him sometimes, but I would tell him I got to study, I can't do that. (5: 387-
>
> 389)

When this was shared with this superintendent's father, he replied to her "if you go

down there and crack up, because you don't do anything else but study, I am going to

make you come home" (5:391-393). At the conclusion of the first semester, this

superintendent earned a 3.8 grade point average, which is a testament to her philosophy

that "we've got to teach our children that in order for them to succeed in life, they've

got to be willing to give up. They've got to be willing to sacrifice. They've got to be

willing to discipline themselves, and they've got to be courageous in taking on the task

before them" (5: 371-374).

Seeing the needs of others and assisting them to accomplish goals began very

early in life for this superintendent. When she was a student at college, she would spend

evenings teaching math to other college students who did not understand. "I spent my

first semester teaching integrated algebra and college level trigonometry because I

loved math. We had study groups, and I was the teacher" (5:408-410). Her college

professor entered the library during one of these study sessions and observed her

tutoring these students. He was so impressed with her performance, he allowed her to

teach his college classes. Other students would see her and ask to attend these sessions.

For these services, she was not compensated. She stated "those poor babies needed help.

As I think back on it God has taken me all the way. He's blessed me, but it has been a

journey" (5:416-418).

The Road to the Superintendency

Attaining the position of superintendent, like her childhood, offered challenges

that she overcame. Her diverse professional background included (a) classroom teacher

of mathematics for eight years at the high school and middle school levels, (b) Math and

Science department coordinator for one year at the middle school level, (c) middle

school curriculum specialist for four years, (d) middle school assistant principal for

eight years, (e) middle school principal for four years, (f) deputy superintendent for

seven years, (g) interim superintendent for one and a half years, and ultimately,

(h) superintendent of a large school district in a southern state. In addition to serving in

these capacities, she taught summer school mathematics at several of the district's high

schools.

She applied for the position of school superintendent for this district in 1999;

however, was unsuccessful. Later, she applied for a superintendent's position in another

urban district, and was unsuccessful there, also. When the position for this district came

available in 2003, she was serving as interim superintendent. Community personnel

began contacting her to apply for the position of superintendent because they felt that

she could make the needed changes to propel the district in an academically progressive

direction. She felt as though she was making great strides in educational advancements within the school district and unifying district personnel in her current position; therefore, was quite comfortable where she was. This, though, did not hinder the individuals from contacting her, insisting that she apply for the recently vacated position. Since this superintendent possesses strong religious beliefs, she said she prayed three months before submitting an application. When she was assured that applying for the position was what God had purposed for her, she submitted her portfolio and application just minutes before the application deadline. After receiving notification that she had been selected to the position of superintendent, she immediately began crafting new policies mandated by the *No Child Left Behind* federal regulation, with the emphasis on creating better performing schools, "quality schools in every community" ("No time", 2003).

Barriers

Overcoming obstacles seem easy for this superintendent. She overcame the obstacle of growing up poor to obtain a college education and to become a teacher; thus making her mother's belief a reality. This belief was shared during a confrontation with the mother of children who had beaten this superintendent in the face as a young girl. While the ladies were chopping cotton, the mother of the children who attacked this superintendent was bragging about how tough her children were as it pertained to embarrassing or fighting others. As this mother was bragging on a recent fight that involved her daughter, this superintendent's mother humbly remarked that her daughter was going to become a teacher someday. As her professional career unfolded, she

became the first African-American principal of one of the largest middle schools in the district. Afterwards, she became middle school director, then deputy superintendent and later interim superintendent of a large urban school district before ultimately being appointed superintendent of an urban school district.

Being appointed superintendent of a large, urban school district was not absent of its own barriers. This superintendent cited four prevailing barriers: (a) her ethnicity, (b) her gender, (c) political pressures by community personnel, and (d) returning home. Of the four barriers discussed, this superintendent revealed that ethnicity and gender were the most difficult to overcome and for the public to accept.

The superintendency is a white male dominated field. After I started climbing in my career, I wanted to provide more service. It was a challenge because I knew there were not many women superintendents in the nation, and for sure not in this area, not many people of color. So the challenge was there. There were naysayers who said that she can't do the job. (2:90-94)

Though ethnicity and gender were obvious and some people within her district had difficulty accepting a superintendent who possessed both characteristics simultaneously, not everyone shared that view. Members of her staff, both central office and local school, had a contradictory opinion:

Truthfully, I don't think of her as African-American. I know for a fact that she is the first African-American female. I like the fact that she's the first female more than anything else. She has done a lot of things for my gender. I do not think of her as being African-American. I just know that she is a wonderful person. (3: 96-100)

Her main focus has been this district. She brought us together as a family. It's

not because she's African-American, we wanted a leader, and she's just that.

She truly cares for us and the district. (5:21-23; 36)

Life's experiences have taught her to cope with individuals who possess prejudices in

these areas. Understanding these barriers enabled her to relate easily to all people,

regardless of socio-economic status. She can relate just as easily to the homeless, poor

people to the wealthiest billionaires that reside in the area where she serves as

superintendent. Furthermore, it was her realization that no matter where one is in life,

we all basically have the same needs, wants, and desires. With regard to ethnicity, this

superintendent exclaimed, "I've been everybody's superintendent, not just an African-

American superintendent" (5:197-198).

Another barrier faced by this superintendent is the area of politics. It was her

belief that everyone possesses a hidden agenda: political or personal, and, that is

unfortunate. She stated that she is constantly plagued by:

community people, with connections to the media, who seek favors, either

personal or to benefit a specific company. I've had people who wanted us to do

things to help their company, their friend's company to make money, to do

things that were not beneficial to help our children. (2:102-105)

In addition, various statements that illuminated these beliefs include:

People give in to pressure and politicking when they really don't have a

commitment to the cause. I can't do that. I just can't do that. Don't ever sell

your integrity. No matter what you do. Don't ever do to that. (5:219-223) I

don't do deals. (5:581) You have to be held accountable for these deals. And

backroom deals will not get you the results you need for the kids. People

expect you to keep doing it. It is always about what they expect to get out of

it. It will never be a good deal for you. When you start making those deals,

you've got to hire somebody's cousin that's not even qualified over someone

who is qualified. And the people know that. Morale goes out the window.

(5:550-558)

This superintendent held fast to her commitment to put the needs of the children in her

school district as priority. As a result of her unwavering commitment to the children of

her district, "people have tried to do things to hurt the administration because I refused

to do those things that may hurt our children" (2: 106-108). She declared, "I'm not

about to commit to doing something that I don't think is right for this district" (5:561-

562).

The final barrier, acknowledged by this superintendent, was that of returning

home. It was difficult returning home to lead people with whom you've grown

up with, taught, or supervised in other leadership roles. When I say our people,

I'm referring to African-Americans, people of color who want you to break the

rules because you grew up with them. I can't do that. I've got to treat every child

alike when it comes to making people obey the guidelines. I can't break policies.

I'm the person who is supposed to be making sure that my other staff members

are keeping the policy, and they get mad when you don't. That's what's so hard

about being a in a leadership position in your hometown, where you were born.

Because folks don't mind asking you to break the rules for their own families. I

don't do it for mine, and I'm not going to do it for others. (2: 108-116)

Superintendent's Role and Responsibilities

"Anything worth doing is worth the effort" (2:197). According to the subject of this study, fulfilling the role of superintendent embodies a tremendous amount of effort. She and other interviewees stated that she devotes tireless, selfless hours to ensuring the functionality of the district. According to her executive secretary, she is at the office late nights and on weekends. She speaks at churches and community organizations (3: 37-39). The superintendent stated:

> Even during the holiday break, I'm either here or I'm answering calls or going
> to a school to take care of something that has happened during the holiday
> break. (2:157-159) I spend most of my time procuring funds from grants and
> other funding sources, forging alliances with the business community, and
> preparing for speaking engagements at surrounding churches and community
> centers. I'm on the go so much that I do not have time for myself. (1:104-107)

A review of her daily calendar indicated that she is engaged from the time she arrives at work until very late in the evening. These engagements included, but were not limited to, meeting with members of the executive board, collaborating with leaders of neighboring school districts, discussing upcoming events for the region and school community, and visiting schools.

During the second interview, the discussion included how this superintendent spends her time. She stated that she "can't go anywhere and relax in this city without someone coming up to me to either say, job well done, or I need a job" (2:144-145). Furthermore, she stated that it is difficult for her to go to Wal-Mart or to the mall at night without someone stopping her and making a comment, which is usually good,

about the condition of the schools in her district or her job performance. She also

divulged that her job is "24/7, particularly when you're from your hometown" (2:149).

She takes her responsibilities so seriously that she seldom takes a vacation. In fact, she

stated that she's probably lost about $6,000 in vacation days (2:154).

This superintendent recognized the importance of community involvement and

maintaining a positive impact with the school community. In January, the community,

which included area and neighboring hospitals, was involved in the Healthy School

Initiative, which involved promoting healthy eating habits and offering solutions in an

attempt to combat the nation's concern with childhood obesity. To show her dedication

and support to this cause, she sponsored and participated in, a Superwalk with the

Superintendent. This event was held after school hours and approximately 3,000 school

employees, students, and parents participated. During the Superwalk with the

Superintendent, the participants walked around the track to promote how being active

will assist in combating obesity.

When hired in 2003, this superintendent immediately developed quarterly, semi-

annual, and annual reports which outlined the goals and degree of completion for each

for the year. These reports, published each year, directly related to the mission, goals,

and objectives of the school district for the academic year. During 2006, a three year

report to the community was published. These reports primarily reflected on the

academics of the district, but the three year report included highlights from the (a)

academic services division, (b) human resources division, (c) support services division,

and (d) superintendent's division.

The 2003-04 report (Caddo, 2003-04) defined nine urgent mandates and challenges. These mandates addressed four major themes: (a) personnel issues, (b) academic concerns, (c) budget concerns, and (d) transportation issues. The personnel issues concerned the workforce stabilization due to the elimination of 312 positions. Academic concerns included: (a) providing textbooks to high priority schools to reduce the shortage, (b) creating a choice plan for four schools (c) devising a plan to address the 23 high priority schools, (d) improving the learning environment district wide in aging schools, and (e) restoring academic programs for Pre Kindergarten and over-age students. Addressing concerns for the budget included the restoration of services created by a budget shortfall and the return of 28 positions to the general fund budget. With regard to transportation issues, the superintendent sought to replace defective buses based on the recommendation of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. At the conclusion of this academic year, the aforementioned challenges and mandates were successfully completed. In addition, (a) nearly $13 million in grants and proposals were obtained, (b) 94% of all work requests from schools were completed, (c) $1.03 million in external funding was procured for textbooks, (d) acquired more than 150 new business and community partnerships, and (e) a bus replacement program was implemented for 100 new air-conditioned buses (Caddo, 2003-04).

The annual progress report for the 2004-05 academic year (Caddo, 2004-05) targeted four priority goals: (a) raise the level of the educational program, student performance, and accountability, (b) recruit, train, evaluate, and retain high quality staff, (c) coordinate and deliver efficient and effective administrative support functions aligned with school-based needs, and (d) expand family, community and school

connections. At the conclusion of the year, each goal was completed with a 95% success rate. The first academic celebration was implemented during this school year. This celebration, coordinated by the superintendent and her staff, was designed to promote and sustain student and staff morale. The first celebration honored the 44,000 students and 6,500 employees, which included teachers, students, parents, support staff, and community partners (Caddo, 2004-05).

The 2005-06 academic report was included in a three year report. This report highlighted successes of the superintendent and the school district for the first three years, 2003- 2006, under her leadership. Published in this document were reports from the academic services division, human resources division, support services division, and the superintendent's division.

The academic services division reported the school district has maintained the recognition of having the most five star schools in the state. The five-star schools were the highest academic performing schools within the entire state. Furthermore, three high schools had average ACT scores that ranked above both the state and national averages.

The report from the human resources division revealed that 19 schools were recognized for exemplary employee attendance. The number of teachers possessing a non-standard teaching certificate was reduced by 56 (Caddo, 2003-06).

Being superintendent included making tough decisions about faculty and staff members, which may include verbal or written reprimands or even termination. Though this superintendent did not enjoy terminating an employee, she did what was prescribed in policy.

I am sensitive to the needs of people. A lot of times, my employees take

advantage of that. I'm not the kind of superintendent who says I'm going to fire

him or fire her because they messed up, because we all mess up. If there's a way

I can help an employee, I will help them. Now, if they've done something like

molested a child, I can't help them or if they've abused a child, I can't help

them. (2:120 – 125)

She tries to work with the employees as much as she can prior to termination. "It has

to be repeated offenses. If there's something that you've done the first time, and it is

something that is not good for our children, and it is not habitual, I will try to work

with them (2: 127- 130). Even though she does not enjoy releasing employees, there

have been instances in which employees were terminated due to the "inability to be

responsible for their job performance" (2: 134-135). She further noted that as a result

of terminations, employees have confronted her with hopes of being rehired. "I've

had people show up at my church wanting me to give them their jobs back. They just

come for that" (2:137).

Though this superintendent believed in following policy, her commitment to the faculty

and staff was evident.

I think a happy employee is a more productive employee. So, I work hard to

take care of them with whatever resources we have. I try to get good benefits for

them for the best cost that we can get. Trying to make sure that we have people

that are working with them from the central level to support what's going on in

the school and the classroom so that they can do the job without interference

from a lot of things. When it comes to raises and funding that they need

personally, we work hard to make sure they have what we can afford to give

them. But, the expectations are real high because we expect you to perform for

the children. (1:21-29)

Furthermore, she made sure that each employee is valued. As an example, the

terminology she used to describe bus drivers yielded a degree of respect for them.

I call them professional bus operators. I want them to know that is their

profession. I try to make sure all employees understand my philosophy about

their jobs and careers. I consider each person a professional person in his own

field. So, I call them bus operators, not bus drivers, but bus operators. (1:56-59)

Expectations and Challenges

The role of the superintendent also involved working collaboratively with the

members of the elected school board officials. Each had specific expectations for the

superintendent.

You know I have 12 board members and most of them expect me to run an

efficient and effective school district. And the others expect me to, I believe, to

be the magician to make sure that we rank tops in every single thing without

considering the uniqueness of our district. You know a large urban district with

suburban parts, rural parts, etc. Also, I believe the Board expects me to

collaborate with the community and the stakeholders. We consider that to be one

of our priorities, one of our goals. But others expect me not to involve them so

much that it creates somewhat of a problem with their decision making. I try to

address the concerns of my board; however, I go back to the mission of our

school district each time I make a decision. (4:1-10)

This superintendent worked with a 12 member board, 5 of whom she believed offered little support to the mission of the school district and the superintendent. "They constantly look for ways not to support things that are best for our children" (5:1-2). These five females, two Caucasians and three African-Americans, posed challenges to the superintendent which were difficult to overcome. This superintendent highlighted how these individuals sought personal gain instead of opportunities to benefit the students. "They plot and harass me about things. I've been beating them out on most things constantly. It's not about power for me; it's about doing the very best thing for the children of our school district" (5:109-113). Furthermore, she stated,

> I've worked myself to death trying to make a difference, because somebody did it for me. And to have five women so power hungry that they feel like I'm stealing their thunder. That hurts me deeply. I actually cried about it, because it really hurts because I know that I've not done anything to these people. (5:141-145) I knew that I was going to have opposition being the first African-American and the first woman. It has not been from the community, it's been from this Board. The people on this school board are chosen to do this. They are chosen to work with the students. (5:153-155)

Further, she asserted:

> They (referring to the five Board members) are something. It's sad that they will spend countless hours trying to figure out ways to block progress. I know, but they do. Let me tell you, power thirsty people do that stuff. They have no foresight, not vision. All they can see is that I'm in their way. They can't even see the work that's going on, and it's been like that. (5: 194-197)

This superintendent stated "they get out there and lie, knowing they've lied" (5:246).

She cited one incident in which these Board members told a lie. When she had the

opportunity to confront these members, she inquired "when did the conversation change

from what was discussed last night? I do not want the public thinking that I've done

something against what we've talked about" (5:249-253).

The opposition faced by this superintendent by these five Board members, "has

been a journey, and I tell you what, it has made me stronger. Every experience, whether

it is good or bad, you need to bring something back. God knows it has been a test with

these folk" (5:255-257).

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Benefits and Complexities of Being
an African-American Female
Superintendent

</div>

According to this superintendent, the benefits were not many (2:45). Instead of

using the term, benefits, this superintendent chose to refer to them as rewards. In an

interview session, she spoke of the enormous amount of love and compassion that she

has for the students. Her educational philosophy, as well as the mission for the school

district, focused on the students. Knowing how strongly she felt about academics and

the students, it was understood that the benefits of being superintendent, in her opinion,

would come from the students. She stated that the greatest benefit or reward for her as

superintendent comes from the young people who call or come back to offer tribute to

her for the difference that she made in their lives (2:46-47). Furthermore, she

commented on the employees that have been inspired to the point of desiring to become

leaders in some capacity, "to do some leading and some real committing to the service

that they provide to children (2:48-49). The greatest reward, according to this

superintendent, came from committed employees who are dedicated to the mission of

the district and the students. The cards, articles in the newspapers, and phone calls

offered support and encouragement and, as well as, reminded her of the difference that

has been made in the community. In addition, she interjected "the most memorable

rewards are not in the form of money, because one is not paid to be a superintendent"

(2:55).

Another benefit mentioned by this superintendent was the gratification of

knowing that what one does makes a difference. She asserted that having a job in the

field of education is a calling. One must be in it for the right reason. Given her strong

religious belief, she declared,

> I am where God wants me to be, and I'm doing what He wants me to do, and
>
> I'm giving it all that I've got, and I believe that He knows my heart, and He will
>
> bless whatever I do. Furthermore, I believe that when God blesses you to serve,
>
> then He will make it successful for you if you will do it His way and you will do
>
> it right. (2:64-71) He gives me the energy, the enthusiasm, the inspiration, and
>
> the motivation to do it. (2:96)

To the contrary, the complexities or problems faced by this superintendent were

not as uplifting. The first problem noted related to political pressures. These pressures

came from community personnel with a mission that was contrary to the mission of the

school district. These individuals desired personal advancement, instead of assisting the

school district and its children. When this superintendent refused to participate in said

endeavors, it was her belief that retaliation occurred.

I've had people who wanted us to do things to help their company, their friend's

company to make money, to do things that were not beneficial to help our

children. I refused to recommend it. So, politically, people have tried to do

things to hurt the administration because I refused to do those things that may

hurt our children. (2:103-107)

Community and school board members who felt as though this superintendent did not

participate in their quest for personal gain resorted to writing editorials in the local

newspaper. Some of the school district employees recently became enlightened to the

editorials and wanted to show their support for the superintendent. "We've been reading

the editorials, now we know what's been going on. Why didn't you tell us? We could

have come down there" (5: 240-242). To this, the superintendent replied, "No, that

would have made bad matters worse" (5:243).

Another problem mentioned by this superintendent related to ethnicity and prior

relationships. This superintendent noted that African-Americans, especially those that

she grew up with, became disgruntled because she refused to violate policy in order to

satisfy a specific situation. She asserted that she must treat every child alike when it

comes to making people obey the guidelines. "I can't do that. I've got to treat every

child alike when it comes to making people follow the guidelines. I can't break

policies" (2:108-111). Furthermore, she stated that she could not break the policies set

forth by the school district and the State. As an added testament, she declared that

people get mad when you refuse to break policy and that it is particularly difficult when

one is in a leadership position in his or her hometown (2:110 – 114). Other ethnic

concerns included that when the expectations of an individual were not met; negative

comments were made from both African- Americans and Caucasians regarding her ethnicity. Based on the expectations of others, for the position of superintendent, when policy and rules are not broken and this superintendent refuses to do so, "they make things up about you and say ugly things, like she's not going to help blacks. The white people accuse me because I'm black" (2:117-120). These individuals included employees as well as community personnel.

The superintendent was aware of her high profile in the community. She noted that she found this situation to be both flattering and difficult. Therefore, the final problem mentioned by this superintendent related to the need for personal space and privacy. While she enjoyed visiting with the children and community personnel, at times she found the restrictions imposed by the community to be annoying. She acknowledged that it is impossible for her to relax in the city because someone is always approaching her with either a positive comment or a request for employment. "I can't go anywhere to relax in this city without someone coming up to me to either say: job well done or I need a job" (2:144-145). She asserted that there are times that she would like to visit the mall or the local Wal-Mart, at night, without assuming the role of superintendent.

> I don't mind, but some days you want to go to the mall at night or to Wal-Mart and just ramble around. But I can't do that because somebody stops me with a comment, and it's usually a good comment. And that's good, and it's not so good. On the other hand, some days you want to just think about you. I want to be Angela Brickfield, not Angela Brickfield, the superintendent. (2:145-149)

A trip to the salon is not excluded because someone knows her wherever she goes. "So when I go get my hair done, I have to talk about school because someone knows me everywhere I go" (2:150-151). Even taking vacation days and remaining at home as difficult, unless she became confined to her home. If she chose to take time off from work, she stated that she would have to visit another city.

> If I want to take vacation days, I can't do it in this city, unless I plan to lock up
> in my house. I haven't taken a vacation. I've lost probably, since I've been back
> as superintendent, about $6,000 in vacation days since you can't roll them over.
> Even during the holiday break, I'm either here or I'm answering calls or going
> to a school where something has happened during the holiday break. (2:151-
> 158)

Leadership Behaviors

The following quote was on the superintendent's desk and served as a reminder of what epitomizes a leader. She likes to refer to herself as a "servant leader because I feel that the leadership should be about service and not about position" (1:38-39).

> A true leader has the confidence to stand alone, the courage to make tough
> decisions, and the compassion to listen to the needs of others. He does not set
> out to be a leader, but becomes one by the quality of the actions and the integrity
> of the intent. In the end, leaders are much like eagles...they don't flock. You
> find them one at a time. (A true leader, online)

This superintendent exhibited an enormous amount of enthusiasm and energy. The executive secretary stated that she often commented to the superintendent that she is not human and never seems to tire nor does she ever stop (3:19). This enthusiasm and

energy was evident during interviews as well as during casual observations and continued throughout this researcher's time with her. During an interview with her executive secretary, this superintendent was described as "very fair, a perfectionist, passionate, intelligent, and committed" (3:17-23; 45). A teacher and school administrator commented, "she always said that we will work til we get it done, and she meant it" (5:24-25).

With regard to her leadership behaviors, this superintendent has high expectations for everyone. This includes (a) students, (b) teachers, (c) administrators, (d) central office staff, (e) parents, (f) Board members, and (g) community personnel. Due to her high expectations and the untiring devotion to the school districts, "people just don't want to disappoint her" (3:27). In order to ensure success for the school district, employees work tirelessly. Furthermore, this superintendent was described as being a great motivator and having an uncanny way of getting people to support her endeavors to support the children of the district. These endeavors include, but are not limited to, public speaking engagements to promote the voting for bond issues and getting sponsors for programs. Based on the 2003-04 Annual Report (Caddo, 2003-04), approximately 300 community partnerships where forged with the school district. The 2006 Annual Report (Caddo, 2003-06), reflected almost 500 community partnerships. During the three years of her leadership, the support from businesses and community personnel increased by almost 200. In order to achieve support of this magnitude, this superintendent believes that the community and the school can and must work together to support the children and when this is accomplished, the students, ultimately succeed.

<u>Leadership and Cultural Identity</u>

As this researcher conducted interviews, it became evident that the participant in this study viewed her past as the passport to her future. Though difficult for her to discuss, she realized that was pivotal in the decisions made and ultimately instrumental in molding her into the individual that she became. Despite the difficulties encountered during her childhood, she was not distracted from being successful. She attributed this abuse to assisting in defining her character. Furthermore, she contended that her past made her tough and provided her with the courage to embrace challenges.

Through her difficult ordeal, her mother served as a source of strength. Her mother, who did not receive a formal education, expected her children to be successful in school. This superintendent recalled how her mother aspired for a better life for her children. It was this aspiration, in conjunction with the confrontation with students, which motivated her to become a teacher. Though the journey was not effortless, her determination provided the motivation to be successful.

<u>Leadership and Gender and Ethnic Concerns</u>

Throughout the matriculation of her career, she was noted not only for being the first African-American superintendent, but also the first African-American principal of one of the district's middle schools. Though this superintendent has been lauded innumerable times for breaking barriers for race and gender, the distinction is never emphasized by herself or members of her staff. During interview sessions she and other staff members viewed being female and African-American as incidental. The female staff members applauded because great strides were made for their gender. Whereas the

African-American staff members simply regard her as the superintendent. This superintendent was very humble and preferred to be recognized as a leader with high expectations for everyone, including herself.

Though she grew up under harsh conditions, she used each situation to mold her into the person she is today. Her success was attributed to her mother and her teachers. This superintendent believed it was these individuals who believed in her abilities; therefore, she held the belief that all children deserve the same opportunity to show their potential in life.

My intent when I became an educator...I wanted to be able to give back and make a difference in the lives of young people. Give hope to those who maybe do not have hope about their values and their worth and about their ability to make a difference. (Flowers, p. 22)

Furthermore, it was her belief that

...it is our responsibility to give back to young people, because somebody gave it to me. I believe, in education, we truly can make a difference, and we can touch lives that maybe we don't even realize that we've touched. (5: 190-191)

Leadership Traits

In order to identify prevailing leadership traits, this superintendent completed the Leadership Practices Inventory Self (LPI). The LPI, which identified five leadership practices, was comprised of 30 statements which are rated from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating an almost never response and 10 being almost always. The superintendent was read each statement, and she provided a response that she felt was indicative of her leadership practices. The results were totaled for each of the five leadership behaviors

indicated on the LPI by the researcher. This superintendent ranked in the 95th percentile and above. The first behavior, modeling the way, described the leader's ability to lead through example by defining or initiating task structure. For this trait, this superintendent scored in 99th percentile. The second behavior, inspire a shared vision, referred to the leader's ability to imagine the future, craft a vision from these dreams, and enlist people in this vision who will assist in bringing this vision into reality. This superintendent scored in the 98th percentile. The third behavior, challenge the process, referred to the leader's ability to seek and accept challenges and the willingness to take risks and the participant scored at the 95th percentile. The fourth behavior, enabling others to act, referred to the leader's understanding of teamwork and the ability to accomplish tasks. This superintendent scored in the 95th percentile on this leadership behavior. The fifth behavior, encouraging the heart, referred to the leader's ability to encourage the constituents to carry on through dramatic gestures or simple feedback. This superintendent scored in the 99th percentile on this leadership behavior.

The results of the LPI were discussed with the participant. Her initial response was a smile, after which, we began to analyze each to determine the personal attributes which contribute to the attainment of each behavior. The first behavior, modeling the way, seems to come natural to her. This superintendent felt a leader should be honest with all stakeholders at all times. "I believe in honesty, because I try to be very honest, with people, always" (2:20). In addition, she asserted,

If you are honest, hardworking, and model those things that employees should

be doing, and if you are sincere, I believe that employees will know and you will

not have to coerce them to follow you. They will want to follow you. I think a

good leader is one who creates such an environment, through all those traits that

I've just cited, where people will want to be a part of your team, and they will

want you to lead them. So I try to live by that. It's like we tell our children. It's

not so much of that you say, but what you do. So, I'm constantly saying to my

employees and to my staff members that we need to serve the children. And we

need to do that with a commitment. And with that commitment, you don't

always watch the clock. You don't always look at the workday, per se, but you

do what is necessary to do the job and to take care of the children. That may

mean that you will take on a lot of other things. I do that myself, so that they

will see that in me and see that it is not talk. It is actually what has to happen to

be a good leader. (2:30-43)

The participant referred to herself as a "servant leader" (1:37) and strongly believed that

the needs of the district and the students are paramount, if the district is to be successful.

One of her school administrators commented:

Her main focus was the needs of the children, and she made us believe that their

needs are paramount. We worked for her. We never complained about being

tired. She said that we will work til we get it done, and she meant it. (5:22-24)

The fact that she adhered and enforced district policy in all situations further

illuminated her leadership ability. The participant of this study felt that having a sense

of purpose enabled her to fulfill the responsibilities of the position. "I'm in the place

that God wants me to be in and I'm doing what he wants me to do" (2:67-68). In order

to be a successful leader, this superintendent believed "my leadership style of being involved with my employees and sending the message that if you work hard and are honest and fair with people, folk will want you to lead them" (2: 21-23).

With regard to inspiring a shared vision, the second leadership trait, this superintendent scored in the 98th percentile. Based on the responses received for this trait and enabling others to act, the fourth trait, this researcher will combine the rationales. She believed in order to inspire others the leader must model way and show a genuine concern for those entrusted to the leaders charge. Furthermore, it was her belief that by employing a "team approach" (4:24) others will see your vision and work diligently to make it come to fruition.

We know that if change is to occur, real, systemic change, ownership has to occur with all stakeholders. My leadership style says that you need to involve all those affected by the decisions being made. If you do that you are able to convince others and all stakeholders that, although we make sacrifices to realize our vision, which we have set for our educational entity, thus impacting what happens in our community. If you are able to convince people that it is genuine and that it is what's needed, they will too buy into it and they will bring their ideas and their philosophies to the table and you can realize and facilitate changes easier that when you try to do it as a top down approach instead of the bottom up approach. (4:25-33)

In addition to the team approach to decision making, this superintendent hired quality personnel and held each accountable for making appropriate, sound decisions based on the area of expertise before interfering. However, there was an incident in

which she depended on the leadership of a principal, but had to interfere when the appropriate decisions were not being made. This incident was a personnel issue with a coach, and the parents at the school rallied because they felt the administration at the school was not taking action.

> I tried to let the staff handle it, and it was not going so well, so I had to step in and make some decisions, and make some calls. We got beaten up pretty bad by some parents, but then the employees rallied. When mistakes are made, the leader has to be willing to acknowledge that. We messed up; therefore, we had to fix the problem that was made. (2:60-63)

Another factor which contributed to this superintendent's scores for the trait enabling others to act was her ability to make necessary changes throughout the district. One of the many changes was to encourage the district's employees to make annual contributions to the United Way.

> I've gotten my district to give more to the United Way because they do more to help these people. Like Providence House helps people living on the street. They take them in. They give their time to help these children. I've gotten the United Way because they give a hand up to people. You know they are always giving a hand up to people. We have given more in the past three years than they have in the history of the district. They have never given $100,000. We give $100,000 +. (5:124-129)

In addition to the contributions made to the United Way, this superintendent enlisted the assistance of one of the local hospitals to provide services to the children and their families.

They (the students of her district) see these babies being killed and abused; coming to school angry, hungry, and sleepy." We've got to serve our children. I try to go out to get the community to come in and help where we can't. We can't go into these homes everyday. So, I've got one of the local hospitals, with their team of experts and social workers, to provide social services. They donate their services to help our families. (5:118-123)

This superintendent was sensitive to the needs of her community (2:120, 134). In addition to services provided by one of the local hospitals and the contributions made to the United Way, she has sought assistance from the Volunteers of America (VOA).

I met with VOA just last week, and we do the in-kind, like bus routes and security. They will do grants to pay the teachers, after school, to help our children. They feed them before they go home, help with homework, and engage them in meaningful activities so they're not on the street. And they are doing that a lot in our schools. (5:133-136)

This superintendent possessed an overwhelming amount of concern for her employees, as well as for the students. "If there is a way that I can help an employee, I will help them" (2:123). An administrator, who was interviewed, cited an incident in which a grant proposal deadline was fast approaching and the grant had not been completed. This administrator was at the office working to meet the deadline around 11:00 PM at night when the superintendent called to ascertain her location. The superintendent continued to call until around 11:45. At this time, she told the employee that she was putting on her clothes to come to the office to be with her if she insisted on remaining at the office. The administrator then informed the superintendent that she was

leaving to go home. The superintendent's reply was "I understand that the grant was important to the administrator, students, and me, but her safety was more important. I could not afford to jeopardize her safety for the sake of a grant" (5: 34-36).

Challenging the process, the third trait, involved the ability to seek and accept challenges and the willingness to take risks. This superintendent scored at the 95th percentile. She did not consider herself a risktaker, but relied heavily on her strong religious beliefs. Even before applying for the position of superintendent, she prayed three months before finalizing her decision. In addition, "I believe that when God blesses you to serve, then He will make it successful for you, it you will do it His way, and you will do it right" (2:69-71).

As was her philosophy, she always placed the needs of the student first. For her score attainment, she offered little explanation, other than she was fulfilling the mission of the school district. "I go back to the mission of our school district each time I make a decision. I make sure it is in the best interest of our children and how does it affect their academic achievement and our effectiveness as a district" (4:9-11).

The fifth trait, encouraging the heart, was where this superintendent scored at the 99th percentile. To this, she stated that she'd done "so much good for the district, that everybody recognizes it" (2:145). Her employees referred to her as being "energetic, having a tremendous passion for people in general, particularly children (2:20-21). She was also described as being "very fair, very articulate, and a perfectionist" (2:17). Being a great motivator can be added to her list of qualities, as well.

She motivates, she is a great motivator. She has a way of getting everyone to

buy into her plan for success for the children, whether it's community leaders

going out and speaking and getting them to buy into going out and voting for the

bond or getting sponsors for different programs. (2:30-33)

This superintendent made herself available to her community 24/7 (24 hours a day and

seven days per week), with little or virtually not time to address her personal needs.

"She goes and speaks at churches and community organizations. Therefore, she is a

recognizable face that people has gained her respect" (2:39-41). Throughout the course

of the interview sessions, this superintendent referred to the mission statement and the

needs to her district, especially the students, as her motivation. She relied on God to be

the source of her strength to meet the needs of the students. The community rallied

around this superintendent in order for the needs of the students and the district to be

met. "I have the engagement from the Sheriff, the Mayor, the Chief of Police, the

commissioners, the City Council leaders, the Committee of 100, just to name a few"

(5:283-285).

<div align="center">Superintendent's Perspective</div>

During the course of the three years this superintendent has served, she has

encountered and overcame barriers from a multitude of directions. These barriers

included (a) race, (b) gender, (c) political issues, (d) religious concerns, and (e) elected

school Board officials. Throughout her tenure, she has remained focused and grounded

because of her strong religious beliefs. She stated that she relied heavily on the

guidance of the Lord before making important decisions, which impacted, not only her

personal life, but the welfare of the school district. The employees of the district

respected her leadership abilities and strength. Her leadership abilities were unmatched by many. When she was elected as superintendent of this district, she recalled that the district was in a "holy mess" (5:149) with finances, academic issues, employee concerns, and there were clearly lines of division within the district. "He (a former board member) didn't want me to come here until the district was messed up. When it was under. Money all gone. People being laid off" (5:568- 569). During the course of her tenure, she brought the district together as a family and generated additional funding through grants to assist in meeting the needs of the students.

As she so often stated, "nothing worth doing comes easy because if it was easy, anyone would do it" (2:197-199). Amid the challenges faced by this superintendent came many triumphs. Major accomplishments of her administration which related to, academic, financial, and employee concerns, included, but were not limited to, (a) reducing the number of high priority schools from 25 to 12; (b) renewing three bond propositions in 2004 and 2006, respectively; and, (c) assisting the acquisition of $45,724,933 in scholarships. Furthermore, she was able to provide support for (a) tripling the number of National Board Certified Teachers, (b) acquiring more than $39.6 million in grant funding, (c) increasing the number of community partners by at least 400, (d) restoring financial stability to the district, thus providing supplements to the employees on three separate occasions, as well as, supplementing three state teacher pay raises, (e) providing broader health insurance coverage at lower rates, (f) replacing existing school buses with air- conditioned buses, and (g) completing capital projects in excess of $76 million, which included the addition of classroom wings and gymnasiums were also achieved under her leadership.

The Superintendent Revealed

This superintendent has revealed that one's destiny is not predicated on one's past. With persistence, sacrifice, and patience, goals can be accomplished. Though her past included many economic, physical, and psychological challenges, she crafted the challenges of each situation to achieve success. She learned the values of hard work and sacrifice at an early age; therefore, enabling her to overcome the obstacles encountered during her quest for the superintendency.

Emerging from the data in this study were multiple themes which contributed to the success of this African-American female superintendent. The first, and most pervasive, was socialization. Socialization results in gender specific traits which are exhibited in leadership behaviors. In this framework, Schmuck (cited in Brunner, 1999) explained that since schools are a gender-based institution, and women experience a different reality than men, "we need to understand women's experiences; what has been written about men superintendents does not necessarily apply to women" (p. xi). This superintendent was a testament to this statement. Blackmore (1999) stated that women are more collaborative and caring. This superintendent exhibited concern for her entire school community and the school district. She wanted to ensure the physical well-being of her school community by coordinating and participating in the Superwalk with the Superintendent and by increasing the level of commitment of her employees to make charitable donations to the United Way.

In addition, she was deeply concerned about the well-being of her employees. After receiving the appointment, she immediately began (a) to stabilize the workforce, (b) address transportation issues, (c) create a choice plan for schools, and (d) address

budget concerns. Upon completion of her first year, 2003-04, the budget was restored,

which included (a) reinstating services which created the initial budget shortfall,

(b) replacing defective busses and initiating a bus replacement cycle, which included

the purchase of air conditioned buses, (c) procured textbooks from grant funding

sources, and (d) the acquisition of more than 150 new business partners.

As indicated by the research of Brunner (1999), Clisbee, (2004), Ozga (1993)

and Reynolds, (2002) female administrators (a) spend less time on paperwork, (b) spend

more visiting classrooms, (c) run more closely knit schools, (d) use different, less

dominating body language, (e) employee different language and procedures, (f) are

nurturing, (g) keep up to date with curricular issues, (h) spend more time with their

peers, (i) are better change agents, and (j) sponsor other women. Based on these

research findings, her determined work ethic, the second trait of this superintendent was

identified. It was reported by district employees, which included the executive

secretary, school administrators and teachers that this superintendent was "very fair,

energetic, intelligent, passionate, and committed" (3:17-23; 45). This superintendent

had a passion for education and worked hard to ensure that her employees shared that

enthusiasm. Furthermore, the executive secretary revealed the following:

> she motivates. She is a great motivator. She has a way of getting everyone to
>
> buy into her plan for success for the children. Whether it's with the community
>
> leaders, going out and speaking and getting them to buy into and voting for a
>
> bond, or getting sponsors for different programs. (3: 29-33)

This superintendent devoted an enormous amount time to her fulfill her duties and to

ensure that her district was excelling. She was on the job "24/7" (2:149). She was at the

office late at night and on weekends. She did not limit her task as superintendent to the central office and the schools within the district; she spoke at churches and community organizations. Based on the data received, she was highly visible in her school community and the surrounding areas. The superintendent shared, "I spend most of my time procuring funds from grants and other funding sources, forging alliances with the business community, and preparing for speaking engagements at surrounding churches and community centers. I'm on the go so much that I do not have time for myself" (1:104-107). Her dedication to her district was evident in the successes documented in the annual progress reports. Revealed in the 2005-06, compiled three year report, the district (a) received recognition from the State Department of Education as having the most number of five star schools within the state, (b) maintained three high schools with the average ACT scores that ranked above both the state and national averages, (c) had 19 schools with exemplary employee attendance, and (d) reduced the number of non-standard certified teachers by 56.

In order to illuminate the successes of this district, the employees understand two concepts. The first was the mission of the school and the second was that they will work until the task is complete. Every decision made by this superintendent was predicated on the mission of the school district and the needs of the students. "I've tried to be sensitive to each employee with the understanding that they know what our mission is and understand that the children come first. They forget children come first, but they know my philosophy" (2:132-133). Based on the data, it is this belief from the superintendent and all of the district employees which assist in the creation of a successful school district.

The third trait of this superintendent was persistence. Her tumultuous past, which included poverty and physical abuse from the hands of her father, as well as strangers, equipped this superintendent with the skills necessary to persevere through even the worst of times. Her quest to achieve the title of superintendent of schools did not come easy. Having applied for the position twice before being successful prepared her for the accompanying challenges. Based on the research of Shakeshaft (1989), females lack of career advancement has been associated with inadequacy and low self-image and lack of motivation and self-confidence. Furthermore, Schmuck (1975) stated these barriers prohibited women from considering school administration as a career option. It was this superintendent's willingness to accept the challenge of superintendent of schools, as well as her persistence, which contributed to the attainment of this position. It is the belief of this superintendent that: "I'm in the place that God wants me to be in, and I'm doing what He wants me to do, and I'm giving it all that I've got. I believe that He knows my heart and He will bless whatever I do" (2:66-68).

A fourth theme which emerged based on the data collected was this superintendent's strong religious beliefs. During each encounter with this superintendent, the discussion of her belief of the existence of a higher being was evident. She consistently expressed the need to turn her attention to God before making important decisions, during meetings with members of the school board, and when the stress of being a superintendent became overwhelming. These instances were not conclusive of the times this superintendent meditated or focused her attention on God or prayed. She attended church regularly and in many instances, was the guest speaker.

Promoting God and her school district were vital to her. She addressed the characteristics of honesty, integrity, and trust, which are generally associated with spirituality. It appeared that the demands of the superintendency and those of her individual experiences served to strengthen her spiritual foundation. Based on the data collected during interviews and the vocal expressions, became evident that a strong belief in God prevailed.

The fifth theme which emerged was the focus on academic achievement. Upon being appointed for the superintendency, she immediately began crafting a plan to improve student achievement by creating a choice plan, which provided parents an option for moving children into better performing schools. The importance of student achievement was paramount. She consistently referenced the children being the focus of the decisions being made within the district. The employees and school board members understood that before any decision was made, it had to be in the best interest of the students. This superintendent consistently used the mission of the school district as a guide. This passion was no secret, as it was understood by the employees, parents, and school community. To celebrate the successes of the district, annual celebrations were held to reward and showcase the students and employees achievements throughout the school year. The academic improvements, made by the students within the district, where recognized at the local, state, and national levels.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study was conducted to determine how one African-American female constructed her understanding of her leadership role as superintendent of a large school district in a southern state. This phenomenological study to investigate how this individual defined and made sense of her role as school district leader, and to identify the benefits and advantages, as well as the complexities and problems faced by this superintendent. In order to identify and describe, through a case study, how this African-American female constructed her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity and how she defined said role on a daily basis, a qualitative approach with a narrative report of the data collected, was generated. This chapter provides a summary of the study, examines the analyses of research findings in order to present the findings, draws conclusions, and identifies implications for future educational planning relative for future research in this area.

Summary of Findings

The purpose of this study was to determine how one African-American female developed an understanding of her role as school district leader and to identify the

benefits and advantages, as well as complexities and problems faced by this superintendent. This researcher used the qualitative approach to ascertain how this African-American female constructed her understanding of the leadership role. This research gave consideration to six research questions, in with the researcher will provide an explanation for the conclusions.

Research Question One

How does the participant define and construct her understanding of her leadership role through the lenses of cultural experiences, gender, and ethnic identity as a school district leader?

Based on the data collected during this research, the participant in this study found her strong religious beliefs to be the source of strength. The cultural experiences gained through the process of growing up, which included growing up poor, having a physically abusive father and enduring abuse from others, crafted her to be a strong, dedicated, hardworking, individual. In addition, these life experiences taught her to accept challenges and to be prepared. These experiences also instilled in her the tenacity to accomplish tasks set forth. This superintendent stated it was these experiences that made her who she is today.

The participant of this study clearly understood that being female presented its own degree of difficulty. She understood that by entering a male dominated workforce she would have to work harder to prove, not only her competence, but her capabilities. Most importantly, this superintendent understood that her ethnicity posed concerns, not only for the position, but for the constituents within the school community.

Research Question Two

What are the benefits and advantages, as well as the complexities and problems, faced being an African-American female school district leader?

The benefits and advantages faced by this African-American female superintendent came from the individuals whose lives that she has touched. She recalled the fond memories of receiving correspondences from former students and peer educators. The greatest benefit, according to this superintendent, was instilling the desire to become a leader in other educators. In addition, this superintendent stated that the rewards from becoming a superintendent are not derived from the finances received because the amount to time and work devoted to the job and the school community will never equate. The untiring and unselfish amount to time this superintendent gave to this school district will not go unnoticed as it can be evidenced in (a) the increase in student academic achievement, (b) the dedication of the employees of the school district, (c) an overwhelming amount of additional grant funding received by the district, (d) the increase in community partnerships for the district, (e) restoration of staff positions, and (f) the annual recognition of teachers, parents, students, employees and community partners. (Caddo 2003-06)

To highlight the increase in student achievement, according to the 2007 Semi-Annual Progress Report (Caddo, 2007), eight schools were recognized as Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence by the U.S. Department of Education and four schools ranked top in the State. In addition, this school district is the only district in the State with more than one Five Star school based on standards from the Department of Education.

Employee dedication was evidenced by the number of teachers who achieved

highly qualified status. According to the 2003 Annual Report, there were 1700 teachers

who were highly qualified. By the end of 2006, that number had risen to 2109. (Caddo,

2003-06) By January 2007 an additional 49 teachers achieved highly qualified status.

By 2006, 36 teachers were selected to participate in the Administrative Internship

Program. This program provides training for teachers who are interested in becoming

administrators. According to the 2007 report, 17 additional teachers were selected to

participate in this program.

Procuring additional funds through district and school based grants permitted

this superintendent to offer additional resources to meet the needs of the students. At the

end of the 2003-04 academic year, the district received $12,459,977 in grant monies. By

the end of 2006, that amount increased to $13,491,275. These funding sources included,

but were not limited to, grants from Funding for the Improvement of Education,

Childhood Collaboration, Reading First, McKinney-Vento and Community Service.

The number of community and business partnerships supporting the district

increased from 303 in 2004 to 485 by 2006, according to the 2003-06 Annual Report.

These community and business partnerships provide support to the school and the

school district.

Upon receiving the appointment for superintendent, the district was facing

financial difficulty and employees were being laid off due to a reduction in force. This

superintendent restored the employees facing layoff and added 65 additional teachers

based on the 2003-04 Annual Report. In addition, through the coordination of funds,

she employed 65 PreKindergarten teachers, 56 class size reduction teachers, and 16 behavior intervention specialists during the 2003-04 school year. By the end of 2004, 1,192 employees were hired. This included full-time, part-time, and substitute employees. By the end of 2005 an additional 1,607 employees were added. In 2006, 394 more were hired to various positions within the district.

In order to recognize the achievements of teachers, students, and employees, as well as honoring the parents and community partners of the district, this superintendent coordinated Academic Celebrations. The first was held in 2005 and continued annually. Individuals representing the entire school community were invited to be apprised of the accomplishments made during that particular school year.

The complexities and problems encountered being an African-American female superintendent came from various sources which included: (a) her race, (b) her gender, (c) political issues, and (d) relationships with elected school board officials. With each barrier, this superintendent had to learn strategies to overcome. Her primary coping mechanism was her strong religious beliefs.

This superintendent expected to encounter complexities with her race and gender. Being the first African-American female superintendent of this district was met with a barrage of emotions by not only the school community, but employees of the school district. Some of the constituents were enthused by the idea and others were disturbed. Those who were enthused felt as though she was making great strides for their gender and did not allow race to be a factor. These persons were more concerned with her intellect and ability to make the desired changes necessary for their school district to excel academically. To the contrary, according to this superintendent, those

disturbed by the idea felt as though they could use her, due to her status in the

community, to obtain personal favors. When this was not accomplished, some

constituents made negative comments. Though these comments were of concern to this

superintendent, she did not permit them to hinder the fulfillment of the mission of the

school.

Research Question Three

How were the encountered barriers addressed and overcome during the quest to

obtain the superintendency?

Bjork (1999) stated that the superintendency is the most gender-stratified

executive position in the country. Furthermore, Bjork's research revealed that men are

40 times more likely to advance than women. Though women form the basis of

minorities in the superintendency, the African-American female, needless to say,

represents an even greater minority.

Securing the superintendency is no easy task. Barriers exist, regardless of gender

or ethnicity. Traditionally, however, females encounter gender specific barriers. These

barriers include (a) family and marriage constraints, (b) social norms, (c) lack of

preparation and/or interest, (d) gender stereotypes, and (e) lack of motivation or self-

interest. These barriers have prohibited some women from considering school

administration as a career option.

As with any other major accomplishment achieved by this African-American

female, obtaining the superintendency did not come easy. She applied for the position

twice, albeit not in this district, before she was afforded to opportunity to demonstrate

her competence and capabilities. Though these attempts were unsuccessful, this

superintendent used the experience gained from each to refine her abilities. Prior to achieving the superintendency, she was employed as the interim superintendent of a large urban district where she was fostering the necessary changes to propel that district forward. Community personnel began contacting her in 2003 to apply for the recently vacated superintendency in the district where she began her educational career. This attempt, though successful, came after much deliberation from this African-American female.

The barriers encountered by this African-American female to obtain the superintendency were (a) her gender, (b) her ethnicity, (c) political concerns, and (d) returning to the home. The participant of this study embraced the barriers of which she had control and worked diligently to reduce the associated stereotypes. Though her gender and ethnicity were beyond the scope of her control, they were instrumental in achieving another milestone in her educational career. After securing the superintendency and working selflessly to improve the district, this superintendent was able to minimize the associated barriers.

Research Question Four

What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for leadership behaviors of a practicing African-American female superintendent?

Major leadership behaviors of this superintendent included: (a) energetic expression (b) confident actions based on deep knowledge of community, and (c) multi-modal communication approach. Assumptions that form the basis for this superintendent's choice of leadership behaviors were based on experience and

sociological factors, but most were based on the superintendent's deep knowledge of the mores of the community.

The superintendent expressed herself in personal and professional situations. She devoted large amounts of energy promoting the image of her school system locally, state-wide, regionally, and nationally. The superintendent was confident that key community members and the members of the Board trusted her to benefit the community by promoting the quality of the schools. In order to maintain that level of trust, she spent many hours promoting her school district through speaking engagements, procuring additional funding through grants, and working diligently with the schools and the school community. Since she dedicated so much time and efforts to the school district, the employees reciprocated her actions by remaining loyal to the school district and the students. This was evidenced by the employees willingness stay late or come early in an effort to meet the needs of the students.

This superintendent believed in hard work and demanded accountability; therefore, excuses for lack of quality were unacceptable to her. This superintendent provided a method to measure positive growth in the district brought by the focus on accountability. She believed in the team approach to accomplishing tasks and often commented on the quality of her team.

Research Question Five

How do the expectations from the school Board members and the schools' communities impact the decision-making process?

This superintendent was born, reared, taught, and accepted her first administrative position in the district where she served as superintendent. As a result,

she was keenly cognizant of the needs and desires of the school district. She was very

knowledgeable of its constituents and their desired expectations for the superintendent.

Her community was her source of strength.

The school Board members and the school communities expected this

superintendent to (a) maintain visibility within the school district, (b) involve all

stakeholders in the educational process, and (c) collaborate with governmental entities

to create a more holistic approach to improving the schools and the school communities.

Knowing these expectations, this superintendent crafted a team which was comprised of

teachers, administrators, and central office staff as her core group of consultants. This

group met regularly to discuss the needs and directionality of the schools and the school

district. Keeping the public informed through frequent town hall meetings and written

communications was one of the many goals of this school superintendent.

Understanding what the school community expected of her had an impact on her

decision making process. The underlying mission of this superintendent's actions was

meeting the needs of the children within her district, which was made known to

everyone involved with this school district. She considered the needs of the children

prior to making decisions. She believed that the stakeholders of the schools must take

ownership of the school community if a sustained, positive impact to the learning

process was to occur. Since this district received minimal funding at the State and

Federal levels, this superintendent relied heavily on the school community for

supplemental income. Therefore, she solicited the community for bond renewals and to

become business partners with the school district. Each endeavor she undertook was

embraced by members of the school community.

In addition, this superintendent believed that if real, systemic change was to occur, ownership must be shown. She believed in the importance of involving everyone who would be affected by the decisions made. By including all stakeholders in the decision making process, she was able to convince the stakeholders and the constituents of her district that making sacrifices in order to achieve the mission and vision set forth by the educational entity everyone wins. This approach also made it easier for her to facilitate the required changes for the district.

Research Question Six

What political, educational, and demographical context of the schools and communities framed the leadership behaviors?

This superintendent, though not heavily involved in politics, understood the political network which existed in the schools and community. Though she was active in the community, she did not participate in the politics. Her primary focus was meeting the needs of the students in her district. To this end, she worked to forge new partnerships with businesses and other community agencies. She tried to respect and foresee   the political decisions rather than affect them.

In order to meet the educational needs of the students in her district, she was committed to meeting the needs of the employees. It was her belief that a happy employee was more productive. She valued all employees for their contribution to the functionality of the school district. This in turn, was reflected in the loyalty to the district and the needs of the students by the employees.

Student achievement was important to this superintendent, and efforts were constantly made to ensure academic success. Creating a choice plan and sponsoring

academic awards celebrations were some examples of plans to meet the needs of the students. She worked closely with the teachers and principals to ensure that the needs of the students were met.

Being superintendent of a demographically diverse district posed challenges. The community had formed political and educational allegiances. Opinions differed based on the needs of the district. The superintendent worked hard to demonstrate a committed effort to continually improve academics and focus on the needs of the district; thus propelling the district forward.

Socialization, work ethic, and persistence were themes which emerged from the data collected. The commonality which existed in each theme was dedication. This superintendent was determined to make her district excel and to be recognized for its accomplishments. By devoting herself to achieving the mission of the school, the district received recognition on the state and national levels. To these accomplishments, she credits: (a) God for granting her the wisdom and knowledge, (b) her staff for their untiring commitment to the mission of the school, and (c) the experiences gained from her past as each instilled in her the ability to accept and overcome challenges.

Recommendations for Practice

This research study focused on an African-American female, who through sheer determination became a very successful and well-respected superintendent of a large, urban school district. One could review the complications and obstacles of her past as deterrents or excuses which would ultimately produce failure. Instead, this superintendent chose to defy the odds and launch a successful career. Her success did not come immediately or without sacrifice. This superintendent demonstrated at a very

early age that if goals are to be achieved, one must be willing to devote the time and energy required for success. Sacrificing, according to this superintendent will ultimately lead to success.

Recommendations for Future Research

The conclusions of this research offer many implications for future research in every state in America. Though women have made great strides in the workplace over the years, the percentage of women in the superintendency in America has not increased dramatically. As more females are certificated as and appointed superintendents, more research studies should be conducted.

This research focused on a single African-American female who demonstrated competence and capability to successfully oversee a large school district in a southern state. Suggestions for successive research include (a) replicating this study for a small, rural school district, (b) compare the leadership behaviors of successful African-American female superintendents throughout a state, (c) compare the leadership behaviors of successful African-American and Caucasian female superintendents of a specific region to determine if similarities exist, and (d) compare the leadership behaviors of successful African- American building level administrators. Most of the research conducted on women in the superinendency has incorporated qualitative approach. In an effort to create a comparison of leadership between race and gender, a mixed approach may be more practical.

This study revealed the unselfish amount of dedication required for a successful school district. It will be interesting to note with the passage of time the number of African-American females who become successful district leaders as women are

placing themselves in position to be superintendent by completing advanced degrees

and earning the proper certification.

APPENDIX A

LEADERSHIP PRACTICES SELF INVENTORY

BEST-SELLING AUTHORS OF *THE LEADERSHIP CHALLENGE*

K O U Z E S
P O S N E R

LEADERSHIP
PRACTICES
INVENTORY

THIRD EDITION

SELF

LP I SELF

Leadership Practices Inventory

by JAMES M. KOUZES
& BARRY Z. POSNER

INSTRUCTIONS

Write your name in the space provided at the top of the next page. Below your name, you will find thirty statements describing various leadership behaviors. Please read each statement carefully, and using the RATING SCALE on the right, ask yourself:

"How frequently do I engage in the behavior described?"

- Be realistic about the extent to which you *actually* engage in the behavior.

- Be as honest and accurate as you can be.

- DO NOT answer in terms of how you would like to behave or in terms of how you think you should behave

- DO answer in terms of how you typically behave on most days, on most projects, and with most people.

- Be thoughtful about your responses. For example, giving yourself 10s on all items is most likely not an accurate description of your behavior. Similarly, giving yourself all 1s or all 5s is most likely not an accurate description either. Most people will do some things more or less often than they do other things.

- If you feel that a statement does not apply to you, it's probably because you don't frequently engage in the behavior. In that case, assign a rating of 3 or lower.

For each statement, decide on a response and then record the corresponding number in the box to the right of the statement. After you have responded to all thirty statements, go back through the LPI one more time to make sure you have responded to each statement. *Every* statement *must* have a rating.

The RATING SCALE runs from 1 to 10. Choose the number that best applies to each statement.

1	=	Almost Never
2	=	Rarely
3	=	Seldom
4	=	Once in a While
5	=	Occasionally
6	=	Sometimes
7	=	Fairly Often
8	=	Usually
9	=	Very Frequently
10	=	Almost Always

When you have completed the LPI-Self, please return it to:

_____

_____

_____

Thank you.

Your Name:_____

To what extent do you typically engage in the following behaviors? Choose the response number that best applies to each statement and record it in the box to the right of that statement.

1. I set a personal example of what I expect of others.

2. I talk about future trends that will influence how our work gets done.

3. I seek out challenging opportunities that test my own skills and abilities.

4. I develop cooperative relationships among the people I work with.

5. I praise people for a job well done.

6. I spend time and energy making certain that the people I work with adhere to the principles and standards we have agreed on.

7. I describe a compelling image of what our future could be like.

8. I challenge people to try out new and innovative ways to do their work.

9. I actively listen to diverse points of view.

10. I make it a point to let people know about my confidence in their abilities.

11. I follow through on the promises and commitments that I make.

12. I appeal to others to share an exciting dream of the future.

13. I search outside the formal boundaries of my organization for innovative ways to improve what we do.

14. I treat others with dignity and respect.

15. I make sure that people are creatively rewarded for their contributions to the success of our projects.

16. I ask for feedback on how my actions affect other people's performance.

17. I show others how their long-term interests can be realized by enlisting in a common vision.

18. I ask "What can we learn?" when things don't go as expected.

19. I support the decisions that people make on their own.

20. I publicly recognize people who exemplify commitment to shared values.

21. I build consensus around a common set of values for running our organization.

22. I paint the "big picture" of what we aspire to accomplish.

23. I make certain that we set achievable goals, make concrete plans, and establish measurable milestones for the projects and programs that we work on.

24. I give people a great deal of freedom and choice in deciding how to do their work.

25. I find ways to celebrate accomplishments.

26. I am clear about my philosophy of leadership.

27. I speak with genuine conviction about the higher meaning and purpose of our work.

28. I experiment and take risks, even when there is a chance of failure.

29. I ensure that people grow in their jobs by learning new skills and developing themselves.

30. I give the members of the team lots of appreciation and support for their contributions

APPENDIX B

HUMAN USE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

LOUISIANA TECH
U N I V E R S I T Y

OFFICE OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH

MEMORANDUM

TO: Janis Kennedy-Williams and Dr. Randy Parker

FROM: Dr. Leslie K Guice, Vice President of Research and Development

SUBJECT: HUMAN USE COMMITTEE REVIEW

DATE: April 23, 2007

In order to facilitate your project, an EXPEDITED REVIEW has been done for your proposed study entitled:

"Superintendent in Action: A Qualitative Study of an
African-American Female Superintendent"

HUC-376

The proposed study's revised procedures were found to provide reasonable and adequate safeguards against possible risks involving human subjects. The information to be collected may be personal in nature or implication. Therefore, diligent care needs to be taken to protect the privacy of the participants and to assure that the data are kept confidential. Informed consent is a critical part of the research process. The subjects must be informed that their participation is voluntary. It is important that consent materials be presented in a language understandable to every participant. If you have participants in your study whose first language is not English, be sure that informed consent materials are adequately explained or translated. Since your reviewed project appears to do no damage to the participants, the Human Use Committee grants approval of the involvement of human subjects as outlined.

Projects should be renewed annually. *This approval was finalized on March 26, 2007 and this project will need to receive a continuation review by the IRB if the project, including data analysis, continues beyond March 26, 2008.* Any discrepancies in procedure or changes that have been made including approved changes should be noted in the review application. Projects involving NIH funds require annual education training to be documented. For more information regarding this, contact the Office of University Research.

APPENDIX C

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

TITLE: Superintendent in Action: A Qualitative Study of an African-American Female Superintendent

PROJECT DIRECTOR(S):   Janice Kennedy-Williams
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Dr. Randy Parker
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Initial Interview Questions

1. What is your educational background? Please include years of experience, educational background, administrative experience, etc. (Include information regarding the path to the superintendency.)
2. What barriers, if any, were encountered during the quest for the superintendency?
3. What characteristics and strengths do you possess which you feel helped achieve the position of superintendent? Include both personal and professional.
4. What is your perceived leadership style?
5. What are the benefits/advantages, as well as the complexities/problems, faced as superintendent? How are these addressed?
6. What leadership assumptions appear to form the basis for your leadership behaviors?
7. How do life experiences assist if fulfilling the role of superintendent?
8. What do you feel was your greatest asset in the attainment of the superintendency?
9. How do you define your role as school district leader?

1. What does the Board expect of you and how does this impact your decision making process? School communities?

2. What political, educational and demographical contexts of the schools and communities framed your leadership behaviors?

3. How do you initiate and facilitate change?

4. How would you describe your relationship with the executive board?

5. How do you deal with conflict (Board, employees, parents)?

6. What do you feel were the expectations of the Board when you were hired?

7. Do you consider yourself a risk taker?

Employee interview questions:

1. What is your position with the school system?

2. How long have you worked with the Superintendent ?

3. How would you describe her – as an individual; as a leader?

4. How do you feel about her leadership abilities?

5. What type of impact do you feel that she's made in schools and the surrounding community?

6. How does she cope with the complexities of being superintendent?

7. What reform measures have been instituted under her leadership? What were the outcomes?

8. What one thing, if any, could be changed to make the district better?

9. How do you feel about having an African American female superintendent as instructional leader?

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VITA

Janice Marie Kennedy was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, on October 24, 1968, the sixth child of Brodie Kennedy and the late Annie Jean Bell Kennedy. After graduating from Summerfield High School (Summerfield, Louisiana), with honors, in 1986, she entered Louisiana Tech University in Ruston, Louisiana in August, 1986. Having a major of Elementary Education and minors of Early Childhood Education and Computer Literacy, she graduated in November, 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She received a Masters of Arts degree in Curriculum and Instruction in 1991 and thirty additional educational hours were earned by 1993 in Educational Leadership.

Janice Marie Kennedy began her educational career in 1989 with the Claiborne Parish School District. Positions there included elementary teacher for eight years, then middle and alternative school principal for four years. In 2002, she relocated to North Little Rock, AR and was employed with the Pulaski County Special School District for three years. While in Arkansas, she served as elementary teacher and administrator before returning to Louisiana in 2005. Currently (Winter, 2008) she is employed as the instructional supervisor with Claiborne Parish School District.

Throughout the course of her career, she has always aspired to improve student achievement and remain abreast of trends in education. Being exposed to a myriad of educational philosophies her enabled her to be successful with educational endeavors.