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A Narrative Study on the Leadership Development of Female Superintendents in New Jersey

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A NARRATIVE STUDY ON THE LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
OF FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN NEW JERSEY

By
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to explore, through the lived experiences of 8 women who achieved the superintendency in New Jersey, the intersectionality of gender, social norms, and race and how these women developed as leaders. The study was designed to identify perceived barriers to career ascension in education administration and the successful strategies that female superintendents in New Jersey utilized to overcome those barriers. The study explored strategies that future leaders might utilize to address leadership development and career ascendency for women who aspire to the superintendency. For this study, a narrative research design was best suited to examine and understand the female superintendents' personal reflections of events and the meaning that they derived through their experiences, from their perspectives. Themes were developed inductively using categorical content analysis to focus on specific content themes within the narrative.

Although women have dominated the workforce in public education, limited access to senior leadership ranks remains. As evidenced by the literature, it is wise to investigate the progression of leadership development to identify and develop future female leaders in education.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the people I love the most. To my parents, Jovita Sanchez and Manuel Gonzalez, who instilled in me the value of education and hard work. My mother personifies courage, resilience, and unconditional love and, together with my father's sense of humor, work ethic, and love of family, they were the first and greatest influence in my life. I am who I am because of the two of you—thank you!

To my husband and best friend, Kiko—thank you for your support and patience as I followed my dream. I know it has not been easy. I am blessed to have you by my side, sharing every journey.

To my daughters, Amanda and Alexis, I hope this inspires you to find your passion and achieve your own goals—anything is possible. *You are my greatest gift from God*.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Problem

The public school superintendency is regarded as one of the most complex roles in

modern society. The highest ranking position in American public school systems requires

superintendents to serve as the top educator of the school community. As chief executive of a

public school district, superintendents have a unique and influential voice in education. A study

sponsored by the Wallace Foundation summarized the link between educational leadership and

student learning. In this study, Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) identified

leadership as the most influential factor, second only to classroom instruction, in responding to

policy initiatives, recognizing local priorities, and improving the overall quality of students'

learning. A superintendent's work portfolio comprises the responsibilities of increasing student

achievement, preparing for the needs of a diverse student and staff population, incorporating

21st-century skills for teaching and learning while balancing the demands of the federal

government, responding to the critical media, and building relationships with the board and

community, all with continuously dwindling resources. School superintendents today, more than

ever, work in an increasingly high-stakes environment full of adversity (Patterson, 2007).

Today's typical superintendent is a male aged 56 to 60 (Kolu, 2013). According to the

U.S. Census Bureau, the superintendency is the most male-dominated executive position of any

profession in the United States (Glass et al., 2000). The American Association of School

Administrators (2010) reported that the number of female superintendents increased from 13.2%

in 2000 to 24.1% in 2010. Glass (2010) indicated that, of the nation's 13,728 superintendents

today, 1,984 are women. The most recent report, *Study of the American Superintendent: 2015*

Mid-Decade Update (AASA, 2015), noted that, although increases have been made throughout

the years, females still only comprise 27% of the superintendency, up just 2% from 2010.

The underrepresentation of female leaders in executive-level positions is not specific to

education. In a broad range of fields, women's presence in top leadership positions—as equity

law partners, medical school deans, and corporate executive officers—remains at 10% to 20%

(Warner, 2015). In fact, the Center for American Progress (2015) estimated that, at the current

rate of change, it would take until 2085 for women to reach parity with men in key leadership

roles in the United States. A study conducted by Eagly and Karau (2002) revealed a perceived

incongruity between the female gender role and leadership roles. They stated, "Leadership has

been predominantly a male prerogative in corporate, political, military, and other sectors of

society. Although women have gained increased access to supervisory and middle management

positions, they remain quite rare as elite leaders and top executives" (Eagly & Karau, 2002, p.

573). Notwithstanding, in a recent study of 900 managers at top U.S. corporations, Coughlin,

Wingard, and Hollihan (2005) reported that "women's effectiveness as managers, leaders and

teammates outstrips the abilities of their male counterparts in 28 out of 31 managerial skill areas"

(p. 136). Some of the skills highlighted included bringing compassion, patience, and teamwork

to the work environment and offering creativity in the classroom. Coughlin et al. noted,

> Women bring a different way of thinking; a cooperative spirit; a gift for "reading"
> people; patience; empathy; networking abilities; negotiating skills; a drive to nurture
> children, kin, business connections and the local and world community; an interest in
> ethnic diversity and education; a keen imagination; a win-win attitude; mental flexibility;
> an ability to embrace ambiguity; and the predisposition to examine complex social,
> environmental, and political issues with a broad, contextual, long-term view. (p. 140)

Studies have tended to confirm the assumption that women will excel at nurturing

competencies, such as developing others, inspiring and motivating others, building relationships,

collaborating, and facilitating teamwork. A recent study conducted by Greenberg (2005)

2

identified personality qualities of female leaders and suggested that, "when they are combined they create a leadership profile that is much more conducive to today's diverse workplace, where information is shared freely, collaboration is vital and teamwork distinguishes the best companies" (p. 7). Recently, several studies in both educational and business settings highlighted strengths that women possess that make them better suited for leadership positions (Brunner, 1999; Davis, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Edgehouse, 2008; Paustian-Underdahl, Walker, & Woehr, 2014; Wickham, 2007). Furthermore, a study conducted by Zenger and Folkman (2012) used a 360-degree feedback instrument that measured 16 competencies and found that managers, peers, other employees, and observers' direct reports all rated females more positively than men overall. The competencies with the largest positive differences included taking initiative, displaying integrity and honesty, and driving for results. These competencies emphasized how women were seen as more effective in getting things done, being role models, and delivering results. These abilities depict leaders who undertake difficult challenges, ensure that people act with integrity, and simply achieve significant results. These skills would be vital in navigating the challenges that superintendents face in their role as chief education officer.

Research from the past 20 years on the general leadership traits that females exhibit has produced conflicting results. Some researchers have reported that men and women hold mostly common leadership traits or abilities, arguing that leadership is contingent on situational factors (Foels, Driskell, Mullen, & Salas, 2000). However,

> other researchers (Eagly, 1987; Eagly & Johnson, 1990; Eagly & Karau, 2002) found that men and women employ different leadership styles based on their personal leadership concept and stereotypical perceptions. Shakeshaft (1989) indicated that women and men approach the job of school administrator differently and, consequently, respond in ways that are often dissimilar . . . as a group, women tend to have a different administrative

style then do men, and that effectiveness for a female may depend on this altered approach (p. 190). Additionally, some contemporary researchers working in the field of social sciences (Eagly, 2013; Wang, Oh, Courtright, & Colbert, 2011; Vinkenburg, van Engen, Eagly, & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2011) report that women display specific gender based leadership characteristics. (Amedy, 1999, p. 2)

Shakeshaft (1989) was one of the pioneers who shed light on women in educational administration. Her research sought to include the perspective of female administrators in the literature and raise awareness of gender stereotypes for those in a position to hire, promote, train, and mentor future female educational leaders. Since then, many studies have focused on female superintendents. While teaching is a female dominated profession, males continue to control the most senior executive leadership position in public schools. Trewartha (2012) noted the following, most recent statistics: "About 75% of all teachers are female (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2003), whereas 24% of superintendents are female (Kowalski, McCord, Petersen, Young, & Ellerson, 2011)" (p. 5). Skrla (1999) stated that the school superintendency is the most gender-stratified executive position in the United States. She explained that men are 20 times more likely than women to advance from the level of teacher to the top leadership role in a school district. Violette (2006) found that, in Tennessee in 2001, female superintendents managed only 18 of the 138 school systems. In North Carolina, of the 117 superintendencies in the state, including two federal districts, women occupy 26 of these executive leadership positions, slightly more than 22% (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2015). Many studies have sought to document the discrepancy between the makeup of the teaching force and that of the superintendency. Even though teaching is a female-dominated field, few studies have examined female superintendents in New Jersey. Barriers have been well documented in some studies, but it is important to learn whether women's perceptions of those

barriers have changed over time (Derrington & Staratt, 2009a). Many women possess the skills, characteristics, and knowledge necessary to be successful superintendents.

Research has shown that women encounter challenges when pursuing the superintendency (Edgehouse, 2008; Montz, 2004; Wickham, 2007). Lee (2000) concluded in her study that women superintendents in the state of Virginia perceived conflicting demands of career and family and exclusion from the informal socialization process of the "Good Old Boy Network" as major barriers. Uzzo-Faruolo (2013) identified stereotyping, gender bias, career paths and the role of self-efficacy as challenges faced by female superintendents in the state of New York. Furthermore, female superintendents in California described the screening and selection process and limited mentor relationships as obstacles in their attainment of the superintendency (MacArthur, 2010). Overall, the findings from the literature suggest that challenges vary and at times are based on stereotypes, lack of professional development, discriminatory practices or even are self-imposed. However as Derrington and Staratt (2009a) asserted, "recognizing a barrier is the first step towards overcoming it" (p. 12). Indeed, Davis (2010), who conducted a study of female superintendents in North Carolina, called for further research on barriers and strategies that women face in their pursuit of the superintendency to develop a clearer picture and assist other women in their preparation for the obstacles they might face.

In 1999, Cejka and Eagly observed something very similar to what current researchers have identified: "the relative constancy of perceiver's descriptive beliefs about men and women may reflect the tendency for occupations to remain relatively segregated by sex along gender stereotypical lines" (p. 590). A recent study by Davis and Maldonado (2015) addressed the importance of studying the experiences of African American women in executive-level positions

in academia to better understand the origin of their development as leaders and how gender and race interact to inform their leadership development. Current research indicates the need to examine perceptions of practicing female superintendents to understand (a) characteristics of female superintendents, (b) how gender might influence their leadership development experiences, and (c) skill sets that are essential in overcoming identified barriers to attaining the superintendency.

Problem Statement

In New Jersey, the proportion of female superintendents rose from 13% in 1996 to 28% in 2011 (Kolu, 2013). Although New Jersey's 28% (Kolu, 2013) is higher than the national average of 24% (Kowalski et al., 2011) a void exists in the empirical literature specific to women superintendents in New Jersey.

A longitudinal analysis of New Jersey school superintendents conducted for the 15-year period of 1996 to 2011 showed that female superintendents increased their representation by 52%, while the male superintendent population declined by 30% (Kolu, 2013). The greatest increase in the number of female superintendents occurred between 1998 and 2006.

According to the data from the New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey had 507 full-time superintendents in 2011 (72% were male, and 28% were female). Gender groupings of New Jersey superintendents by district type revealed that, in 2011, districts in New Jersey with the highest percentage of female superintendents were either the wealthiest or the poorest (Kolu, 2013).

Female superintendents also tend to be concentrated in districts with K–6 and K–8 grade-level configurations. However, new salary caps instituted in New Jersey in 2011 prompted

numerous superintendents to seek employment in neighboring states or to retire, thereby opening positions in a wide spectrum of districts.

Table 1

Female Superintendent Populations for 1996–1997 and 2010–2011, by District Configuration

District configuration/type	1996–1997 (%)	2010–2011 (%)	Increase in female superintendents (%)
K–12	16	20	4
K–8	20	31	11
K–6	18	39	21
K–12 sending district	17	40	23
9–12	4	29	25
7–12	6	12	6
Vo-tech	5	29	24
County Services	27	27	0
Jointures	0	50	50

Note. Adapted from *A Longitudinal Analysis of New Jersey School Superintendents*, *Their Professional Profiles*, *and Career Paths* (Doctoral dissertation, p. 50), by M. K. Kolu, 2014, Available from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3637719).

Superintendents do not earn tenure in New Jersey; instead, they agree to 3- to 5-year contracts. The short-term contracts and the newly instituted salary cap tend to increase mobility from district to district within New Jersey. Kolu (2013) noted that districts with the highest concentration of female superintendents retain their superintendents an average of 2.7 years.

Of the studies conducted in New Jersey, few have sought to understand the career trajectories of women who have achieved the superintendency. Edmunds (2008) interviewed female superintendents in New Jersey on leadership styles and behaviors, and DeLuca (2009) replicated the study, comparing the findings to male superintendents. Kolu (2013) studied turnover rate and career patterns, not barriers and facilitators, as in the present study. The

prospective increase in superintendent vacancies and opportunities for lateral movement across New Jersey public school districts makes the present study relevant.

Misner-Senyk (1987) conducted a study of New Jersey female superintendents where only 10 of the 37 superintendents agreed to participate and concluded that further research on women in this state was needed. Although the number of female superintendents in New Jersey has increased since earlier studies, thereby generating a larger and more diverse pool of potential participants, few studies have examined the influences on leadership development and the perceptions of barriers women have faced and overcome to attain the superintendency.

Consequently, to identify potential, quality female leaders, education scholars must first understand the perceptions and the personal and professional experiences of current female superintendents in New Jersey. Given that the barriers might vary for different women, this study examined the perceived characteristics and skills that practicing female superintendents identified as influential factors in their development as leaders and assisted them in overcoming barriers they faced in attaining and remaining in the role of chief educational officer in New Jersey.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore, through the lived experiences of women who achieved the superintendency in New Jersey, the intersectionality of gender and social norms and how these women developed as leaders. The study also identified perceived barriers and the successful strategies that the female superintendents utilized to overcome these barriers. Finally, this inquiry adds to the literature on female superintendents and addresses the paucity of empirical research specific to female superintendents in the state of New Jersey.

Significance of the Study

The importance of effective leadership behaviors among female superintendents in New Jersey, the challenges faced by these women, and the strategies they employ to overcome these obstacles make this study significant. Further investigating the pool of potential applicants for superintendent vacancies is timely due to the massive retirements of school administrators beginning to occur among individuals who are members of the post-World War II "baby boom" generation (U.S. Department of Labor, 2000). Derrington and Staratt (2009b) contended that, although the number of women superintendents has increased, at the current annual rate of increase, it would take until 2035 to see a 50:50 gender ratio among superintendents.

Women represent 24.1% of superintendents nationally (Kowalski et al., 2011). How these female superintendents perceive their leadership style is valuable to them, to universities with programs in educational administration, and to New Jersey school boards. Furthermore studies have reported the following statistics on female superintendents by state: 22% in North Carolina (Davis, 2010), 13% in Tennessee (Violette, 2006), 15% in Ohio (Millar, 2014), and 16% in Texas (Sampson & Davenport, 2010).

Recently, the State of New Jersey has experienced an exodus of superintendents to neighboring states, particularly New York and Pennsylvania (Brody, 2014). The movement has been due in part to a salary cap instituted in 2011, which expedited the retirement of many experienced superintendents, thereby increasing the opportunities available to practicing and aspiring female superintendents. This study adds to the current literature regarding successful female superintendents in the U.S. public school system and to the limited literature available on female superintendents in New Jersey public school districts.

This study may be beneficial to current female superintendents and female educators aspiring to the superintendency. By examining the experiences of current female superintendents and the origin of their leadership development, this study provides information regarding how gender identity interacts with leadership experiences and how it might influence women's own conception of leadership in the field of education. This information moves beyond the traditional feminist discourse. Furthermore, capturing the qualities of female leaders who have achieved positive outcomes not only adds to the literature but also focuses on individual experiences. By understanding perceptions about gender roles and norms for women in the superintendency, existing barriers can be addressed and strategies developed to increase their representation in the role of chief education officer of a public school district.

Theoretical Framework

Many researchers have employed feminist theory to frame and comprehend the experiences of women in educational leadership (Grogan, 2000). Qualitative researchers have considered several theories and perspectives to denote the complexity of gender issues related to the superintendency role (Begley, 2001; Haack, 2010). However, "research on socio-cultural issues such as intersectionality is needed to provide a deeper understanding of how . . . social realities can affect an individual's lived experiences in the workplace (Jean-Marie, Williams, & Sherman, 2009)" (Davis & Maldonado, 2015, p. 55).

The theoretical framework of this study focused on the intersectionality of gender, leadership experiences, and race to capture the social realities of female superintendents in New Jersey. Although research exists on intersectionality, the intersection effects of race and gender on leadership development has received little attention within the confines of traditional literature (Davis & Maldonado, 2015).

10

According to Davis (2008), "the image of a crossroads which is associated with intersectionality seems applicable to nearly any context, providing a useful way for visualizing how differences intersect within a particular person's identity or in a specific social practice or location" (p.75). She further proposed that intersectionality initiates a process of discovery, alerting the education field to the fact that the world is always more complicated and contradictory than one can anticipate. Finally, she encouraged each feminist scholar to engage critically with her own assumptions in the interests of reflexive, critical, and accountable feminist inquiry (Davis, 2008).

Bowleg (2012) defined *intersectionality* as a "theoretical framework that posits that multiple social categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status) intersect at the micro level of individual experience to reflect multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression at the macro, social-structural level" (p. 1239). She contended that studies utilizing this framework will result in literature that more accurately reflects the societal realities of inequality and power by revealing individual experiences that reflect and create the structures that promote discrimination.

Cole (2009) proposed that some members of disadvantaged groups also hold privileged identities (e.g., middle-class Black individuals, White women) and, therefore, although much of the literature on intersectionality has been theorized from the standpoint of those who experience multiple dimensions of disadvantage, this framework can also inform how privileged groups are understood. Hancock (2007b) argued that intersectionality goes beyond addressing issues germane to specific populations by also offering a paradigm for theory and research that provides a new approach to understanding the complex causality that characterizes social phenomena.

This analytical framework can help the researcher look for causes of human behavior and to notice and hypothesize about the multiple paths that might lead individuals to the same or similar outcomes. The researcher achieves this by understanding how social categories depend on each other for meaning and, thus, mutually construct one another and work together to shape outcomes. Cole (2009) suggested, "Intersectionality makes plain that gender, race, and class can simultaneously affect the perceptions, experiences, and opportunities of everyone living in a society stratified along these dimensions" (p. 179).

The United States public school superintendency continues to be the most gender-stratified executive position in the country, where men are 40 times more likely to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in school than are women (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000). Examining the superintendency by exploring the intersection of gender, leadership development, and race emphasizes the underrepresentation of women by highlighting their unique experiences. The theoretical framework of intersectionality can provide deeper insights into the leadership experiences that shaped women's career decisions in the education field that led them to the superintendent position.

Design

This study used a qualitative research design with interviews of practicing female superintendents of diverse ethnic backgrounds. A matrix was utilized to identify a purposeful sampling of novice and senior female superintendents that were leading public school districts in the State of New Jersey. The qualitative design allowed for an insider's perspective of female superintendents, their leadership development, and their lived experiences as a product of the intersectionality of gender, race, and leadership development experiences.

Research Questions

This study examined three main research questions and one subquestion:

RQ 1. Who are the female candidates who rise to the level of superintendents?

    RQ 1a. In what ways did gender identities, social norms, and race inform female superintendents' leadership development?

RQ 2. What barriers do women encounter in ascending to the level of superintendent?

RQ 3. How do women navigate the challenges they face?

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations refer to factors such as researcher bias and research methodology that might compromise the findings (Isaac & Michael, 1995). Several limitations of the study were identified. The study collected data from personal interviews; therefore, the findings relied entirely on participants' self-reports. As with any self-report instrument, honesty, integrity, willingness to respond, and interpretation of the questions impacted the responses. The results of this study might not be generalizable to states other than New Jersey. Researcher bias was a also a limitation given that I am a Hispanic female superintendent in a New Jersey public school district, and, therefore, my perceptions and personal experiences might have mirrored those of the participants.

Delimitations

This study only involved participants in one Northeastern state, New Jersey, and encompassed districts with diverse student enrollment, district factor groups, and grade-level structure. This study was limited to practicing female superintendents of public school districts. Aspiring superintendents, retired superintendents, and interim superintendents were not petitioned. Private, parochial, and charter school districts were not considered for this study.

Definition of Terms

This section defines key terms for the study. Some terms are defined as they were used for the purposes of this study, and other terms are defined as they have appeared in the literature.

Barrier: A barrier is any factor or obstacle that hinders career advancement to the next level in administration or management (Shakeshaft, 1998).

Demographics: Demographics are the characteristics of a given population (e.g., sex, race, age, geographic location).

Glass Ceiling: The glass ceiling is an unacknowledged discriminatory barrier that prevents women and people of color from rising to positions of power or responsibility, as within a corporation (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000).

Intersectionality: Intersectionality is a sociocultural theoretical framework that focuses on the interlocking system of race, gender, and social class (Stanley, 2009; Davis, 2012).

Perception: Perception is the impressions and feelings of the participant that become part of the data used to understand a setting (Patton, 2002).

Superintendent: The superintendent is the chief executive officer (CEO) of the school district and is hired by the school board to manage the administrative affairs of the school district (Norton et al., 1996).

Organization of the Study

This inquiry is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 has presented the introduction to the study and the research questions driving the study. Chapter 2 reviews the literature pertinent to the underrepresentation of women in the superintendency. Chapter 3 describes the methodology utilized to conduct the study, including the participants, data collection, and data analysis.

Limitations and assumptions are also addressed. Chapter 4 summarizes the data collected through qualitative measures. Finally, chapter 5 includes a summary of the study and its findings; conclusions; and recommendations for practice, educational preparation, future female leaders, and further study. A comprehensive references list and appendices follow chapter 5.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This literature review includes a historical perspective of women's efforts to achieve gender equity as superintendents in the public school system. The chapter provides a framework of women in leadership positions outside and within the educational setting. In addition, the literature surrounding barriers and successful strategies for overcoming those barriers, career pathways, and demographic profiles of practicing female superintendents and the districts they serve are reviewed. The review also presents empirical research findings on skills and characteristics that studies have identified as necessary to overcoming existing obstacles in various states.

Purpose of the Review

In reviewing the literature on female superintendents, research-based philosophical and theoretical articles relating to this topic were examined. Although some studies have been conducted on female superintendents, the literature does not address the leadership development of female educators who rise to the position of superintendent in the State of New Jersey.

The purpose of this review was to identify empirical studies and educational research that (a) provide a historical perspective of females in education; (b) identify characteristics of female leaders in business, political, and educational settings; (c) examine facilitators and barriers encountered by female superintendents in other states; and (d) note the relevance of previous studies focused on female superintendents in New Jersey to the present study of their leadership development. Finally, implications of the literature and current trends for the future of women in the superintendency are summarized.

Literature Search Procedures

Relevant studies and literature that pertained to the research questions were obtained through several online databases, including ERIC, ProQuest, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global, Online Search Services, Seton Hall University Library Research Services, and the New Jersey Department of Education website. All databases were explored using the following key terms: *female*, *women*, *administrator*, *gender*, *school administration*, *leadership practices*, and *superintendent*. In addition, I used 23 texts to assist with knowledge from other books in the field of inquiry, and nine texts concerning references and procedures for the study design.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for the Literature Review

Studies that met the following criteria were included in the review: (a) peer-reviewed journals, dissertations, and government reports; (b) descriptive, nonexperimental, case study, phenomenological, meta-analysis, and qualitative and quantitative research; (c) books, articles, and theories.

Historical Perspective

To establish a framework for this study, it is important to recognize the history of the superintendency and the paths attempted to achieve gender equity in a male-dominated position. Ella Flagg Young became the first female superintendent when she assumed the superintendency of Chicago Public Schools in 1909. At that time, she declared, "Women are destined to rule the schools of every city" (Blount, 1998, p. 1). Her statement, however, has not translated into the reality of public school administration. The public school superintendency has evinced a trend throughout the 20th century. Women began to ascend to the superintendency in the early 1900s, and their representation increased from about 9% in 1910 to a high of 11% in 1930. However, after the position became extremely segregated by sex, women's representation hit an all-time

low of 3% in 1970 (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The rapid decline of female educators after World War II due to a realignment of gender roles led to a decline of female school administrators throughout the United States.

The enactment of several laws can be credited with the increase of women in leadership positions in the 1960s and 1970s. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 prohibited discrimination in pay based on gender. After 1970, when only one woman held a state superintendency, a more promising trend emerged with the passage of Title IX of the Civil Rights Act of 1972. Tallerico and Blount (2004) believed that advances made during the civil rights initiatives set the stage for the increase in female superintendents. Specifically, they stated,

> The enactment of the Title IX Educational Amendment of 1972 led to the dissolution of low quotas on the number of women who could enroll in colleges and universities and concomitant increases in the proportions of women earning administrative credentials. Similarly, the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974 provided federal funding for numerous projects designed to dismantle sex-based inequities in education. These funds planted seeds for the support and growth of both education-related sex equity research and action oriented assistance to prospective women administrators. (p. 646)

Additionally, the passing of the Civil Rights Act of 1991, which established the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission, indicated that prejudice against women was the greatest barrier to their advancement. The law also offered groundbreaking ideas on ways in which women were to be given greater representation in numbers and visibility in top management and decision-making positions. Although laws now protect women from discrimination as they ascend in education move through the layers of education and provide a basis for pursuing legal action, research does not find significant progress in gender equity in the years since these laws were enacted.

Underrepresentation of women in top leadership positions is not unique to the field of education. In 2003, women constituted 46.6% of the U.S. workforce but only held 10% of the

senior-management positions in Fortune 500 companies (Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000). Although the number of women serving in school-leadership positions has increased slightly, the overall profile for female superintendents during the past century shows very little growth (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006b). Caution should be exercised when attempting to draw overly optimistic conclusions from the recent increase in female representation at the highest level of public school administration because women have not attained, or sustained over time, equitable representation in the superintendency. Grogan (1996) asserted that experiences of female leaders need to be considered to ensure a broader and more comprehensive picture and to reconceptualize the superintendency.

Females in Leadership Positions

Substantial research has theorized and speculated about the influence of gender on leadership styles. Some stereotypes of female leaders are that they excel at nurturing competencies and utilize a collaborative approach to decision-making, whereas men exhibit greater strength in political- and financial tasks. However, a recent study suggested that strengths traditionally linked to male counterparts, such as taking initiative, driving results, solving problems, and championing change, now show a greater correlation with females in leadership roles as viewed by their superiors, subordinates, and colleagues (Zenger & Folkman, 2011).

Conversely, Eagly et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis of 45 studies of transformational, transactional, and laissez-faire leadership styles concluded that the extant findings were encouraging for female leadership. Other studies have established that all aspects of leadership style in which women exceeded men related positively to leaders' effectiveness, whereas all of the aspects in which men exceeded women had negative or null relationships with effectiveness (Eagly et al., 2003).

19

Women in Business

Although women have ascended to the top leadership positions in corporate America, progress has been much slower when compared to education. Today, women comprise 5% of CEOs and 17% of corporate board members among the nation's Fortune 500 companies. A current study on women in leadership conducted by Caliper Research and Development (2014) confirmed that, although women's representation in the workforce increased from 37 to 48% from 1970 to 2009, only 26% of all CEOs in the United States were women. Moreover, only 2 to 3% of women were serving as CEOs in Fortune 500 companies (Barsh & Yee, 2011).

Current research indicates that women who have attained senior executive positions exhibit traditionally successful leadership attributes as well as attributes needed for success amid resistance and difficulties. In general, the study completed by Caliper Research and Development (2014) found that successful women executives' descriptions of their personality traits included being straightforward in their communications style, action oriented, risk-takers, and skilled at solving complex problems. Traditionally, these leadership traits have been considered "masculine"; however, studies confirm that they are universal leadership traits that are embodied by successful women leaders as well as men. A meta-analysis conducted by Paustian-Underdahl et al. (2014) addressed this debate by quantitatively summarizing gender differences in perceptions of leadership effectiveness across 99 independent samples from 95 studies. Their findings show that, when all leadership contexts are considered, men and women do not differ in perceived leadership effectiveness. In addition to these stereotypical "masculine" traits, researchers found repeated instances in which resilience, energy, and empathy emerged as drivers of successful leadership and ability to overcome obstacles. These personality traits identified by female senior executives represent an added benefit for female leaders given the

20

potentially stressful and challenging situations they may encounter as they serve in top leadership roles.

Women in Politics

The Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University noted that the results of the 2014 midterm election marked an important milestone in the history of the U.S. Congress. For the first time, more than 100 women were serving in Congress: 20 in the Senate (20% of all senators) and a record 84 women in the House of Representatives (19% of all House members). Limited literature exists on female political leadership, in part due to the paucity of women who have succeeded in achieving a highly visible political leadership position.

Women in Education

Female principals and superintendents are characterized as employing a leadership style that incorporates an ethic of care; that values relationships, inclusion, and connectedness; and that empowers others to work toward common goals in a collaborative and participatory approach (Brunner, 1999; Davis, 2010; Edgehouse, 2008; Wickham, 2007). Although research indicates that men and women have different leadership styles, the difference could be due, in part, to men seeing leadership as leading and women seeing leadership as facilitating (Schaef, 1985). Women as educational administrators focus on instructional leadership in supervisory practices and are concerned with students' individual differences, knowledge of curriculum teaching methods, and the objectives of teaching (Conner, 1992). In the area of instructional leadership, women tend to spend more years as principals and teachers and have more advanced degrees than men; they emphasize the importance of curriculum and instruction in their work (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Given their educational and professional experience, female school administrators are more likely to interact with their staff and spend more time in the classroom or

with teachers discussing the academic and curricular areas of instruction. Female educational leaders are, therefore, more likely to succeed in influencing teachers to use more desirable teaching methods.

Reporting the percentage of women in administrative positions in U.S. public and private schools is challenging. Currently, the education field relies primarily upon membership counts in administrative organizations, occasional surveys by these organizations, or occasional surveys by the National Center for Education Statistics for such data. Women constitute approximately 75% of teachers, the pool from which principals and superintendents are selected. The most recent available figures from National Education Statistics indicated that approximately 34.5% of principals and 18% of superintendents in the United States are female (Goldring, Taie, Rizzo, Colby, & Fraser, 2013).

In the 1970s, it was important to have evidence to argue that female administrators were at least as good as, if not better than, male administrators. This research was conducted in response to assertions that women were unfit for administrative jobs due to their supposed inability to discipline students, work with men, "command" respect, and possess rational and logical approaches to leadership. The stereotypical mentality was that women take care and men take charge. Although these negative attitudes about women administrators have lessened, evidence indicates that they are not extinguished. Nonetheless, the gap between women's evidently more effective style and their lesser success in achieving promotions to more powerful roles suggests that the behaviors that foster promotions should receive special scrutiny from researchers (Eagly et al., 2003). Giving women equal access to the superintendency of public school systems would increase the size of the pool of potential candidates while increasing the proportion of female candidates with superior leadership skills.

Perceived Barriers for Women Pursuing Top Leadership Positions

Although recent studies indicate that men and women make equally good politicians, business leaders and school superintendents, men continue to exhibit an advantage in attaining top positions in these realms (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011; Harris, 2007; Hoff & Mitchell, 2008; Kowalski & Stouder, 1999). The number of recent studies focused on female leadership styles concedes that women face some unfair, gender-biased obstacles in reaching the topmost leadership positions. Research studies validate how even unconscious, systemic bias likely affects even people's real-world behavior toward women as leaders (Nam, 2015). Studies suggest that people, in general, need to be aware of how these biases subtly influence the factors behind the underrepresentation of women in the executive leadership positions.

A study conducted by the PEW Research Center (2014) explored public attitudes about gender and leadership, with a particular focus on leadership in U.S. politics and business. The results were based on the responses of the 921 women who participated in the survey. The findings showed little agreement on the major barriers that hinder women's attainment of top executive positions. Uneven expectations and companies not being ready to elevate women are cited more than any other factor as a major reason that more women are not in top leadership roles in business. About 4 in 10 women cited a higher standard for women and businesses' unwillingness to hire women for top executive positions as significant barriers (43% each). Conversely, at least 3 in 10 women said that these were not factors holding women back (33% and 31%, respectively). Twenty-six percent of women surveyed noted family responsibilities as a significant barrier for women hoping to reach the top levels of corporate leadership.

It should be noted that studies have identified three of the five challenges that have the most negative impact women's success in leadership relate to work–life balance issues. The

23

challenges with the least negative impact appear to be related to dealing with female leader stereotypes, unfair performance evaluations, and exclusion from male leaders' social networks (Caliper Research and Development, 2014).

Barriers Encountered in Political Leadership

Although no clear consensus existed in the PEW Research Center (2014) study, about 4 in 10 (38%) women reported that a major factor in women attaining leadership positions is that women who run for office are held to a higher standard than men and need to do more to prove themselves. About an equal share (37%) said that many Americans were not ready to elect a woman to higher office, and 27% thought that women who were active in party politics received less support from party leaders (PEW Research Center, 2014). Women in the PEW study saw higher expectations, voter hesitation, and lack of institutional support as major obstacles to female political leadership. About half of women surveyed (48%) reported that family responsibilities were not a barrier for political leadership; however, about as many said that family responsibilities were at least a minor obstacle.

A 2010 study by Loyola Marymount University and American University, published in the *American Journal of Political Science*, "Gendered Perceptions and Political Candidacies: A Central Barrier to Women's Equality in Electoral Politics," explored a potential explanation for this persistent political gender gap. The study's findings showed that women who had credentials, backgrounds, and experiences comparable to those of men were substantially less likely to perceive themselves as qualified and therefore do not attempt to seek office.

Barriers Encountered in Educational Leadership

The Washington Association of School Administrators replicated a study in 2007 that had originally been conducted in 1993. The results of the completed questionnaires demonstrated a

shift in the rankings of barriers identified by female superintendent hopefuls. Whereas, in 1993, the top-ranked barriers were perceived as institutionalized and rooted in societal practices, such as gender stereotyping and sex discrimination, in 2007, self-imposed barriers, such as family responsibilities and inability to relocate, were noted as more significant.

Women in leadership positions confront barriers or obstacles that others do not realize exist. Particularly in educational settings, barriers include the perception that female leaders are unable to discipline older students, particularly men; that they are too emotional; that they are too weak physically; and that males resent working with females (Whitaker & Lane, 1990). After these myths are dispelled, the glass-ceiling barrier that limits women from achieving high-ranking positions must be overcome (Cullen & Luna, 1993). Society's attitude toward appropriate male and female roles is another obstacle. A stigma might be attached to the female superintendent, and she can be forced to endure the negative force of resentment among her staff (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). The stigma and resentment of staff could result from a female superintendent "exhibit[ing] a leadership style that differs from the expectations for male-normed educational administrative positions" (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p. 43). The lack of encouragement to pursue leadership positions, coupled with the lack of recognition through formal and informal social networks, leads to fewer females advancing to the superintendency. Not unlike females in business and politics, balancing family responsibilities and traditionally sex-typed expectations in the household adds to the barriers encountered at work, especially in a top leadership position that requires long hours and stressful responsibilities, such as the superintendency.

A recent study conducted by Dana and Bourisaw (2006b) found women to be nonsupportive of other women. Men and women are accustomed and conditioned to working

under the direction and leadership of men; they are not accustomed to performing work that meets the expectation of a woman CEO (p. 161). Women sabotage other women because competition interferes. A recent study explored professional sabotage, specifically among women in educational leadership. Brock (2008), in reporting her findings, cautioned prospective female leaders to be aware of the dynamics of competition and indirect aggression to which some women subscribe.

In one of the most comprehensive studies of the superintendency, Kowlaski and Stouder (1999) suggested the following barriers for limiting administrative opportunities for women: "[a] lack of family support, [b] lack of employment opportunity, [c] gender discrimination, [d] lack of collegial support, [e] familial responsibilities, [f] lack of self-confidence, [g] racial/ethnic discrimination, and [h] personal lack of tenacity" (p. 6). Overall, the findings of their study suggested that females were hesitant to report that gender discrimination had been a barrier. Only 38% of superintendents reported discrimination, but 38% more of the respondents were not sure. Follow-up interviews were conducted to probe for more data. In general, the women were hesitant to report having experienced discrimination because they lacked conclusive evidence to that effect, even though they appeared to harbor suspicions of having been negatively affected by discrimination (Kowlaski & Stouder, 1999).

Demographics and Career Paths of Female Superintendents

In the only large-scale, national study on female educational leaders, Brunner and Grogan's (2007) *Women Leading Systems: Uncommon Roads to Fulfillment*, the most common personal demographics of female superintendents were identified. Their study found that 93% of female superintendents in the United States were White, and most (70%) were 55 years of age or younger (with nearly 30% younger than 50). Additional findings noted that 76% were married

and that 77% had raised or were raising children at the time, including 35% of whom were raising children under the age of 20 when they were first appointed superintendent. Responses regarding spousal support indicated that 19% had a spouse who took a less demanding or more flexible position, 20% were in a commuter marriage, and 20% made other accommodations, which largely included divorce.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) and Miller (2009) found most of the women worked in rural or small-town districts with student populations under 3,000 (60%). Researchers found that 90% of the women, throughout their career, served in more than one school district. The results of the study also found that most female superintendents completed an undergraduate degree in education (57%); many held either a PhD or an EdD (49%), and most degrees were in educational administration or supervision (79%). However, Yonson (2004) reported that 88% of female superintendents in Pennsylvania held a doctoral degree, and Kowalski and Stouder (1999) found that 14 of 15 female superintendents in Indiana held a doctorate. Kowalski and Stouder noted that a few states, such as Indiana and South Carolina, require superintendents to possess a doctoral degree before they are eligible for the position (New Jersey has no such requirement). According to Glass, Björk, and Brunner (2000), 56.8% of women hold a doctoral degree, whereas only 44.7% of their male counterparts do. Studies have also found a positive correlation between women leading larger districts and holding a terminal degree— the larger the district size, the higher the percentage of women with a PhD/EdD (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women continue to earn doctoral degrees at a higher rate than their male counterparts (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass et al., 2000)

Regarding early career experiences, according to Grewel (2002), most women begin their careers as teachers and then become principals. Montz (2004) found that about half of the

women she surveyed held a central office position before becoming superintendent. Additionally, women who have participated in leadership opportunities while working at the secondary-education level, (e.g., team leaders, department chairs, and coaching positions) seem to rise to the superintendency in greater numbers (Glass, 2000). Several studies found that female superintendents had spent significantly more time as a classroom teacher compared to male superintendents (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Glass et al., 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Yonson (2004), in her study of all female superintendents in Pennsylvania, found that the most common pathway included four different positions (38%), but the most shared career path was to go from teacher to assistant principal to principal to assistant superintendent to superintendent (11.7%). Yonson's findings support the results from Brunner and Grogan's (2007) national study, where 51% of respondents identified the most common path as teacher to principal to central office administrator to superintendent. However, it should be noted that nearly half of the women in Brunner and Grogan's study did not follow that path, as some of the participants progressed to the level of superintendent without ever holding a principal or a central office position. In general, studies have shown that women attain the superintendency later in their careers, have more children, have more degrees, teach longer, have a stronger background in curriculum and instruction, and have typically worked in an elementary setting.

Characteristics and Skills of Successful Female Superintendents

The school superintendency, as in many executive leadership positions, requires certain knowledge, skills, and abilities that will make them effective. Since the *Nation at Risk* report (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), the role of the superintendency has largely focused on bringing about successful reform and change. Characteristics and skills associated with effecting successful change are predominant among successful female

superintendents. Researchers have found that one of the many skills women bring to educational leadership positions is the ability to create and sustain educational reform (Björk, 2000; Grogan, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989). Female educational leaders tend to have greater experience with curriculum and instruction, which may account for their success (Björk, 2000; Hill & Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1987). Studies have found that effective female superintendents typically have a greater understanding of student achievement than their male counterparts (Björk, 2000; Shakeshaft, 1989) and are able to create a shared vision, share power, and be effective change agents (Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1999).

All of the aforementioned knowledge, skills, and abilities are widely considered the most prominent skills of school leaders, and, as such, they have been embedded into standards for superintendents, principals, and other school administrators. Additionally, transformational leadership has been used as an indicator of successful leadership. Transformational leaders are identified as inspirational, positive role models who are concerned about followers, are empowering, and push followers to be creative and to take chances (Eagly & Carli, 2007). Research shows that women, as a group, have more transformational qualities than men (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This research indicates that women have more leadership potential and tend to lead more effectively than men do during challenging times. The role of superintendent of schools "continues to be a position that requires complex skills and strategies to meet the demands of federal and state mandates and move schools into the future" (Montz, 2004, p. 61).

Society might subscribe to the ideology that care and leadership are mutually exclusive; however, an ethic of care is becoming a preferable way to lead. Female school leaders have already been attributed characteristics such as being nurturing, supportive, and concerned about relationships. These leadership skills can be directly correlated to staff retention, parental and

community support, increased student achievement, and attainment of long-term goals, and these skills make women better suited to lead schools (Shields, 2000).

Studies on Female Superintendents in New Jersey

Shakeshaft (1989) set out to assess what the field knew about organizational behavior and claimed that her dissertation, more than any other source, has provided empirical evidence on women in administration. A limited body of research specific to female superintendents in New Jersey involved doctoral studies that included the following themes: (a) leadership styles, (b) gender bias, (c) career paths, (d) perceptions of school board members, and (e) demographics. The findings of these dissertations chronicled the history of female superintendents in New Jersey and their experiences and identified the need for additional research.

Bastas-Christie (1987) examined the underrepresentation of women in administrative positions by outlining how it continues to be a troubling issue for aspirants and researchers alike. She aimed to determine the attitudes and perceptions of New Jersey school board members toward female superintendents who had successfully attained the superintendency and to identify the influence of these attitudes and perceptions on the hiring process. Upon completing interviews with six board members, she concluded that "board of education members' expectations are sex-stereotyped and modeled after their community values in respect to the hiring of a female superintendent" (p. 135).

A follow up study conducted by Dulac (1992) described the personal and professional characteristics of female superintendents and school board presidents of public schools in her study of 52 female superintendents in Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. She set forth to identify the barriers and strategies and their effect on women's attainment of the superintendency as perceived by school board presidents and

30

female superintendents. Her findings note a highly significant difference in perceptions of external and internal barriers. More important, Dulac (1992) claimed that her findings implied "the existence of an untapped source of potential candidates for the superintendency—qualified women" (p. 172).

In her study of 11 female superintendents of public schools in New Jersey, Senyk (1987) analyzed gender issues with a survey instrument and recommended further analysis through the qualitative approach. Her research identified a lack of willingness on the part of women to help each other and described female superintendents as being "jealous of women superintendents" and lacking "faith in women as administrators" (Senyk, 1987, pp. 164–165).

Conversely, Edmunds's (2008) research on leadership preferences and use of power confirmed minimal experiences of gender bias among the 10 female participants. She cautioned, however,

> that several female superintendents declined to participate in the study for fear of reprisals despite an assurance of confidentiality. It is also significant to note that the female superintendents interviewed agreed that "the perception of gender bias against women in the superintendency is outdated and that women have broken the glass ceiling in this state. (p. 189)

Summary

This literature review highlighted the importance of the superintendent position in developing, implementing, and maintaining educational innovations in school districts and the leadership skills that women possess and utilize in achieving exceptional results (Bjork, 2000; Grogan, 1999; Leithwood et al., 2004; Tallerico, 2000). Female leaders possess an inclusive style that aids in improving institutions. If the perception is perpetuated that women's role in education is to nurture learners while men manage the schools, then the lack of equal

representation in leadership is inevitable. Studies have shown that female leaders are still being tested in ways that men are not, and their leadership abilities undergo much scrutiny.

Each of the sections of the literature review helped to increase awareness and understanding of the lack of women in top leadership positions—throughout history and across professional settings. Furthermore, the literature review recognized the experiences of female leaders throughout history as they relate to the superintendency. Although some studies have shown the contributions that women can bring to the superintendency, these contributions are overlooked by school boards when so few women are chosen to fill the position. As Montz (2004) noted,

> Ongoing efforts to improve leadership in public education and the increasing focus on student success for all students may be more successful if the voices, knowledge and skills of women educational leaders are explored and included in the study of leadership. (p. 51)

Although some research has been conducted on female superintendents, these studies have generally focused on topics such as barriers, mentoring and sponsorship, and leadership style rather than on women's individual, lived experiences. As a result, research on how female superintendents develop as leaders is markedly absent. Limited research exists on how gender identities and social norms inform the development of women as leaders in education.

Chapter 2 has examined the skills and traits that women in leadership roles possess and the gender bias they experience when seeking top leadership positions in business, politics, and education. The literature review suggests that the leadership development experiences of women might be different from those of men. The discussion on this study's theoretical framework of intersectionality and the review of empirical studies provide relevant context on the influence of gender, social norms, and race on the leadership development of practicing female superintendents.

Although research exists on intersectionality (Alston, 2005; Byrd, 2009; Collins, 2003; Horsford, 2011; Stanley, 2009), studies that address women's leadership development from the perspective of intersectionality in the superintendency do not exist. As evidenced by the literature, the need for research in this area is critical to the professional development of future female leaders in our public schools.

Research focused on female leaders and their experiences can set the expectation of equitable treatment and encourage readers to view women not just as female leaders, but simply leaders—leaders who are willing to do effectively whatever the position entails. Although equalizing access to all leadership positions is smart, practical, legally required, and socially responsible, nowhere is it more important to use every available pool of educational talent than the superintendency (Lee, 2000). Therefore, it would be wise to investigate the leadership development of practicing female superintendents through their lived experiences and their rise to the superintendency. The narrative of female superintendents will help bridge the gap between what is and what could be for women in and aspiring to the position of chief educational officer.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the intersectionality of gender, race, and other sociocultural themes experienced by female superintendents in New Jersey through their lived experiences of how they developed as leaders.

Research Design

Through a qualitative research design, the study utilized a narrative research method. Prior to the mid-20th century, quantitative approaches had dominated research in the social sciences; however, since that time, interest in qualitative research increased, as did the value of qualitative work in addressing matters of equity and social justice (Creswell, 2009; Denzin, 2008). Creswell (2009) noted that "qualitative research is a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). In qualitative research, meanings and interpretations are negotiated with human data sources because it is the subjects' realities that the researcher attempts to reconstruct (Merriam, 2009). According to Glesne (2006),

> Qualitative researchers seek to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them. . . . Qualitative research methods are used to understand some social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved, to contextualize issues in their particular sociocultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions. While quantitative research methods are designed with the intention of making generalizations about some social phenomena, qualitative research methods create predictions concerning those phenomena and provide causal explanations. (Glesne, 2006, p. 4)

Merriam (2009) posited, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences" (p. 5). Van Manen (1990) contended that individuals develop a perspective or a worldview that is determined by their environment, which includes the people

themselves and their culture, race, and situation. According to Becker (1970), to understand an individual's experiences, we must know how that individual perceives the situation, the obstacles the individual believes he or she faces, and the alternatives that are available. A qualitative researcher attempts to (a) understand and make sense of phenomena from the participant's perspective, (b) serve as the primary instrument of data collection, (c) utilize an inductive process, and (d) produce a highly descriptive product (Merriam, 2002). Because this study sought to uncover and describe the meaning female school superintendents give to their experiences and developmental processes in their lives, the study was interpretive and descriptive by nature. Additionally, qualitative interviews provide the opportunity for reticent groups, such as female superintendents, to share their voices. Therefore, a qualitative research design was appropriate for this study.

Research Method

Narrative inquiry is an interpretive research methodology based firmly on the premise that human beings come to understand and give meaning to their lives through story (Andrews, Squire, & Tambokou, 2008). Similar to phenomenology, narrative inquiry seeks to understand lived experiences and how individuals describe and perceive those experiences (Patton, 2004). The method captures personal and human dimensions of experience over time and considers the relationship between individual experience and cultural context (Clandinin & Conelly, 2000). Grounded in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology, narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research that involves gathering narratives—written, oral, visual—and focusing on the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences (Josselson, 2006). The approach seeks to provide "insight that (befits) the complexity of human lives" (Josselson, 2006, p. 4).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) defined *narrative inquiry* as follows:

Arguments for the development and use of narrative inquiry come out of a view of human experiences in which humans, individually and socially, tell stories lived. People shape their daily lives by stories of who they and others are as they interpret their past in terms of these stories. Story, in current idiom, is a portal through which a person enters the world and by which their experiences of the world is interpreted and made personally meaningful. Viewed this way, narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experiences, then, is first and foremost a way of thinking about experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of the phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as a phenomenon under study. (p. 477)

Knowledge constructed through stories of lived experiences and meaning gained from narrative inquiry helps make sense of the complexity of human lives (Bruner, 1986). Narrative is a basic human way of making sense of the world–we lead "storied lives" (Riessman, 1993).

A wide variety of narrative approaches exists. Creswell (2013) suggested that the unique elements of these approaches can be combined. Komolthiti (2016) summarized the well-known approaches below:

(a) A biographical approach is a narrative study in which the researcher writes and records individuals' life experiences.

(b) An autoethnography approach is one in which the subject of the study writes or records her own experiences

(c) A life history approach explores an individual's entire life in multiple episodes.

(d) An oral history approach gathers personal reflections of events from one or several individuals. (p. 68)

Thus, for this study, an oral history, narrative approach was best suited to examine the lived experiences of female superintendents in New Jersey. This approach illuminated the participants' personal reflections of events and the meaning they derived from their experiences, particularly about how gender, social norms, and race informed their development as leaders. As Clandinin and Connelly (1994) noted, "Precisely what is needed to move inquiry and knowledge

36

further along" (p. 256). Situating participants' voices and thoughts into the text makes the study more than "a mere summary and interpretation of the works of others, with nothing new to add" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1994 p. 256).

Participants

To identify the primary participants, this study employed purposive sampling, considered by Welman and Kruger (1999) to be the most important kind of nonprobability sampling. Merriam (1988) contended that the needs of qualitative research are best met by nonprobability sampling. Merriam described purposive sampling as "based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, gain insight; therefore one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most" (p. 48). A small number of cases, or subjects, can be extremely valuable and can represent adequate numbers for a study. This is especially true for studying hidden or hard-to-access populations, such as deviants or elites; in such populations, relatively few people, such as six to a dozen, can offer insights and might simply be the maximum people available in the groups being studied (Adler & Adler, 2012).

Brannen (2012) advised that the most important issue in deciding how many qualitative interviews are enough is the purpose of the research, namely the type of research question to be addressed and the methodology it is proposed to adopt. He believes that even an individual case study is sufficient if the case is unique and it is not comparable with other cases.

There are no specific rules when determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative research. Patton (1990) suggested that the time allotted, resources available, and the study objectives might best determine the sample size for a study. Boyd (2001) regarded two to 10 participants or research subjects as sufficient to reach saturation. For the present study, I identified eight female superintendents, and the method involved intimate, face-to-face

interactions with the individuals. I selected the sample using my judgement and keeping in mind the purpose of the research (Babbie, 1995). I sought participants who "had experiences relating to the phenomenon to be researched" (Krueger, 1998 p. 150). Internet searches were followed by telephonic and e-mail inquiries to the offices of the New Jersey School Administrators Association, the Seton Hall Superintendent Study Council, the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, and the New Jersey Department of Education. Participants held the title of superintendent and were under contract on a noninterim basis during the 2016–2017 school year.

To attempt to trace additional participants of diverse ethnic backgrounds, snowball sampling was utilized. Snowball sampling is a method of expanding the sample by asking one participant to recommend others for interviewing (Babbie, 1995; Crabtree & Miller, 1992). Bailey (1996), Holloway (1997), and Greig and Taylor (1999) called the participants through whom entry is gained gatekeepers, and they referred the people who volunteer assistance as key actors or key insiders. The primary participants were asked, at their discretion, to provide the names and contact information of any other female superintendents who met the purposive sampling criteria.

The overall criteria for sample consideration included (a) female superintendents who indicated a willingness to participate in the study; (b) available female superintendents whose districts were within a 100-mile radius of me; and (c) female superintendents who had held their present position for at least 1 year. To be able to examine situational effects on the superintendents' perceptions, the women considered for the study represented diverse ethnic backgrounds, district profiles, and level of experience in the district (Table 2).

Table 2

Profiles of Participants

Participant	District type	Population setting	Enrollment	DFG	Highest degree	Ethnicity	Marital status	Age
Superintendent 1	K–8	Rural	201	FG	MEd	White	Married	42
Superintendent 2	K–12	Suburban	4,013	GH	EdD	Black	Married	50
Superintendent 3	K–8	Rural	1,720	I	EdD	White	Married	53
Superintendent 4	9–12	Suburban	2,200	I	MEd	White	Divorced	37
Superintendent 5	K–12	Suburban	2,674	I	MEd	White	Married	56
Superintendent 6	K–12	Urban	2,400	A	EdD	Latino	Married	55
Superintendent 7	K–12	Suburban	3,788	I	EdD	White	Married	57
Superintendent 8	K–12	Urban	28,000	B	EdD	Black	Divorced	66

Population settings included rural, suburban, and urban areas as defined by the data categories from 2004 Common Core of Data–Public Education Agency Universe maintained by the Department of Education. This data set defines enrollment categories as follows. Urban is considered equal to or greater than 25,000 pupils, suburban is classified as 3,000 to 25,000 pupils, and small city and rural is categorized as 300 to 3,000 pupils. For the present study, areas of fewer than 300 pupils were assumed to have no one person functioning entirely as a superintendent and, therefore, were not reported.

Ethical Considerations

The research conducted involved human subjects; therefore, all institutional review board guidelines set forth by Seton Hall University were followed. In particular, informed consent was obtained from the participants. Based on Bailey's (1996, p. 11) recommended items, an informed consent "agreement" was developed to gain participants' consent. The agreement informed participants of the following:

1. that they are participating in research,

2. the purpose of the research (without stating the central research question),

3. the procedures of the research,

4. the risk and benefits of the research,

5. the voluntary nature of research participation,

6. the subject's (informant's) right to stop the research at any time, and

7. the procedures used to protect confidentiality (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bless & Higson Smith, 2000; Kvale, 1996; Street, 1998).

Researcher Biases

One inherent researcher bias that was addressed is that I am a female superintendent in the State of New Jersey. Member checking was utilized to minimize this bias. Participants in the study were asked to check the accuracy of the account, specifically "whether the description is complete and realistic, if the themes are accurate and if the interpretations are fair and representative of those that can be made" (Creswell, 2002, p. 280).

Data Collection Procedures

The central research question was, who are the female candidates who rise to the level of superintendents? However, Bentz and Shapiro (1998) and Kensit (2000) cautioned that the researcher must allow the data to emerge. For this reason, the actual interview questions put forth to participants were

- In what ways did gender identities, race, and social norms inform your leadership development?

- What barriers did you encounter in ascending to the level of superintendent?

- How did you navigate the challenges you faced?

Kvale (1996) drew a similar distinction between the research questions and the interview questions. Regarding data capturing during the qualitative interview, he remarked that it "is

40

literally an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest," where researcher attempts to "understand the world from the subjects' point of view, to unfold meaning of people's experiences" (pp. 1–2).

Demographic Profile Questionnaire

The demographic profile questionnaire asked about the female superintendents' educational and professional histories, as well as background information, such as ethnicity, marital status, and age. The questionnaire requested information about the districts these women led, their career paths, and personal demographics, all of which were utilized to create a narrative profile of each participant.

Interviews

Semistructured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted. The questions were "directed to the participants' experiences, feelings, beliefs, and convictions about the theme in question" (Welman & Kruger, 1999, p. 196). Gay, Mills and Airaisan (2012) stressed how "narrative research necessitates a relationship between the researcher and the participant more akin to a close friendship, where trust is a critical attribute" (p. 400). As a practicing female superintendent, I was viewed as an "insider." Creswell (1998) defined an insider as "someone accepted in the field of education who has an understanding of the participants" (p. 76)

Field Notes

I took field notes to record what I heard, saw, experienced, and thought while collecting and reflecting on the process. Researchers are easily absorbed in the data-collection process and can sometimes fail to reflect on what is happening. However, Groenewald (2004) emphasized the importance of maintaining a balance between descriptive notes and reflective notes, such as hunches, impressions, feelings, and so on. Miles and Huberman (1984) stressed that memos (or

field notes) must be dated so that the researcher can later correlate them with the data. In addition to the eight interviews that were conducted in this study, field notes were gathered, recorded, and compiled to provide a record of the researcher's understandings of the lives, people, and events that were the focus of the research and that would allow me to construct a narrative (Gay et al., 2012).

Data storing

Audio recordings of the interviews were stored, with the permission of the interviewees (Arkley & Knight, 1999; Bailey, 1996). Each interview was assigned a code, for example, "Superintendent A, 1 May 2016." If more than one interview took place on a date, a lowercase alphabetic character distinguished the different interviews (Superintendent B, 1 June 2016a). Each interview was recorded on a separate folder. Each folder was labeled with the assigned interview code. As soon as possible after each interview, the recording was listened to in order to record and make notes. Key words, phrases, and statements were transcribed to allow the voices of research participants to speak (Groenewald, 2004).

Equipment failure and environmental conditions can seriously hinder the research and, therefore, McComish and Greenberg (2000) advised that researchers must, at all times, ensure that recording equipment functions well and that spare batteries, tapes, and other backup materials ' are available. A digital recorder was utilized to record the interviews, and a digital voice recording application was utilized as a backup. Once I confirmed the recording from the digital recorder, the backup audio was deleted. To limit the background noise and interruptions of the interview setting, interviews were scheduled in the superintendent's office, according to his or her schedule availability.

Field notes are a secondary data-storage method in qualitative research. Because the human mind tends to forget quickly, field notes are crucial in qualitative research to retain the data gathered (Lofland & Lofland, 1999). This implies that the researcher must be disciplined and record comprehensive notes after each interview. The notes should be contain judgmental evaluation. Some example prompts might be "What was the physical setting like? Who was involved? Where did the activities occur? Why did an incident take place and how did it actually happen?" Lofland and Lofland (1999) emphasized that field notes "should be written no later than the morning after" (, p. 5). In addition to discipline, field notes also involve "luck, feelings, timing, whimsy, and art" (Bailey, 1996, p. xiii). This study's method followed Groenewald's (2004) version of a model or scheme developed by Leonard Schatzman and Anselm Strauss, supplemented by Robert Burgess's data analysis model. Three types of field notes were made:

- observational notes (ONs)—"what happened notes" deemed important enough to the researcher to make;

- methodological notes (MNs)—"reminders, instructions or critique" to oneself on the process; and

- analytical memos (AMs)—end-of-a-field-day summary or progress reviews.

Morgan (1997) remarked that, because field notes involve interpretation, they are, properly speaking, "part of the analysis rather than the data collection" (pp. 57–58). The writing of field notes during the research process compels the researcher to further clarify each interview setting (Caelli, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Following Groenewald's (2004) process, a file was created with divisions for each interview. Hard copies of the following documents were filed:

- informed consent agreement;

- demographic profile;

- field notes made during the interview;

- field notes made subsequent to each interview;

- any notes or sketches that the participant made during the interview or which the participant shared with the researcher;

- any additional information that the participant offered during the interview, for example, brochures;

- any notes made during the data analysis process, such as grouping of units of meaning into themes;

- the draft transcription and analysis of the interview presented to the participants for validation;

- the confirmation of correctness and/or commentary by the participant about the transcript and analysis of the interview; and

- any subsequent communication between the participant and the researcher.

Data storage included the demographic profile, audio recordings, field notes, and filing of hard-copy documentation. To protect participants' confidentiality, the interview transcriptions and field notes were stored electronically on a USB memory drive and kept in a locked, secure physical site utilizing the same coding used for the audio recordings.

Instrumentation

Each female superintendent completed a demographic profile prior to the face-to-face interview. The women were asked to provide information related to their current district; career path; and personal characteristics, such as education, ethnicity, and marital status. The

questionnaire was used to gather demographic information efficiently, without taking time from the interviews.

The interview protocol included semistructured, open-ended questions. The initial interview protocol was shared in its entirety with two retired female superintendents to obtain feedback on general format as well as to test the items for clarity. The retired female superintendents made recommendations regarding content validity. To ensure validity, I reviewed the questions and gathered data to determine themes and patterns. The interview questions were developed based on information revealed in the literature review, as well as on the research questions. Multiple questions, leading questions, and yes–no questions were not utilized to minimize confusion and poor responses.

The interview protocol questions were designed to address how gender identities and social norms informed the leadership development of female superintendents. Interview questions focused on each individual's life history, career path, leadership development, gender identity, and lived experiences. All of the interview questions were designed to frame the answer to the research questions. At the beginning of the interview, I explained to each superintendent that, although I had prepared questions to guide the interview, the purpose was to hear their personal experience and, therefore, digression was appropriate, and the dialogue would evolve from their stories (Clandinin & Conelly, 2000). The interview protocol was developed from an adaptation of the interview protocol created by Davis (2012) in her study of leadership development of African American women in business and academia:

1. Tell me about your early childhood?

   - What role did your family play in helping you develop as a leader?

   - What role models influenced you as you were growing up?

2. Please describe the person or people who taught you the most during your career.

- What made this person or these people unique?

- What personal choices or career decisions have you made to achieve the
  superintendency?

3. What are two or three critical situations or incidents that influenced you as a leader?

- Why were these situations (incidents) important?

- What experiences in being a leader have been your biggest challenges or
  obstacles?

- What did you learn about yourself from this experience?

4. How has your gender and race shaped your development as a leader?

- How has your gender influenced or affected your career?

- How has your race influenced or affected your career?

- How have social norms influenced or affected your career?

5. What lessons have you learned as a woman in a leadership position?

Data Analysis

Coffey and Adkinson (1996) warned,

There are no formulae or recipes for the "best" way to analyze the stories we elicit and
collect. . . . [S]uch approaches also enable us to think beyond our data to the ways in
which accounts and stories are socially and culturally managed and constructed. That is,
the analysis of narratives can provide a critical way of examining not only key actors and
events but also cultural conventions and social norms. (p. 80)

Gay et al. (2012) characterized the qualitative researcher as beginning data analysis from the initial

interaction with participants and continuing that interaction and analysis throughout the study.

Individuals who agreed to participate were sent an introductory email along with a copy of the

informed consent form (Appendix A) and a sample of the demographic profile questionnaire

(Appendix B). Information gleaned from the analysis of the questionnaire was utilized to create tables of information related to district demographics such as (a) enrollment, (b) socioeconomic status, and (c) school sites. The tables also provided information regarding the personal and career characteristics of each superintendent. The data were sorted into tables by categorical responses and aggregated for each participant, creating a narrative profile for each female superintendent.

Lichtman (2012) used the following analogy to describe the process of organizing and categorizing the interview data:

> I see it as a process of sorting and sifting. Imagine that you have a large sieve, but it doesn't look like a traditional sieve. Some holes are square, some round, and some irregularly shaped. You put into the sieve a number of objects—some round, some square some irregularly shaped. You shake the sieve. The round ones drop through the round holes. The square ones drop through the square holes. Some of those irregularly shaped drop trough the odd-shaped holes, while others stay in the sieve. You have sorted your objects based on a system. Some fit while others do not. There are no clear rules. (p. 248)

Lichtmann continued, "The goal of qualitative analysis is to take a large amount of data that may be cumbersome and without any clear meaning and interact with it in such a manner that you can make sense of what you gathered" (p. 250). Lieblich et al. (1998) developed a model that suggests four types of narrative analysis. Komolthiti (2016) summarized them as

1. Holistic-Content focuses on the content derived from the entire narrative.
2. Categorical- Content focuses on specific content themes within the narrative.
3. Holistic- Form focuses on plots or the structural components of the entire narrative.
4. Categorical- Form focuses on specific forms of linguistics, such as metaphors used in discrete sections of the narrative. (p. 68)

This study employed a categorical-content analysis to focus on specific content themes within the narrative. In keeping with the iterative nature of the process, the researcher listened to each audiotape within 24 hours and added thoughts and comments to her field notes.

The interviews were transcribed into Microsoft Word documents by a professional transcriptionist. After the transcriptions were completed, I listened to each interview at least

twice to ensure the accuracy of the transcription, making modifications throughout the process, as necessary. Additional notes were also compiled. To ensure anonymity, the researcher assigned an alphabetic letter to each participant and voided all transcripts of any references to actual people, schools, and locations. Initially, to move from the raw data to meaningful concepts of themes, I utilized Lichtman's (2012) "three Cs" coding process to categorize the (Figure 1).
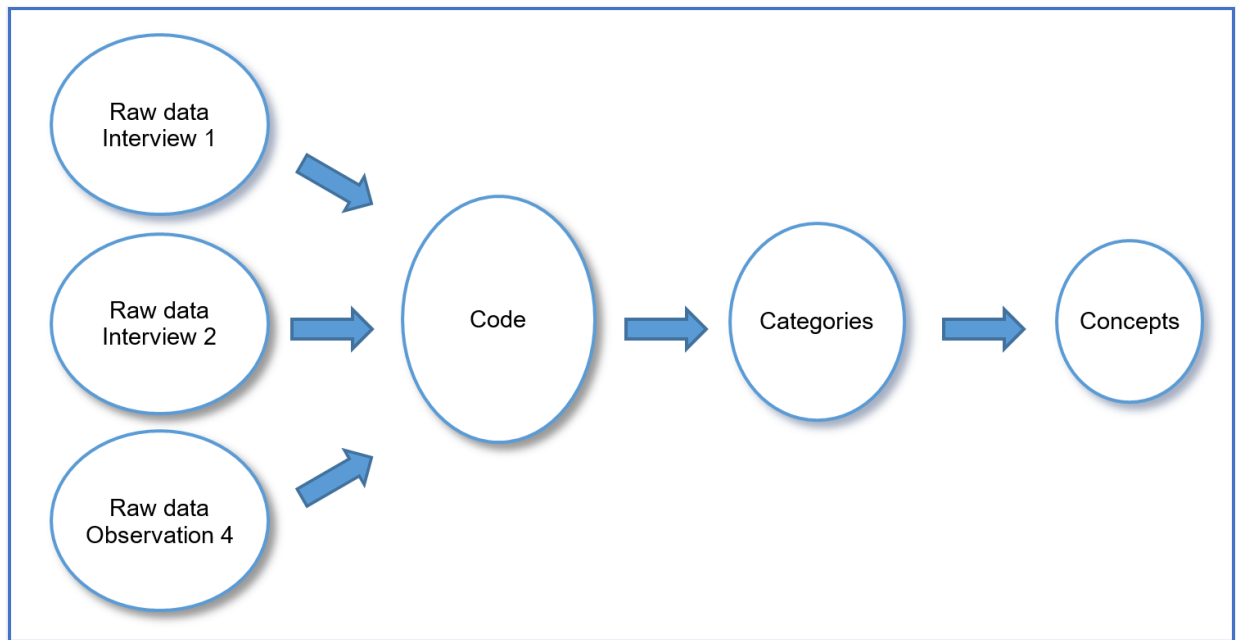
Figure 1. Three Cs of data analysis: Codes, categories, concepts.

Following Lichtman's (2012) six-step process, I initially coded a Microsoft Word copy of each transcript by writing a word or phrase from the responses in the margins to create summary ideas. After revisiting the large number of codes identified in the initial coding, I eliminated redundant codes by collapsing and renaming them to remove synonyms and clarify terms. Upon developing an initial list of categories by organizing the codes, I identified major topics and organized related subtopics within the codes. Each transcript was reread to further modify the list of categories and subcategories. Critical elements within the categories and weaving the existing literature with the new data assisted in identifying preliminary themes.

To strengthen the process, data analysis through explicitation was also utilized. Hycner (1999) cautioned that "analysis" has dangerous connotations for qualitative studies:

> The term [analysis] usually means a "breaking into parts" and therefore often means a loss of the whole phenomenon . . . [whereas "explicitation" implies an] . . . investigation of the constituents of a phenomenon while keeping the context of the whole. (p. 161)

Coffey and Atkinson (1996) regarded analysis as the "systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships" (p. 9). This method allows the data to be transformed through interpretation. Groenewald (2004) proposed a simplified version of Hycner's (1999) explicitation process. For this study, Groenewald's simplified steps were utilized:

1. Bracketing.

2. Delineating units of meaning.

3. Clustering units of meaning to form themes.

4. Summarizing each interview, validating it and where necessary modifying it.

5. Extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews and making a composite summary. (p. 17)

These steps are explained in detail below.

Bracketing

Bracketing means that "no position is taken either for or against" (Lauer, 1958, p. 49). The researcher simply allows the data to emerge without presuppositions. This issue was particularly significant during this study because I am a practicing female superintendent. In this study *bracketing* also refers to the interviewer acting simply as an interpreter. As suggested by Miller and Crabtree (1992), I set my personal views and preconceptions aside. I listened repeatedly to the audio recording of each interview to become familiar with the words of the interviewees to develop a holistic view of their lived experiences, which, in turn, allowed for careful examination and description (Holloway, 1997; Hycner 1999).

49

Delineation

Delineation was conducted by extracting units of meaning from the interview data and carefully eliminating redundancy (Moustakas, 1994). To accomplish this, I considered the literal content, the number of times a word was mentioned, and the context in which it was used (Groenewald, 2004).

Units of Meaning

Utilizing the nonredundant units of meaning, I again bracketed my presuppositions to remain true to the phenomena. Listening to the audio-recordings of the interviews, I identified significant topics, also called units of significance (Sadala & Adorno, 2001). These units provided a holistic context from which meaning could be derived. By rigorously examining the list of units of meaning, I tried to elicit the essence of the units' meaning within the holistic context. I followed the process outlined by Holloway (1997) and Hycner (1999), which emphasizes the importance of the researcher going back and forth between the recorded interview (the gestalt) and the list of nonredundant units of meaning to derive clusters of appropriate meaning.

Summarizing, Validating, and Modifying

In maintaining a holistic approach, I created a summary of themes elicited from the data analysis. The interview transcripts were shared with each participant to ensure accuracy, and modifications were completed, if necessary, as result of this validity check. Two participants requested minor editorial changes. Once the four steps of the process outlined above had been done for all the interviews, I looked "for the themes common to most or all of the interviews as well as the individual variations" (Hycner, 1999, p. 154).

The study allowed themes to emerge inductively. Following iterative processes, such as rereading the transcripts, relistening to the audio, and reexamining my notes, potential themes were determined. Cross-case analysis was used to compare and contrast events and the personal experiences of the female superintendents to identify common themes.

Summary

Interviews with eight female superintendents in New Jersey provided data for a qualitative analysis of how gender, social norms, and race intersected to inform their development as leaders and their career paths in field of public education. Specifically, the research design and purposive sampling of participants provided a comparative analysis of superintendents' perceived barriers and successful strategies from different district profiles (K–8, Regional, K–12), distinct population settings (rural, suburban, and urban), diverse ethnic backgrounds, and varied experience levels. Finally, this study of intersectionality investigated how these female superintendents constructed and interpreted their own experiences and examined how these data can be utilized to promote future female leadership development.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of eight practicing female superintendents in the State of New Jersey. Drawing on their stories, the study explored the intersectionality of gender and social norms and how they developed as leaders. The study was designed to reveal each participant's reality as perceived by the individual and as it related to the pursuit and achievement of the superintendency.

Literature on the history of females in education; the characteristics of female leaders in business, political, and educational settings; the facilitators and barriers encountered by female superintendents in New Jersey and other states have provided a historical perspective for this study on leadership development. The objective was to understand the participants' backgrounds and the trajectories of their career development. This chapter presents the findings for the following research questions:

RQ 1. Who are the female candidates who rise to the level of superintendents?

　　　　RQ 1a. In what ways did gender identities and social norms inform their

　　　　　　　leadership development?

RQ 2. What barriers did they encounter in ascending to the level of superintendent?

RQ 3. How did they navigate the challenges they faced?

The eight superintendents in the study were serving as superintendent during the 2016–2017 school year. The semistructured, in-depth, face-to-face interviews were conducted during the months of July, August, and September 2016. The findings in this chapter represent the overarching themes that emerged from the interviews. The narrative of each participant's

personal journey to the superintendency describes how gender identities, social norms, and, at times, race informed their leadership development experiences.

Coding Process

I audio recorded the interview with each superintendent so that I could transcribe and analyze the text. Although the transcribed text was uploaded into NVivo 11 qualitative analysis software for coding purposes, I chose to select specific words, sentences, and paragraphs and to assign single or multiple codes to derive themes from the interviews, demographic profiles, and field notes. I analyzed every word, sentence, and paragraph and assigned an appropriate code. Some statements fell into more than one code. Once the coding was completed, similar codes were combined into code families, or themes. The themes, which emerged from the experiences of how the female superintendents developed as leaders, were explicated from the text of the eight participants in the research study. The women in the study confirmed that gender, social norms, and, at times, race informed their development as leaders in the field of public education. Throughout the interviews, all of the participants described how the intersection of gender and social norms affected their leadership development and career trajectories. An effort was made to protect their identity and confidential responses by modifying any identifying information.

Demographic Profile of the Superintendents

The participants were eight female superintendents representing eight counties in New Jersey. Each superintendent was asked to complete a demographic profile prior to the face-to-face interview. The demographic profile provided educational and professional histories as well as background information, such as ethnicity, marital status, and age. The results of the demographic profile are reported below and include information about the districts these women were leading, their career paths, and personal demographics.

The women reported that their ages ranged from 37 to 66 years old, with a range of 2 years to 19 years of experience as a superintendent. Regarding marital status, six superintendents reported being married, and two reported being divorced. Regarding ascension to the superintendency, four of the eight women were promoted to the superintendency internally from within their current district. Moreover, those individuals promoted internally had only sought that particular superintendency. One participant sought the superintendent position outside her district and had applied to three other districts before being hired for the position of chief school administrator. Five of the women were between the ages of 45 and 58 when they assumed their initial role of the superintendency; one was 33 years old, and two were 38 years old.

All eight women participated in a face-to-face, in-depth, semistructured interview. All acknowledged the presence and assistance of a mentor. Six reported that male mentors provided assistance, whereas two reported that only female mentors provided assistance. Furthermore, all eight women described their mentors as being superintendents when they decided to pursue the superintendency. One participant became a superintendent in 2013 and was the first female superintendent of a K–12 district in her county. Another assumed her first superintendency in 2014, and two others began in 2010. Two superintendents followed female predecessors, and four were the first female superintendent in their district. As depicted in Figure 2, the total years of educational experience among the superintendents was more than 29.

The group average of total years in the superintendency was 7.3. Regarding educational background, all of the participants hold a master's of education degree. Five hold a doctoral degree in education, and one superintendent is currently pursuing her PhD (see Table 3).
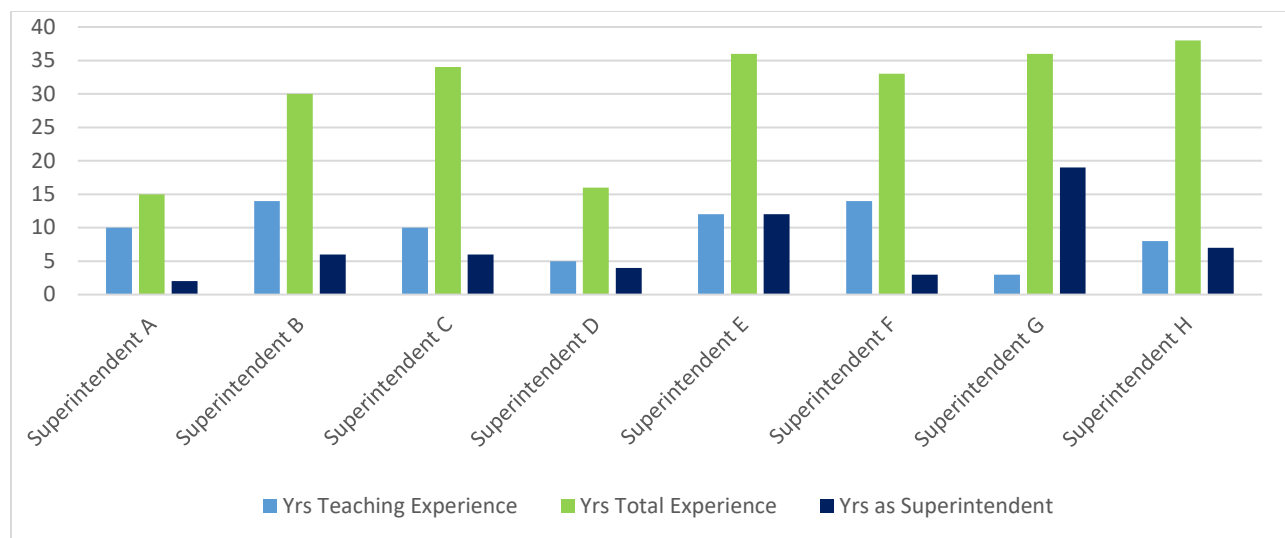
Figure 2. Experience of superintendents participating in study.

Table 3

Experience and Educational Level of Participants

Participant	Total years of education experience	Total years as superintendent	Highest degree
Superintendent 1	15	2	MEd
Superintendent 2	30	6	EdD
Superintendent 3	34	6	EdD
Superintendent 4	16	4	Working toward PhD
Superintendent 5	36	12	MEd
Superintendent 6	33	3	EdD
Superintendent 7	36	19	EdD
Superintendent 8	38	7	EdD
M	29.75	7.37	

Profile of Individual Superintendents

Superintendent 1

Superintendent 1 (hereinafter S1) became a superintendent in 2012 at the age of 38. She

had 15 years of educational experience; she spent 5 of those years in educational administration

and 2 of those years as a superintendent in her current district. A female mentor assisted her

career, and she was promoted to superintendent from within her district. Her career path began as

an elementary teacher, where she taught basic skills and first, third, and fourth grade. She started her administrative career as an elementary assistant principal and served in this position for 4 years. She then became a principal for a year, followed by her current position as a superintendent/principal. She is the chief school administrator of a rural district that serves 201 students in grades PK–6.

Superintendent 2

The first of two African American superintendents, Superintendent 2 (hereinafter S2) became a superintendent in 2011, at the age of 45. She was promoted from within her district. She had 34 years of educational experience, with the last 5 years as superintendent. Her career path began as a secondary education teacher of biology and general science. As a secondary education teacher, she also served in a leadership capacity as cheerleading coach, science team advisor, Honor Society advisor, drill team advisor, assistant band director, and assistant junior class advisor. Her administrative career began as supervisor of math and science for 2 years, director of math and science for 3 years, and assistant superintendent for 5 years prior to achieving the superintendency. She is the superintendent of a suburban, K–12 district serving more than 4,000 students.

Superintendent 3

Superintendent 3 (hereinafter S3) became a superintendent at the age of 53. She had 28 years in education, with 18 years as an administrator and 6 years as a superintendent. The respondent began her superintendency in 2010. She applied to the superintendency as an internal candidate but secured the superintendency outside her district. Her career path began as a secondary teacher of English language arts. Her administrative career began as a secondary teaching supervisor, and, then, she accepted a principal position at an elementary school. She

later accepted a principal position at an elementary school that was closer to home. She moved to the position of assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in another district after unsuccessfully applying for the same position in her own district. She served as an assistant superintendent under the direction of two different superintendents before leaving the district to accept a superintendency. She is the superintendent of a rural K–8 school district with more than 1,700 students.

Superintendent 4

Superintendent 4 (hereinafter S4) became a superintendent in 2013 at the age of 33. She had 16 years in education, with 7 years in educational administration and 4 years as a superintendent. She was promoted from within her district from supervisor to assistant principal to principal. She left this K–12 school district to accept the superintendency. Her career path began as a secondary math teacher, where she also served as soccer coach, class advisor, and math league advisor. From the classroom position, she became a supervisor of instruction. Her administrative career continued as a high school vice principal for 1 year and a high school principal for a year, from which she was promoted to director of curriculum and instruction. She served as the acting superintendent for 6 months prior to accepting the position of superintendent in another district. She is the superintendent of a suburban regional high school district with more than 2,200 students.

Superintendent 5

Superintendent 5 (hereinafter S5) became a superintendent in 2004 at the age of 45. She had 36 total years in education, with 12 years in educational administration and 12 years as a superintendent. She was promoted internally to superintendent from within her district. Her career path began as a secondary teacher where she taught math, English, and business at the

high school level. Her classroom experience also includes middle school computer science. During her time as a teacher, she served as cheerleading coach, tennis coach, softball coach, newspaper advisor, yearbook advisor, student council advisor, and peer leadership advisor. She was promoted to a central office position as a supervisor prior to becoming a high school assistant principal and, later, principal. She left her principal position and the district to become assistant superintendent. Upon the superintendent's retirement, she applied and was promoted internally to become the superintendent of schools. She is the superintendent of a suburban K–12 school district, with close to 2,700 students enrolled.

Superintendent 6

The only Latina in this study, Superintendent 6 (hereinafter S6), became a superintendent in 2014, at the age of 52. She had 33 years in education, with 17 years in administration and 3 years as a superintendent. Her career path began as a secondary teacher. Her administrative career began as a high school assistant principal, and then she entered central office administration as the director of curriculum and instruction after 3 years. Once in central office administration, she served in that position for 14 years. She served as the acting superintendent for a full year prior to applying for the position as part of the district's superintendent search. She was one of 30 applicants, and after three rounds of interviews, she was the final candidate. She was the first female superintendent in her district. She leads a rural K–12 district with more than 2,400 students.

Superintendent 7

At the time of this study, Superintendent 7 (hereinafter S7) was beginning her 36th year in education. She was 57 years old and attained her first superintendency at the age of 38. She began her educational career as a teacher of French at the secondary level. She taught for 3 years

and then became a business administrator in her first administrative position. She served as a county business administrator and superintendent of schools for the New Jersey State Department of Education. Later, she accepted a position as the assistant superintendent in a regional K–12 school district prior to becoming superintendent. She has been superintendent in three different districts during her administrative career. Currently, she serves as the superintendent of a K–12 suburban school district with an enrollment of approximately 3,800 students.

Superintendent 8

The second African American superintendent, Superintendent 8 (hereinafter S8), became a superintendent in 2009 at the age of 59. She has 36 years of educational experience, serving 7 of those as a superintendent. She attained the superintendency as an outside candidate. Her career path began as a secondary education teacher of English. As a secondary education teacher, she also sought leadership opportunities outside the classroom, including serving as advisor to the school's co-op program. Her administrative career began as an assistant principal. She assumed two principal positions at the secondary level and then became deputy chancellor in a neighboring state prior to achieving the superintendency. She is the superintendent of an urban, K–12 district serving more than 28,000 students.

The interviews revealed that the participants varied in their backgrounds and demographic profiles. Of the eight superintendents interviewed, five were White/non-Latina, two were African American, and one was Latina. All but one was serving in her first superintendency. They ranged in ages from 37 to 67 years old. The majority of the superintendents (71%) were married for the first time. One was married for a second time, and two remained single after divorce. Six of the eight superintendents had children, and, of those,

five had more than one child. Table 4 summarizes the demographic profiles, and Table 5

summarizes the marital status and number of children.

Table 4

Demographic Profiles of Female Superintendents in New Jersey

Participant	Race	Age	Number of superintendencies	Initial degree	Primary source of income
Superintendent 1	White/non-Latina	42	1	Elementary Education	Yes
Superintendent 2	African American	50	1	Science Education	Not known
Superintendent 3	White/non-Latina	53	1	English and Sociology	Yes
Superintendent 4	White/non-Latina	37	1	Math and Economics	Yes
Superintendent 5	White/non-Latina	56	1	Math Education	Not known
Superintendent 6	Latina	55	1	Biology	Yes
Superintendent 7	White/non-Latina	57	4	French	Yes
Superintendent 8	African American	67	2	English	Yes

Table 5

Female School Superintendents' Marital Status and Number of Children

Characteristic	*n*	%
Marital status		
Married-first time	5	62.5
Married-second time	1	12.5
Divorced-single	2	25.0
Number of children		
0	2	25.0
1	1	12.5
2–5	5	62.5

Note. $N = 8$.

Table 6 describes the districts that the female superintendents were leading at the time of the data collection. The number of students enrolled in the districts ranged from 201 to over 29,000. One district was comprised of one school, whereas the largest district had 42 schools. The grade-level composition for each district, number of schools, and the district factor group varied from a one-school, K–6 school district to a regional high school district from the lowest (DFG A) to the second highest district factor group (DFG I). Six of the eight female superintendents had a male predecessor.

Table 6

District Profiles led by the Female Superintendents

Participant	District configuration	Community	District factor group	Student enrollment	No. of schools	Followed male super-intendent
Superintendent 1	PK–6	Rural	FG	201	1	No
Superintendent 2	PK–12	Suburban	GH	4013	7	Yes
Superintendent 3	PK–8	Rural	I	1720	3	Yes
Superintendent 4	9–12	Suburban	I	2200	1	No
Superintendent 5	PK–12	Suburban	I	2674	6	Yes
Superintendent 6	PK–12	Urban	A	2400	5	Yes
Superintendent 7	PK–12	Suburban	I	3788	7	Yes
Superintendent 8	PK–12	Urban	B	29000	42	Yes

Career Path

The narratives showed that female superintendents followed unique career paths that led them to the superintendency. Four of them held the position of principal prior to becoming superintendent. In the group, the predominant position held was secondary education teacher (87.5% of the group had held each position). Including supervisor and director positions, 87.5% of the participants held a central office administrative position prior to superintendency. Five of the participants had been an assistant superintendent, and two were promoted internally and

directly from that position to superintendent. All shared that the superintendency had not been a career goal prior to taking the position (Table 7).

Table 7

Summary of Career Paths

Experience	S1	S2	S3	S4	S5	S6	S7	S8	%
Elementary teacher	✓								12.5
Secondary school teacher		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	87.5
Elementary school vice principal	✓								12.5
Secondary school vice principal			✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	62.5
Elementary school principal	✓		✓						25.0
Secondary school principal				✓	✓			✓	37.5
Supervisor		✓	✓	✓					37.5
Director		✓		✓		✓	✓		50.0
Assistant superintendent		✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	62.5
Business administrator							✓		12.5

Findings: Major Thematic Strands

This section presents the major findings based on the coding procedures used in this study. The following themes were developed from the interview transcriptions based on the question, "To what do female superintendents in New Jersey attribute their leadership development and success in ascending to the superintendency?" The themes emerged from this study through inductive analysis. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) regarded analysis as the "systematic procedures to identify essential features and relationships" (p. 9). Upon developing organized within the codes. Each transcript was reread to further modify the codes into a list of categories. Critical elements within the categories and applying the literature to the data assisted in identifying preliminary themes. This method allowed me to transform the data through interpretation. In addition, following Groenewald's (2004) simplified version of Hycner's (1999) explicitation process, the following steps were utilized: (a) bracketing; (b) delineating units of

meaning; (c) clustering of units of meaning to form themes; (d) summarizing each interview; validating it, and, where necessary, modifying it; and (e) extracting general and unique themes from all the interviews to create a composite summary.

Five major themes arose from the coding process: (a) early influences, (b) career choices, (c) intersectionality, (d) leadership experiences and (e) cultivating future leaders. Table 8 lists the final codes and corresponding themes identified by the researcher.

Theme 1—Early Influences: Destined to Succeed

She Believed She Could, So She Did

Early influences were the first theme that emerged from the superintendents' narratives. These experiences occurred during their early childhood and adolescent periods. Evident in their responses was the influential role of individuals who were instrumental in shaping their destiny.

> My first day at kindergarten. I had this star name tag, I remember my kindergarten teacher just whispering in my ear, "I can tell you are going to be a star in my class." I guess, I think sometimes people tell you those things and you believe them. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Their stories underscored the importance of strong character traits that were exhibited by family members and observed in school and in their community activities. These traits also played an important role in instilling leadership values and attributes that became the guiding factors in their success. Most participants recalled a desire, stemming from childhood experiences, to take on leadership roles early in life.

> I was very outspoken and vocal. I always wanted to be first. I wanted to be that child that [when asked], "Who wants to clean the board?" I will be raising my hand, and I would volunteer to do that. I will always try to be, I guess it's called the middle-child syndrome, where you want to excel and to be noticed. That was me. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

Table 8

Summary of Codes, Categories, and Themes

Codes	Categories	Themes
Hard work Community Value of education Responsibility Role in family Group work Academically driven Sports and extracurricular activities Exposure- nontraditional roles Work experience	Strong work ethic Academically driven Confidence Overcoming obstacles Early leadership roles	Early influences— destined to succeed *She believed she could, so she did*
Network Taking additional responsibilities Goal oriented History of accomplishment	Sponsors Learning what not to do Right place at the right time Professional growth/willingness to learn	Career choices— mentorship *The value of opportunity*
Do not compromise Assertiveness Invisible to invincible Prepared to be tested	Gender Social norms Race Age Double jeopardy	Intersectionality *You are who you are*
Perceptions Balancing stereotypes Striving to belong	Act the part Speak up	Leadership experiences: playing the game *Leaning in*
Perceptions Time Commitment Thick Skin Developing Others	Lessons learned Pay it forward	Cultivating future leaders: empowering others Paving the way

64

Some participants recalled the influence of teachers and peers and how these significant individuals identified them as good students and, therefore, provided them with leadership opportunities.

> Then, they used to go by your IQ. I was sent to another school to go to a gifted class. In that class, it was like the top class of the school. Everybody thought they were smart because you knew you were in that class. Knowing that you were expected to be gifted, you acted like that. I mean, we may not have been gifted, but, certainly, teachers had this expectation of you. I guess this is sort of where I developed my philosophy about the power of expectations. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

The women revealed that their roles within their family were instrumental in developing their leadership abilities. Family members instilled in them the importance of hard work, responsibility, and the belief and expectation that they would succeed.

> My uncles on my mother's side, they were always working. One had a restaurant business; another one had, like, a taxi cab business. They were all people that were busy; none of them was ever sitting [around]. They always talked about how much work they did and the commitment they had, whatever job they did. My mother always said—[it] doesn't matter what you are doing, you do it with pride. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

The participating female superintendents were asked to respond to the following prompt and question: "Tell me as much as you can remember about times when you have had experience with leading and or leadership, and how did you accomplish leading in these experiences?" All participants described leadership opportunities at home, in school and in extracurricular activities. The five major categories revealed within this theme were work ethic, academically driven, confidence, overcoming obstacles, and early leadership roles.

Work Ethic

Work ethic was a common thread throughout the eight interviews. All participants discussed how they observed their parents' strong work ethic and how it was an expectation throughout their upbringing.

I remember as a child, three in the morning, four in the morning, he was studying. . . . then [he would] go back to bed for 1 hour and wake up for 1 hour [and] go back to work. That was something that, as a young child, got embedded in me very strongly—his work ethic. Same for my mother. My mother was a factory worker, but she never stopped going to work. She would wake up very early—5:00 a.m.—leave the house, and come back by 5:30–6:00 p.m. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

They spoke about the importance of completing chores. Most stated that they were expected to help around the house.

My mom—she used to say, school is your job and, then, chores are your work. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

One of the eight superintendents revealed how her work ethic derived from having to pay for college, which required her to work 20 to 30 hours a week.

So, I was the girl in the pizzeria. I served. I took orders. I did the dishes. I made the sandwiches in the back. Couldn't touch the pizza because that was the man's job. Lots of odd jobs. I cleaned houses for people. One summer I took a 4:00–12:00 shift at a factory that made plastic flowerpots. (S3, personal communication, August 1, 2016)

Although the superintendents' stories suggest that they came from different backgrounds and experiences, many felt that their family upbringing and life experiences had a profound impact on the choices they made, their ability to become successful, and their leadership style. Seven of the eight women stated that they had a positive, somewhat typical, nurturing childhood experience. One noted that, although she was born to a teenage mother who died when she was only 10 years old and had to live with different relatives, her extended family became influential.

But it was a strong [family]—not overly religious, but about working hard—and my father worked and was proud of never being absent a day. Working hard, just continuing to try because I lived with relatives, we were an extended family. It was about reaching out to a lot of different people and having an obligation towards family. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

66

Academically Driven

The women's narratives reveal that they were all academically driven from an early age.

> For me, I was a math science person, so English, writing, didn't come naturally to me. If I knew that, okay, I could spend an hour on this and do okay or I could spend 3 hours on it and get the A, that's what I would do. That's always the way I've been. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Most participants were part of a gifted, advanced, or honors program during their educational career. Several were the first to graduate from college in their immediate family and came from families that stressed education.

> My family was primarily a Baptist family. My mother, who got married when she was 15 years old, always stressed education. She was the person who took me to my first library visit, and that was really something that was emphasized throughout in my family— education was going to be the ticket for us. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

Confidence

All indicated that family values, confidence, and integrity were important factors in their leadership development.

> These teachers that I had in Spanish Harlem believed that I was bright, capable—that I was going to go far. So, I believed I was bright, capable, and going far, and you couldn't tell me anything else. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

They learned, as children, the importance of believing in one's ability and talents. Self-confidence and reliance on their own knowledge and skills were commonalities in the women's narratives.

> It's not the language we use, but, if somebody was talking in English, I was not afraid, with my broken English, to go and communicate, because we were able to understand. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

The female superintendents described their experiences with group work and how their active participation in group tasks was encouraged by their teachers and peers and helped them develop as leaders.

Obviously, people get reputations for different things. The fact that I was more of [a] perfectionist and would follow through, people would know, "Good, if [she] is in charge, we know it will get done." So that was always the way with group work. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Most superintendents described themselves as confident and outspoken from an early age.

I was always known as the one that "*lays it out there*"; if there is something that's said or being done that I don't agree with. I don't have that fear of who is going to be mad. (S1, personal communication, July 27, 2016; emphasis original)

Additionally, confidence allowed them to take initiative, volunteer for activities, and try out for opportunities available to them.

In third grade you could be picked to hold one of the flags. So—but you had to write a statement to apply, why you wanted to do it. I never missed an opportunity to do something like that. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Overcoming Obstacles

The women acknowledged that being resilient in overcoming obstacles was another quality that they possessed and that helped them achieve success while developing as a leader. They described challenging situations that they confronted early in their life and their determination to overcome them, which led to a unique learning experience in their development.

The challenge that I faced at Penn State was having come from an all-Black community to going to a predominantly White area and just fitting in. There was only one female that had an impact on me; she made me successful for the wrong reason. It was my high school guidance counselor. [She] told me I needed to go to an all-Black school because I wouldn't be successful anywhere else. She motivated me, but in a different way. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

As the women achieved success, their destiny was further reinforced in the growth of their core strength, assertiveness, and self-advocacy. Meaningful experiences tested their determination and reinforced their personal strength and leadership style.

I didn't have a direct path. I graduated from high school January 1965; I didn't graduate from college until June 1974. I had a lot of experiences in between there—two children, etcetera. I use my story for students because they always say, when you have a break, it's hard to, you know. If you keep your eyes on the prize, you know what you want to do and have a strategy around it. Then, when I started working as a teacher, I taught for a semester, and then I was laid off because, in New York, that was the great recession and everything. I went back to school and got my master's. So turning those, like, setbacks into opportunities. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

Although most women shared that family support was an important factor in guiding their decisions, fostering their strong character, and acquiring their leadership skills, one recognized a teacher who stepped into that role:

Particularly my mom never felt that she could help us. She just didn't feel like she had enough knowledge because she never graduated—she didn't get past eighth grade. So the woman who was the advisor to our yearbook and is still a very good friend of mine to this day − actually, she and her husband would take me to visit colleges because my parents actually didn't know that much. They were very helpful to me. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Early Leadership Roles

In describing their early childhood and life experiences, these women revealed how family, formal education, and challenges contributed to their destiny for success. For them, their desire and drive to become leaders was further impacted by meaningful developmental experiences.

My aunt, my father's sister, was very strong, had convictions, and was political. She was so involved in politics until the day she died. She would commonly recruit us to just help out to hand out flyers or join the campaign and staff meetings. We were very involved at a young age. We would join, but sometimes it would be me pushing them to go. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

These early leadership experiences provided an opportunity to guide their leadership styles. They each shared candidly what they viewed as leadership roles early in their lives. They identified these roles through educational experiences, community service, or extracurricular activities that they believed helped them prepare for the superintendency.

Most superintendents participated in band or orchestra or played the lead role of their

high school musical.

> I was the drum major for my junior and senior year, which was so cool because you're in
> charge of the band, and it was just really neat. It really, I think, broke me out of my shell
> and had me making some decisions. When you're on the field, you're making some
> decisions about how things are going to function in the band—now it's much more high-
> tech. Back in the day, the band director would be up in the booth watching us but with no
> way to communicate with you. So I was kind of pretty much on my own. (S3, personal
> communication, August 1, 2016)

The women noted unique experiences. Some were the first to achieve specific recognition

or followed a nontraditional path. Extracurricular clubs and athletics defined their versatility as

high-achieving students.

> I was involved with the newspaper as the editor. I was involved in the yearbook. I was
> the editor of the yearbook. I played three varsity sports, tennis, bowling, and softball.
> Actually, I was the first person to get 12 varsity letters. I was the captain of the tennis and
> bowling team. In softball, I was the pitcher. I won the Science fair; then, I had the
> opportunity to go to NASA and see a space shuttle lift off. Actually, that happened to me
> three different times between seventh and twelfth grades. (S5, personal communication,
> August 4, 2016)

Theme 2—Career Choices: Mentorship

The Value of Opportunities

The second theme outlined career choices and the role of mentors in the leadership

development of the female superintendents outside their race and gender identities. They

described experiences, both positive and negative, and the contribution these experiences had on

their development as leaders. Most respondents referenced the paucity of female leaders who

could serve as role models during their career in education. All noted that White men occupied

most of the leadership positions as principals, directors, and superintendents. Five expressed that

White men exclusively granted the opportunities afforded to them. These men either provided

them with access to leadership opportunities or encouraged them to pursue a leadership position.

One of the women identified a female superintendent as her only mentor, and two other participants acknowledge the helpful support from both female and male sponsors with their career advancement. All of the men who served as the participants' sponsors had the power within a school district to assist in advancing their careers within their organizations.

In reflecting upon their career experiences, the women were asked the following question: "When you think of a professional mentor in your past, what leadership practices did they subscribe to that you admired and used for yourself?" This led to descriptions of how relationships with mentors influenced their career advancement, how they learned from observing great and not so great leadership practices, how timing and opportunities assisted their career, and finally how their willingness to grow professionally empowered them to seek and achieve positions of leadership that ultimately led them to the superintendency.

Sponsors

Three of the eight superintendents acknowledged that they were viewed as daughters to their male mentors.

> On my first job I worked in [Garten]—it was such a tiny district. The superintendent—I think he viewed me more as a cute little daughter, a very paternalistic kind of thing. He was very encouraging, very much wanted me to succeed. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

> At times, women utilized the perceived paternal instinct to their advantage,

> So I will say that I have sometimes shamelessly played the female card. Sometimes, you come across people who, like, want to feel real paternal towards you, so, whatever. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

All participants recognized a sponsor as someone who believed in them, encouraged them to pursue a position, and provided them with opportunities to develop their leadership skills. They described these college professors, colleagues, and supervisors as supportive, encouraging, and partly responsible for increasing their confidence level.

The realization that very few women worked in the top leadership position in the district

made the pursuit of the superintendency more attractive:

> I mean, when I first started, there really weren't very many women; it was really kind of unusual to have women in that role. I think it was the challenge of it that just made it really appealing. I just think it was kind of, I can do that. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

Similarly, five women expressed how their male superiors included them in opportunities that were

beyond their job description.

> Because, at that point, when I met the superintendent there, I always say he took advantage of the fact that I wouldn't say no. He would say, "You need to be in charge of the grants. You need to be in charge of this." He gave me all these other opportunities so that I could work my butt off. But he did give me experiences that helped me to continue to move forward. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

However, three of the female superintendents described such opportunities as a way for their male

superiors to delegate their own tasks.

> When I had a male superintendent, it was very clear that there are the visionary people who talk about what needs to get done. Then there are the people who do it, and you can separate them by gender. So the males would say we could do this or we could do this . . . but, then, when it came down to the paper had to be typed or the form had to be filled out, it was almost always a female who took that role, and that always bothered me. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Learning What Not To Do

The women shared personal and professional experiences that, whether positive or

negative, influenced their leadership development. (S3, personal communication, August 1,

2016) provided an example of a female leaders she did not want to imitate:

> Sandra knew her staff. She was brilliant. She was at one point, I think, president of the International Reading Association. Sandra needed to be the brightest and best looking person in the room, at all times. It was very challenging to sit in her classes. I often would tell my colleagues that she treated it like it was the engineering program at Rutgers and was picking people out to weed [out] the amount of students in the program. For me that was one of my very first experiences with, wow, I don't want to be like that. As much as the positive experiences mattered, I think, for me, it was seeing how people were not doing it well. For me, that was sort of the challenge of I could do that better.

Indeed, several participants described an experience where they viewed a leader in a less-than-favorable light and were determined not to replicate their behavior if given an opportunity to lead. Superintendent 5 (personal communication) provided an example of a female leader she did not want to imitate:

> She taught me things, [but] I can never be like her. Because she was always getting information, but she was never making a decision, and that always drove me a little crazy. It's important to get the information, but, at some point, you got to probably say, okay, this is how we are going to do it.

> Intrinsic motivation was also a direct result of childhood experiences. One participant described this drive in detail:

> I do respond well to looking at the negatives and saying, "I don't want to do that." Both my parents were chain smokers, and just kind of blowing in your face kind of smoking. I had asthma, so I'm like, "I will never smoke," and that motivated me to do that. We grew up in East Orange, and I'm going, "I will never be poor." That motivated me to just do things differently. Just looking at my friends as I was growing up and seeing how their lives were not going in the right direction, it was always, for me, "I'm going to ditch that person." I have been okay with that, like, not hanging out with the bad crowd, and, even if we were close when we were 7, but now we're 17 and you're nuts, you have to get out of my circle. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

The career paths of the women in this study varied greatly in type of positions held, level, area of teaching experience, and time in each position. However, most participants shared the importance of how being in the right place at the right time advanced their careers. These unexpected opportunities proved to significantly influence their career advancement as well as their development as educational leaders.

Right Place at the Right Time

Six women recounted a time when they assumed a leadership position that became available due to a resignation or retirement within their district. In all but two occasions, the female leaders pursued and were successful in attaining the vacant position.

The interesting thing was I did not apply for the superintendency, and it was in my vision, but I wasn't sure if I was quite there yet. I had discussed it. The board had asked me my feelings on it, and I just kind of sat back and thought, "I don't know if right now is the time." I knew that the process was not yielding 100% of what they were looking for. Then, they asked if I had any plans on putting in for it, and I received several inquiries from community members, and that was kind of my hint. Okay, well, I guess it's not time to be scared of that office; it's time to see. (S1, personal communication, July 27, 2016)

Career path was also determined by opportunities that became available to them within their own district. Being approached to apply for the position was viewed as a sign that they were ready for the position, and their confidence came from the support of others.

The vice principal resigned on the principal's first day, having nothing to do with the principal, but he just happened to get a job somewhere else. So they needed a vice principal, and the superintendent came to me and the new principal and, then, asked if I was interested. I was very nervous about accepting it, but I thought, "How [can] I say no to this opportunity?" They've came to me, so I did it. Vice principal for a year, the principal leaves to become superintendent, and they ask me to become the high school principal. At that point, I was 27 years old. In that district, the board asked me to take over the superintendency when the superintendent left to go to another district. They did actually ask me to take it full-time, and I told them I wasn't interested. So I did it as acting superintendent for 6 months. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

In contrast, two of the eight shared the difficulties in achieving the superintendency after serving as assistant superintendent or acting superintendent in their own district.

Normally the expectation is that, when you are the interim superintendent, you will become the superintendent, but that process was not for me. I had to overcome a lot of obstacles. I had to interview three times. I said, "You can select somebody from the outside, but nobody will know the biggest issues that we are currently having and the reasons why the other superintendent is not here anymore." I am your best candidate, you can select another candidate, but he will take 3 or 5 years into fixing what I already know. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

Two females shared how they knew they were being groomed to take the position available by the outgoing administrator. At times, they even recognized the succession plan.

When I worked in the county office, the nights were very minimal. I was county school business administrator for a couple of years, and then the person that I worked with as county superintendent was a woman, and she was grooming me to take over for her when she left. When she left, I took over that position. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

Several participants reported how they learned early in their career that they would need to move out of their district to seek their first administrative position. For one superintendent in particular, good timing seemed to evade her.

> I am never the successful internal candidate. . . . When I was a teacher in [Warrensville], I interviewed for a supervisor position—didn't get that. When I was in [Westmont] interviewing for a district literacy supervisor position, I didn't get that. It just never − when I was principal in [Melville], they were hiring for assistant superintendent. I put my name in, and I made it to the final round, and in the end, the superintendent picked an outsider. When I was in [Hart], my superintendent retired right when the salary cap came in. I phoned the board president, [and I offered to be the assistant superintendent and acting superintendent, [but] she didn't take me up on it. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

> Still, even when not interested, opportunities availed themselves.

> Actually, I told [him] I never wanted to be a superintendent. When I came here as the assistant superintendent, he said to me that he would probably be here for another 10 or 15 years because his daughter was in college. Then, 4 years later, he was gone. Yes, he did encourage me to apply, and I don't know what happened. At the board level, I went through the whole process. My sense is he was probably very supportive of that. It was probably easy because, when I came here, he involved me in everything. I got excellent training in terms of behind the scenes with the board and from committee meetings and things like that. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Professional Growth (Willingness to Learn)

Self-confidence is a personal characteristic identified by seven of the eight women. Many divulged how their confidence allowed them to seek and accept feedback and criticism.

> I have never been afraid of criticism. On the contrary, I welcome that, because I always said nobody is perfect, and the more you know, the more powerful you are because you grow as an individual. I guess that's why I developed my model of learn, grow, and move on. [My first principal] let me make decisions, and not all my decisions were perfect, and he said, "You will make them." But then he would bring me [in], and we talked about it. I have always learned from the people around me, even from my secretary; she is a good model for me on keeping your mouth shut, when you have to, and just don't say things. I learned by experience there are certain things that you share, and there are other things that you don't share. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

> It is interesting to note that two female superintendents whose teaching experience was solely at the secondary level acknowledged how they learned about good teaching from

elementary school teachers. These experiences influenced their educational philosophy and leadership.

> It really wasn't until I sat in those [kindergarten] classes that I learned, like, "Holy crap! This is what real teaching is like." Seeing 6-year-olds self-manage. I don't think we called them centers at that time. The amount of independence that kids had at that level made me think differently about teaching. It gave me a different perspective in terms of teaching and patience and understanding of the elementary teachers and how hard it really is to run an elementary classroom and how hard it is to teach kindergarten. It also shifted my thinking from science and math to children. Because, prior to that, it was about science and math, and then it became about children. It was a very hard transition for me at first. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Every woman recognized high-quality mentorships they cultivated or were offered during their career. All were able to utilize these sponsors as a career-advancement strategy. They espoused a confidence level that embraced feedback. Their desire to take on additional tasks and responsibilities enhanced their leadership skills and propelled their careers to the next level.

Theme 3—Intersectionality: Double Jeopardy

You Are Who You Are

The third core theme emphasized how gender, social norms, and race affected the women in their careers. The term *double jeopardy* proposes that females face multiple levels of discrimination because they are discriminated against by their gender, social norms, and race. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term *intersectionality* and theorized how different types of discrimination interact. Being a female in a male-dominated position was something that the research participants experienced on a daily basis. They were frequently confronted with the assumptions and stereotypes associated with their gender, social and cultural expectations, race, and, at times, age.

Although they were linked together in the sameness of their gender and leadership position, their racial classification, age, and career path vary. The women in this study share some common experiences when harmonizing their gender and professional identities.

Listening to the narratives of the eight female superintendents made it possible to gain insight into how gender, social norms, and race informed their leadership development. Their responses made it possible to identify multiple lenses that they used to synthesize and elucidate meaning from their experiences. The women shared their experiences in response to the following question: "How have your gender, social norms, and race shaped your development as a leader?"

Gender

When asked the question about how their gender shaped their development as leaders, they confessed that being a woman meant they would always have to work harder. They knew that they would always be challenged and that they would always have to confront and overcome stereotypical perceptions. These thoughts were grounded in the realization that things are different for them, as women, compared to their male counterparts.

> My ex-husband is in education as well, and he is an administrator. We actually taught at the same school together. We did our master's together, and, it's funny . . . it was by superintendents that are colleagues of mine now. They would always seek him out for things and not me, back when we were teachers. I don't know if they remember it and are hoping I don't remember it. People didn't know if I was in it for the long haul because they figured I would have a family and leave. I think that's also why they were always tapping into him because it was, "Oh, well, she is going to have kids and stop working." whereas he is the one who needs to climb the ladder and make money. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Seven of the eight participants recalled instances of an overt double standard they experienced due to their gender.

> You know, to a certain extent, getting interviews or being viewed positively by the board is not strictly a function of what's on your resume. I remember when I interviewed for the

position, the board president was a guy. It wouldn't cut it nowadays, but he told me after the fact that he was fine with my capabilities. He said he really didn't want to hire me because he was afraid that I was just going to get pregnant and leave. I was like, "Oh my gosh! This is what I'm up against. Just because I'm a woman. . . . What's to say that I even want children?" (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

Even when they were the successful candidate and were offered the superintendency, the compensation was not equitable compared to that of male superintendents.

Like every time I left a job, I'm just trying to think. I think, without exception, I was always followed by a male, and they always paid them more. Like, even when I left [Blair], that was the last job that I left before salary caps were in place. Milton followed me, and they had to be paying him at least 10,000 more than when I walked out the door. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

Half of the participants noted how the length of the contract was always less than the length of contract offered to their male predecessor. Even though five of the eight women acknowledged serving as the primary source of income for their family, they were not viewed as the head of the household.

In terms of discussing my salary and my merit goals, as you know, we are capped, [and] there are people in the district that make quite a bit more than I do. The board never questions that, and somebody made an offhanded comment that I didn't need the merit goals because I don't have a family to support. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Many participants recognized that the bias they experienced was often subtle, perpetrated by both men and women. Such bias undermined their efforts for equity.

When I was named the superintendent of the year, a couple of people said, "Well, it's about time it was a woman." I kind of stopped, and I looked at them and said, "Yeah, but I would hope that I was the superintendent of the year because I was the best person, not because it was time for a woman to be the superintendent of the year." (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

One of two African American superintendents shared how she had become accustomed to the preconceived notions of individuals regarding the superintendency.

I've also been dismissed. I will tell you my assistant is a 6' 2" White man. We walk in together; he is always assumed to be the superintendent, and I'm always either his

78

assistant or just someone who is there. I always wait for it too to see what happens, and they go right to him and introduce themselves. Then, I'll just stand quietly for a second. Then, I'll say who I am, and they are like, "Oh, you're [the superintendent]." (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Similar notions of disparity when interviewing candidates for other administrative positions were also noted:

Because I sit in on all the interviews when we're interviewing for an administrative position, for whatever reasons, the male candidates come in, and we have discussions regarding the scoring. Unless they really say something that just doesn't hit home, the male's score is always a little higher. It's always higher in the confidence [area]; they believe he can do this job. Then, we'll have the female candidates with similar backgrounds, and it's, "I'm not sure if she'll fit in. I'm not sure she'll be able to—you know how that staff is like. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Many remarked how they had to work harder than their male counterparts to be considered proficient at their job. Unlike White men in the superintendency, the female superintendents thought that they were more likely to be questioned by subordinates and superiors alike and asked to explain their reasoning.

I do feel that, really, if you want to get the job done, if you want the details paid attention to, etcetera—if you want it done right, a woman will do that because we must try harder. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

Most of the female superintendents openly discussed how they must balance being nurturers with being assertive while making the tough calls.

Females always have to prove themselves. They have to be witches in order to achieve. "A witch lives here." That was something that was said, and I didn't take it as an offense. It was hard to develop a balance between being kind but strong at the same time. I am not perfect; there are some people that, where they see my feet, they want to see my head, and that's okay. I respect that too. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

Social Norms

Skrla et al. (2000) noted that, in the same way the US has constructed a male-dominated superintendency, it has created a package of norms about femininity and female behavior. The author described that package as consisting of "dependence, passivity, fragility, low pain

tolerance, nonaggression, non-competitiveness, inner orientation, interpersonal orientation,

empathy, sensitivity, nurturance, subjectivity, yieldingness, receptivity, inability to risk

emotional liability, and supportiveness" (p. 83).

Women shared their personal stories of perpetuated norms associated with women in

leadership positions.

> I noticed that, from my previous superintendent, who was a male, and he could get angry, and he could curse, and it was just, you know, he's really mad, he is really upset, and we better do this. I know I can't do that. I've heard even when female principals will be, you know, "I don't know what's wrong with her." So if I would yell and curse, and then it's not "She's really passionate about this." It's just "Something is wrong with me. I'm having a moment. Maybe me and my husband must have had a fight." There is still some of that that goes on. How is she going to react, people will say, "I was afraid to call you." And I'm always interested in why. "Cause, I didn't want to make you upset" and I'm going, "Make me upset?" I [ask], "Are you worried that you personally are going to make me upset? Or that the incident is going to make me upset or the fact that I have to do my job is going to make me upset? Like, what are you worried about?" [They respond] "Oh, I just didn't want to bother you because I know you're dealing with a lot." I'm thinking, "You never said that to [the previous male superintendent]. Like, you would never say that to him." (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Most of the participants believed that they had to demonstrate less female-dominant

attributes to ascend and be successful as superintendents. Their experiences denote the

challenges they faced managing a male-dominated role while still being true to themselves.

> They have a whole different attitude about what they expect from me. I can remember, at the end of the year, at the end of the Summer Institute, they gave me this round smiley face because there is this expectation that women are supposed to smile and be pleasant. Here I was—I was like all business because I am all business—and so, there is that, like, "Wow, what's going on?" (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

> I'm sure that there are number of people that call me a bitch, and I don't really care. I agree that that's an area where, simply by doing our job, we potentially get labeled with that negative label where, you know, guys would probably not. I have worked with some people who, it's been apparent to me, struggle with taking directions from a woman. It's like, I'm not being nasty—I'm just doing my job. You may not like it. You may think it's mean. I don't know that there is any way around that or any way to resolve it because I think it's a cultural thing, and it's unfortunate, but I'm, like, way beyond that. I don't care at this point. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

Similar experiences were shared about boards of education, association leadership, and

parents:

> It's like they perceive me as being compassionate, and that is sometimes perceived, particularly by boards of education, as not a good skill to have. They really feel like you are not going to get things done. I remember, specifically here, the board didn't think that I would be able to handle being superintendent because I was a person that would get a tear in my eye, and they are like, "Well, how are you are going to take care of the difficult problems?" I think they learned pretty quickly that, sometimes, you need somebody who is compassionate. Because people feel like they are going to do what's right for their kids. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

> It was right after Columbine, so that was a really difficult thing and, at the end of the day, everything was fine, everybody was returned home safely. I remember getting over the PA. I could feel myself like, as I'm talking, starting to choke up because I was just relieved that we had made it through. People sometimes think that you should never have to show any kind of emotion. I think the compassion was negative for me with my board education at the time, but I think my staff appreciates it. I mean, it's a double-edged sword. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

High-performing leaders require tackling tasks and issues while building and maintaining

relationships among all stakeholders to optimize collaboration. Finding the perfect balance

between setting high expectations and shared leadership, at times, required the women to clarify

their role as superintendent. They noted that relationship building and collaboration did not

imply a release of their authority.

> I have definitely had to change, shift my demeanor a little bit. Because I am a warm, friendly person, I've said to people, I've said to my association leadership, don't mistake [approachability] for weakness. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

This theme was also evident in interactions with parents:

> I think there are some views out there that exist even within this community that, as a woman, I should be softer on certain items. I've had parents in meetings where I hold my ground and make my statements and they say, "As a mother, I would think . . ." So I find that they are expecting more softness maybe on certain issues when it involves children. (S1, personal communication, July 27, 2016)

81

Race

Based on the conversations about race and gender, all participants overwhelmingly expressed that both social constructs influenced their development as leaders. The three minority female superintendents felt that being African American or Hispanic and female were not mutually exclusive categories; on the contrary, they contended that both background characteristics influenced their development into the leaders they are today. From their perspective, however, being a woman was, first and foremost, their greatest challenge in attaining future success as a superintendent. Their voices highlight experiences within the dichotomy of being an African American or Hispanic female in a male-dominated leadership position:

> I think, if I were an African American male, I would be given a little bit more power to speak. Being a female in our profession, I think the men have it in our profession. I think I would be seen as more in a position of strength if I were an African American male walking in over being a White female. It is a double-edged sword because, if you're female, and then you're African American, you're invisible. It's like I can't even hide; it's not even like I'm just a different nationality. It's tough, and I think people make you earn your voice when you're African American. They make you earn it more in our profession when you're female and it's, if you look at how we're structured, we could be teachers—that's fine—we could dominate that area. But not this one, not the decision makers, not the leadership, not the ones who are impacting the legislator. That's not generally our expected role, especially if it requires you to argue, debate, and fight passionately. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

> You know what, I can honestly say, I just think of where I've applied. I wouldn't say racial, I would say more gender—more gender than anything else. Of any kind of barriers I have faced, I would say probably more gender. I'm thinking of particular jobs I didn't get, and then they hired an African American male. Being an African American female is a very different experience than a White female. I just believe that. I was in Cleveland at a conference, and someone talked about coming off as an angry Black woman. I mean that whole concept. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

The only Hispanic superintendent imparted her experience not only as a minority, but as a nonnative English speaker:

Race, instead of making it easier . . . many people will say, "You got it because you are Latino." I say, "No, I got it because of my qualifications, my knowledge, and my expertise." Race and being a female is a double whammy for a woman that looks for positions of leadership. First of all, being a woman, that's the first challenge, but being a minority, regardless of race, is a big second challenge that you have to overcome in order to get the position—and keep it—because you have to prove yourself every single day, prove that you have what it takes to make it. I say, "Look where I am, a Latino woman that speaks with an accent. People have the tendency to think that, because you speak with an accent, you are not intelligent, and that is common, I find. I know a second language, [and] that means I know more than you because I can communicate twice and I can understand other cultures, but that has been one of the biggest obstacles for me, in this environment. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

Age

Glass (2000) suggested that women spend more years teaching in the classroom prior to seeking an administrative position compared to men. In addition, their careers might pause as they take time away from their profession to raise children. Women might be reaching central office opportunities in their late 40s, early 50s, at which time they are required to decide whether to embark on a new position when retirement is quickly approaching. School boards also might consider age as a factor when looking to hire someone with experience versus someone who can offer longevity to the district.

The women shared their unique experiences, one as a young superintendent who achieved the superintendency in her early 30s, and another who reached the superintendency later in her career.

I definitely know, when I was becoming a supervisor, I was asked, "You are going to be supervising people 20 to 30 years older than you, how do you deal with that?" They all comment, and I think partly because I'm younger and I'm a woman. They will make comments that I don't believe they would make if I was a man in [my] 50s. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Being older also influenced their candidacy:

I think they got that reverse-age-discrimination thing going. Okay, like, "We could hire her, but she is already old enough that she could retire. How much longer do you think she is going to work?" I think, when people get to be my age, I think they don't know if

they are a serious candidate for the long term. I think we like to view them as maybe not staying around too long. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

The leadership experiences of the female superintendents were often characterized by experiences of disparity, discrimination, and a higher level of scrutiny. The female leaders in this study developed their leadership competencies, and they were confident in their leadership abilities even when leading under great adversity. These women demonstrated resiliency and an unwavering determination to succeed in a position infrequently occupied by their fellow female educators.

<center>**Theme 4—Leadership Experiences: Playing the Game**</center>

Leaning In

The participants recounted their experiences with adapting to and developing their skills to compete. They also shared their thoughts about working in an environment dominated by predominantly White men. They reported that they were forced to become more assertive about having their opinions acknowledged and their voices heard. Their voices paved the road toward empowerment.

Be Comfortable With Who You Are

The following narratives support the strength exhibited by these women when, in spite of the realization that being a female presented obstacles, they chose to embrace their true identity.

> So, I have that too—that I'm not whatever it is that they think I should be—that makes me more approachable to females. I guess I don't have that either. I'm not in the boys' club or the girls' club. I'm just kind of here. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

> When I came here to interview with the board, I had a black pantsuit on. I don't even wear skirts when I'm [in] an interview or a meeting, [and I wear] low heels. I didn't want them to look at me, I think I either put my hair in a bun and I minimized the makeup. But [now] I'm like, this is ridiculous that I feel like I can't be myself. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

So, now, periodically, I'll bake for board meetings or whatever, but I think it's that I'm not afraid to be a woman. I don't and I have never felt like that. I don't wear pants, and that's a conscious decision. I'm a woman, and I know, like, a dress is a personal choice. Some people just don't feel comfortable wearing heels every day. But, that's who I am, and I don't feel the need to portray myself as being masculine at all. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

One woman summarized the belief of the entire group:

I think that, as a woman, first of all, embrace who you are. I think that that's the biggest thing—embrace who you are, and that's as in your gender, in your ethnicity, in your culture. Be proud of that and what guides you: your family values, your neighborhood, whatever that you are—let that influence your core. Okay, they are going to say, "Oh, she's doing that because she's a woman or she's African American." You're doing it because it's who you are and what you believe. I've been doing this for a long time. People just, I don't say they forget you're a woman, they forget you're African American, but people will just understand that's who you are and that's how you're going to respond, and they respect that. They may disagree with you, but they, as long as they know you're doing this because this is your core belief, then it works. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

Speak Up

Almost all of the women expressed that they were the only female superintendent at their county roundtable meetings, where the other superintendents were predominantly White men. In realizing that they were habitually the only woman at the table, all participants developed an internal insight for how they would handle situations. Often, using their voice prevented them from becoming invisible.

I've interjected and said something about, "Let's do this." And then no one chimed in, and the male next to me said, "Let's do the same thing." I'm sitting [there], and I'm like, "I just said that, and I decide. . . . how am I going to get their attention to realize that, yeah, you just dismissed me?" So, sometimes, I actually do actively lean into the table, and I'll just say, "You do realize that, of all of us, I'm the most qualified one here." I have to do that sometimes to pull it back, because it does get to be a little crazy, and they're like, "We didn't mean anything." (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Their opinions usually face greater scrutiny.

I think, sometimes, I have found that, when the same question is posed and a male answers it but with no support, it's just kind of okay. When a woman answers it, they follow with, "Well, why do you feel that way?" I believe if I'm going to speak, answer,

or whatever, I always add my reasoning. When you're outside the building, whether you are at a county meeting or a state meeting, you're the oldest or you're the youngest, your information is important, your opinion is important. (S1, personal communication, July 27, 2016)

Act the Part

Communicating with various stakeholders is a daily requirement of the superintendency. Five women viewed less-than-desirable interactions with individuals as one of their greatest challenges. Their experiences show how they became adept at utilizing both presumably male and female stereotypical characteristics to address the task or overcome the obstacle faced and how they were proactive in preparing for the consequences that would result from their decisions.

> My biggest obstacles are probably occurring right now. . . . It's with my union; I would say just my union president and leadership team. In that, their focus is not on the students, and it really isn't even on the members. They are just going to use every little thing; every little thing is going to be a grievance. If we can drown you in paper, we will − attitude. So, trying to move forward with what we're doing—we're doing some amazing things, while also dealing with that. It's kind of like compromising between the evils and just, every day, coming in and keeping that smile on your face and saying, "Okay, let's be about the business." When you have, in this case, and these people not only have an agenda, but they're not nice. They say mean and nasty things to people. I've been trying to find that balance of your freedom of speech as your union leadership, but also your insubordination as well, and, when do you strike? Then, bringing everybody else back up because they just got off the phone with someone who is being nasty. I spend a lot of time reinspiring, and reencouraging people here when they feel like they are under attack for doing a good job. I have learned that I'm a pretty good actress without trying to be phony, and that worries me that I can go into the zone, so to speak, just to deal with the politics of it, which isn't—that's not the real me, because that's not really what I want to say. That's not really how I feel, it's just what you have do. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

Being a role model of professional behavior and setting the expectation for respectful interactions was the common approach utilized by most women.

> It's really challenging because of how many people we have to interact with. I always believe that you always have to treat people as you would want them treating you. I think you even have to treat them better than you would want them to treat you. (S5, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

The women considered the affective side of leadership as a key skill in being a successful superintendent. They also shared their awareness that every decision would lead to consequences, and they readily accepted them.

> I always like to be collaborative in my decision making, I like to go and reflect, but after I have gathered some information, and on the same day, I will make the decision as the superintendent. I know I am going to see them, and they are going to come to me and confront me, and I will keep my cool. I think that's one of the things I have learned the most: Just keep cool, because I have always said, words are just words. (S6, personal communication, August 10, 2016)

Theme 5—Cultivating Future Leaders: Empowering Others

Paving the Way

The women in this study conveyed, through recounting their experiences, some of the subtle biases and overt inequities that are present in the superintendency for female superintendents. These women have persevered and performed competently in an environment where doubts of their capabilities are prevalent and less-than-favorable assumptions are present. Even through their confidence and resiliency, they still have had to lead under greater scrutiny and higher expectations than have their male counterparts.

When asked what advice they would share with women pursuing the superintendency, they shared anecdotes of lessons learned and examples of how to prepare to rise above the challenges and perform with tenacity.

Pay It Forward

Despite the confidence exhibited by these successful female leaders, they shared how self-promotion did not come easily to them and is not typically viewed as a feminine characteristic. They caution aspirants to the superintendency to ensure that they do not understate their knowledge and skill in an effort to exhibit humility, especially during the interview process.

I believe that some other female who is thinking whether or not they want to lead is watching you, and may make a decision based on that. So, I do talk about that a lot with my other female leaders, administrators, and teachers who want to be leaders about "don't ever sell yourself short." Even if you don't know, it's okay to admit, "I'm going to get some more research on that." But don't downplay yourself, and don't ever say, "I'm just a girl." or "What do you want from me? I'm a woman in a man's world." All those little things that we do that just knock us down, and I don't tolerate the male jokes either. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

The importance of maximizing every opportunity for an interview was common advice.

You need to get good at interviewing because you are out of practice for a while. The other thing I say to women, and really, it's for women only, so many of us were raised where you don't brag about yourself. It is so much harder to promote yourself in an interview because, typically, they'll say, "What strengths do you bring?" So, for me, I've learned certain phrases: *people have complimented me for such and such* or *I've been told that*. . . . [It is important] for women to find a way that they can convey their strengths in a way that suits them. If you get invited in for the interview, take it. I think that's a learning opportunity—you never know where it will go. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

The importance of being true to yourself was also highlighted:

So, some of that is about, is it the right [fit], is [it] your style? Sometimes boards can figure that out, so, the other part [is] why we say to people, "Don't pretend to be somebody else when you interview. Be who you are, don't let them be surprised as to who you are when you get on the job. It's hard enough boards change, at least for the board that hired you. Be the person you are." (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

The importance of being aware of prejudice and bias that you will be facing as a female in a male-

dominated position was also emphasized.

I think, number one, going [in] with their eyes wide open that people will have preconceived notions about a woman—with regard to her age, with regard to the way she dresses, with regard to her relationships, that people do have set expectations and set perceptions. And not that any of them are right or wrong, but you need to be aware of them so that you can deal with different groups of people accordingly. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Suggestions were offered on balancing life, family, and stress.

To have a balance in your life, that's not a skill that we have, that we do well. You can easily become consumed by this job, and life is too short. You have to make sure that you find things for you, your family, to make sure that you are not consumed by the job. I

think that's probably difficult to do because superintendents are just driven people. The other thing in terms of assuming this position, I think people have to be willing to make the commitment in terms of time. It takes it to a whole different level. Your family has to be supportive of that, because you are never really off. Even on vacations, they are calling. It's a 24–7 commitment, and the sacrifices that you have to make in terms of, if you have a family, they have to understand that you are not always going to be able to be there for every little thing. It's a personal sacrifice as well, and—stress—the other thing in accepting a position like this is that you have to be willing to accept stress, and the most frustrating thing is that 99% of the problems that we have to deal with, we didn't create. Someone did some bonehead thing; they should have known better, and you are left having to either discipline them, explain to the parents why you are sorry that happened, or correct it. (S7, personal communication, August 11, 2016)

Lessons Learned

One of the last questions asked was what lesson or lessons they learned as a woman in a leadership position. All eight female superintendents told of experiences that related to a challenge that they overcame by showing determination and rising above their own fears because others depended on their leadership.

Recognizing the importance of providing wisdom to others, the women shared their very personal experiences and the knowledge they acquired in the process. In times of crisis, the women surprised themselves:

We had a, a really challenging event right after the Penn State–Sandusky issue. I was on vacation when I got a call from a police officer who said that one of my staff members had been arrested for the same thing at the same time that this was going on. . . . It was month two of my superintendency. It was like, "Oh my God, what do I do? It was one of those moments where I thought, "I'm not ready for this job. I came back to an excellent team here who helped me problem solve. It was at that point that I really got a full gist of the legal responsibility of the job. It was a quick learn what to do, what to say, how to handle the media. There was just no time to figure it out. You really had to be on your feet. I did learn that, in a crisis, I'm pretty good, I can handle this, I'm quick on my feet, and I can orchestrate people. I also learned that, when that happened, there were so many eyes looking up like what are we going to do? So many people were depending on me being rock steady—that, if I had a little meltdown, we would have lost it. That was really important for me to have experienced earlier in my career because just more happened after that. So I was prepared for that, but also recognizing that I have an obligation and responsibility to lead people out of the crisis. That comes along with the job, and there is no training for that. (S2, personal communication, July 29, 2016)

89

[There was] the issue of my email that got leaked out [by a colleague]. I've said to folks here, don't put anything in [an] email that you don't want known to the world. I don't care if it's an attorney–client privilege matter, somebody could still hack our email and post everything. That particular situation I had to be very careful whom I called for advice on that. . . . I mean, when I saw the article come up and I remember I was driving on the Parkway. I see the snapshot of my email. . . . I pulled over—I almost threw up. I needed somebody to calm me down and, like, talk me through how to deal with this and how to manage this . . . a methodical way of approaching it and looking at it rationally. Instead of trying to respond or talk [to people] or get my words misconstrued, I was placing statements on the website in a timely manner. What helped me was to approach it and not just react to it, but be very thoughtful about it. (S4, personal communication, August 4, 2016)

Conquering the disappointment of rejection was deemed important in seeking the

superintendency.

What I've learned is—and it's so interesting now that I'm at this level—each district conducts the process so differently. I was lucky when I started interviewing for superintendent positions. I think I only interviewed in maybe four places. Some boards are very professional; some boards don't have a clue. Some boards are heavily guided by search firms, and some are not. I am never the successful internal candidate. I've learned throughout my span, don't ever be crushed because something else is going to come out of that, you just have to wait and see where it is. You never know what a place is looking for. I've interviewed in places where they clearly have things that needed to be fixed, and they were looking for a candidate who could come in and do that. So it's as much as you interviewing for the community and finding if this is the place that you feel is a good match for your skill set. (S3, personal communication, August 1, 2016)

The most experienced superintendent recommended a graceful exit to any position:

Here is one thing I would advise. It's what I tell people. I always tell them because I think I'm really good at not burning bridges, and I think that's a critical thing, not burning bridges. Don't do it—you can't go back. You stand up for what you believe in, but you can do it without crushing people. (S8, personal communication, September 20, 2016)

Summary of the Analysis of the In-Depth Interviews

This chapter presented the qualitative data collected through responses to a demographic

protocol and in-depth, semistructured interviews of eight female superintendents in New Jersey.

The interviews were audio recorded and then transcribed. Although the transcriptions of the

interviews were uploaded into my copy of NVivo qualitative analysis software, I chose to

conduct the analysis without the software. Each transcript was read multiple times, and inductive analysis was used. This approach required immersing myself in the details of the data to discover important categories, dimensions, and interrelationships (Patton, 1990). Some themes became apparent during the interview, and I discovered others while listening to the audio and reviewing the transcriptions. However, analysis evolved from blocks of text relating to each theme and excerpts that were shortened to exclude irrelevant discussion, repetitions, and unnecessary digressions. This second stage of analysis also involved noting when the women returned to a theme within their story and organizing the excerpts accordingly. The final stage of analysis involved looking for commonalities and differences between the participants in relation to each theme. As Denzin (as cited in Hatchell & Aveling, 2008) noted, in this way, the "text allows the reader to re-experience the events in question, coming to see the truth of the narratives that contain them" (p. 14). A table was constructed for each of the five themes, and 18 categories were listed and classified within those themes according to the way each woman represented the theme in her story.

The analysis of the interview transcriptions revealed five major categories in the participants' perceptions of their early leadership development: strong work ethic, academically driven, confidence, overcoming obstacles, and early leadership roles. Within the theme of career choices, the following categories emerged: sponsors, opportunities, timing, and professional growth. Within the theme of intersectionality, the following personality attributes dominated: gender, social norms, race, and age. Within the theme of leadership experiences, the following codes emerged: confidence, assertiveness, and role expectations. Within the theme of cultivating future leaders, the following codes emerged: pay it forward and lessons learned. Through

analysis, I determined these factors to be significant components to ascending to the superintendency.

The research questions were discussed as they related to the responses from the participants during the interviews and from the demographic questionnaire. The results for the first research question, which addressed district demographics, career path, and personal demographics, were derived from the demographic questionnaire and were clarified through the face-to-face interviews. The results from the transcribed participants' interviews provided results to RQs 2 and 3. Research question 2 focused on gender identities and social norms and how they informed the participant's leadership development, and RQ 3 focused on female superintendents' perception of the successes and barriers they encountered in their search for and ultimate fulfillment of their duties as superintendent.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the findings, the outcomes of the data analysis, and a discussion of the results. The chapter ends with conclusions and implications for future research.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATIONS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Interpretation

According to the *Study of the American Superintendent: 2015 Mid-Decade Update* (AASA, 2015), women make up 27% of the superintendency, which is a slight increase from their previous study conducted in 2010. In that study, according to Glass (2010), of the 13,728 superintendents at that time, only 1,984 were women. Coughlin et al. (2005) reported that women's inherent feminine disposition serves as the foundation for the development of essential leadership skills necessary to be effective in executive positions. These findings suggest that, as contemporary female leaders have opportunities to express their "voices" in the workplace, their power will increase (Coughlin et al., 2005, p. 137). Although some research has been conducted on female superintendents in New Jersey (e.g., Bastas-Christie, 1987; Dulac, 1992; Edmunds, 2008; Senyk, 1987), most studies have focused on the barriers women encounter and their access to equal opportunity in seeking the superintendency rather than on the individual experiences of their leadership development. The present results further substantiate the need for a greater understanding of how these latent leadership skills are developed in order to bring more women into the highest leadership position available in school districts.

Grogan (1996) reported that gender and race are "powerful factors in the way women have been formed as individuals" (p. 90). Alston (2005) suggested that researchers consider race and gender as a "lens to investigate the intersectionality of lived experiences" (p. 684). Alston's study confirmed that the intersection of gender, social norms, and race plays a crucial role in the leadership development of women who pursue and achieve the superintendency. Throughout the

interviews, all of the superintendents described their leadership development as it related to their experiences and the effect of these experiences on their career trajectories.

Understanding the leadership development experiences of female superintendents throughout their personal and professional lives is necessary for improving leadership development opportunities for women in the field of education. The findings revealed that leadership development is an ongoing process that occurs in natural settings, such as through family influence on and participation in school and community activities. Development of leadership traits and positive self-concept as a leader began during early childhood for most of the female superintendents in this study. Many of the women expressed that their strong work ethic, desire to succeed, and integrity developed in the environment created by their parents. Regardless of their ethnicity, educational background, or family's socioeconomic status, the women credit their parents with instilling traits that predestined them for success.

All of the superintendents shared that their families stressed high expectations for academic success during their childhood. This expectation was further underscored when many of them were identified for acceleration and honors programs within their schools and districts. The traditionally defined models of the U.S. workforce assume certain academic fields are, essentially, masculine. Stereotypical assumptions about gender differences make conditions difficult for women to achieve equality in many professions, such as business, sports, academia, and politics (Valian, 1999). However, half of the women in this study described their interest in male-dominated programs, such as chemical engineering, medicine, business, and mathematics. In addition, two of the superintendents spoke of their experience in politics. One took an active role assisting her aunt in political campaigns, and another superintendent formulated a campaign strategy to run for her district's school board after graduating from college. The study also

94

revealed that most of the women participated in band or orchestra, and several served as captain of their high school soccer, softball, tennis, or bowling team. The results of this inquiry indicates that the women in the study did not feel limited by their gender; in fact, they were raised to believe that they could achieve and that their success would be a product of their hard work, self-advocacy, and determination.

The study also reveals that the development of leadership involves internal motivation, access to leadership opportunities, and mentoring that recognizes women's leadership potential. The women in this study deemed others' encouragement and belief in their ability to lead critical in their pursuit and attainment of leadership positions. Glass et al. (2000) documented that three quarters of the female superintendents in their study noted that networking and relationships granted them entry to higher level leadership positions. All eight participants studied here reported that their supervisors prepared them for new leadership roles by training them through delegation and giving them access to opportunities that led them to their next administrative level. Through their mentors' encouragement, support, and faith in their abilities, these women gained the courage to apply to leadership positions that, ultimately, led them to the superintendency. This finding coincides with results from previous research (Ceniga, 2008; Glass et al., 2000). These findings are consistent with Bjork and Kowalski's (2005) study, in which the majority of the women were mentored into their position. In the present study, all but one of the women received sponsorship from a White male superintendent. White men occupy the majority of superintendencies, and, in that position, they have the decision-making authority and access to provide opportunities to women. In reflecting upon their career experiences, the participants described how relationships with mostly male sponsors served as a catalyst to their career advancement.

Similarly, opportunities that presented themselves, primarily without the women's initiation, furthered their career path to the superintendency. Most of these opportunities came from an early retirement or unexpected resignation, and they were able to capitalize on the opportunity, recognizing that they were in the right place at the right time. In most instances, a mentor presented the opportunity, and this support provided them with the confidence that they needed to apply. Even though the women shared that the superintendency was never a career goal, they all completed the requirements necessary to apply more than 5 years prior to securing the position. Powell (2012) reported similar results in her study: "There was a moment of time for each where 'the stars lined up' and each woman was then able to initiate an action step of her own to apply for a superintendency" (p. 101).

When gender, race, and social norms converge, women, in particular minority women, might experience interrelated barriers that limit career advancement at all levels of an organization (Davis & Maldonado, 2015). Minority female superintendents acknowledged the double standard of being a woman and a minority in a predominately White, male-dominated leadership position. Collins (1990) suggested that race and gender are interlocking social constructs. Furthermore, Davis and Maldonado (2015) viewed them "not [as] separate entities that intersect [but as] completely bound to one another, incapable of being separated" (p. 181). However, contrary to Collin's findings, the minority female superintendents in this study all agreed that being a woman was their greatest challenge. Even though they viewed being a woman and a minority as double jeopardy, gender was perceived as the greater barrier of the two. Two of the three minority superintendents provided examples of a man of their same race securing the superintendency over them. The majority of the women shared how they experienced both overt and subtle gender biases, mostly from stereotypical beliefs that men

96

would be more knowledgeable and better able to handle tough decisions. All of the participants shared how men, in general, were viewed as better suited to lead a district because of their perceived likeability and skills in finance, politics, and communication. According to the participants, both men and women held these views consistently.

Conclusions

Research is limited on the impacts of gender, social norms, and race on women's leadership development in education, specifically regarding the superintendency. Consequently, this study provides a framework for understanding the leadership development experiences of successful female superintendents. The findings can inform educational leaders to replicate an environment that promotes equal opportunities for women at all stages of educational and professional growth. The study can also serve as a reference point for higher education institutions, educational leadership organizations, and state departments of education whose members and staff seek to identify and prepare outstanding leaders for the nation's public school systems.

The opportunities provided by family, peers, teachers, and supervisors allowed women to demonstrate their leadership abilities. Moreover, recognition of these abilities helped women build their self-concept of being a leader and the confidence to pursue leadership positions. Acknowledgement by others that they could perform leadership tasks influenced women's decision to step into the next leadership position. Their history of accomplishment becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. This finding informs parents and educators that they must move beyond simply promoting participation in activities that help shape young girls' leadership qualities; instead, they must provide them with the opportunity to demonstrate their leadership skills and recognize them for their abilities in order to build a young girl's self-concept of being a leader.

97

The female superintendents in this study credited a mentor, sponsor, or both with assisting them in climbing the educational leadership career ladder. This finding suggests that women who aspire to the superintendency must be willing to establish strategic, professional relationships with superintendents to gain access to the position. The professional opportunities offered to women will be based on credibility they build over time in their job performance at every level of administration.

This study confirms previous research in the areas of gender discrimination, typical career paths of female superintendents, the critical role of mentors, and women's confidence in their ability to achieve success, even when faced with opposition. The study extends previous work by adding eight voices of female superintendents from the state of New Jersey to the limited literature on this topic. Their diverse stories revealed specific phases of leadership development and highlighted commonalities across race and women's experience with social norms. The findings from this study benefit women aspiring to the superintendency and inform leadership programs and associations that seek to encourage and prepare females to pursue the superintendency.

Recommendations

From this research, we can discern that the experiences that gave these female superintendents the opportunity to show leadership, as well as the recognition they received from their leadership role, helped build their self-concept and gain confidence in being a leader. Although limited by the small number of participants, this study identified some generalizable activities and factors associated with the leadership development of these women from a young age. The study also offers links between self-concept and leadership development. This finding informs families and educators that they can actively develop leadership skills of girls at early

age by offering them opportunities and encouraging them to take leadership roles in sports, community organizations, and school activities. Furthermore, the finding should compel leadership programs and supervisors to offer women opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills and to develop their self-concept as a leader to the point where they are ready to seek and apply to an initial leadership role. Their success, and the recognition they receive at each level, will further encourage them to pursue a higher position within their organization.

This study adds to the evidence of gender- and race-based discrimination. Even though such discrimination is well known, the findings are important because they share the success of female superintendents. The findings also highlight their resiliency and determination as they were empowered by the clarity of their convictions and refused to compromise their values in seeking and maintaining the superintendency. Women encountered greater stereotypical expectations as they advanced in leadership roles. These findings suggest that it is necessary to support and mentor women as they continue to develop leadership skills and climb the career ladder.

Future Research

Although this study provides useful information about the ongoing leadership development of eight female superintendents, the study was exploratory in nature and was limited by the small number of participants. Suggestions for future research would be to conduct a quantitative study that secures more participants. The development of a statewide database that mandates statistical information for every public school superintendent would assist researchers in achieving greater access to data on female superintendents.

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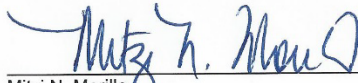# APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

REQUEST FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH, DEMONSTRATION OR RELATED ACTIVITIES INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

All material must be typed.

PROJECT TITLE: A Phenomenological Study on the Leadership Development of Female Superintendents in New Jersey

CERTIFICATION STATEMENT:

In making **this application,** I(we) certify that I(we) have read and understand the University's policies and procedures governing research, development, and related activities involving human subjects. I (we) shall comply with the letter and spirit of those policies. I(we) further acknowledge my(our) obligation to (1) obtain written approval of significant deviations from the originally-approved protocol BEFORE making those deviations, and (2) report immediately all adverse effects of the study on the subjects to the Director of the Institutional Review Board, Seton Hall University, South Orange, NJ 07079.

_____   5/7/16

Mitzi N. Morillo
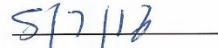RESEARCHER   DATE

**Please print or type out names of all researchers below signature.
Use separate sheet of paper, if necessary.**

My signature indicates that I have reviewed the attached materials of my student advisee and consider them to meet IRB standards.

_____   5/7/16

Dr. Elaine Walker
RESEARCHER'S FACULTY ADVISOR   <mark>[for student researchers only]</mark>   DATE
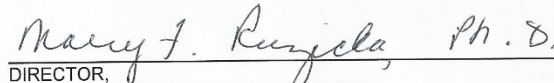
Please print or type out name below signature

The request for approval submitted by the above researcher(s) was considered by the IRB for Research Involving Human Subjects Research at the ___June 2016___ meeting.

The application was approved ✓ not approved ___ by the Committee. Special conditions were _____ were not ✓ set by the IRB. (Any special conditions are described on the reverse side.)

_____ Ph. D.   7/11/16

DIRECTOR,   DATE
SETON HALL UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL
REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN SUBJECTS RESEARCH

113

SETON HALL UNIVERSITY
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INFORMED CONSENT

TITLE OF STUDY: A Phenomenological Study on the Leadership Development of Female
Superintendents in New Jersey

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR/RESEARCHER: Mitzi N. Morillo, Student in the Executive
Leadership Doctoral (Ed.D.) Program

FACULTY ADVISOR: Dr. Elaine Walker

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the intersectionality of gender, social norms, and race of
female superintendents through their lived experiences of how they developed as leaders.

Procedures

Subjects will participate in a one in-depth interview. If permission is given to be audio recorded
it will be done, otherwise the researcher will take notes. The interview will take no more than an
hour and will take place at participants' current site of employment or by phone. In the
beginning of the interview, the researcher will provide reasoning of the basis for her research.
The interview protocol will begin as follows: the participant will be assigned a code, which will
be used when transcribing the audio recording. The subjects will be asked to complete a
demographic profile consisting of questions related to their district such as the type of school
district they lead (i.e. urban, suburban, or rural), years as a superintendent, and their career path
before becoming a superintendent and personal demographics. The researcher will then proceed
to ask questions related to the research questions:
1. Who are the female candidates that rise to the level of superintendents?
   1a. In what ways did gender identities inform female superintendents' leadership
   development?
2. What barriers do women encounter in ascending to the level of superintendent?
3. How do women navigate the challenges they face?

Instruments

The demographic profile includes questions about their district, career path, and personal
demographic of the participants.

The interview protocol will include semi-structured, open-ended questions. The interview
protocol questions will be designed to address how gender identities and social norms inform the
leadership development of female superintendents.

A HOME FOR THE MIND, THE HEART AND THE SPIRIT

Interview questions will focus on the following areas: each individual's life history, their career path, leadership, their gender identities, and their lived experiences. The interview questions will be designed to frame the answer to the research questions.

Voluntary Nature
Participation in this research study is voluntary and participants do not have to answer any questions they do not want to. If at any time, the participant decides that she does not want to participate in this study, she can withdraw at any time without prejudice.

Anonymity
Each participant will be assigned a code, for example "Superintendent A. All data collection, analysis and reporting will utilize coding to preserve anonymity.

Confidentiality
All information gathered in this study will be kept confidential. No reference will be made in written or oral materials that could link you to this study.

Records
All records will be stored in a locked facility for a minimum of three years after completion of the study. After the storage time the information gathered will be shredded and the audiotapes destroyed. A digital copy of the data will be stored electronically on a CD or USB memory key in the Principal Investigators' office in a locked cabinet.

Potential Risks and/or Discomforts
There are no known risks associated with this research study.

Potential Benefits
There are no direct benefits to participants.

Compensation
No compensation is associated with participation.

Contact Information
If the participant has questions as to her rights as a human subject, she can contact Seton Hall University IRB at telephone (973) 313-6314 or email irb@shu.edu.

If the participant has any questions about the research, she can contact the Primary Investigator/Doctoral Student Mitzi N. Morillo at: telephone ███████ or email mitzi.morillo@student.shu.edu or her Faculty Advisor Dr. Elaine Walker at: telephone █████ ███ or email elaine.walker@shu.edu.

2

Participant Consent:
I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 30 years of age. A copy of this signed and dated Informed Consent form will be provided to you.

_____   _____   _____

Participant Name (Please Print)   Signature of Participant   Date

Agreement to be Audio-Recorded or Not:
Please check your preference about audio recording:
☐ I agree to be audio recorded.
☐ I do not agree to be audio recorded.

3

APPENDIX B

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE

Part 1: District Demographics

The questions listed here will provide data about the district in which female superintendents work. Please select the response that most closely resembles your district.

1. How is your position classified?
   - ○ Local School District Superintendent
   - ○ Regional School District
   - ○ Regional High School District
   - ○ Career Technical School District
   - ○ Educational Service Center (ESC) Superintendent

2. How is your district classified?
   - ○ Rural
   - ○ Suburban
   - ○ Urban

3. How many students were enrolled in your district as of October 15, 2015? _____

4. What is your district's District Factor Group for the 2015–2016 school year? _____

5. Which of the following best describes how you obtained your current superintendency position?
   - ○ Hired from within
   - ○ New to district

Part 2: Career Paths

The questions listed in Part 2 will provide data about the education and experiences of female superintendents. Please select the response that most closely resembles your experiences and education.

6. What is the highest earned degree you hold?
   - ○ M. A., M.Ed., or M.S.
   - ○ Ed. S
   - ○ Ed.D. or Ph. D.
   - ○ Other (please specify) _____

7. Which of the following was your field of study in your highest graduate degree?

- ○ Educational Administration
- ○ Curriculum and Instruction
- ○ Elementary Education
- ○ Middle Childhood Education
- ○ Secondary Education
- ○ Humanities or Fine Arts
- ○ Science or Engineering
- ○ Mathematics
- ○ Business
- ○ Other (please specify) _____

8. Are you currently working toward an academic degree? If so, please state the degree you are working on _____

9. How many years were you a classroom teacher? (Do not count your years as an administrator)

10. Other than as a superintendent, how many years were you in an administrative/supervisory position? (Do not count your years as superintendent) Please list the position and number of years in the position:

Position: _____   Years _____
Position: _____   Years _____
Position: _____   Years _____

11. Please describe your career path to the superintendency.
For example:

Teacher> Principal> Director of Curriculum and Instruction> Superintendent

Career Path:

_____

12. What did you teach in your first full-time teaching position? _____

13. What other teaching experiences did you have prior to becoming an administrator?

_____

14. What extracurricular activities did you have a contract for while teaching?

_____

15. What certification process did you follow to earn your certificate for the superintendency?

○ A degree program (please specify program) _____
○ A certification program (please specify program) _____
○ Other (please specify) _____

16. How long after earning the appropriate licensure/certification, did you apply for your first superintendency?
○ Less than a year
○ 1 year
○ 2 years
○ 3 years
○ 4 years
○ 5+ years
○ I did not seek the position and was appointed

17. How many school superintendencies have you held? _____

18. What year of the term of your contract are you in? _____

Part 3: Personal Demographics:

The following questions pertain to personal demographics. Please select the response that most closely describes you.

19. What is your ethnic background?
○ American Indian/Alaskan Native
○ Black/Non-Latino
○ Asian/ Pacific Islander
○ Latino
○ White/Non-Latino

20. What is you marital status?
   - ○ Married
   - ○ Single
   - ○ Divorced
   - ○ Widowed

21. What is your age? _____

22. What age were you when you first became superintendent? _____

23. How many children are you raising or have you raised? _____

24. Please list the ages of the children in your household during the time you have been superintendent. _____

25. Are you the primary source of income for your family? _____