

BLACK FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS AND RESILIENCY:
SELF-PERCEPTIONS OF GENDER- AND RACE-RELATED CONSTRAINTS
FROM A RESILIENT REINTEGRATION PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

TERESA JOHNSON DAYE: Black Female School Superintendents and Resiliency: Self-Perceptions of Gender- and Race-Related Constraints from a Resilient Reintegration Perspective
(Under the direction of Dr. William Malloy)

It has only been within the last twenty years that female superintendents and superintendents of color have been included in the scholarship and research on the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Glass, 1992; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Brunner, 2005; Tallerico, 1999). Jackson (1999) describes Black women superintendents as “doubly marginal in society, as females and African Americans” (p. 141). The number of Black female superintendents continues to be unsteady. There are recent reports of several Black female school superintendents either being dismissed or announcing their resignations. It appears any momentum gained in increasing the numbers of Black female superintendents may be reversed by the frequent resignations and dismissals of Black female superintendents across the country. Jackson recognizes that Black females are living examples of human adaptability, strength and accomplishment when granted opportunities to serve in the role of superintendent.

In recent years, investigators and researchers from multiple disciplines such as child development, pediatrics, psychology, psychiatry, sociology, and education have engaged in studies of resiliency (Werner, 2000). Whereas most of the earlier resilience research has focused on children and adolescents, increasing numbers of studies on the resilience of adults who are exposed to personal and work-related stress are beginning to surface. This study

used the common themes that emerged from the review of the literature as a framework to investigate how Black female superintendents perceive their experiences as superintendents from a resiliency perspective. The study presents the findings from interviews with five sitting Black female superintendents who expressed their perceptions of the impact of race and gender on their roles as Black female superintendents, and more poignantly, manners in which they dealt with any perceived race- or gender-related constraints.

The study participants' contributions on perceived race and gender inequities serve to highlight the issues and identify methods of dealing that may lead to the elimination of social injustice in the superintendency and the educational arena as a whole. A positive outcome may manifest in the form of more respected, productive and extended tenures for Black female school district superintendents.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the five Black female superintendents who graciously supported me in my efforts as I completed this milestone. Your selfless and tireless donations of time and service to our children and public education are greatly appreciated, honored, and respected. They serve as sources of inspiration to those who will follow in your footsteps. Thank you so very much.

I also dedicate this special project to my very special, loving and deserving family: Paul, my extraordinary husband—no matter how high I get, I'll still be looking up to you; and my children, Christopher, Jessica, and Darian—you are the wind beneath my wings. Thank you for allowing me to shift focus to do this very special something for me. I hope you realize it was just as much for you. You are my strength and inspiration. I love you!!!

Finally, I dedicate this project to my deceased parents, Benjamin and Jessie, who probably would have not even understood the process due to their educational limitations; but they loved, encouraged, praised and supported me, and those acts certainly nurtured my resilience and self-efficacy. Here's to you, Momma and Daddy!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

When one chooses a professional path, it is quite typical and wise to seek models with which to consult and emulate en route to attaining that goal. As an aspiring school superintendent, it has been, and seemingly will continue to be a challenge for me to identify Black female superintendent models and mentors to follow and study. White female superintendents, though not as plentiful as Black or White male superintendents, do exist in identifiable numbers. Black female superintendents are, however, rare. The recent resignations of four prominent Black female superintendents across the United States including San Francisco, Cleveland, and Minneapolis create an anxiety within me. I am fretful that the recently observed indolent incline in the number of Black female superintendents may drift, or is drifting, into a reversed, retrogressive state.

The purpose of this dissertation was to identify Black female superintendents' perceptions of gender- and race-related constraints from a resilience perspective, with a focus on resilient reintegration processes. I wanted to determine if there are observable and perceived barriers, including race and gender, that manifest in short tenures for the Black female superintendent. Additionally, I wanted to identify the ways in which Black female superintendents respond to barriers and adversity in their professional roles, especially those who are experiencing success as school superintendents. Although there is a recognized

increase the number of studies on female superintendents in general, none of the studies reviewed in the literature has focused specifically on the resiliency of Black female superintendents.

My interest in the topic of female school superintendents evolved as I was completing a graduate course assignment that highlighted the issue. The assigned text by Kowalski and Brunner (2005) relayed that Blount (1998) and Jackson (1999) implied that early communities were reluctant to hire women and persons of color as schoolmasters because they believed women were less intelligent than men. Women received little, if any formal education; they were not prepared to teach others; and persons of color were not considered at all. Additional research revealed that women did eventually become teachers and even dominated the teaching profession; however, they have not been as successful in school leadership positions. A careful reflection on my personal school and professional careers revealed the same observations, especially for school leaders.

There is a marked difference in the numbers of male and female superintendents in our country. There have been numerous studies on persons in the superintendency, both male and female; however, there is a paucity of research on female school leaders in general, and even less on Black female superintendents (Blount, 1998; Gewertz, 2006). At the superintendent level of school leadership, Gewertz revealed that the American Association of School Administrators reported in 2000 that, of the 14,000-plus sitting district superintendents, only 15 percent were women, including all races and ethnicities, and Black female superintendents represented a much smaller percentage. Gewertz reported that the rate was 2% or less in the middle and late 1990s, which was the most recent data available at the time of her report. She suggested the recent resignations are fueling renewed discussions of

the roles of race and gender in the superintendency, and other earlier studies suggest that other possible constraints exist for female superintendents, both Black and otherwise.

McCabe (1992) conducted a study which examined perceived constraints of female superintendents, and Alston (1996) conducted a study examining perceived constraints and facilitators of Black female superintendents. The findings of both studies indicated the existence of constraints, perhaps real and perceived. It does not suffice to only identify the constraints; it is equally or more important to understand processes and procedures to build resilience to and mitigate the risk factors associated with those perceived constraints.

As a Black female nearing the completion of an Educational Leadership doctoral program, I embarked on the journey of identifying female superintendents in my state and country whom I may observe, shadow, emulate, and identify as a mentor. I believed it wise to begin studying their behaviors, leadership styles, mistakes and successes. I was totally awestruck at the sparse numbers of females I discovered, and even more so of the exiguous Black female superintendent population. I began to wonder if historical hegemonic and androcentric implications of society at large were as prevalent in educational leadership as had been implied in other fields and professions. After all, centuries since the male-dominated teaching profession began, women have infiltrated teaching, but they remain a diminutive minority in educational leadership, particularly the superintendency.

Recent resignations of three Black female superintendents were highlighted by Gewertz (2006). Gewertz suggested that there is some disagreement between educators and scholars on the issue of the impact of race and gender on the perceptions of superintendents, suggesting that race and gender may be perceived barriers for school superintendents. Glass, Bjork, and Brunner (2000) found that most female superintendents believe that gender is a

barrier to attaining the superintendency. However, Alston (1999) performed a study of Black female superintendents that revealed that they did not perceive race and gender as major obstacles in their positions as superintendents. Consider the recent and past resignations of Black female superintendents. Are the resignations a sign of the future? Are Black females encountering insurmountable obstacles forcing them to resign from their positions? Are there lessons to be learned from successful Black female superintendents that will aid others in the successful retention of their positions?

Alston (1996) reported that there are Black females who are very successful in their professional roles as school superintendents. Glass et al. (2000) reported that nearly 93% of the females in their study were given “excellent” or “good” ratings by their boards of education, and they likewise rated their own performance. Might resilience account for their success?

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to investigate Black female superintendents’ perceptions of constraints and barriers from a resiliency perspective, with a focus on resilient reintegration processes. The study was primarily based on literature dealing with women in educational leadership in general, Black females in educational leadership, and resiliency theory. Two primary questions emerged in my quest.

Research Questions

1. What perceived gender- and race-related constraints do Black female school superintendents identify in their professional roles?
2. Which resilient reintegration processes do Black female school superintendents employ to mitigate or overcome perceived gender- and race-related constraints?

Definition of Terms

Terms are defined in the context of their use within this study.

1. Black—of or belonging to a racial group having brown to black skin (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000) including African-Americans and other brown peoples.
2. Gender—sexual identity, especially in relation to society or culture (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).
3. Lifestyle choice—decisions made by the individual to determine ways of living including marital status, professional decisions, decisions to have/rear children, and affiliations
4. Perception—that which persists in the mind as the product of careful mental activity (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2000).
5. Race—a local geographic or global human population distinguished as a more or less distinct group by genetically transmitted physical characteristics (The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, 2006).
6. Reintegration—the return to well-adjusted functioning (*The American Heritage® Stedman's Medical Dictionary*, 2002).

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7. Resilience—the process of coping with disruptive, stressful, or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event (Richardson, Neiger, Jenson, & Kumpfer, 1990).

8. School district—geographic area within a state organized for the purpose of supporting and directing public education and headed by a superintendent of schools (McCabe, 1992).
9. School district characteristics—components applicable to the school district based on the setting of the district (i.e., urban, suburban, rural).
10. Superintendent—the chief executive officer of a school district employed by a board of education to be political, educational and managerial leaders who work to improve education (Johnson, 1996; Konnert & Augenstein, 1995).

Limitations

This study was limited to the population of approximately 100 Black female superintendents in the United States public school districts during the 2006-2007 school year. It only involved five full-time “sitting” superintendents.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

Throughout the history of the Western culture, women have had the daunting challenge of having to prove themselves equal to men in most every area outside of the home and family care. Their male-imposed subservient roles rendered them ineligible for membership and participation in various occupations and organizations and alienated them from many rights. America is very much like many other countries when it comes to gender roles. Males reign dominant in many instances, both historically and presently.

Women have been deemed inferior to men in most every way imaginable, particularly in intellectual and physical capacities. Feminist theory sets out to dispel theory offered by males and even some females who have been conditioned to accepting theories shaped and conditioned by males and manifesting in male superiority. Feminist theorists assert that most aspects of life can be understood in terms of gender qualities. The feminist critique aims to expose the powers as well as the limits of the gendered divide of the world. The principal goal of most feminist research is to diminish the gendered inequities that saturate cultural life (Kramarae, 1989). Feminists refuse to accept that inequalities between women and men are natural and inevitable, and they insist that they should be questioned (Jackson & Jones, 1998), and Black feminists refuse to accept their general placement among women of other

ethnicities. This dissertation focuses on the Black woman as a school district leader. It is important to clarify the need to isolate the Black female's perceptions and processes.

Collins (1991), speaking on the critical distinction between Black women and women of other races and ethnicities, proclaims, "On certain dimensions, Black women are more closely resemble Black men; on others, white women; and on still others, Black women may stand apart from both groups" (p, 207). That quotation is a fitting segue into this section on Black feminist theory and the need for it. Moses (1989) frames the issue by saying:

At the intersection of race and gender stand women of color, torn by the lines of bias that currently divide white from nonwhite in our society, and male from female. The worlds these women negotiate demand different and often wrenching allegiances. As a result, women of color face significant obstacles . . . (p. 1)

Likewise, Alston (1999) states that "because of Black women's work, family experience, and grounding in African-American culture, . . . Black women as a group experience a world different from those who are not black or female" (p. 80). As important as the women's movement has been, it has been determined that "mainstream women's movement reflected the aims and objectives of white, middle-class women" (Simien & Clawson, 2004, p. 795).

Race and gender are not consistently perceived as barriers for minority women; however, a recurring theme throughout the Black feminist research has been *Black feminist consciousness*—"the recognition that African American women are *status deprived* because they face discrimination on the basis of race and gender" (Gaines, 2005; Simien and Clawson, 2004; Springer, 2005). Black feminist consciousness is an outgrowth of Black feminists' understanding that Black women were discriminated against based on both their race and gender. hooks (2000) theorizes what has come to be known as intersectionality—"the interlocking nature of gender, race, and class" (p. xii). Having to bear the burdens of prejudice that challenge people of color, in addition to the various forms of subjugation that

hinder women, African American women are disadvantaged doubly in social, economic, and political structure in the United States” (p. 83). Many of the challenges that Black women encounter are evidenced in their quests to fill roles in educational leadership. Has the Black female superintendent been spared such challenges and disadvantages?

It is understood that not all females regard themselves as feminists, and not all Black females consider themselves Black feminists. Relative to the proposed topic, however, Collins (1990) postulates four major themes of self-identified Black feminist thought: (1) Black women empower themselves by creating self-definitions and self-valuations that enable them to establish positive, multiple images and to repel negative, controlling representations of Black womanhood; (2) Black women confront and dismantle the “overarching” and “interlocking” structure of domination in terms of race, class, and gender oppression; (3) Black women intertwine intellectual thought and political activism; and (4) Black women recognize a distinct cultural heritage that gives them the energy and skills to resist and transform daily discrimination. Those themes, philosophically, may be perceived to indicate a kinship to resilience. Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell and Benham (2006) identify the themes of Black feminist theory as racial differences, gender differences, and differences in power and privilege. They avow “the differences in power and privilege affect the ability of Black women school superintendents and principals to create change and act for social justice” (p.36).

Educational leadership has maintained a narrow focus of social justice and oppression (Gosetti & Rusch, 1995) that must be broadened. The increased breadth and depth of that focus can be attained through a concept that Gosetti and Rusch refer to as *multiple lenses*. Multiple lenses suggest educational leadership focuses on social justice and equality in

multiple ways and from multiple perspectives. It brings into focus the everyday traditional and privileged ways of seeing, thinking, and knowing and it empowers individuals to notice and question the embedded notions that have previously been ignored or accepted. Gosetti and Rusch summarize such notions by stressing that privileged perspectives in educational leadership erroneously support silences, reproduce silences and “no problem” as acceptable norms; and the notions emphasize the difficulty and complexity in modifying such views, actions, and ways of thinking.

The education profession, whether consciously or subconsciously, has seemingly embraced and implemented gender hegemony ranging from the acquisition of education to educational leadership, creating systems of inequity and social injustice. Rusch (2004) posits many educational leadership programs perpetuate issues of equity and diversity because the programs of study and class discussions do not examine, critique and challenge policies and laws that support gender, class, racial and other inequities.

This dissertation research will review the theoretical underpinnings of gender hegemony, emphasizing its impact on educational leadership as well as the status of women in educational leadership, with special attention on Black females in the superintendency. The experiences of all women have erroneously been generalized, for race and class yield as many differences as there are similarities among women. Women in educational leadership today continue to experience influences of patriarchy. This review of the literature is arranged to logically move from a broad to a specific perspective. It begins by addressing educational leadership, fielding the research on women in general and progressing specifically to the Black woman in educational leadership. Subsequently, it likewise addresses the school superintendency, women in the school superintendency and Black

women in the school superintendency. A section on resilience is presented to identify the context from which the study will be conducted.

Educational Leadership

Historically, studies of males and the traditional scientific management perspective have been the sources of literature about women in educational leadership (Sanders-Lawson et al., 2006). Much of the literature on educational leadership has not recognized or included women, and the language suggests managers are males or gender neutrality (McGregor, 1960; Tallerico, 1999). A perusal of the literature on the subject reveals that women and people of color were not included in the study of leadership until the late 1970s (Sanders-Lawson, et al., 2006). Mertz and McNeely (1998) argue that “school administration has been male dominated and male defined (largely White male); that is, explained, conceptualized and seen through the eyes of males” (p. 196). Following is a brief review of women in educational leadership and Black women in educational leadership.

Women in Educational Leadership

Nationally, men dominate educational leadership, that is, the superintendency, the assistant superintendency, and the high school principalship (Glass, 1992; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). Female principals are more prevalent at the elementary level than at the secondary level (Mertz & McNeely, 1998; Montenegro, 1993). Outside of the school, more female administrators occupy central office positions such as staff coordinators and directors (Ortiz, 1982; Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 1997).

There is a limited amount of research that focuses on educational leadership from a female perspective as is evidenced by the dated literature (Shakeshaft, 1989; Wesson &

Grady, 1994). Tyack and Hansot (1982) are repeatedly cited in the literature with their historical precedent stating:

Amid proliferation of other kinds of statistical reporting in an age enamored of numbers, reports so detailed that one could give the precise salary of staff in every community across the country and exact information on all sorts of other variables—data by sex became strangely inaccessible. A conspiracy of silence could hardly have been unintentional. (p. 13)

That particular quote is a recurring one in the research on females in educational leadership, stressing the intentional absence of the data on women in that field.

Traditionally, definitions of leadership have been narrow and male-centered. Such definitions should be broadened to reflect women's values, beliefs and experiences, and move away from patriarchal models (Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Available research is inconsistent, as Glass et al. (2000) report that women are in charge of about 13 percent of school districts in the United States, and Hornbeck (1999) reports 12%.

Research has indicated that women's roles have varied from those of men in educational leadership. Dorn, O'Rourke, and Papalewis (1997) allege that "women involve themselves with staff and students, ask for and get participation, and maintain more closely knit organizations" (pp. 18-19). A comparison of female superintendents to their male counterpart reveal that females, on average, are older than the males; females have fewer years of experience as a superintendent, but more years experience as classroom teachers; females hold more doctoral degrees; females belong to more professional organizations that support curriculum and instruction; and females are politically more liberal (Brunner, 2000a). In consideration of the fact that the majority of female superintendents are White, Tillman (2004) argues that it is problematic to include the experiences and contributions of Black

female educational leaders with those of predominantly White women. Consequently, the following section presents literature on the Black female in educational leadership.

Black Women in Educational Leadership

There is limited research on Black women in educational leadership, especially those in the principalship (Benham, 1997; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Tillman, 2004). Tallerico (1999) describes the situation saying, “Women and persons of color continue to be woefully underrepresented in the superintendency” (p. 31). Loder (2005) regards the underrepresentation as limiting to “scholars’ and policy-makers’ knowledge of [Black females’] unique leadership dilemmas” (p. 299). Benham attributed the limitations of research to several factors. First, Benham recognizes the low numbers of Black female leaders in comparison to White men and women and Black men. Such limitations impact samples large enough to conduct large-scale studies. Second, Benham identified the limited number of researchers conducting research on Black females. Lastly, Benham notes that the absence of such studies is intentionally limited, describing it as, “an educational leadership discourse and practice that has been structured to impede such treatment” (p. 282). Bloom and Erlandson echo the sentiments of Benham, saying:

Findings from a minority insider’s perspective are regarded as dubious and unlikely to be published in professional journals. Suspect conclusions are summarily ignored or dismissed, seldom becoming a part of administrative leadership theory. (p. 344)

Tillman (2004) argues that work on Black educational leaders, particularly principals, is often embedded in a more general topic of “women and minorities.” She states, “. . . this research rarely presents detailed portraits of the lives, work, vision, and impact of these principals on the school community and student achievement or discriminatory practices that affect their work” (p. 126).

Both race and gender, as opposed to gender alone, are critical factors in the leadership of Black females (Sanders-Lawson, Smith-Campbell, & Benham , 2006; Tillman, 2004). In educational leadership Black women occupied more supervisory and consultant roles (Shakeshaft, 1989; Tallerico, 1999). The authors assert that as principals, Black women primarily served in elementary schools that were challenging and predominantly Black; fewer were found as high school principals, a position seemingly reserved for men. Today Black women continue to be considered for positions based on their gender.

Tillman (2004) notes that Black educators have historically made significant contributions, establishing a tradition of excellence in Black school leadership. Although Black females have assumed leadership positions for centuries, much of it was done in secrecy, especially during the period of slavery (Alston, 1996; Jones, 2003). Tillman adds that educated Black women opened schools in the North and South, and they maintained roles as both teachers and principals. Some of such Black female leaders were the Jeanes Supervisors, female principals who served as teachers and principals, who also served as assistants to county superintendents of schools (Tillman, 2004; Alston, 1996; Alston & Jones, 2002). Although the Jeanes supervisors reported to county superintendents, they fundamentally served as superintendents themselves. The Jeanes supervisors concentrated on the improvement of instruction, introducing new methods and curricula, and organizing in-service training. Black females comprised eighty percent of the Jeanes supervisors (Jones, 2003).

Improving educational opportunities for women was often the focus of Black educational leaders. Tillman (2004) and Jones (2003) provide an impressive list of pioneering Black women educational leaders that includes Sarah Smith, Fannie Jackson

Coppin, Anna Julia Cooper, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Lucy Craft Laney, Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Mary MacLead Bethune. These Black women demonstrated tireless efforts to support and educate Black children and the Black community. Coppin is the namesake of Coppin State College, which is now part of the University of Maryland system. Coppin lived her life advocating for better employment opportunities for women. She believed women should strive to attain employment based on skills and not settle for the positions traditionally deemed “women’s” jobs (Jones, 2003). Laney founded and became the principal of the Haines Normal and Industrial Institute in Augusta, Georgia. She originally planned for the school to serve females only, but once males began to apply, she accepted them, as well (Jones, 2003). Burroughs became the first president of the National Training School for Women and Girls, Inc. and remained so from 1909 until 1961 (Jones, 2003). Bethune was involved in numerous efforts to support women’s education. She was the founder of the Daytona Literary and Industrial Institute for the Training of Negro Girls that later merged with an all male school which is now known as Bethune-Cookman College (Jones, 2003).

Some studies and research on Black women administrators allude to their status as mothers and associates the motherhood values of nurturing, caretaking and developing children (Loder, 2005; Mertz & McNeely, 1998). Loder pointed out the controversial viewpoints on the effectiveness and appropriateness of maternal leadership approaches. Loder cited Eugene (1989) who proposed that motherhood is a manifestation of the role of care historically portrayed by the African America woman. Collins (1991) referred to the style of leadership by Black women in the community by the cultural term of “othermothering,” defining the term as “women who work on behalf of the Black community by expressing ethics of caring and personal accountability, which embrace conceptions of

transformative power and mutuality” (p. 132). In the 19th and 20th centuries, principals and teachers were acknowledged as providing leadership for the Black communities (Loder, 2005; Siddle-Walker, 2003). “Today’s Black women continue to ‘make communities’ wherever Black people live. This same spirit is evident in the school systems that these Black women now lead [as school superintendents]” (Jackson, 1999, p. 147).

School Superintendency

The term *school superintendent* is usually associated with local school districts; however, today the position exists at the state, intermediate district, and local district levels (Kowalski & Brunner, 2005). “As early as 1804, Congress used the phrase *superintendence* of public schools in granting power to the District of Columbia city council to provide for local education” (Cuban, 1988, p.111). As with other facets of educational leadership, the term *superintendent* was borrowed from non-educational fields. It was used to describe 19th-century mill managers, Lutheran church officials, and Methodist church leaders (McCabe, 1992). The first state superintendent was appointed in New York in 1812. Forty years later, each northern state and some southern states had followed the lead of New York by creating state superintendents as well. Today, all states in America have state level superintendents (Kowalski & Brunner, 2005). Some are appointed to the position, while others are elected. Appointments and elections vary from state to state. According to Kowalski and Brunner, the first local district superintendent was appointed in 1837 in Buffalo, New York (Cuban, 1988).

The focus of the following sub-section on the superintendency relates to the contemporary perspective of the roles of the superintendent and then reviews women and Black women in the superintendency.

Roles of the School Superintendent

Roles of the school superintendent have evolved over time. Kowalski and Brunner (2005) report the earliest role conceptualization of the school district superintendent was that of being the school board's clerk supported by the belief that school boards were directed to hire figureheads but were stubborn to relinquish power. Kowalski and Brunner cite Callahan (1966) and Kowalski (2001, 2003) to present other roles of the superintendency over the last century.

During the period between 1850 and the early 1900s, the superintendent served the role of teacher-scholar. Superintendents often were considered master teachers, they authored professional journal articles, and they advanced to roles in higher academia.

During the early 1900s until 1930, superintendents played the role of manager, an outcome of the urbanization created from industrialization. As school districts grew, superintendents' roles shifted in order to control materials and manage human resources. Additionally, many of the philosophies of the Industrial Revolution seeped into education, particularly given that many of the school board members embraced the management styles of the new era.

From 1930 until the mid-1950s, the superintendent's role was that of a democratic leader. Given the demise of the country following the Great Depression, educational resources, both material and human, were deficient in quantity. Schools began to compete with other public services, thus giving the superintendent political charges.

During the mid-1950s through the mid-1970s, the superintendent assumed duties that labeled him or her an applied social scientist, forged by several societal and professional conditions. Efforts were made to align school administration with business management and

public administration. Superintendents were expected to learn and apply theory and scientific inquiry to the challenges and practices of their field.

From the mid-1970s until now, the superintendent's role is viewed as that of communicator. That identification is attributed to the informational society our country and world have become. Kowalski and Brunner (2005) caution that these roles, though matched with specific time periods, should not be considered in complete isolation from each other. Even today, all remain essential characteristics. The superintendent of today must be cognizant of the social and philosophical conditions that warrant a specific emphasis on a given role. Although the roles of the superintendent are traceable and identifiable, it is most inappropriate to assume equal transfer of duties among all superintendents—that is men, women, and persons of color. Kowalski and Brunner (2005) underscore the point by saying, “People tend to believe that if men and women and persons of color are superintendents, then information on the superintendency applies to, and is related to, all of them. Such a belief is understandable, but it is not grounded in reality” (p. 150). Women and persons of color do encounter different experiences as superintendents. Brunner (2003) suggests that male responses to studies on the superintendency dominate conclusions to the extent that aggregate data on women and persons of color are barely noticeable.

Women in the School Superintendency

The number of women in the superintendency is higher than over the last ten years (Brunner, 2000a); however, a line graph depicts a flat line representing the percentages of women superintendents over the last century (Blount, 1998). Grogan and Brunner (2005) reported that women led 18 percent (about 2,500) of 13,728 school districts in 2003 and 2004. Brunner (2000a) reported that of 2,262 superintendents responding to a study on

American school superintendents, only 297 were women (see Table 2.1); however, that number was double the number from a similar study in 1992.

Table 2.1

Ethnicity by Gender of School Superintendents

Race	Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Black	38	2.0	15	5.1
White	1855	95.3	272	91.6
Hispanic	27	1.4	4	1.3
Native American	15	0.8	2	0.7
Asian	3	0.2	2	0.7
Other	9	0.5	2	0.7
Total	1947	100.0	297	100.0

Note. From *Ethnic Minority Superintendents* (p. 103), by C. C. Brunner. In T. Glass, L. Bjork, & C. Brunner (Eds.) *The 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency*, 2000, Arlington, VA: American Association of School Administrators.

“The superintendency continues to be constructed as a male arena” (Grogan & Henry, 1995, p. 172); however, women began gaining access to the position as early as the late 1800s, and when Ella Flagg Young became the first woman superintendent of the Chicago public schools in 1909, she postulated:

Women are destined to rule the schools of every city. I look for a large majority of the big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system. It is a woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership. As the first woman to be placed in control of the schools of a big city, it will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been made and to show cities and friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man. (Blount, 1998, p. 1)

Feminists regarded the women's attainment of the superintendency a particularly important goal for women, allowing them to yield significant educational influence and develop increasing social, political and economic power (Blount, 1998). However, by 1928, only 1.6% of all superintendents in the United States were women (Shakeshaft, 1989), and the gains of women in this position have been minimal. Glass (1992) found that women typically advanced to the superintendency via stints as a classroom teacher, principal, and central office administrator. Given the fact that women comprise 70% of all teachers, a typical expectation would be for women to comprise a large percentage of leadership positions. However, that is not the case for the superintendency. In 1998, 12% of the public school superintendents in the United States were women (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). The highest level of female superintendency during the 20th century was 14% in 2000 (Bjork, 2000a). Bjork reports the greatest gains for women in the superintendency over the past decade were in suburban and urban school districts with student populations from 3,000-24,999, according to a study that he and his colleagues conducted in 2000. Seventy-one percent of the female superintendents in the study reported they were in their first superintendent assignment.

Much of the limited research on female superintendents emphasizes the themes of demographics, educational preparation, experience, characteristics of the school districts in which they serve, mentors and role models, lifestyle choices, and perceived barriers (Jackson,

1999; Manuel & Slate, 2003; McCabe, 2001). It is noteworthy that Glass et al. (2000) found that the majority of female superintendents follow the same career path as the majority of male superintendents en route to the superintendency—that is, teaching, principal and central office.

It has only been within the last twenty years that female superintendents and superintendents of color have been included in the scholarship and research on the superintendency (Blount, 1998; Glass, 1992; Glass et al., 2000; Kowalski & Brunner, 2005; Tallerico, 1999). Recently, women have begun studying other women, specifically in the superintendency (Schmuck, 1999). Grogan and Brunner (2005) conducted a survey of school superintendents which revealed several facts about women superintendents including women and men superintendents are about the same age—70% were fifty-five or younger; the job search for both genders is similar—73% of men and 72% of women secured superintendent jobs within a year of beginning their job search; significantly more women than men superintendents hold undergraduate education degrees; women superintendents spend many more years in the classroom than do men; although both groups are more likely to be hired from the outside, women stand a better chance of being hired from the inside of larger districts; women have a better chance of being hired through professional search firms; women have more current academic preparation than men; and women superintendents participate in more professional development than do men. Grogan and Brunner believe their study indicates more positive attitudes regarding women in the superintendency may be evolving, and women may be considered less of an anomaly given repeated stints in the role. Their backgrounds in curriculum and instruction may be considered a factor in the speculated evolution.

Despite more recent studies like Grogan's and Brunner's (2005), there remains a paucity of research on both women superintendents and superintendents of color; however, the amount of research on the former outweighs that of the latter (Alston, 2000; Banks, 1995; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2000). Alston (2000) notes that although women in general are increasingly obtaining powerful positions in education and other professions, African American women remain a "serious" minority. Peyton-Caire, Simms, and Brunner (2000) appropriately stated:

Although we adamantly embrace this scholarship on gender and the superintendency, we must acknowledge the underexplored juncture where gender and race collide and the particular experiences of women of color –within the ranks – take on a deeper and peculiar meaning. Indeed, [their voices] have not been prominently heard in the educational administration arena. Whereas gender is an indispensable variable in such inquiry, it is alone insufficient in revealing the intricacies of these women's experiences and encounters during their plight. (p. 517)

The following section attempts to provide a plenary overview of the Black female superintendent.

Black Women in the Superintendency

Scholarly records indicate that women in general and Black women, particularly, eventually penetrated the male-dominated school superintendency and began receiving appointments to the top public school educational position (Blount, 1998; Jackson, 1999). However, Black women assumed the role long before records began. Revere (1987) reveals that likely the first Black woman superintendent in our country was Velma Dolphin Ashley, 1944-1956. Barbara Sizemore is recognized as the first Black woman to lead a major urban district. She served as superintendent of schools in Washington, D. C. and Chicago, Illinois (Jackson, 1999). It was not until the 1970s that women in general and Black women in

particular began receiving appointments to the school superintendency (Jackson, 1999) (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2

Number of Women Superintendents and African-American Women Superintendents Based on Research Studies

Year	# Districts	Women Supt. Number	Percent*	Black Women Supt. Number
1910	5,252	329	6.26	n/a
1970	10,380	71	.68	3
1982	13,715	241	---	11 (Arnez)
1983	n/a	n/a	---	15 (Ebony)
1985	16,000	---	---	29 (Revere)
1989	11,007†	284	6	14 (Bell & Chase)
1991	10,683†	424	5.6	19 (Bell & Chase)
1993	14,000‡	800‡	7.1	32 (Jackson)
1995	14,000‡	800‡	7.1	45 (Alston)
1996	14,000‡	800‡	7.1	33 (Jackson)

* Percent of all superintendents

†Bell and Chase (1993) used only K-12 districts in their studies

‡ Approximate figures from AASA

Note. From *Getting Inside History – Against All Odds: African-American Women School Superintendents* (p. 146), by B.L. Jackson, 1999, Albany, NY: SUNY.

Jackson (1999) describes Black women superintendents as “doubly marginal in society, as females and African Americans” (p. 141). She states, “. . . black female superintendents constitute a small but determined lot who have gone virtually unnoticed and unchronicled” (p. 141). Likewise, Bell (1995), addressing gender consciousness, asserted women of color (including Black) are placed in two minority positions as females and

women of color, creating double barriers to their access and mobility within the profession. Jackson dedicated a chapter on African American women school superintendents to “correct this oversight” (p. 141). Jackson recognizes that Black females are living examples of human adaptability, strength and accomplishment when granted opportunities to serve in the role of superintendent. She notes that until her 1994 study, the most recent study of the Black female superintendent was conducted ten years earlier by Revere. Jackson’s 1994 study served as a much needed update, and she notes that as of the date of her study, there had not been an accurate and complete compilation of data on women superintendents, another reiteration of Hanson and Tyack’s 1981 claim of a silence conspiracy. Thirty-two sitting and forty-one former Black women superintendents were identified for Jackson’s 1994 study, and four themes emerged from that study:

1. These women, as they grew up, had the support and experiences which, unknown to them, prepared them for leadership. When opportunity knocked, they accepted the challenge, which was their due, only to find, like many white and female superintendents, that their time in power was limited and that turnover was high.
2. Although they all discussed the difficulties of staying in the job, they believed that they had and were making a difference for students. Optimism was their sustaining attitude.
3. All who survived came to realize that the superintendency is “life in a fishbowl” and accepted their new public persona.
4. Thus belying the popular misconception that African-American women were not as well prepared as others, their lives as young people and budding professionals amply demonstrated that they were ready for leadership (e.g., doctoral degrees, robust experience in the field, and good strong connections to their communities) and had meaningful life experiences as educators. (p. 142)

Jackson (1999) posits the number of Black women superintendents is too small to be a significant percentage, adding that, despite the fact that nearly 15% of the students attending public schools are Black, less than fifty Black females in a given year have achieved the rank of superintendent. Though the figures are dated, it is relative to note that in 1978, there were only five Black female superintendents; in 1982, there were eleven; sixteen

in 1983; twenty-nine in 1984; and decreased to twenty-five in 1985 (Arnez, 1981; Revere, 1985). Alston cites in 1993 there were 1,960 White female superintendents compared to 20 Black female superintendents. Brunner (2000a) reports that in a national study of school superintendents, of the 2,262 superintendents responding to the study, Blacks accounted for 5.3% of the sample, and Black women accounted for a mere 5.1% with fifteen respondents. Alston cites Brunner and Peyton-Caire's (2000) study which revealed that female superintendents were 91.6% Caucasian compared to 5.1% Black. Alston (2005) reveals that only 2.2% of the nation's superintendents are persons of color. Brunner believes the percentage of minority superintendents has probably not increased at the same rate as increased percentages of minority students. The presentation of these important data is necessary to accurately portray the scarcity of the Black female in the senior educational leadership position, the superintendency.

Alston (2000) argues the Black woman's involvement in school leadership is minimal beyond the role of school principal. The scarcity of the Black female superintendent is aligned with the paucity of research on the Black female superintendent, which makes it challenging to collect data on the role (Jackson, 1999; Tallerico, 1999). Jones (2003) suggests that in an effort to understand the experiences of the group, interested persons often have to analyze numerous fragmented existing sources to extrapolate data.

Today, Black women educational leaders are more apt to serve in urban districts with predominantly Black populations (Banks, 1995; Gewertz, 2006; Ortiz and Marshall, 1988; Tallerico, 1999; Tillman, 2004). However, other women are typically appointed to small school districts (Jackson, 1999). Kowalski (1995) reports that "women and minorities had a greater presence in the superintendencies of urban school districts than they did in public

school districts in general” (p. 7). The Council of the Great City Schools (2003), a coalition of 66 of the nation’s largest urban public school systems, reported data to substantiate the claim of more Black women educators in urban districts. The Council reported that in 2003, approximately 23% of its superintendents were women. Some 13% of all superintendents were Black females which is quite disproportionate to the 2% Black female statistic nationwide. The Council reported that in the previous years of 1997, 1999, and 2001, 18% of the Council’s superintendents were Black females. In each of the years reported, Black female superintendents outnumbered White female superintendents in the urban districts that form the Council of the Great City Schools.

Grogan and Brunner (2005) found that Black women superintendents do not obtain positions as quickly as their White counterparts. While more than 70% of White female superintendents obtain positions within a year, only 56% of Black female superintendents are as successful. Twenty-five percent of Black female superintendents reported having to wait five years or more compare to only 8% White women and 9% White men. In the same study, Black women believed the diversity of the school board to be a factor in their hiring. Role-wise, Grogan and Brunner reported:

[Eight] percent of African-American women superintendents compared to 3 percent of white women believe they were hired to be community leaders...In addition, African-American women superintendents were twice as likely as white women to say they were hired as change agents and twice as likely as the general population of minority superintendents to say they were brought in to lead reform efforts (p. 3)

Grogan and Brunner found that women superintendents of color believed they had the challenge of “proving” themselves. One participant stated, “A woman of color always has to do a better job. There is little room for error. Her actions are watched and evaluated more

closely.” Another shared, “The expectations are higher and the tools are not as available as for white counterparts.”

Alston (1996) cited five constraints Black female administrators encountered en route to the superintendency. Her list included the absence of networking and support systems, the absence of knowledge of the internal organizational structure, and few role models. She also recognized that Blacks are not always regarded as capable leaders, and there is a lack of processes to identify Black female leader aspirants.

Peyton-Caire et al. (2000) posit three major themes relative to the plight of the female and the superintendency: (a) Women of color have difficulty accessing the position of the superintendency; (b) when in the position, women of color continue to be faced with difficulties, and (c) some qualified and capable women of color may not be interested in the superintendency. Alston, however, suggests Black female superintendents work against institutional sexism, racism, and apathy. She refers to Black female superintendents as servant leaders, saying “they endeavor to continue to lead and serve in public education—to do something about it” (p. 682). Alston also states, “These women not only have a strong sense of efficacy, but they are empowered and are deeply caring about their mission—to serve, lead, and educate children” (p. 682). Alston argues that despite the small numbers of Black female superintendents and the overwhelming obstacles with which they contend, Black female superintendents are “flourishing” in their jobs. However, Alston recognizes that the perseverance and resilience of successful Black female superintendents has not been studied extensively.

Resiliency

Resilience study is relatively new compared to other areas of social science. Brown (2004) stated, “Forty-five years of wisdom tells us that resilience makes a difference in the quality of life . . .” (p. 11). Given that this dissertation purports to identify barriers and processes for overcoming any identified or perceived barriers, resilience may well play an integral role in the success of people in general, and for Black female superintendents, in particular. It seems appropriate to first review resilience theory followed by a few resilience models. This section on resilience ends with a review of the literature as it relates to career resilience.

Resilience Theory

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

While there is no universally accepted definition of *resiliency*, most definitions are similar. Richardson et al. (1990) defined it as “the process of coping with disruptive, stressful or challenging life events in a way that provides the individual with additional protective and

coping skills than prior to the disruption that results from the event” (p. 34). Similarly, Higgins (1994) defined resilience as the “process of self-righting and growth” (p. 1). The Wolins (1993) defined resiliency as the “capacity to bounce back, to withstand hardship, and to repair yourself” (p. 5). The Wolins continued to explain the use of the term *resilient* as opposed to other terms used to describe the phenomenon such as invulnerable, invincible, and hardy, saying that *resilient* recognizes the associations of pain, struggle and suffering.

Researchers have used the term resilience to signify three classes of phenomena—(a) good developmental outcomes in children from high-risk backgrounds who have overcome great odds; (b) sustained competence under conditions of stress; and (c) individuals who have successfully recovered from a serious childhood trauma (Werner, 2000). The underpinnings of the resiliency paradigm is a “dramatic new perspective on how children and adults bounce back from stress, trauma, and risk in their lives that is emerging from the fields of psychiatry, psychology, and sociology” (Henderson & Milstein, 2003, pp. 1-2). Several landmark studies on resiliency, some longitudinal, have been conducted including Werner, 1993; Bandura, 1995, 1997; Fergusson and Lynskey, 1996; Masten, 1997; Resnick et al., 1997; and Masten, Hubbard, Gest, Tellegen, Garmezy and Ramirez, 2001 (as cited in Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000). These studies include Asian American, African American and Caucasian children who have been followed from infancy and the preschool years to middle childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, and midlife (Werner, 2000). Brown (2004) states that forty-five years of wisdom with a long-term scientific track record indicates that resilience is a key factor to the quality of life, especially for youth. Werner (1984) conducted a seminal study on the resilience of children.

Werner identified four characteristics that resilient children have in common. They are:

- 1) an active approach toward solving life's problems,
- 2) a tendency to perceive their experiences constructively,
- 3) the ability to gain others' positive attention, and
- 4) the ability to use faith to maintain a positive vision of a meaningful life. (p. 70)

Richardson (2002) presented the *three waves of resiliency inquiry* as a means of education on resiliency (see Figure 2.1). The first wave of resiliency inquiry was in response to the question of what characteristics mark people who will thrive in the face of adversity or risk as opposed to those who do not? Consequently, the first wave describes the internal and external resilient qualities that aid in people's ability to cope with or recover from high-risk situations and setbacks. The second wave of resiliency inquiry was an effort to discover the process of attainment of the qualities that might have been identified in the first wave. The third wave of resilience inquiry resulted in the concept of resilience. Richardson stated, "It became clear that in the process of reintegrating from disruptions in life, some form of motivational energy was required" (p. 309). That energy is what we now know as resilience. Richardson posits that both resilience and resiliency are "metatheories providing an umbrella for most psychological and educational theories" (p. 309).

Resilience is often associated with risk; however, resilience is distinct from risk orientation (Brown, 2004; Henderson & Milstein, 2003). While risk carries a negative connotation, resilience "evolves into a strengths-based approach to a global view of the whole [person], not at a given point in time per se, but long term, as it evolves over one's life" (Brown, 2004, p. 20). Henderson and Milstein state resiliency research differs from risk research that contributed extensively to the deficit. They further described risk research as a pathology-focused model that permeates views of human development. Most risk research

focuses on individuals who are experiencing problems such as drug abuse, school failure, and criminal involvement. Examinations of such individuals' lives allows for the identification of "risk factors" that can be associated with the problems the individuals are experiencing.

However, when "protective factors" are in place, people experiencing interruption find that interruption to be temporary. Moriarity (1987) noted:

Resilience as I have conceived of it, in terms of recovery over a shorter or long time, involves global aspects of the whole child—growth and growth drive. . . . Resilience, like competence and adaptation as outcomes of coping, is an evaluative concept, not a unitary trait. The resilient child is oriented toward the future, is living ahead, with hope. (p. 101)

Benard (as cited in Brown et al., 2001) identified three essential protective factors of resilience: (a) connections with and care from an adult, (b) opportunities for participation and contribution, and (c) high expectations for self. Osofsky and Thompson (2000) report that Werner's findings were that children who adapted successfully to adult life exhibited protective factors that included an adaptable temperament, development of realistic educational and vocational goals, and parents and caretakers who exuded competence and instilled trust and self-esteem.

Werner (2000) identified protective factors both within the family and in the community that are supportive of resilience in youth. Those within the family include maternal competence, affectional ties with alternative caregivers such as grandparents or siblings, socialization practices and faith. Werner noticed that resilient children are engaging to other people. They bear good communication and problem-solving skills, and they believe in themselves. Factors in the community include friends, school, and teachers and mentors. Support systems in the community provide rewards and reinforcement and positive role models. These are forms of protection.

Henderson and Milstein (2003) compiled a list of internal protective factors that are critical for fostering resilience. Their list included the use of life skills including good decision-making, assertiveness, impulse control, and problem-solving; the ability to form positive relationships; an internal locus of control; and feelings of self-worth and self-confidence.

Using the works of Werner and others, Henderson and Milstein also created another list identifying environmental protective factors which included promoting close bonds, supportive relationships with many caring others, goal setting and mastery, and the encouragement of prosocial development of values and life skills.

It is timely to reiterate that resilient children and adults bear similarities. Inarguably, each of the protective factors outlined above could apply to adults as well as children.

Benard (1991) described resilient children as socially competent, possessing life skills that include problem-solving, thinking critically and self-starters. He further described them as visionaries with a sense of life relevancy and a motivation to achieve in school and life. Similarly, Higgins (1994) described resilient adults as those who develop positive relationships, are skilled at problem-solving, and are motivated for self-improvement. They are usually social activists and change agents with a sense of faith. Most resilient adults possess the ability to construe positivism and meaning from encounters with stress, trauma and tragedy. Though they consider themselves resilient adults, many did not consider themselves resilient youths. Henderson and Milstein (2003) contend resilience is a characteristic that manifests differently from person to person. Resilience may be inconsistent, increasing or lessening from time to time and situation to situation. Protective

factors are internal and external characteristics that serve to mitigate the negative impact of stressful events and circumstances.

Resiliency Models

The Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990) is a diagram that demonstrates when an individual, regardless of age, experiences adversity, he or she also experiences protective factors that buffer that adversity (see Figure 2.1). The model suggests two critically important messages: (a) dysfunction is not an automatic outcome of adversity, and (b) an initial dysfunctional reaction to adversity is not necessarily permanent, and can improve over time. Henderson and Milstein (2003) explain:

With enough “protection,” the individual adapts to that adversity without experiencing a significant disruption in his or her life. The individual stays within a comfort zone, or at “homeostasis,” or moves to a level of increased resiliency because of the emotional strength and healthy coping mechanisms developed in the process of overcoming the adversity. Without the necessary protection, an individual goes through a process of psychological disruption, then over time reintegrates from that disruption . . . the availability of personal environmental protective factors will govern the type of reintegration . . . Reintegration may also eventually result in an individual’s return to the comfort zone or increased resiliency. (pp. 5-6)

The resiliency movement has augmented the meaning of the term resilient reintegration to mean positively connote growth or adaptation via disruption as opposed to only recovering or bouncing back (Richardson, 2002). Increased energy to grow and improve is a requisite for resilient integration, and according to resiliency theory, that increased energy is innate resilience (Richardson, 2002).

Richardson (2002) offered the following five points as grounding paradigms and benefits of the resiliency process model:

1. Clients have the choice of personal growth in the wake of their disruptions.

Immediate outcomes of disruptions that are characterized by hurt, loss, guilt, or

fear bring an awareness and opportunity to connect with one's resilience. True resilient reintegration may be the strengthening with one's union with her/his spiritual source of strength.

2. Enriching planned disruptions may be the solution to stagnation. Clients will be able to see that after taking "leaps of faith" into disruptions, there is the opportunity for resilient integration.
3. Clients can become more process oriented by looking for the "silver lining" as they work through disruptions and reintegrations.
4. Finding meaning and purpose in disruptions help value experiences.

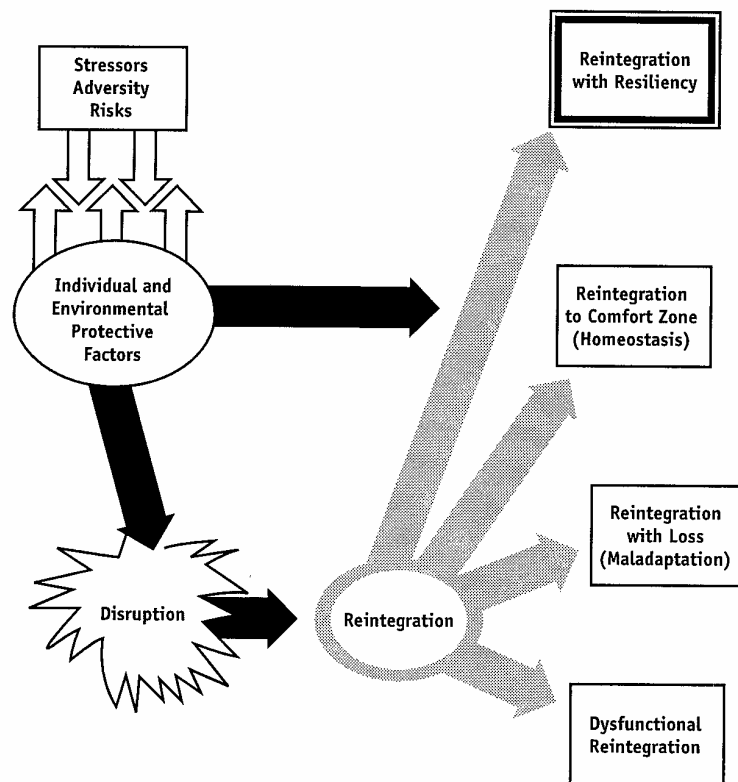


Figure 2.1. *The Resiliency Model by Richardson, Neiger, Jensen, and Kumpfer, 1990*

A review of the literature on resilience and resiliency brought forth several other resilience models or frameworks to aid in handling adversity. Benard and Marshall (1995)

developed the *Framework for Tapping Natural Resilience* (see Figure 2.2). Determining necessary actions were deeper than prevention strategies, the two combined their knowledge of about the capacity of kids and adults for healthy functioning with what they had learned from scientific resilience research to develop a framework representative of the two pieces of knowledge. Their planning framework included five components:

1. Belief: Are all children, youth, and adults at promise even if they do not realize it?
2. Conditions of Empowerment: What are the conditions of empowerment revealed by research and best practice?
3. Program Strategies: What program strategies and approaches will create conditions that tap resilience?
4. Evaluation, Individual Outcomes: What results can we realistically expect for children, youth, and adults when we tap resilience?
5. Evaluation, Societal Outcomes: What happens at family, organizational, community, or societal levels?

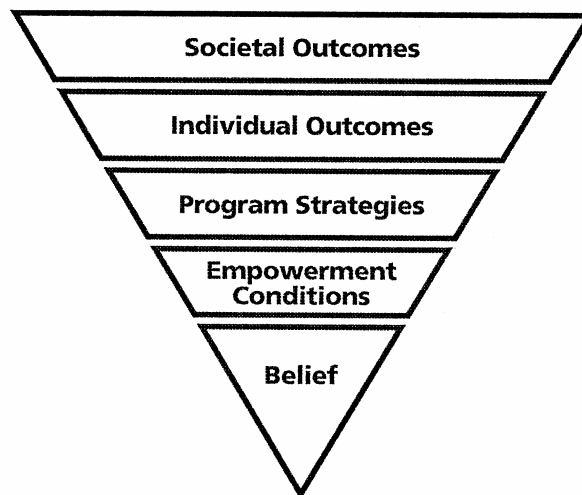


Figure 2.2. *Framework for Tapping Natural Resilience* (Benard & Marshall, 1995)

The creators of the model explained that the foundation for systems-change tapping resilience falls first on the leaders' belief about human functioning and the natural capacity for resilience. It requires decisions to be made to determine if there is hope for all regardless of risk factors (Marshall, 2004).

Silva and Radigan (2004) presented the three-stage Agentic Model (see Figure 2.3) based on the concept of agency as advocated by Giddens (1979). According to Giddens, agency refers to “a continuous flow of conduct” (p. 55). Giddens stated, “An adequate account of human agency must, first be connected to a theory of acting subject; and second, must situate action in time and space as a continuous flow of conduct” (p. 2). Silva and Radigan summarized Giddens thoughts to say that one always has the ability to act in one way as opposed to another way. Silva and Radigan stated, “The Agentic Model posits that the critical factor in developing resiliency is not the existence of the support systems, nor their actions, but rather how the student negotiates potentially hazardous situations” (p. 133).

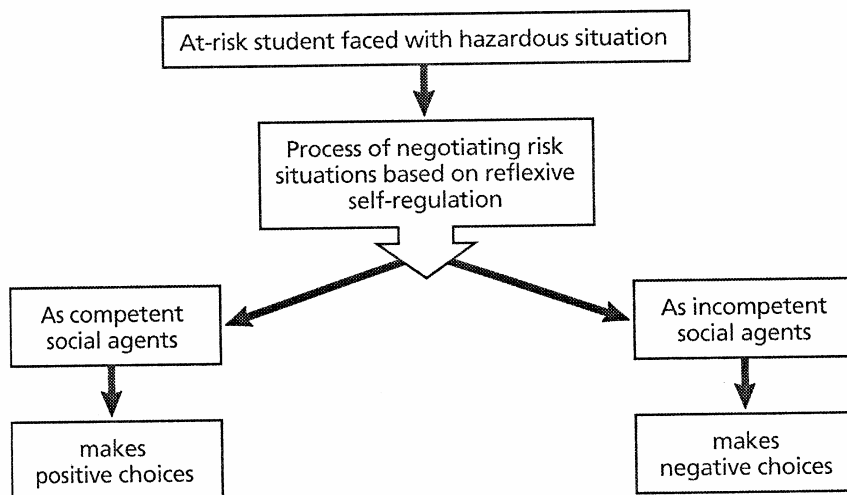


Figure 2.3. *The Agentic Model—Analysis of Strategic Conduct Based on Reflexive Self-regulation*

As stated earlier, there is some discussion about the difference between risk and resilience. Wolin and Wolin (1993) designed a model intended to demonstrate that the risk paradigm and the resiliency paradigm complement rather than oppose each other (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5). The Wolins refer to the risk paradigm as the Damage Model (Figure 2.4) and the resilience paradigm as the Challenge Model (Figure 2.5). The Damage Model portrays the harm that troubles and adversities can cause children to endure; it portrays them in a passive state without options and being helpless. The Challenge Model portrays hardship as an opportunity as well as an adversity; they are challenged by the troubles to explore options that allow them to respond actively and creatively.

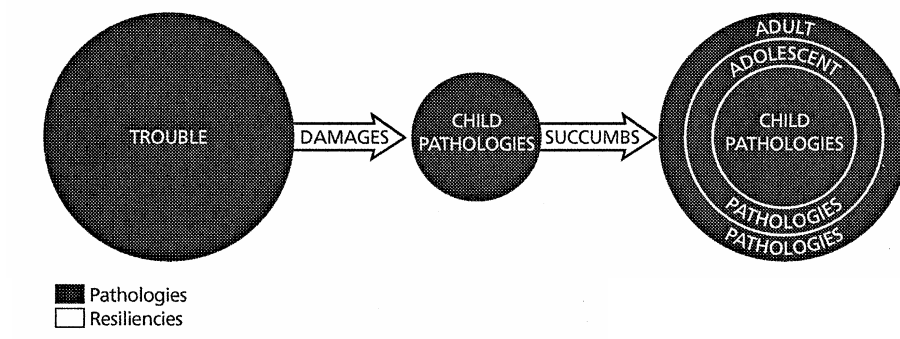


Figure 2.4. *The Damage Model from Wolin and Wolin (1993)*

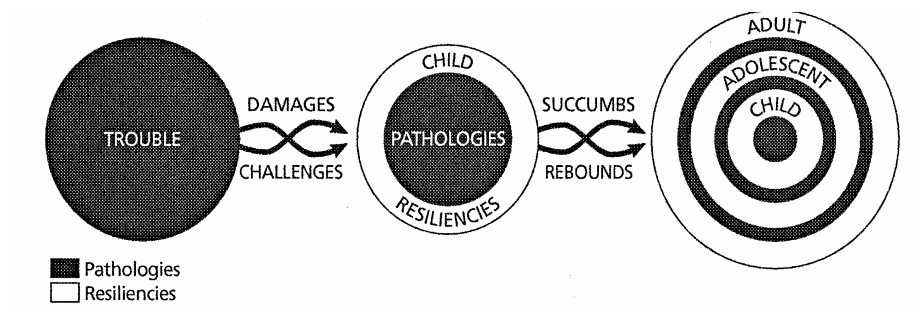


Figure 2.5. *The Challenge Model from Wolin and Wolin (1993)*

Henderson and Milstein (2003) developed the Resiliency Wheel (see Figure 2.6). The Resiliency Wheel depicts a six-step strategy for fostering resiliency in schools. However, the strategies may be applicable in fostering resiliency in general, not just in schools. One half of the Resiliency Wheel (steps 1-3) offers steps to mitigate risk. Those steps include (a) increase bonding, (b) set clear and consistent boundaries, and (c) teach life skills. The other half of the Resiliency Wheel (steps 4-6) offers steps to build resiliency in the environment. Those steps include (d) provide caring and support, (e) set and communicate high expectations, and (f) provide opportunities for meaningful participation. It can be expected that the different models accommodate the needs of different individuals in different situations. No one model should be regarded superior to another.

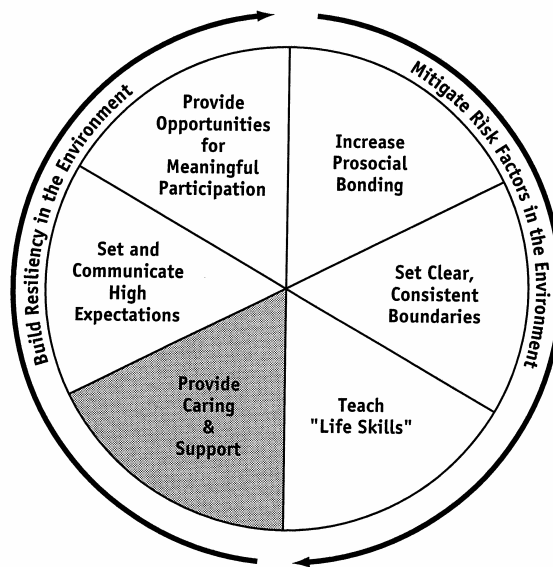


Figure 2.6. *The Resiliency Wheel from Henderson and Milstein (2003)*

Career Resilience

Research by vocational behaviorists and others who have studied adults concur with Benard's (1991) and Higgins's (1994) position that adult and children resilience are similar. As stated, however, comprehensive studies on adult resiliency are recent explorations of the

phenomena. According to London (1998), there are three distinct, yet intricately connected components of career motivation: career resilience, career insight, and career identity.

Career resilience gives people the stamina to keep going, and it equips them to overcome career barriers. It is the ability to withstand vicissitude, even when the outcome is disruptive or not the most favorable. Career resilience is composed of self-confidence, a propensity for achievement, risk-taking characteristics, and the ability to work both independently and cooperatively. Career resilience buttresses career insight and career identity (London, 1998).

Fine (1991) stated resilience reflects the powerful interaction among a person's inner psychological life, his or her relationship to the surrounding world, and his or her emerging functional capacities. Coping skills demonstrative of resilience do not occur simultaneously; they grow through a process of choosing from available alternatives and the reinforcement of constructive behaviors. Fine identified three key roles of personal attributes, citing their importance to resilience. Personal attributes compensate for loss of competence during stress and protect the individual against perceptions of harm, and stress is perceived as a challenge.

Fine (1991) posits when one is confronted with career barriers, it causes compromise of opportunities for commitment, control and challenge. Through career resilience, selected coping mechanisms appear. Examples of such mechanisms are the transformation of barriers into adaptive behavior and the ability to find meaning and purpose.

Fine (1991) also identified three phase-specific attributes of career resilience: (a) the acute phase in which energy is directed at minimizing the impact of the barrier; (b) the reorganization phase in which a new reality is realized and embraced either in part or as a whole; and (c) the rest of one's life.

This study used the common themes that emerged from the review of the literature as a framework to investigate how Black female superintendents perceive their experiences as superintendents from a resiliency perspective. Recognizing that many Black female superintendents are successful in their profession, this research study sought to identify the perceived role of resilience, if any, in overcoming the identified constraints.

Although I reviewed and presented several resiliency models in the literature review, I elected to use Richardson et al.'s (1990) Resiliency Model as a framework. Each of the models presented was suitable for use in one fashion or another; however, I was not only interested in the perceived constraints, but also the specific manners in which Black female superintendents respond or have responded to perceived adversity. While there are some important common concepts on resiliency (i.e., the determination of necessary actions, resilient capacity, handling and negotiating hazards, the complement of risk and resilience, adversity as an opportunity, fostering resilience, and risk mitigation) between the models, the Resiliency Model aligned seamlessly with my interests. The Resiliency Model allowed for the identification of perceived stressors, adversities and risks (often referred to as constraints or barriers in this study), followed by four possible resilient reintegration paths: reintegration with resiliency, reintegration to a comfort zone, reintegration with loss, and dysfunctional reintegration. Those reintegration paths are at the heart of this study. As stated, I do not deem it sufficient, beneficial and salient to only identify the constraints without addressing processes of dealing with the constraints. Each of the other models supported resilience, but none except the Resiliency Model had as specific a focus on specific reintegration processes. The constraints identified by the participating Black female superintendents will be placed in the box labeled "stressors, adversities, risks," and the

reported processes of resilient reintegration will be analyzed based on the descriptions and details provided by the participants.

Conclusion

The number of Black female superintendents continues to be unsteady. During the literature review phase of this study, four Black female school superintendents announced their resignations. It appears any momentum gained in increasing the numbers of Black female superintendents may be reversed by the frequent resignations and dismissals of Black female superintendents across the country. There have been numerous studies on persons in the superintendency, both male and female; however, there remains a paucity of research on the Black female superintendent. Why are some remaining while others are leaving the profession? Does resilience play an integral role in that investigation? A succinct statement of resilience theory is that there is a force within everyone that drives them to seek self-actualization, altruism, wisdom and harmony with a spiritual source of strength (Richardson, 2002). Do the Black female superintendents possess these characteristics, allowing them to be characterized as resilient? The experiences of the Black female superintendent need and deserve to be researched, highlighted and celebrated for her efforts to serve and lead in public education. Additional research should be dedicated to her to allow her to take her rightful place in America's society. The provision of the research may serve to enlighten those who aspire to the superintendency as well as provide insight to those who have already acquired the role, giving them the vision necessary to effectively maintain their roles.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

Introduction

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate Black female superintendents' perceptions of gender- and race-related constraints from a resiliency perspective, with a focus on resilient reintegration processes. The study was primarily based on literature dealing with women in educational leadership in general, Black females in educational leadership, and resiliency theory.

Conceptual Framework

As a Black female who aspires to the school superintendency, I sought to collect data that would elucidate the perceived constraints and adversities identified by Black female superintendents. More importantly, it was my desire to investigate methods the Black female superintendents employed to mitigate, overcome, or eradicate the constraints and adversities. A review of the literature on the historical underpinnings of gender and race theories, women in educational leadership, women in the school superintendency, and resiliency guided the extrapolation of the themes.

The similar outcomes of studies on the constraints and issues of female superintendents by Alston (1996), Jackson (1999), Manuel and Slate (2003), and McCabe (2001), and The Resilience Model (Richardson et al., 1990) heavily influenced the

development of the conceptual framework for this study. Jackson's and Alston's studies were conducted specifically on the African American female school superintendent, McCabe's study investigated how female superintendents perceived the role of superintendent of schools, and Manuel and Slate's study gave voice to the perceptions of Hispanic female superintendents to determine their personal and professional experiences in their pathway to the superintendency. The Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990) serves as the framework to determine which of the four resilient reintegration processes (reintegration with resiliency, reintegration to a comfort zone, reintegration with loss, and dysfunctional reintegration) was adopted by the individual participants.

Research Questions

1. What perceived gender- and race-related constraints do Black female school superintendents identify in their professional roles?
2. Which resilient reintegration processes do Black female school superintendents employ to mitigate or overcome perceived gender- and race-related constraints?

Rationale for a Qualitative Methods Approach

This study was a qualitative methods study. Descriptive data was gathered from a biographical questionnaire which collected background information from the study participants. The literature review presented limited research on female superintendents, and even less research on Black female superintendents. The paucity of female superintendents presents a challenge for researchers in terms of having adequate numbers to support comprehensive studies. Due to the anticipated limited numbers for my particular study, it is not feasible to expect that quantitative methodology would completely satisfy my search to identify the depth of the perceptions of the Black female superintendents from whom I

gathered data. The qualitative epistemology holds that one comes to learn the realities of subjects through their interactions and subjectivist explorations with participants about their perceptions (Glesne, 2006).

I utilized qualitative methodology because it is the approach that best matches my research problem. Qualitative research allows participants to tell their own stories about their perceptions. While the quantitative data are informative, they lack detail that gives “heart” and “voice” to their numerical and statistical values. It was that “heart” and “voice,” the specificity, that I longed to investigate. I wanted to explore the stories behind the quantitative data. Coffey and Atkinson (1996) described these sought after stories as, “...on one hand, highly structured (and formal) ways of transmitting information. On the other hand, they can be seen as distinctive, creative, artful genres” (p. 55). The authors further contended that because stories are a form of discourse used everyday, stories are an obvious way for interviewees to communicate with interviewers, retelling key experiences, perceptions, understanding and events.

Additionally, I recognized beforehand that the number of participants would be small, as there are few Black female superintendents in our country, relatively speaking. Creswell recommended the use of qualitative methodology for studying a small number of individuals or sites. Many of the studies I encountered through the literature review such as Alston (1996), Jones (2003), and McCabe (1992) utilized qualitative methodology, as well.

Role of the Researcher

As the primary researcher, I conducted one-on-one interviews with five Black female superintendents and analyzed the collected data to identify themes in my formal roles as the

researcher. Consequently, I was the primary instrument of the qualitative data collection and analysis, as explained by Merriam (1998).

Site Selection and Participants

Access

I received the *Directory of African American Superintendents* from the National Alliance of Black School Educators (NABSE). The directory was the most comprehensive document known to be available that provided contact information for Black female superintendents. I carefully perused the directory to identify typical female names, and for names that were not easily recognized as females, I contacted the respective districts to determine the gender of those superintendents. Although it was not necessary, I was prepared to use the “snowball” effect to identify study participants by contacting Black female superintendents whom I or my dissertation chairperson knew, or those who responded, and ask them to provide contact information for other Black female superintendents.

Steps to Acquire Participants/Sample Size

The researcher used the *Directory of African American Superintendents* (NABSE, 2005) to identify Black female school district superintendents. The researcher contacted, by mail (electronic and/or postal), the superintendents to apprise and recruit potential participants for the study. Subsequent mailings included a letter of explanation, a biographical questionnaire for potential participants to complete, and two copies of a consent to participate form, one of which the participant completed and returned to the researcher, and the other was to be retained for the participant’s records. One item on the biographical questionnaire asked potential participants to indicate their school district type. Using that information, two of each—urban, suburban, and rural—were selected for the study.

However, it was determined late in the data collection process that one of the participants was not available for the interview process, and given the time constraints under which the researcher was operating, the study was conducted with five participants.

Population and Number of Participants

The target population for the study was Black female superintendents. Creswell (2005) defines a target population as a “group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study” (p. 145). It was expected that both the population and sample for this study would be small. Six (6) Black female school district superintendents of varying ages were selected to participate in the study. The participants created both purposive and criterion samples, allowing the researcher to identify emerging themes and have participants meet a predetermined set of criteria related to the study.

Rationale for Choice of Participants

Only current practicing superintendents were considered for this study because the researcher was attempting to collect current, unbiased, and non-reflective feedback.

Data Collection

After receiving IRB approval, each selected participant was mailed (postal) a biographical questionnaire (see Appendix B) that consisted of a series of questions that aided in the understanding of the participants’ educational and job histories. Also, each consenting selected participant was asked to submit a resume that likewise served to provide background information on the participant’s educational and job histories. Each participant was asked to provide the documents prior to her interview.

The researcher scheduled and arranged one-on-one interviews with each selected participant individually. Interviews were either face-to-face or by telephone. An eleven-

question interview protocol (Appendix C) was used to guide the interview. Prior to conducting the official interviews, the researcher conducted one pilot interview with a sitting Black female school district superintendent in order to confirm the feasibility and functionality of each interview question to collect appropriate data.

Each participant is referred to by her geographic distinction and the number of the interview for that geographic kind (i.e., Rural Superintendent 1, Rural Superintendent 2, etc.). Probing for data occurred as was appropriate. Each interview, regardless of interview format, was audio-tape recorded in order to collect complete data. Following the completion of all interviews, the audio-taped recordings were transcribed for coding by the researcher.

Analysis

The researcher hand-coded the transcribed text for each interview. The researcher conducted both within-case and cross-case analyses to identify and compare perceived constraints and resilient reintegration processes (reintegration with resiliency, reintegration to a comfort zone, reintegration with loss, and dysfunctional reintegration), if any. Glesne (2006) explained that *thematic analysis* is a process that involves coding data, then separating the data by codes into data clumps for further analysis and description. That was precisely the process used for this study. The data were initially coded and separated according to the conceptual framework, and the data were revisited to categorize and synthesize them in order to interpret them.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness, also called research validity (Glesne, 2006), was established by peer review for this research study. I solicited the support of a colleague who has been prepared to review my interpretation of the questionnaires and interviews to establish trustworthiness.

Additionally, participants had the opportunity, if desired, to review the transcripts and my interpretations of their respective interview (member checking) prior to the submission of my final draft of the dissertation. Such a review granted participants the opportunity to confirm the data which includes direct quotations and summarized data. Only one participant expressed an interest in the member checking process.

Limitations

Glesne (2006) warned, “Part of demonstrating the trustworthiness of your data is to realize the limitations of your study” (p. 169). This study was limited to the small population of Black female superintendents in the United States public school districts during the 2006-2007 school year. It only involved a small sample of full-time “sitting” superintendents. The interview itself, may be considered a limitation given the low number of questions although additional questions of probing were presented when deemed appropriate. Glesne stated that it is the researcher’s responsibility “to do the best that you can under certain circumstances” (p. 169). Some of the study participants cautioned of time constraints, creating circumstances of limited time commitment.

Significance (Implications for Leadership)

Women have become more present in the education profession, but they lag significantly behind men in educational leadership. More poignant, Black females lag significantly behind White females in attaining the leading educational leadership role of superintendent. Although Black students comprise a large fraction of the student population in America’s public schools, and Black teachers comprise a major portion of the teaching force in America’s public schools, Blacks, particularly females, occupy a minute fraction of the top educational leadership position. Alston (2000) states, “Our leadership must be

representative of those who follow” (p. 530). Black females are not proportionately represented in leadership or in much of the literature on women in educational leadership. However, Black female educators participate in and complete programs of higher education that prepare them to take the helm of school districts. They hold the credentials, but they do not fill the positions, and when they do, their tenure is relatively short.

This study was an effort to apprise Black female superintendent aspirants of the perceptions of Black female superintendents by and from Black female superintendents, allowing them to tell their stories as they perceive them from a resiliency perspective, while at the same time contribute another quality piece of literature to the existing sparse collection. Jackson (1999) suggests the number of Black female superintendents leaving the profession does not result in a net gain in the number of African-American women superintendents over the years. Perhaps this study, and others like it, will create a level of understanding and preparation that will manifest in lengthier and more productive tenures for Black female superintendents.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate Black female superintendents' perceptions of gender- and race-related constraints and barriers from a resiliency perspective, with a focus on resilient reintegration processes. The specific research questions for this study were: 1) What perceived gender- and race-related constraints do Black female school superintendents identify in their professional roles?; and 2) Which resilient reintegration processes do Black female school superintendents employ to mitigate or overcome perceived gender- and race-related constraints? This chapter describes the results of the qualitative study.

The presented results derive from the research on the expressed perceptions and experiences of the five Black female superintendent participants. The results were obtained from face-to-face and telephone interviews. The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section describes the five participants studied, including descriptive statistics. The second section presents perceived constraints, distinguishing between race-related constraints and gender-related constraints. The third section of this chapter presents manners of dealing with the perceived constraints, presented thematically. The fourth section presents resiliency-building advice that the participants believed would aid and direct aspiring Black female superintendents. The second, third and fourth sections align seamlessly with components of

the Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990) which illustrate risks, stressors and constraints; protective factors; and resilient reintegration processes. The data in each of the first four sections are presented according to themes that surfaced from the data. The fifth and final section presents a summary of the findings.

The reported results are the findings of a small sample of a small population of Black female superintendents. The results are not purported to be conclusive nor representative of all Black female superintendents. Given the small population, and particularly the small sample, every effort has been made to maintain the anonymity of the Black female superintendent participants. Consequently, no names are used in the presentation of data. Instead, participants are identified by their school district type and an assigned number (i.e., Urban Superintendent 1, Rural Superintendent 2, etc.). In instances where data could possibly lead to the identification of participants, non-identifiable data were substituted in brackets.

Participants

A total of five Black female school superintendents participated in this study. The literature review suggested that most Black female superintendents are placed in urban settings where the majority of the population served is minority students. This study includes Black female superintendents from urban, suburban and rural school districts. Consistent with the literature, most of the served districts have majority minority populations. The original study design included six participants, two from each of the school district types. Due to extreme difficulty in scheduling and executing one interview, one proposed participant was eliminated from the study. Consequently, two urban, two rural, and one suburban superintendent participated in the study.

Of the five participating Black female school superintendents, 2 (40%) are between the ages of 50 and 54, two (40%) are between the ages of 55 and 59, and 1 (20%) is 60 years of age. Three of the women are currently married, and two are divorced. All but one were parents of two to three children. All of the participants hold Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) degrees; the highest degree earned for one is the Master of Science (M.S.), while three hold Doctor of Education (Ed.D.) degrees, and one holds a Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Educational Leadership. All of the participating superintendents were appointed versus elected to their positions. The participating school districts reported district budgets ranging from \$40M to \$500M. All student demographic data were obtained from Standard & Poor's (2006) *School Matters* web site.

Each study participant was asked to suggest a metaphor she would use to describe her role or experiences as a Black female superintendent. Most could not readily respond to question; however, at some point in the interview, most were able to identify a metaphor to describe herself, her position, or her attitude. Those metaphors are presented along with the geographic descriptor of the superintendents, and they serve as a mean of introduction.

Rural Superintendent #1 (RS1)

RS1 was not able to produce a metaphor for her role as a Black female superintendent. She only alluded to the position as a "non-traditional role." RS1 is the appointed superintendent of a small rural school district with a budget of approximately \$70M. The school district is comprised of approximately 23.9% Black students, 70.3% White students, 4.7% Hispanic students, and 1.1% others. The economically disadvantaged student rate is 30.7%, and the students with disability rate is 18.7% in the district. RS1 is serving in her fourth year as superintendent of her district. She has held professional positions as a

teacher, speech and language clinician, principal, assistant superintendent, and associate superintendent. She is the married mother of two children.

RS1 graciously granted a face-to-face interview. She invited me into her small office that is housed in the central office facility. Sitting at a small round table, we quickly engaged in the business at hand, my manner of respecting her time and generosity to support my study. Carefully and clearly enunciating, she shared that she has completed her 30th year in education and is eligible for retirement. Referring to her retirement eligibility, she jokingly stated that she would start our interview “with the possibility of being able to stop.” She chronicled her education profession stating she began as a special education teacher, she has worked in speech support, and she has spent the last twenty years in administration at one level or another, including assistant principal, elementary and high school principal, assistant superintendent, associate superintendent, and currently superintendent. Her current position is the only superintendent position for which she applied. Reflectively, she indicated she believes she is better now than she has ever been as it relates to being able to do her job because she learns more every day. As a matter of fact, she called herself a “lifelong learner.”

RS1 relayed her intense personal and professional beliefs relating to learning, advocating for students, and strong communication skills, happiness and collaboration. She self-identified five definite strengths – hardworking, articulation of ideas and work to be done, collaborator, “people” person (which she associated with collaborator), and energetic – a characteristic that she believes is essential to the job of superintendent. She referred to the superintendency as “probably the most important work that anybody could do, and it’s probably the hardest work that you can do.” Observably, she identified herself as being very

comfortable around people. She stressed she “gets along with people well,” and she “kind of put people at ease.”

RS1 decided to seek the superintendency because she had “gone through the ranks.” She decided she would “give it a shot” once she found a place that she believed was a “good fit” for her. She emphasized she did not want to take a superintendency just to take one. She was selective about location, as well. She stated she chooses to be happy, and she felt certain “any old place” would not produce that happiness. Additionally, RS1 indicated that she believed she could have obtained a superintendent position sooner, had she sought the opportunity. She felt confident she could do the work.

A concluding interview question inquired about the superintendent’s next professional steps. RS1 remained poised as she had throughout the interview and voiced her uncertainty. She said,

I don’t know. You know, I’ve got thirty years. I’m not ready to stop work; I still have some years left. I don’t know what I’d do with my time if I stopped, and I’ve thought about several things. I’ve thought about retiring and doing superintendency in another state. I thought about retiring and doing some consulting. I thought about retiring and working at a university, so I don’t know. But it’s nice to have options, yea, it’s cool! It’s just exciting to think of the possibilities and be able to pick and choose.

That is the same person who, at the beginning, stated “she’d start with the possibility of being able to stop.”

Urban Superintendent #1 (US1) – The Human Being, Woman, and Superintendent

US1 fully recognized that this study centered on gender and race, and she emphasized her existence as a human being of primary importance. She underscored the position as one of service to mankind that deals with human issues and human problems regardless of race and gender. She poetically stated,

I'd just say the Black female superintendent is a human being first, she's a woman second, she's a superintendent third, and I don't know at what level I would add Black. She is all that she needs to be, and I say that not because I don't want to be recognized as Black, because that is significant and important, and people will always know I'm Black. But what I would say is that first I am a human being because every issue I deal with, be they Black kids, White kids, White teachers, Black teachers, White custodians, they are human issues and human problems first. I don't need to focus on Black. I just need to know it's what I am, and I love it, and it's exciting! I wouldn't be any other color.

US1 is the appointed superintendent/CEO of a small urban school district with a budget of \$84M. The racial demographics of her school district include 89.5% Blacks, 2.9% Whites, and 7.5% Hispanics. There is a reported economic disadvantage rate of 70.5%, and students with disabilities comprise 22.6%. US1 is serving her second year in her current position, and this is her first position in the school district. She is the divorced mother of two adult children. Her previous professional positions include teacher, supervisor, assistant principal, assistant superintendent, and divisional superintendent.

I arrived to conduct a face-to-face interview with US1 a few minutes before the scheduled appointment, only to notice that the parking space marked "Superintendent" was vacant. Upon reporting to her office, it was confirmed that she was out of the building due to a district emergency. About an hour later, it was my delight to learn that US1 was en route, not just to grant the scheduled interview, but to pick me up and allow me to shadow her for the remainder of the afternoon. Unfortunately, the shadowing was brief due to a scheduled afternoon flight. US1 exuded a warm, down home spirit as I entered her vehicle. She immediately began explaining the circumstances as we pulled out of the parking lot. She advised we would stop for a quick lunch and proceed to one of her elementary schools where she was serving as a substitute teacher for the district's reading initiative. Yes, the superintendent had committed to report to the school daily to serve in that capacity until a

permanent teacher was recruited—true testimony to her support for literacy, if nothing else. We had anticipated conducting the interview over lunch, but the environment was not conducive to audio-recording, so we tabled the interview until we were back in the vehicle and en route to the school. The interview was conducted through travel and concluded in the parking lot of the elementary school.

Speaking with a fast northern accent, US1 eagerly shared that she always knew she wanted to be a teacher from the time she was little, stating, “I mean really little, we’re talking like playing with dolls, lining them up. We’re talking like four, five, six, . . . and I absolutely love teaching,” (perhaps the reason we were en route to her voluntary teaching assignment). She began her educational career as a ninth grade science teacher, teaching several science disciplines. She said she “just had a ball!” Next, she moved to the middle school level and quickly adjusted to the pace of middle school with the same level of adoration. She was “catapulted” into an administrative position as a special assistant to a deputy superintendent for human resources as a direct order of desegregation, so she went “straight to central office right out of the classroom.” She conceded that she had a “strange kind of career path” that included being a supervisor, receiving her master’s degree, being a dean at four institutions of higher education, an assistant professor, an associate professor, associate provost which she likened to being the associate vice president of academic affairs. Most of those positions took place prior to US1 accepting a position as an assistant principal at a very large high school. US1 was noted repeatedly stating she loved every professional opportunity she described.

US1 is currently in a district where she is regarded CEO/Superintendent. It is a small district with less than ten schools. She highlighted her love for education, pointing out that

when she was 54 years old, she reflected on the number of years she had been in school and realized that there were approximately 44 years that she had been in some level of school taking a class or course somewhere. At that point, only ten years of her life could be identified “school-free.” She boastfully declared that she had “lived practically my entire life within schools, and I love it. I’m very comfortable there.” She jokingly concluded that all she has ever spent her money on is tuition—hers and her children’s. She admitted that she did not mind the expenses, sizing up the dividends in the words of teabag quote she remembered from many years ago which stated, “Empty your purse into your head, and no one can ever take it from you.”

US1 attributes her superintendent aspirations to the many years of living life in education, and equally important, watching those who were in charge make what she perceived to be inappropriate decisions. She said, “I wanted to change that.” Responding to a question about her future professional plans, US1 thought momentarily before responding with,

Superintendency! I love it. I’d like to stay [here]. I need more than three years to turn this district around. I’m going to do the best I can in the eighteen months I have remaining on my contract, and if I get a new contract, I’ll stay. I love it! It’s, it’s, I love coming to work, right now, today. It could all change tomorrow, but right now, I love it!

Suburban Superintendent #1 (SS1) —The Sailboat

SS1 elaborated identified her metaphor, saying:

My metaphor is a sailboat. Sometimes you go out on the lake or the ocean to sail, and the waters are very calm and blue and clear, and a gentle breeze comes along and your sail starts to bellow and it starts to fill out, and then you just move very, very swiftly and wonderfully; and if you get your sail pitched just right, then it’ll catch the wind, and then you’ll start racing through the water. It’ll lean in so that there’s one edge that rides very close to the water while the other edge of the boat is up, and then it will come back to balance, and then you can sail straight and flat on the water. Then, there are times when there’s no wind and the waters aren’t calm; and if you

don't do something, you'll be tossed about in the water. Your sails have, your sails are down because there's nothing that's gonna help you move except the little trolling motor that's on the boat, but you're going to have to move because not moving means that the waters will knock you over; they'll bowl you over. It also means that as you move through rough waters. In a sailboat, you cannot go sideways when the waves are coming at you like this because when they come at you like this, the water hits your boat, and you'll turn upside down. You must sail through the waves, you must cut through them, and I means you go up and you go down, and you go up and you go down, but you must cut straight through the waves. That's the only way to survive. It's the only way to keep your boat from tipping over, left or right; and as you cut through it, and as I say, I have been in the boat, and I've had to go up and I've had to come down. I've had the water splash in my face with these glasses on where I couldn't see because the water was coming at me. But as you go through them, headed towards shore, it stops and the waters calm and you can sail in and you take a deep breath and go shooo! And then there's the politics of it, that saddens me oftentimes, too; and the skill that you need—navigate through those waters.

SS1 is the appointed superintendent of a large suburban school district with an operating budget of \$500M. The school district is comprised of 73.4% Black students, 6.8% White students, 12% Hispanic students, and 7.8% other students. There is a 73.7% economically disadvantaged rate, and the student with disability rate is 11.7%. SS1 has been in her current position since 2004, and she is the first female to hold the position in that district. This is her second superintendency. She has also served as an associate superintendent, as well as an administrator at different levels in organizations outside the traditional school system. She began her career as a high school teacher, she served as an elementary teacher, and she also served as a high school principal. She is the divorced mother of two adult children.

SS1's receptionist summoned me from the waiting area of a very elaborate central office facility, not at all similar to the typically renovated school central office facility. I was ushered to the conference room where the interview was to take place. I used the second wait time to set up my recording apparatus. Shortly thereafter entered a tall pecan-complexioned woman, smiling, carrying a ceramic mug, looking at my recording equipment and inquiring

about what was about to take place. I was relieved when she relaxed and said, “Oh, you’re doing the interview.” SS1 started talking to me just like we were old friends; after all, we had had several electronic communications prior to this face-to-face meeting. With no detectable accent, SS1 began eagerly telling me about herself. She frequently alluded to her relationships outside of the profession, speaking about her friends in other geographical locations and her support system. She shared that she is a divorcee with two adult children, and her mother and father have both passed. She mentioned her sister, and her admiration for time she spends with her sister. She also expressed a fondness for fishing and described her many fishing artifacts.

On a professional level, SS1 explained that she entered college at the age of seventeen. Having come from an area which she believed had prepared her and other Black students well for higher education, she attended a white university and graduated in three years. She earned a master’s degree, and as a teacher she observed that there was “good leadership in some of the schools, . . . and some absolutely horrendous leadership.” She said, “I saw good teachers and I didn’t see good teachers, so I just kind of started thinking, you know, maybe I should try some leadership positions.” She perceived the area in which she was living at the time to be a “closed” one, meaning there was an inside track for advancement. She did not regard herself on that track. She said she realized she “couldn’t move up,” so she “moved out.” She accepted a position at the State Board of Education. She later returned to the school system, but only for thirty days before she was “moved up.” She said, “From there, I had a steady process up.” Her experiences, out of sequence, include working in state offices, working with state senators, being a coordinator, principal, supervisor, and director. She alluded to a point in time when she supervised those who had

positions higher than hers, an act of her boss because the boss knew she was “qualified to do so.” She described promotional periods as being “every six to eight months.” SS1 also had stints at the federal level.

SS1 attributed her interest in the superintendency to a professor she had in graduate school who had a wealth of experience and talked volumes about what should be done for children and how to change the lives of children. SS1 stated, “For some reason, it just resonated with me that, that’s what I wanted to do.” Speaking on the considerable impact she had as a principal, she further stated, “But when I heard about the superintendency, it, it just planted a little seed in the back of my head, just a little seed about what, what you can do for children.” And from that seed has grown SS1.

When asked about her future professional plans, SS1 responded:

I used to think this might be my last superintendency, but now I realize that’s not necessarily the case; but my hopes for now are to go to the university, and I want to teach people how to be good leaders. We need them in our schools, we need them in our district offices, we need them for our school districts, and I think I have something to offer there. [My mentor] was a great mentor; he and I still have dinner together, we’ll have a glass of wine together and talk. I can always pick up the phone and talk to him, and I want to do that for some people, and I want to help with some dissertation writing.

Rural Superintendent #2 (RS2) – The Novelty

RS2 referred to the Black female superintendent as a novelty. She asserted:

I just hope for the next generation that it won’t be such a novelty, and they will, as I said, go ahead, step up and do your part because I think that women have a lot to contribute. Obviously, we’ve done that in the classroom, but we have not stepped up to the superintendency, and I challenge the next generation to now wait until you think every piece of your life is in order because every piece of your life is never in order! That’s what life is. But you know what to do, and you’re capable, and I just, I just want to challenge you all to go ahead and get with it.

RS2 is the married superintendent of a geographically large rural school district with a reported operating budget of \$40M. Her district is comprised of 85% Blacks, 13.7% Whites,

0.8% Hispanics, and 0.4% others. She has a large economically disadvantaged rate of 73.7%, and a students with disabilities rate of 11.7%. RS2 began her current position as superintendent in 2005, and she had no previous experience in the school district. Previous professional positions include teacher, assistant principal, curriculum and instruction specialist, principal, and two positions as assistant superintendent. She holds a bachelor's degree, two master's degrees, and a doctor of education degree. She traveled a typical trajectory en route to the school superintendency. RS2 described her primary duties as the chief school executive as develop and maintain a positive educational program designed to meet the needs of the community and to carry out the policies of the Board of Education. RS2 did not indicate parenthood, so it is assumed she is not a parent.

I was not afforded the pleasure of meeting RS2 face-to-face; consequently, the interview was conducted via telephone. After a brief expression of my gratitude for her time and interest, we immediately commenced with the interview, resulting in very succinct responses from RS2. RS2 quickly proclaimed preparation for the role of superintendent, stating, "I prepared myself professionally. I have the broad basic administrative experiences, ranging from successful classroom teacher, to director, assistant principal, program administration, and two assistant superintendencies." She expressed that her interest in the superintendency relates to her passion for wanting to make sure that the next generation, and the current generation, "have better educational opportunities than even those I had, which were good."

Attempting to respond to my question on future plans, RS2 spoke of what she hoped to accomplish more so than her future plans saying, "I'll tell you what I would love to do. I would love to be a superintendent who affects a change in [this district]." That aspiration is

indicative of continued employment in the district as she works to “set the school system back on the right course so the next person can really soar and focus on doing what school systems are supposed to do for children.”

Urban Superintendent #2 (US2)

US2, the married mother of three adult children, eagerly announced that she has been a teacher and administrator in the same district for “close to thirty-five years,” and it is the same district in which she was a student. Her 35,000+ -students school district is comprised of 70.9% Black students, 23.3% White students, 1.2% Hispanic students, and 4.6% other students. There are 64.2% economically disadvantaged students in the district, and 22.6% students with disabilities. US2 began in her district as a teacher, and she later became a curriculum supervisor. She served in principalships at the elementary, junior high and high school levels before she was appointed deputy superintendent. She has a reported operating budget of \$4.3M for more than sixty schools. US2 holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees, and a superintendent’s certificate. She has been in her current position since 2005.

During our telephone interview, US2 enthusiastically stated, “I have very strong convictions of those that are most important to me – my faith, our children whom I serve and lead. US2 solidly reflected on a piece of advice from her father who admonished, “Your word is your bond.” She said she believes that is also true today.

US2 proudly advised that she did not seek her position as superintendent; instead, she was invited to assume the role. She has now assumed the role for two years after being a deputy superintendent for approximately 15 years. She had also held the position of interim superintendent in the district. US2 was apprised that the board was seriously seeking continuity and consistency for the district, and having demonstrated both, she was asked to

assume the role and responsibility, which she accepted. Recognizing her experiences as the deputy as critical and preparatory, US2 quickly acknowledged that as much as she had done in that role, “there is no one like the superintendent.” Her point of interest was that regardless of the closeness of the positions, one does not experience the full effects of the role of superintendent until fully assuming the responsibility. She refers to the superintendency as “a place that’s kind of different.”

When I inquired about US2’s future professional plans, she quickly, almost without thinking, noted in a phrase, “[I’m] at the end of my career.” She waited a second or two and added, “Within the next couple of years, absolutely. And the rest of my time, working at my church.

Perceived Constraints

The study participants focused on the effects of race and gender on their roles as Black female superintendents. Participants were asked to focus on perceived race- and gender-related constraints and processes, if any, and manners used to deal with or overcome any noted constraints. Each participant, in her own personality, relayed her perceptions. This section is dedicated to relaying the stories of the participating Black female superintendents in their own words as often as is feasible. It is related to questions 3, 4, 5, and 6 of the interview protocol (see Appendix C) —the findings of which are divided into three sections—perceived constraints, manners of dealing with the perceived barriers and constraints, and resiliency-building advice to aspiring Black female superintendents. Each category is presented with supporting themes that emerged from the participant’s interviews. The emerging themes are supported by specific examples and quotations from the participants, allowing the reader to hear the rich voices of the five Black female school

superintendents. It should be noted that some themes were not generally identified while others were more globally supported by most or all of the participants. Their identified perceived constraints and barriers are presented first.

Perceived Race-Related Constraints

Some responses related to perceived race- and gender-related constraints indicated difficulty in separating the two, and are reflected in the dialogue. Generally speaking, participants bore different perceptions of the level of influence and impact of race on them in their roles as school superintendents. Participants were asked to identify perceived race-related constraints or barriers in their role as a Black female superintendent. Responses centered on race-related constraints varied from participant to participant. Where most thought it had some air of constraint, one did not perceive race to negatively impact her in any manner. As a matter of fact, she thought it afforded her opportunities and inclusion, instead. Immediately after hearing the interview question, US1 quickly responded, “I don’t let race bother me!” Similarly, SS1 reacted by saying, “I refuse to see [race-related barriers or constraints] as barriers.” RS2, during her interview, added, “I really do believe in any position in the United States, and I know that is very politically uncomfortable for people to admit it, but race is a key factor.” When asked to be specific about race-related constraints, themes of school district type and wealth, suspicion and mistrust, and isolation surfaced; and one of the participants positively addressed race, which might be considered an anomaly in the context of the findings. Their perceptions follow.

School district type and wealth. The literature review indicated that Black superintendents, and particularly Black female superintendents, are more typically appointed in urban communities where the majority of the student population, too, is Black. Location,

or school district type, was minimally supported by the study. One participant, RS2, did allude to the belief that the racial make-up of a school district contributes significantly to the race of recruited candidates. She indicated race to be a key factor, particularly in smaller communities such as the one in which she works. RS2 stated her predecessor was also Black, but male. He was the first Black in that school district that serves an 85% Black student population and a 65% Black community. Speaking on the issue she stated:

It tells you something. It certainly isn't credentialing, and it certainly isn't that Black people don't go into or didn't go into education. The ones in his generation and my generation tended to be overly represented in education, but did not ascend to levels of the superintendency even in predominantly Black communities and even in Black school systems. So, I do think it is still an issue for some communities as to the race of the superintendent . . . [it] speaks to the fact that African Americans who are superintendents still are more likely to be superintendents in a predominantly Black school system.

This view suggests that access to superintendencies in majority school districts remains a challenge for Blacks, particularly Black females. Not only was the school district type and location alluded to as a challenge, but finances were also implicated.

RS2 adamantly expressed that Blacks were often appointed in districts that are experiencing financial turpitude. She believed Blacks are often placed in “a predominantly Black school district that has financial challenges and that is kind of up against a wall.” She reported that being a general observation of Black female superintendents in her area. She shared a comment from one of her colleagues who stated, “Well, you do understand if this school system were 85% White instead of 85% Black, you wouldn't have some of the financial issues that you have now.” She quietly reflected, “And I do understand that.” She identified a primary duty in her assignment was to “restore the financial stability and credibility.” She also expressed her perception that being White granted the privilege of economic influence and credibility. However, several of the participants were in charge of

school districts that had sizable budgets, contrary to the assumption that Black females are usually placed in school districts that are experiencing budgetary woes. None of the other study participants expressed concerns of constraint related to school district type and school district wealth, or the lack of. Others did speak on being suspected and mistrusted in other area, however.

Suspicion and mistrust. The majority of the study participants believed their Black race garnered perceptions of suspicion and mistrust. RS1 discussed how she felt like she was living in a “fish bowl.” She believes people are always watching to see what she is doing, and they often try to attach race to the decisions she makes. She elaborated:

I think that there is this idea that if you are a minority, particularly for me, everybody Black I bring into the district has to be somebody I know. I either went to school with them, or we were buddies or I know their family or we came from the same place, like there are ninety Black folks in the world that I don’t happen to know. I even had someone to ask me if one of the minority principals I hired was my roommate in college, and I thought, ‘You know, we don’t even need to go there.’ I’d dare say if I were White, nobody would even have thought that.

Similarly, RS2 spoke of mistrust as a barrier for Black female superintendents. She stated that she really does believe “there is such a thing as White privilege.” She explained that “being White buys you certain things in this United States in terms of influence, particularly economic influence, and in terms of credibility.”

RS1 discussed the perception that too many Black people in the upper ranks of an organization, regardless of their quality professional performance, create suspicion and mistrust, especially amongst White people. She shared:

When I first came to this role, the chair and the vice chair were both minorities, as well, so it was kind of like, you know there were suspicions out there that there were too many Black folk in charge, if that makes any sense at all. And so there were questions relating to some of the decisions that were made that I heard about. No one would ever say that to your face, but you know you get that “scuttlebutt” out there.

There is a “flip side” when addressing suspicion and mistrust, as was pointed out by RS1. She indicated that, just as Black female superintendents may be suspected and mistrusted, they too, have to be suspicious and observant of wrongdoing. They are not able to accept everyone and everything at “face” value, particularly in the geographical area in which she has chosen to serve. She did not expect to experience racial suspicion in her area due to the diverse and highly educated status of the community citizens. She thought the citizens would have been “a little bit more enlightened.” She was aware that racial prejudice is indigenous to some areas, and to be expected, but she was not expecting that to be such an issue where she works. Unfortunately, she has perceived just the opposite. Speaking on racial suspicion, she stated:

I guess I assumed that with all these universities around, I was just surprised that [racism] was as prevalent as it is. [Where I’m from,] you know race has always been an issue [there], I would say; but it’s open, you know where people are, you know where they stand. It’s very evident, you know, there’s no question about it. Here, it’s not . . . people don’t, they’re not as open with the way they feel about people and issues and circumstances, but you know it’s there.

US1 stated that Black female superintendents experience racial barriers daily. She cited an incident with her state officer whom she perceives to refuse to positively acknowledge any of her accomplishments. She explicitly attributes his behaviors to her race and gender. She is convinced that he goes well out of his way to demean her, but she refuses to let his racially based behaviors deter her. She gave an example of her accusations:

I know the game he’s playing, so it doesn’t bother me. Every single day, every year! Not only did my schools make AYP, this man took his own data, at his direction, had somebody redo the data to try and show that we made no academic gains. And as clear as it could be that we made AYP, safe harbor, yes, who cares; we still moved those kids at least 10%.

The described mistrust and suspicion on both sides may well lead to the described isolation that emerged as a theme.

Isolation. These women expressed that they are very intelligent with much to offer, both to those whom they serve and to those with whom they work. However, some of them attached perceptions of isolation to feelings of racial constraint. Those who spoke on isolation described instances when they were not included or not invited to join in the dominant discussion or activity. That isolation was the one issue of perceived race-related constraints on which US2 spoke. She stated:

Well let me just say this to you. I have found that I'm in a meeting and there are other people sitting around the table, too often than not, I notice the gravitation to other non-minority people, males or females, at the table.

However, she said she really did not perceive it too much of a constraint because she knew they would eventually have to communicate with her, but she conceded that such behavior does "slow down the process a little bit."

RS1 stated, "Unfortunately, [race] is kind of always on the table. Sometimes you know it's more pervasive than at other times, but I realize it's there." But RS1 had a particularly enlightened vantage point on the subject of race. Converse to the negative perception of the implications of race, RS1 was able to carve a positive view of the social construct of race. That is not to suggest that she did not recognize some negative implications, but she positively noted:

I see that as very positive, as well though, because I think I bring something to the table that other people can't. I mean, sometimes I get to the table when other folk would not because there are o few of us. It means that we are included in some things in the name of diversity that we probably would not be included in otherwise. So, you know, I take it both ways, it has positives and it has negatives, and I have always chosen to take it as a positive. I think many of the experiences that I have had was because I was a minority, and you know there are so few of us that you know when it comes time to have representation, you get tapped a lot because there are so very few.

She continued to explain that even that notion is sometimes perceived negatively because "it wears you out sometimes." Furthermore, RS1 stated, "You know you get appointed to

things, and nobody ever tells you you're appointed because you're Black or female." No participant, however, spoke so positively about perceived gender-related constraints.

Perceived Gender-Related Constraints

The Black female superintendents were asked to address perceived gender-related constraints, just as they did race-related constraints. US1 announced, "The gender thing is alive and well. Like racism, it's there, it exists. It's up to me as a female, if I decide this is the job I want, I have to begin to knock some of those barriers." It was again noted that there were some difficulties in maintaining a focused distinction between race and gender issues. RS2 clearly admitted:

I tend to not separate the gender from the race. I think that as an African American woman, you're not really sure which is the factor. I'm a very strong female, so I don't know that the gender issues are overt.

At times, I had to redirect the conversations and probe in efforts to collect the specific data on gender-related issues. The apparent related themes were job acquisition, perceived limited knowledge, and absence of a support system.

Job acquisition. Recognizing the superintendency as a field that has been dominated by males, job acquisition itself was repeatedly identified as a gender-related constraint. RS2 was only able to identify job acquisition, the "initial selection," as the sole gender constraint. She responded to the question saying, "I cannot really say other than actually getting the superintendency. I really do believe that it's more difficult for a woman to be selected superintendent because, in large part, the superintendency has been a male-dominated field." SS1 offered the same sentiment saying, "My challenges in the superintendency, first is to get the job." She maintained that people just have not embraced the idea that women, especially Black women can do the job. She rendered that in the two interviews where she has landed

the job as superintendent, there was no question that she was the best candidate. She believed boards of education and interviewers seek methods of elimination for the Black female candidates. She stated that sometimes, the message is just too clear of which person is the better candidate, and there is no room for anything but that recognition, resulting in the Black female getting the position. She explained:

People still expect men to do the job; people still expect white men to do the job. In the two interviews where I have ended up as superintendent, I have absolutely been the best candidate, and so there's just no place to go with that, even though people do try to go somewhere else. They try to because you get to the interview, and they don't expect you to be that good. They don't know how to, what's the word, they don't know how to eliminate you.

However, she conveyed that sometimes, regardless of qualifications that are far superior to those of other candidates, the gender barrier wins out, and the female candidate loses out of another position. US1 related high salaries and attractive perks for school district superintendents to the gender constraints. She asserted:

Boards are scared to, to let a woman do it because they don't see a woman (1) making over \$100,000, (2) making over \$150,000, and (3) making \$200,000. Then I think there's a mental set they have that says women aren't supposed to do that, and so that just eliminates women right there. You should not, the perks of the office should not go to a woman, they're reserved for a man, black or white, but a man.

Although a few Black females are successful in acquiring the position of school district superintendent, they sometimes recognize a different constraint, a perceived lack of knowledge.

Limited knowledge. The participants had much to say on the topic of women and knowledge. They expressed low expectations from boards and communities, indicating women do not have budget or facility knowledge, women are only versed in instruction as opposed to other facets of the job. US1 believed that people do not expect Black females to enter the job equipped with ample knowledge for survival. She insists there are some who

expect Black females to enter expecting to receive on-the-job training, leading to major mistakes. She exclaimed,

Okay, here's the assumption—if you are White and male, the expectation by most people in our society in America is that you know what you're doing. And so, you're already trusted until you make a boo-boo. If you are anything other than that, Black, Hispanic, female, whatever, you are assumed to be guilty to make boo-boos until you prove that you can do your job.

RS1 solemnly described her feelings on the topic, saying,

I think that the expectation for females is that people think that you're limited in some areas because you're female. You know, for example, buildings and grounds, or your facility issues. Generally, the thought is you're probably not going to know that much about finance. They give us credit for knowing about curriculum, instruction, and maybe human resources, but the other areas, you know, it's kind of assumed that you're probably not going to be as adept to that as you are to some of the other things.

SS1 shared another story that highlighted the perception of limited knowledge. She jovially elaborated:

We did interviewing for architects who were going to start our building plan. This one group came in, and they went to all the White men. And I'm standing there, too, and there's another woman standing there with me. They just kind of bypassed us, and so I didn't say anything. So we sat down, and we went around the table to introduce ourselves. When they got to me and I said [I was] superintendent of schools, you could have knocked them over with a feather. They knew they had just blown it, as they say, and they had.

She laughed audibly at that one. Later referencing the same story, she said,

Just because I'm a woman, don't think I don't know how to build. Sometimes they say, 'Well, you know this isn't something that most women know something about.' I say, 'Excuse me, but this woman knows about this so let's go on with your detail presentation.'

US1 addressed knowledge from a different angle, sharing her observations of White men having a lack of knowledge, which in turn motivated her to seek the position of the superintendency. Speaking about her experiences, she shared,

I watched them make mistakes, I worked with my superintendent. I gave him information on a daily basis that kept him from making mistakes. When I saw that, let

me tell you what slapped me upside my head—he has a doctorate, and knows this little bit of stuff, there’s one with my name on it. I’m going to get it! That man did more for me in his ignorance that he will ever know.

Akin to knowledge is the ability to make decisions. Some of these Black female superintendents believed they are perceived to be limited in their abilities to make sound and appropriate decisions. US1 was quick to note that “people don’t think [women] can make decisions.” She said, “People don’t think you’re smart, and they don’t think that you are wise until you have to work with them.”

Absence of a support structure. Although it was not a recurring theme, it is noteworthy that RS1 identified the small number of Black female superintendents as a barrier. “There are just a few of us, for one thing,” she stated. All but one of the study participants discussed mentors at some point during their interviews. The general consensus was that as Black females, they need a support structure consisting of others who look like them. It was the perception that the absence of that network system is a constraint, barring the women from opportunities to interact with and support each other.

This study not only sought to reveal perceived race- and gender-related constraints and barriers, but to extend those identifications to examine how the participants managed such constraints.

Manners of Dealing with Perceived Constraints

The study participants were asked to describe manners in which they dealt with some of the perceived constraints and barriers that they encountered. The following accounts identify strategies and methods utilized by the Black female school district superintendents to deal with perceived gender- and/or race-related constraints. US2 appropriately stated that

It's our responsibility as people in positions of leadership and authority to figure out how we maneuver around those things that otherwise could cause us not to be able to provide for our children and our staff what they need in order to be successful.

Several themes emanated, including attitude and determination, confrontation, preparation, knowledge, skills, passion, and mentors.

Attitude and determination. It was clear from the beginning that the way some of the participants accepted or rejected perceived constraints and barriers was impacted significantly by the individual's attitude. RS1 revealed that she regarded her status as a Black female as a positive, citing that her race and gender have garnered her inclusion and opportunities that she may not have otherwise gotten. That attitude has been her way of dealing with possible perceived constraints. US1 alluded to attitude when she conceded,

I think there are a lot of [constraints and barriers], but I think like anything else in life, everybody plays a role in where they want to go, and what they want to do, and what they want to be, and how they're going to get there.

Determination surfaced as a sub-theme of attitude throughout the study. For example, RS1 chimed,

If anything, [race and gender barriers] probably made me more determined to do what needs to be done, and to say what needs to be said and to move on. Let the chips fall where they may because when I am doing what I think is right, then I'm not going to let that bother me nor deter me.

Another sub-theme of attitude is that of dismissal. Some of the Black females claimed they simply dismissed the notions of racism or sexism. US1 stated, "I don't let race bother me, let me tell you something, there are so many racist people that I cannot let it bother me." Likewise, RS1 alluded to dismissal when she spoke on not letting others make their problems hers. She said, "If you've got an issue, it's yours, it's not mine...I'm perceptive enough to know what's out there or be able to read people, but I've never let that hold me back; I've

never let that stop me.” Similarly, SS1 simply but matter-of-factly stated, “I have refused to see them as barriers.”

RS2 expressed her belief that it is a sine qua non for the person in the role of superintendent to bear an attitude of focus, certainty and tenacity. She stated:

So, the way you deal with it is you stay focused on what the real mission is. You stay professional, you stay alert and sharp and rested, and you do what you believe is right, it's the right thing to do for children. There are many good reasons to be fired, and I think the best one is that you are doing the right thing even though it may be politically unpopular. So basically, that's how I deal with it. I'm able to defend what I do and why I do it. I stay very composed, I stay very positive, and I stay professional, and I educationally sanction any decision or recommendation. And once you do that, that's what you're supposed to do.

Such an expression is an example of attitudes that participants believed required them to assume stances of confrontation as a means to deal with constraints and barriers.

Confrontation. Occasionally, some of the Black female superintendents spoke of dealing with issues “head on.” They offered that there is no real subtle way to address constraints, suggesting that candor is often the best method. SS1 stated, “I just plain ole confront them, and I call it what it is. Sometimes I can be very direct in calling it what it is, and sometimes I have to be a little more genteel in saying it.” US1 supported the notion of confrontation by sharing the following story about an encounter with an alleged racist board member,

Everybody was like, ‘Oh, he can’t stand Black people, he can’t this, he can’t that.’ The word was out and I thought, ‘Mmmm, he’s gonna be my best friend.’ We had a dinner meeting once. I grabbed the man’s hand, went in the man’s face, and I said, ‘Hi, I’m [me]. It’s so nice to meet you. I was like, ‘I’m gonna sit right next to you.’ I put my arm through his and walked over to the table with him and sat down. We talked all night. Do you know that that man gave me everything I asked for? So that’s my approach.

US1 later returned to the topic stating that her confrontation comes on the heels of advice from Coretta Scott King and a personal friend who contends that we, as people, have some say so in how we are treated by others. She stated,

They don't bother me, and I'm not going to let them bother me. Yes, I have been done in racially, my children have, too. I fight it, I get to the bottom because I believe what Coretta Scott King said, if we don't address it immediately when it happens, hey, we're the ones that have to be responsible for telling people how to treat us. That was confirmed by Carl Rogers. He is a client centered therapist. He tells everybody each of us gives other people messages about how to treat us. But everybody participates in how other people treat them.

Speaking on gender issues, US1 started, "If it begins to give me that message that this is a problem, I go to it. Okay? I don't go away from it. So, if it looks like it's gender, I address it that way." She passionately added a story of support that reverted to the issue of racial confrontation.

When people say racist things to me, I will get them aside, if it's a one-on-one. I will get them aside and say, 'Help me understand what you meant,' or 'I heard you make a statement. I don't want to take offense without understanding where you're coming from.'

Speaking on confrontation, US1 stated, "One, always confront, but two is, you have to have enough knowledge in your head to understand how to confront in a constructive way, so knowledge is key."

Knowledge and skills. Each of the participants either directly or indirectly addressed knowledge and skills as a means to confront potential constraints and barriers. US2 spoke of her "skills and finesse." She described situations in which people know her and her role, yet they tend to direct their attention to other non-minority individuals who may be affiliated.

When people come to meet with me, and there are other people that I have sitting around the table who don't look like me, they're more inclined to look at them, but are asking me or expecting me to provide them with whatever that next step is required for them to do or go on. I manage to force the conversation back to me by sitting quietly until...they look to me and talk to me.

SS1 had much to say about knowledge and skill being weapons against gender and racial constraints. She forcefully spoke of her training in desegregation. She spouted:

I have twenty years of deseg work behind me. I understand diversity, I understand how you build interpersonal relationships, I understand how you connect. I've had the training in body language, I've had the training in what you do with your eyes, and when you're talking, if your hand is in a certain position. I've had those kinds of training. I have had about eighteen hours of behavior modification psychology courses, and so I think I recognize who the closet racist is. I recognize who the overt racist is. I know the person that's coming after me, and I know the person who's going to challenge me. I know the person who's looking for help. Those kinds of things I'm able to read pretty readily, so I come off as being disarming. I can disarm almost anybody.

SS1 continued to explain the need for a workable skill set in mitigating or overcoming constraints. She talked about people who do not have such skills saying:

There are other women who don't have a skill set to overcome [constraints]. I know of one person in particular who got her superintendency, a very lovely one in a very nice school district, mostly White. They gave her everything she wanted in her contract, but she only lasted eight months. And this is why – she perceived some barriers, she perceived that she knew how to handle them. I think she just went about it very inappropriately.

It was recognized that knowledge acquisition, alone, was insufficient. Some participants recognized the need to use their acquired knowledge to demonstrate their preparedness for and competence to be school district superintendents. As US1 stated, “You have to be knowledgeable enough to use the right language in order to self promote.”

Preparation and competence. A couple of the participants hinted at preparation as a means to mitigate constraints. They believed that being prepared to do the job prevents one from making mistakes that may support the perceived stereotypical thought of incompetence. Remaining consistent with her brevity, US2 succinctly stated, “We know that as Black people, too often, we are expected to have to go well beyond that which is required, even in 2007, to demonstrate our competency. You had better be prepared to do that.” RS2

addressed preparation from the very beginning; it was the topic of the second sentence of her interview which stated, “I prepared myself professionally, in terms of credentials. I have the degrees, I have the licensure, and I have the broad basic administrative experiences.” Others spoke a great deal on preparation, but it was more in terms of advice, which will be presented later. However, mentors and support systems were considered important components of preparation.

Mentors and support systems. No question specific to mentoring was presented to the study participants because I wanted to see if the topic would emerge as a theme, as the literature suggested, and it did. More times than not, *mentoring* surfaced in terms of advice as opposed to it being a mean of mitigating or eradicating perceived constraints and barriers. However, SS1 recalled listening to the stories of her graduate program mentor, who had been a superintendent four times. Having “planted a seed” for the superintendency, she recalled how intently she listened to the messages of his stories. One of her mentor lessons was about avoiding mistakes. She shared a story of how that mentor “got fired because it snowed, and he didn’t get the school buses running fast enough, but when you’re from the south, you don’t know about snow.” As simple as it was, she learned a major lesson from that story.

SS1 also spoke of another mentor who had a “wealth of experience.” She said he “talked volumes about what you do for children, and how you change the lives of children.” She smiled and took a deep breath, signifying a passionate memory, and said, “And for some reason, it just resonated with me. That, that’s what I wanted to do.”

SS1 elaborated on a support system that she uses as a means to combat constraints or barriers. She shared:

Let me say another way you deal with it is when I say “genteel.” Another way you deal with it is to get an expert in, because [expert’s name] is here to talk about

leadership with my staff. And he'll always talk about me, he'll reference me and what I did in my principal leadership in [name of city], which he has also placed in one of his books. And so, now all of a sudden, I have an authority that helps clear up some minds about whatever else they thought. So there, there are some other strategies you can put in place, so it doesn't always have to be you, if you bring in a recognized figure or someone, you know what I'm saying?

US1 briefly alluded to the advice of a mentor when she spoke on the importance of taking care of herself so she would be in the condition to take care of others. She seemed extra excited to share the advice saying, "And then somebody finally told me, guess what? Well, I got a lot of good messages, excellent messages, and one of my mentors told me a long time ago, '[my name], listen to me. Leadership out of frustration is worst than no leadership at all. Learn that now.'" She continued to talk and she quickly interrupted her thought and added:

Oh! The other thing they told me, 'You can always panic last, okay, so do everything else first. And then, if nothing works, you can panic!' I have never had to panic. So, but that's good mentoring. I have had wonderful mentors along the way, and I know their mentoring has helped me to deal effectively.

Others had much to contribute in terms of mentoring, but the offerings came forth in the form of advice. The next section, properly entitled *Wise Words* based on the wisdom of the study participants, is dedicated to the advice that the Black female superintendents proffered.

Resiliency-Building Advice

Responses from the superintendents varied in content and length throughout the study, but it seemed that each was eager to extend advice to aspiring Black female superintendents. They tendered guidance that included recommendation, caution, and dissuasion on topics of knowledge and competence with sub-themes of preparation, credentials, comfort and experience; mentors and support systems; and self-efficacy and attitude.

Knowledge and competence. SS1 didn't have to think long about the advice she would offer. She emphatically stated:

Know your stuff, sister! Know your stuff! I have people who come in here saying, 'Well, [SS1], I want to be just like you.' And they'll sit up here and say, 'And I'm working on my doctorate and so and so.' And I'll say, 'Great. What's your focus?' 'Well, what do you mean?' "What's your area of focus?" You know, we all have a strand of focus; well, they're not clear on that.

SS1 continued to describe such conversations with aspiring superintendents, highlighting perceived deficiencies in preparation. She advised that aspirants should be well read in their area. She elaborated about aspirants "who haven't worked hard and don't know what the hard work is." She mocked some who talked about having been in the classroom and complained that that experience was "just so hard." She admonished:

If you're gonna go after this job, I think you need to have shown some leadership along the way. Have you written grants to get more money in for your kids, neighborhood, your community? Have you led some discussions? Have you done some mentoring? Have you organized something that supports kids?

After momentarily switching her conversation to mentors, she quickly returned to knowledge of the job suggesting that one has to know all aspects of the position – maintenance, instruction, finance and facilities. She states,

If you want to be a woman superintendent, take every opportunity to learn as much as you can as you move through the different levels. Don't back off from it saying, "That ain't my cup of tea." Your cup of tea is everything. I've gotta know human resources, I've gotta know finance, I've gotta know when I have a bad CFO because if that budget ain't right, I lose my job. I've gotta know about HR because if I don't, if I hire too many teachers, they're gonna bust my budget. There are so many things you've got to know. And then, you gotta know accountability because you've got all these kids that have to make AYP, okay?

RS1 did not need to give the issue much thought before she began to speak. She, too, emphasized knowing all aspects of the job. She encouraged aspirants to take advantage of every opportunity afforded them en route to the superintendency. She pleaded:

Well, I would say, be prepared. Do your homework. I mean, you know, every experience that you could possibly have, take it, and learn from it. The more you've leveled up, and I mean the more experiences you've had, below that, beneath that position, below or beneath are probably both bad words, but experience every level that you can and learn as much as you can.

She reflected for a moment and quickly reiterated the charge—"Be prepared and know the work that you are required to supervise. Know when it doesn't look right or know which questions to ask. Just be prepared!" I regarded that as general sound advice for anyone in the role without regard to race and gender, so I pointedly asked RS1 if she had any specific advice for the Black female aspiring to the superintendency. She highlighted preparation especially for the Black female. She cautioned that the Black female had to be more prepared than the Black male because the low expectation for her is well rooted in the minds of those who will be judging her. She cautioned to Black female to "always be out there ahead of the curve." RS1 emphasized anticipation, telling the Black female to "anticipate what's gonna come next, and how it's gonna come." She advised on how the Black female aspirant will have to prove herself. She warned:

You know, you're going to have people who are going to be examining you, at least until you prove yourself. You know, until you've been in it long enough for people to just kind of relax and assume, 'Okay, she knows what she's doing.' But initially, you know, they're not gonna give you that "benefit of the doubt." They might for somebody else, but they're not gonna give you that benefit of the doubt.

When I asked RS1 if there was anything that we discussed on which she would like to reflect or expand, she immediately restated preparation, saying:

You know, we've got to be ready with all of the credentials, nine times out of ten, prior to our even being considered for the position. So, I guess the thing I would say is be prepared. If that's something you really want to do, then put yourself in a position so that when you go to the table, there is no reason that they can tell you that you don't have what it takes. I mean, take away all those barriers that are going to be thrown up in your face so that you force people to deal with you and what you know.

RS2, began her spiel on advice saying, “Go ahead and do it!” Sounding as if she might have an opposing view of some of RS1’s sentiments, she stated:

We feel that we have to have every “I” dotted and every “t” crossed in terms of having done every job there is to do, so we are over-prepared. If I have a regret, it’s that I did not move into a superintendency earlier.

However, as she continued, it was clear that the message was not in total opposition of RS1’s. RS2 proceeded, saying:

[My advice] is get your credentials because you’re gonna need your credentials. People may or may not like you, they may not believe you should be in the job. If you don’t have the credentials as a female, or as an African American, you’re ‘dead in the water.’ Go ahead and do it. Be sure you have the credentials, the licensure is what I mean. You’ll have the experience, or you won’t even get an interview. That’s not an option that you have.

US1’s advice sounded much like that of the others who spoke on knowledge and preparation. She advised “Learn your job well so that when you’re in your job, you’re not still learning it. That’s too stressful; you tend to make too many mistakes, and you can’t afford to make mistakes with that many people’s lives.”

US2 supplemented competence with comfort. Along with feeling capable, US2 asserted the establishment of a feeling of comfort in the position, interacting with different groups of the same and different races, and comfort advocating for all children. On behalf of the children, she stated:

People tend to want to put you in a box because you’re Black; they sometimes think that you only have the interest of Black children, and yes, I think yes you should have the interest of Black children, but you need to feel comfortable in supporting all children, no matter who they are or what their situation in life is, and understand why you’re doing it.

She also noted that comfort should be undergirded with competence. Much of the knowledge expressed was knowledge that was learned from their mentors, and mentoring emerged as a theme from the superintendent’s advice.

Mentors and support systems. The Black female superintendents recognized the impact of good mentoring on their success, and it was no surprise that mentoring was included in the advice to aspiring Black female superintendents.

Reflecting on her mentors, RS2 felt compelled to remind aspirants to “know that there are people who have moved ahead of you, who’ve come before you, who’ve somewhat paved the way, and that is male, female, Black and White.” She was clear to establish that all of her mentors have not been Black females or females at all. She recalled,

I am mindful that the majority of my mentors in [city] have been White males, and that’s not a contradiction to what I have just said. They were White males because that was what was in the superintendency. I’ve had some women, but they’ve been more recent in my career. And of course, I’ve had African American males who’ve been in the superintendency, as well, but the initial pool have by and large been White males.

She felt certain that the average superintendent is a wonderful person whom aspirants can call upon for mentoring, especially those they know, and perhaps even those aspirants do not know. She alluded to the mentorship network as a sisterhood, brotherhood or fellowship.

SS1 referred to her service as a mentor while at the same time recommending mentorship. She revealed a strategy that indicated her strong desire to learn from and emulate others whom she identified as strong effective leaders when she yielded:

The young people who come to me and ask me to be their mentor are the ones that I’m willing to work with because at least they know they need one. They need somebody to help them, and so I would suggest that you find a mentor. I took Ruth Love’s resume, I got a copy of it, and I studied her resume. I looked at all of the positions Ruth Love held. I looked at all of the other kinds of work she did. Did she write articles, were they published, what schools did she go to, what kind of degrees did she have, where did she make her presentations, and where does she work? I studied it hard.

Those words of mentorship advice brought forth hints of self-efficacy and comfort which were addressed more pointedly.

Self-efficacy and attitude. Many comments throughout the interview process indicated that the study participants believed in themselves as noted in RS1's postulation, "I was confident I could do the work." The brevity of RS2's statement is not indicative of the power of the statement in which she counseled, "Know that you can do it!" She repeated, "Just know that you can do it." She referred to those who had already set the precedent.

US1's descant on attitude warned of stereotypical expectations. She deprecated:

Now, I will tell you that there are some behaviors that will be misunderstood, and people will say, "Well I just want to be myself; don't tell me how not to be." Everybody has a professional behavior that they exhibit, if they want their needs met. So, you're gonna have to change some of that. Don't be angry, don't be defensive, just be right. Show them that you're in control of the situation, that's what I would do.

She contended that a stereotype exists that Black people are supposed to be angry, and it is incumbent upon those in the role to dispel the myth, help distinguish between anger and decisiveness. Many of the words of wisdom repeatedly reminded those aspiring the role of superintendent to remain focused on the children and their needs.

Children advocacy. At the conclusion of US2's interview, as with all others, I asked if there was anything that we had discussed on which she would like to reflect or expand. She took a deep breath and responded:

You know, I guess I probably should say no, but I just would like to emphasize this—We are put in positions of major authority and responsibility, and I said earlier, sometimes we forget why we are put in these positions and we use them for the wrong reasons. But I can't tell you what the reasons should be for you, but I just strongly encourage you to know why it is that you, you know, or any person—male or female, but we're talking about female, African-American females, that you really know why you're doing what you're doing.

After a pause, she continued:

Why it is that you've accepted the call, to take on this tremendous responsibility. But also in my mind, I see it as a tremendous blessing to be able to have the ability to put

our young people in positions to be successful. As long as we remember that, and don't become confused . . .

Also speaking of child advocacy, RS2 stated,

I have an obligation first to the children and to the parents of those children in that community, and to what I want to deliver to them and what the vision would indicate that is needed. Stay focused on the real mission.

Children's needs vary from area to area, and SS1 provided insight on relocation as well.

Willingness to relocate. A final, but pertinent piece of advice came from SS1. She forewarned the aspiring Black female superintendent of the possibility of relocation saying:

You know, you can have the job if you're willing to move, and some people think they're supposed to stay [in one place] and I'm gon be it cause I've been here 38 years. You can be a superintendent anywhere you want to be, if you're willing to move. That's the first criteria, and they don't understand that you move and then you can come back, 'cause guess what, I can come back here and sell what I've learned some place else.

Summary of the Findings

This chapter presented the qualitative data that were intended to relay the rich, personal and relative stories of the participating Black female school district superintendents. Their stories were arranged according to the topics that emerged from the interview questions that supported the two primary research questions. Using a resilience lens, the interview questions focused on perceived constraints based on race and gender, manners in dealing with the perceived constraints, and resiliency-building advice for aspiring Black female superintendents that would serve to weaken or minimize constraints or guide one to use factors that would allow her to "bounce back" after experiencing a form of disruption.

The study participants identified several perceived gender- and race-related constraints. Often, race and gender themes intersected. Numerous topics contributed to the development of the combined themes of perceived constraints which included school district

wealth, suspicion and mistrust, isolation, job acquisition, limited knowledge expectations, and the absence of a support structure, including mentors.

Additionally, the findings signify several manners in which the study participants deal with the identified perceived constraints. The processes included their personalities, attitudes and determination; confrontation; knowledge and skills; and mentors and support systems. Each may be appropriately regarded as either an individual or environmental protective factor or a resilient reintegration process, all of which are components of The Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990) which will be addressed in the next chapter where I will interface the findings with the literature and the conceptual framework.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this dissertation is divided into four sections. The first section provides an overview of the background and research questions. The second section provides a review of the methodology for the study. Section three is a summary of the results; and section four, the final section, is the discussion of the findings of the research which includes the interpretation of the findings and their relationship to the conceptual framework and literature, implications for practice, recommendations for future research, limitations of the study and the conclusion.

Background and Research Questions

The title of this dissertation is *Black Female Superintendents and Resiliency: Self-Perceptions of Gender- and Race-related Constraints from a Resilient Reintegration Perspective*. This focus was developed based on (1) my identity as a Black female, (2) my identity as an aspirant of the school district superintendency, and (3) my strong belief that one should solidly prepare oneself for any task to ensure success, and I deem this quest to be a preparatory task. Given the superfluous asymmetry of the numbers of Black females in the role and the recent trend of voluntary or involuntary resignations of Black female superintendents, I sought to hear directly from Black females currently in the position. I thought it would be wise to learn as much about those who look like me from those who looked like me and who had achieved the ranks already.

In my search, I was directed to Gewertz's (2006) article that reported on Black female superintendents' departures, and I must admit that it "added fuel" to my inquiry. Although the research did not specify that a departure rate for the Black females was any higher than the departure rates for their White and male counterparts, the superintendents' departures "peaked" my interest and curiosity, particularly having the departures situated in the context of potential racial and gender implications. It became my desire to identify manners in which current Black female superintendents dealt with perceived constraints and to identify advice to aspiring Black female superintendents that would aid in the mitigation of constraints based on their race and gender. Although the topic of this dissertation had been determined prior to the consumption of Gewertz's article, this dissertation could well be considered a reaction to that article which addressed race, gender and the superintendency, with a specific focus on the Black female superintendent.

The number of Black female school district superintendents continues to be unsteady in our country. It appears any momentum gained in increasing the numbers of Black female superintendents may be reversed by the frequent resignations and dismissals of Black female superintendents across the country. There have been numerous studies on persons in the superintendency, both male and female; however, there remains a paucity of research on the Black female superintendent.

The purpose of this study was to investigate Black female superintendents' perceptions of gender- and race-related constraints and barriers from a resiliency perspective, with a focus on resilient reintegration processes. The study was primarily based on literature dealing with women in educational leadership in general, Black females in educational leadership, and resiliency theory. Two primary research questions were developed to address

the concerns of the study: (1) What perceived gender- and race-related constraints do Black female school superintendents identify in their professional roles?; and (2) Which resilient reintegration processes do Black female school superintendents employ to mitigate or overcome perceived gender- and race-related constraints?

Review of the Methodology

This research was a non-experimental, qualitative study. Two major research questions were posed to determine if Black female school district superintendents perceived any race- and gender-related constraints, and if so, how did they deal with those perceived constraints.

The population for the study consisted of five sitting Black female superintendents. The original plan was to have six participants, but one participant was not available for the scheduled and rescheduled interviews. The participants included two rural school district superintendents, two urban school district superintendents, and one suburban school district superintendent, from four different states in the United States of America. Non-identifying descriptors were used in order to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Each participant consented to and participated in either a face-to-face or telephone interview with the researcher. The researcher used an eleven-question interview protocol to solicit data from the participants. Additionally, each participant completed a biographical questionnaire and submitted a copy of her resume to the researcher. Those instruments were used to collect additional data about the participants and their respective school districts. The data were carefully reviewed several times and coded in order to identify emerging themes. Resulting data were reported thematically.

Summary of the Results

Five Black female school district superintendents from urban, suburban and rural school districts participated in this dissertation study. The participants had varied lengths of tenure as superintendents. They represented school districts that were very diverse and distinguished from each other. The only criteria used for the selection of the participants were that they were currently practicing in the role (sitting), and special consideration was given to their school district types (i.e., urban, suburban, rural). Selection did not include any measures of success, tenure, or any other factor.

Qualitative data were collected through individual interviews to allow for rich, thick declarations and portrayals of the five Black female school district superintendents. The data were analyzed to determine (1) if the study participants perceived race- and/or gender-related constraints, and (2) how did the study participants manage any perceived constraints.

Summarily, the participants did identify perceived constraints related to both race and gender; and likewise, they identified manners they employed to deal with their perceived constraints. Additionally, the participants offered advice to aspiring Black female superintendents in efforts to mitigate or avoid constraints, and possibly even to apprise and counsel aspirants of resilient protective factors necessary to “bounce back” from any engagement with constraints or disruption. Numerous topics including location, isolation, low performance expectations, confrontation, child advocacy, poor decision-making skills and limited knowledge were ascertained; however, several were minimally supported or isolated topics. The preponderant themes that emerged were: (a) competence, (b) attitudes and attributes, and (c) mentors, models, and support systems. As indicated by the title, this

study viewed the findings through a resilience lens. The following sections interface these dominant themes with related literature and the conceptual framework.

Relationship of the Findings to the Conceptual Framework and Literature

Relationship to the Literature

Although scholars like Alston (1999) encourage that “black women be treated as a group unto itself and that black women be viewed as a group unto itself through a black feminist lens” (p. 87), it has already been established that research on females in school leadership erroneously subsumes the Black female, and there remains a paucity of literature on the Black female superintendent. Given those not-yet controlled circumstances, the iterate themes of this study (competence; attitudes and attributes; and mentors, models and support systems) are assimilated with the existing literature on females in educational leadership, identifying literature specific to the Black female school administrator where appropriate.

Competence. A resounding theme throughout this study was that of competence – knowledge of the job in order to be able to do the job, skills necessary to do the job, adequate preparation prior to taking the job, and varied preparatory experiences en route to the job. It was alluded to from both deficit and adequate perspectives. The study participants were adamant in their assertions that Black females, particularly, needed to be able to demonstrate competence well before being considered for the position or they do not stand a “fleeting” chance for consideration.

However, Tallerico (2000) indicate that superintendent search processes may have little regard for competence, potentially adding to the exclusionary practices that Black female superintendent candidates may endure. Her article, *Gaining Access to the Superintendency: Headhunting, Gender, and Color* describes and analyzes superintendent

search and selection processes. Essentially, the article addresses the practice of school boards employing headhunters and search consultants to recruit superintendent candidates. In light of this study's participants' beliefs of the role of competence, Tallerico posits:

In sum, the experiential backgrounds routinely described as “best” or “strongest” by this study's informants reflect career pathways more likely followed by nonminority males than by any other administrators. The favoring of positions infrequently occupied by females and administrators of color lessens these groups' chances of being viewed as most qualified to advance through the final selection gates in the search process. (p. 31)

It is ironic that none of the candidates, in all of their discourse about competence and job acquisition, mentioned anything about headhunters, gatekeepers or search firms.

Tallerico (2000) highlighted the concept that gatekeepers often act as individual decision makers, and their practices often reflect those of their profession or institution. Such implies that regardless of the competence of candidates, candidates may be advanced or dismissed according to the cultural norms of the searching organization. Tallerico also highlights the theories of Riehl and Byrd (1997) which suggest that the construct of gender impacts career mobility. Their conclusion is that “the positive effects of personal and socialization factors such as aspirations, qualifications and experience do not assure women equity with men in administrative career development” (p. 21). Tallerico quoted Riehl and Byrd saying, “And so, all else being equal, women's predicted probability of becoming a school administrator generally remained below that for comparable men” (Riehl and Byrd, 1997 as cited in Tallerico, 2000, p. 22).

Competence, with an emphasis on prior experiences, was strongly urged by the Black female superintendent study participants. Likewise, Tallerico's (2000) study found that “gates are typically open widest” for those candidate with prior experiences as superintendents, assistant or associate superintendents, or high school principals. Her study

indicated that those who had lower level principalships and other administrative positions were less likely to be considered for advancement despite indications of “near-generic competencies” indicative of knowledge that appear in vacancy advertisements. Alston (1999) identified “societal attitudes that blacks lack competency in leadership positions” as one of five major constraints of her study to identify constraints and facilitators that black female school superintendents encountered en route to the superintendency.

Participants acknowledged that competence, with its sub-themes of knowledge, skills preparation and experience, was but a single factor in acquiring and maintaining the job; competence needed to be supplanted by proper attitudes and personal attributes.

Attitudes and attributes. All of the study participants, at one point or another, expressed attitudes of acceptance, self-efficacy, determination, focus, certainty, and self-awareness. They described personal attributes that included decisiveness, toughness, articulation, and tenacity. It should be noted that as positively connoted as these descriptors may be, some of these qualities bear negative connotations in the context of their roles as Black female school district leaders. More importantly, these are attitudes and attributes that the participants perceived were necessary to reject gender bias. Skrla, Reyes and Scheurich (2000) point out that although women like these study participants refute stereotypical patriarchal notions in regards to their own behaviors, there are those with whom these individuals must interact who continue to embrace concepts of bias. Bjork (2000b) adds that the situation is exacerbated by “unwritten societal and professional rules discouraging women superintendents from publicly acknowledging unequal treatment and the unyielding silence of those in the profession” (p. 12).

Bjork (2000b) reveals that women, regardless of their positive attitudes and attributes, experience lived experiences of gender bias which have a debilitating effect on their careers.

Bjork stated:

Dominant male notions shaped the behavior of women superintendents particularly with regard to their ideas of power as control, cultural norms prescribing women's silence, the negative consequences of forthright professional dialogue, barriers to verbal communication, and delegating to surrogate administrators messages intended to influence policy making and decision processes. When women broke these normative cultural rules, they were censured and often put their jobs in jeopardy. (p.11)

The women in this study were very verbose about their comfort with being Black and female, but they were not ignorant of the associated challenges, particularly those associated with their gender. But they believed in their agency to do the job and do it well. Jackson (1999) reported that the attitudes of self-efficacy may be that an individual's experiences, both growing up and during their careers, gave them the self-confidence and sense of efficacy that comes with both knowledge and acceptance of who they are. It seems they were aware but not accepting of the stated cultural norms. They viewed their attitudes and attributes as manners to dispel the norms. They refused to be silenced, but they were smart enough to identify appropriate times to speak and act.

Some common and expected roles of a superintendent are decision-making and articulation. These study participants proclaimed their propensity to make appropriate decisions and to communicate effectively. Brunner (2000) stated that women in her study knew that as superintendents, they were expected to speak out whenever required or needed in multiple settings and under myriad circumstances. However, the research suggests that speaking out and decisiveness from a female is sometimes regarded as assertive leadership (Gewertz, 2006). Gewertz states assertive leadership can get Black women branded in ways

that men or White people would not be. Gewertz (2006) quoted Arlene Ackerman, a former Black female superintendent as saying, “We’ve demonstrated success, but then somehow we’re viewed as autocratic instead of decisive” (p. 24). Likewise, Gewertz reported that director of Harvard University’s urban superintendent training program stated he believes “people have a hard time with strong African American women” (p. 24). Brunner found that women superintendents often had to resort to “different tactics that facilitated their efforts to speak.” Men, she exclaimed, did not have to resort to such extreme efforts. So, it is here that I capture the negative association of the positively relayed attitudes and attributes of the study participants.

Skrla et al. (2000) said that women superintendents in their study did not regard gender as a factor while in their jobs. However, in retrospect, the participants were able to make some perceived gender-related observations. Gewertz (2006), however, stated that some Black female superintendents regarded their gender more of a barrier than their race. This study on Black female school district superintendents bore the same finding, but the participants indicated their attitudes and attributes allowed them to mitigate the perceived gender barriers. Skrla et al. implicated either unawareness or denial of the role of gender in the work of the study participants. Considering the positive attitudes and attributes shared by my study participants, I, too, question the participants’ awareness and/or denial of the issues that surround them. The participants for this study ably identified gender-related constraints, but they seemed to regard their attitudes and attributes to be superior to those perceived constraints. The participants’ believe that several of their attitudes and attributes were fostered and nurtured by guidance from mentors, role models and support systems, another indication of the intersecting quality of the overarching themes of this study.

Mentors, models and support systems. Alston (1999), referring to the paltriness of research on the Black female, suggests that Black women superintendents in the literature become “invisible,” creating the absence of a trail for aspiring Black females to follow. She proclaims the collective and individual voices of the Black female superintendent are significant, and they serve to guide those to follow them. Such guidance often comes in the form of mentoring. Crow and Matthews (1998) described mentors as active, dynamic, visionary, knowledgeable, and skilled; and they guide other leaders to those same qualities. The Black female study participants in this study often spoke of their mentors and role models, at times indicating adopted behaviors and lessons learned.

Tillman (2001) posits that research on mentoring Blacks is minimal, and there is a need for more empirical studies that record the mentoring experiences of Blacks. Tillman conducted a study that identified mentoring as a method to “facilitate the professional growth and development of African American faculty and to increase their representation in predominantly White institutions” (p. 295). Although her study focused on faculty mentor relationships in institutions of higher education, the outcomes may be transferable to the field of education as an institution, serving to increase the representation of Blacks, and Black females particularly, in educational administration.

Young and McLeod (2001) conducted an exploratory study of women in educational administration that focused on women’s decisions to enter educational administration. Although their study was not specifically focused on Black women nor the superintendency, the findings may be transferable to those cohorts. Their findings were that administrative role models, endorsements and support greatly influenced women’s decisions to enter

administration. They found that administrative leadership styles were key determinants in the development of the leadership style of their study participants.

Young and McLeod (2001) suggest that women, more so than men, require encouragement to pursue administrative careers. While some of the Black female superintendents spoke of self-determination, there were hints of external encouragement from mentors and role models. Edson (1995) reported that aspiring men administrators tended not to have mentors and support systems, suggesting that the supports are not needed for advancement. However, all five of these female study participants expressed, in one manner or another, the need for mentorship, role models and support systems. Similarly, Alston (1999) identified facilitators for Black female superintendents, and ranked in the top six was the provision of a mentor or sponsor. Edson's 1995 study of 142 female principal aspirants report that significantly more women who had mentors advanced as opposed to those who did not advance. Jones (2003) suggests that the lack of mentorship for Black administrators and aspirants may lead to a lack of opportunity for administrative positions. She stated that it is important for aspirants to secure mentors in the same districts, when possible, in an effort to afford the aspirant increased awareness of the cultural norms and subtle idiosyncrasies of the district. Like the Black female study participants, Alston (1996) stressed mentors and support systems as requisite factors for Black female administrators' success.

Some of the participants spoke of support systems which included encouragement from others. Jackson (1999) found in her study with African-American female superintendents that several received support and encouragement from their university professors. Like one of the participants in this study, it was noted that the majority of the

supporters and mentors were male and White, although in both studies there was mention of formal or informal Black female mentors and supporters. Pence (1995) listed possible indicators of successful mentoring that included educational philosophy, physical proximity, gender matching, and goals. Notably, the list is not inclusive of race. Tillman (2001) conveyed the assumption that same-race match is likely to be the strongest predictor of success in a mentor-protégé relationship. She stated that mentors typically choose protégés who share the same ethnic, religious, academic, and/or social backgrounds. However, she indicated the possible limitations of Blacks, in this case Black females in educational leadership, to use this process given the scarcity of others who share those same backgrounds. In Tillman's study, she found that protégés had occasionally experienced strains in mentoring relationships due to racial and/or cultural differences, but the differences did not cause deterioration of the relationship. Instead, they deemed the relationships as successful. It was noted that protégés distinguished between personal and professional mentors, and they emphasized that the essence of their relationship was mentoring for professional growth and advancement. Remarkably, it was observed that the most important factor of mentoring was whether the mentors could provide the protégés with career support ensuring advancement. Tillman's study did warn against two assumptions of mentoring: (1) same-race mentor-protégé relationships yield the best outcomes, and (2) successful mentoring relationships is the sole determinant of promotion or tenure.

Mentoring comes in various forms – individual, group, personal, professional, research, observation, to name a few. One of the study participants indicated she collected and cogitated resumes of role models, did research, and kept abreast of the literature. Jones (2003) warned that some researchers like Brunner (2002) cautioned against the use of

literature as a form of mentoring. Given the paucity of women, especially Black ones, in the upper echelons of educational administration, aspirants may find it necessary to resort to literature for guidance, which accents the need for increased literary contributions. While Brunner suggested the literature may contribute to perceptions of discouragement or inability, Jones argued that the literature may serve to uplift, inspire and encourage. She stated, “If Black female aspirants are in areas where there are no other Black female administrators present, then having literature is a beginning point.” She asserted that increased discourse on Black female leadership experiences, Black female aspirants might be inspired to know that there are people out there doing what they aspire to do. Through her research, Jones recognized the mentor in a “plethora” of roles – teacher, coach, task master, confidant, guide, counselor, and friend. Mentors have been regarded a very important factor in aiding individuals to mitigate or overcome constraints and barriers; they model and help develop resilience and protective factors that allow for the success of individuals.

Relationship to the Conceptual Framework

Along with the perceived external constraints imposed upon women, particularly those of color, Young and McLeod (2001) offer that definitions of aspiration defined by male research have accounted for the lack of female aspirations to administration. They suggest that women have developed internal barriers such as low self-confidence and the acceptance that leadership is for men. Such acceptances make the pursuit of administrative advancements by females less likely. The conceptual framework for this dissertation was Richardson et al.’s (1990) Resiliency Model. The concerns presented by Gewertz (2006), Alston (2005) and this dissertation are clearly supported by the Resiliency Model. Richardson (2002) conceptualized resilience as “a force within everyone that drives them to

seek self actualization, altruism, wisdom, and be in harmony with a spiritual source of strength” (p. 313).

Alston (1996) recognized that some Black females are experiencing success as school district superintendents. In a follow-up study, Alston (2005) focuses on her “interest in the source of tenacity and resilience of those Black women who meet the challenges of the superintendency and are successful” (p. 677). She appropriately began her article, *Tempered Radicals and Servant Leaders: Black Females Persevering in the Superintendency*, with a head note that asserted,

Despite the small numbers of Black female superintendents and the overwhelming obstacles of the position, Black women who serve as public school superintendents continue to meet the challenges of educational leadership and are flourishing in their jobs. As noted in previous research on Black women in the superintendency and Black female leaders in general, there remains a paucity of research. What is it about these women that keeps them in their positions? . . . (p. 675)

That concluding interrogative statement is the essence of this study. What is it about these Black female superintendents who continue to meet the challenges of educational leadership that keeps them in their positions? Or is it just a matter of time before, they too, will be gone for reasons other than “normal” attrition? If there are overwhelming obstacles, how are some of the Black female superintendents managing those obstacles? Alston used the term, *tempered radicalism*, from Meyerson and Scully (1995, as cited in Alston, 2005), to describe women like these Black female superintendents. The authors described tempered radicals as “individuals who identify with and are committed to their organizations and also to a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with the dominant culture of their organization” (p. 586). Meyerson (2001) added, “they rock the boat and stay in the boat,” (p. xi).

The aforementioned questions coupled with the notion that “they stay in the boat” support my inquiry and the conceptual framework used to interpret the study findings. The basic assumptions of the Resiliency Model are the concepts of *constraints* (stressors, adversity and life events), *protective factors*, *homeostasis*, *disruption* and four *resilient reintegration processes* (resilient reintegration, reintegration back to homeostasis, reintegration with loss, and dysfunctional reintegration). I will use the tenets of this model to establish the kinship of the model and the study findings.

Constraints. The Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990) describes constraints as adversity, risks, and stressors. The participating Black female superintendents disclosed several perceived constraints. The race-related constraints included location, financial distress, suspicion and mistrust, and isolation. The gender-related constraints included job acquisition, limited knowledge, a lack of decision-making skills, exclusion, and absence of a support structure or system. The study participants were able to identify several race- and gender-related perceived constraints. It was interesting to hear that while most of the superintendents considered race and gender as barriers, one of them did not perceive race to be a barrier, but more of an asset. The participants’ perceptions were inconsistent between identified constraints, and there was not one constraint that all of the study participants identified. The individual who experiences constraints ideally also experiences individual and environmental protective factors that buffer those constraints or that adversity, and the study participants often referred to such factors.

Protective factors and homeostasis. Henderson and Milstein (2003) posit that the environment is critical to an individual’s resiliency in a couple of ways – (1) internal protective factors that assist an individual in being resilient when faced with stressors or

constraints, and (2) immediate environmental conditions contribute to individual's ability to shift the balance from one of maladaptation or dysfunction to homeostasis or resiliency. In the Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990), protective factors (also called resilient qualities) are indicated by a set of upward pointing arrows interfacing with the identified constraints. The arrows indicate that one is effectively dealing with the life prompt and maintaining homeostasis.

Homeostasis is described as a biopsychospiritual balance that allows one to use the body, mind and spirit to adapt to current life circumstances. Homeostasis is often disrupted by expected and unexpected stressors, adverse events, or risks. Henderson and Milstein (2003), in interpreting the Resiliency Model, suggest that an adequate amount of "protection" allows an individual to adapt to the adversity without experiencing a significant disruption in life; therefore, the individual remains at homeostasis or "moves to a level of increased resiliency because of the emotional strength and healthy coping mechanisms developed in the process of overcoming the adversity" (p. 5). The study participants often acknowledged knowledge and skills as manners of dealing with perceived constraints. Those are categories supported by homeostasis, which may explain why the study participants remain functioning in their roles, with the exception of one who was recently reported to have experienced disruption. However, the disruption had not occurred during the time of this study; therefore, it is not addressed in this study.

The Black female school district superintendents identified several factors which could be determined to be individual or environmental protective factors. Although the protective factors were not an anticipated outcome of the study, it is clear that, for these participants, individual and environmental protective factors (e.g., attitude, knowledge,

mentors, skills, passion) were key in dealing with the perceived constraints, allowing the participants to maintain homeostasis. The interaction between daily stresses and protective factors determines whether serious disruptions will occur. Henderson and Milstein (2003) explained,

With enough ‘protection,’ the individual adapts to that adversity without experiencing a significant disruption in his or her life. The individual stays within a comfort zone, or at “homeostasis,” or moves to a level of increased resiliency because of the emotional strength and healthy coping mechanisms developed in the process of overcoming the adversity (p. 5).

Similarly, Grogan (1996) reported that her study participants “successfully negotiated potential obstacles, held on to their aspirations, and resisted discouragement” (as cited in Tallerico, 1999, p. 34). The study participants’ utilization of individual and environmental protective factors seemed to be effective in mitigating or possibly even eradicating their perceived race and gender constraints, and as the literature suggests, expressions from the participants were sometimes indicative of increased resilience against some possible constraints.

Disruption and resilient reintegration processes. Henderson and Milstein (2003) further explained that without the necessary protection and coping mechanisms, an individual will enter a process of psychological disruption which will require time to reintegrate from that disruption. The Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990) illustrates four resilient reintegration outcomes after one experiences disruption. However, none of the study participants was deemed to be at such a period of psychological disruption at the time of this dissertation study. It should be noted though that an individual may enter a resilient reintegration process and emerge to return to homeostasis or increased resiliency. Given the descriptions of some of the perceived constraints and the manners in which the participants

dealt with them, it is fair to say that descriptions surfaced that were indicative of disruptions and matriculation primarily through two resilient reintegration processes – reintegration with resiliency and reintegration to homeostasis. There was no indication of participants experiencing either of the other two resilient integration processes – reintegration with loss and dysfunctional reintegration. Overall, the results of the study uphold the tenets of the Resiliency Model (Richardson et al., 1990). These Black female superintendents do perceive constraints based on race and gender, and they use what they have—internal and external protective factors—to counter the constraints of racism and sexism. The following section addresses implications of the research for practice and for future research as it relates to the Black female school district superintendent.

Implications of the Research

The superintendents who participated in this dissertation study clearly indicated to one degree or another that they perceive race and gender to be issues for them in their roles as school district superintendents. An assiduous and thorough review of the data generates several implications for practice and for research.

Implications for Practice

Superintendent mentors. Aspiring Black female superintendents should seek mentors. There is so much to be learned from those who have studied and occupied the role. Females, especially Black females, must make special efforts to nurture and mentor other Black females in an effort to increase the sparse numbers of Black female superintendents. As RS2 stated, “I just hope for the next generation that it [Black female superintendents] won’t be such a novelty, and they will...go ahead and step up.” It is known that Black female leadership does not mimic Black female student populations. As Alston (2005) noted, Blacks

and Hispanics make up 15.9% of the nation's population and 28% of the nation's school children. However, persons of color only represent 2.2% of the nation's superintendents. Alston cited Peterson (1992) who admonished, "...there is an embedded responsibility for many Black female leaders to pass on to the next generation 'a capability to withstand mental anguish...and assaults on their dignity'" (p. 682).

Universities. Universities, too, must realize and accept their roles in recruiting minorities for their educational leadership programs, with a special emphasis on Black females. They should engage in frequent discourse and carefully designed coursework that support the development and success of the minority leader. Prescribed coursework should address perceived deficit areas such as facilities and budget. Programs should perpetuate equity and social justice in an effort to develop leaders who will promote and implement programs that serve to embrace minority leadership and political reform. Rusch (2004) referred to such conversations as a "constrained discourse." She asserted,

The data show that twice as many men as women perceive department discussions about gender as frequent and generally experience the discussions as open, problem solving, and involving most of the faculty. The number of women who describe the discussions as contentious and uncomfortable suggests that the fault line occurs more frequently for women than men. (p.28)

Additionally, universities should pay attention to recruit minority faculty who may serve as role models and "cheerleaders" for other minorities, again with a special focus on Black females.

School boards. Closer to the schools, school boards of education should review studies like this one to highlight the need to participate in diversity trainings that will accentuate the offerings of females and persons of color in efforts to dismiss notions of male

and racial hegemony. Hegemonic practices should be reviewed, denounced and dismissed; and more diverse attitudes should be fostered, nurtured and adopted.

Alston (2005) posits, “Despite the small numbers of Black female superintendents and the overwhelming obstacles of the position, Black women who serve as public school superintendents continue to meet the challenges of educational leadership and are flourishing in their jobs” (p. 675). It is a *sine qua non* that we uplift the voices and accomplishments of these successful Black female school district leaders so that others will strive to emulate them, learn from them, and interact with them as opposed to ostracizing them and treating them as a misunderstood anomaly.

Just as this research implicates recommendations for practice, there are also implications for future research.

Implications for Future Research

Research is a quality tool for enhancement. As a result of this study, the following are recommended implications for future research.

Additional literature. There is a dearth of literature available on the Black female school district superintendent, although there is an observable increase. Black females have generally been subsumed in educational leadership on females. However, the research is so minuscule that absolute data on the numbers of Black female superintendents in the country are not available. Generally speaking, it is recommended that additional research on the Black female superintendent is needed to reduce the existing paucity. Their voices need to be heard because, be it real or perceived, they have much to say. Others who aspire to follow their lead stand to learn much from such literature. It may actually be considered a form of mentoring. Alston (2005) appropriately asks, “Are our research communities in educational

leadership ready, ‘in the thick of the battle,’ to fill the gap?” (p.685) She is referring to the gap of missing “lived leadership experiences of Black female leaders in the 21st century.”

Replicated studies. Replicate this study with a focus on what the sitting superintendents perceive they need in order to experience lengthy successful superintendencies. It bears repeating that it is insufficient to only identify constraints without some discourse about possible solutions or mitigation plans. Also, a replication of this study several years from now may ascertain any changes in these circumstances.

Former superintendents. So many Black female superintendents are leaving the position. A replication of this study with retired, resigned or dismissed Black female superintendents may disclose significant data that may serve to ensure the success of those to follow.

University support study. Conduct an examination of university educational leadership programs to identify methods, if any, to support the development of minority female school leaders. Examine practices to hire faculty to teach related courses on race, gender and social justice issues, and examine the programs of studies to determine if such courses are required or optional.

Gatekeeping theory. As suggested by Tollerico (2000) and given the strength of the theme of competence in this study, it is recommended that future research investigate the impact of gatekeeping theory in the advancement of Black female superintendents, especially given the fact that the study participants did not mention headhunters and search firms in this study.

Limitations of the Study

The primary limitation of this study is the small size of the population and the study sample. As previously stated, the data are not intended to be generalizable or representative of all Black female school district superintendents.

Additionally, it has been stated that the researcher is a Black female with latent superintendent aspirations. Some may regard that status as one of bias; however, it should be considered that it is common for researchers to conduct research on their own racial, ethnic, professional groups without question or concern.

Another limitation may be that participants were selected without regard to any specific standard of measure, for example, performance, tenure, etc. Such specificity may have yielded different results and experiences.

A final limitation may be the short interview that was used to collect data from the participants. Given the time constraints under which the researcher worked, and the attention dedicated to respecting the participant's time, it was planned to minimize the number of questions for the study.

Conclusion

This dissertation study set forth to lift the voice of the Black female school district superintendent by listening to her perceptions of race- and gender-related constraints, if any. I hope this study will serve as a primer for many—Black female superintendent aspirants, current Black female superintendents, school boards, educational leadership programs, and people in general. It is critical that such perceptions are addressed. While there may be those who choose to argue the issues of inequity, perceptions tend to be real to those who possess them. Glesne (2006) refers to the concept of interpretivist or the *constructivist paradigm*

which maintains that humans construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is more right or more real than another, and “these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed separately” (p. 7). Gewertz (2006) intimated the perceptions of a former Black female superintendent saying, “Bias based on race and sex might not be as blatant as it was decades ago, but that doesn’t mean such attitudes don’t still exert a powerful influence on how a job unfolds” (p. 24).

If historical patterns continue to predict the future, it can be expected that more women will infiltrate the arena of educational leadership, just as women penetrated the institution of teaching. Although the numbers of Black female superintendents have not demonstrated a voracious incline, there is an observed increase in the appointments. However, it seems that many of those appointments are impermanent, bearing an interim look. The brevity of the tenures is of major concern. Might male and majority ethnic hegemonic practices that bear unrealistic prerequisites account for such curtness? It is critical that the race and gender marginalization are recognized and addressed in thought, policy and practice.

The discourse of these Black female superintendents revealed beliefs of satisfaction in their roles. They believe they are effective and efficient regardless of the racial and gender barriers they identified. They use protective factors to buffer themselves against the perceived constraints and barriers as they continue their mission to serve and lead school districts to provide cogent and efficacious educational experiences for children. However, I would be remiss not to mention that one of the study participants experienced disruption since participating in this dissertation study. It is imperative that Black female superintendents concentrate on their resilient characteristics, and serve to foster internal and

external resiliency for themselves as well as others. It is my sincere hope, though unfortunately not a sanguine one, that the state of being for the Black female superintendent will impetuously evolve to one of permanence, equity, confidence, trust and belief so that she can thrive in a position that she is so well-suited, and in any place she deems she is suited to serve. I conclude with the words of one study participant,

I think we're more surprised and we shouldn't be to see women, African-American women in little places with students that are mostly White, but we're there. And it's very interesting when you see that...that's where we are more than in large urban centers. Remember, there was Barbara Boyd Bennett, there was Arlene Ackerman, we got Beverly Hall, Carol Johnson, Pat Harvey. They were in the large urban districts as recognized by the Council of Great City Schools. Now Arlene is gone, Barbara Byrd-Bennett is gone, Carol has moved from Minneapolis to Memphis, Beverly is still in Atlanta, House used to be in Memphis. I mean so, we're not just there [in large districts] anymore.

APPENDIX A

RESEARCH LETTER OF INVITATION

Principal Investigator: Teresa Johnson Daye
401 Denton Street
Durham, North Carolina 27713
919.544.0716
E-mail: tdaye@email.unc.edu

Research Title: *Black Female School Superintendents and Resiliency: Identification of Resilient Reintegration Processes of Perceived Professional Constraints*

[DATE]

Dear [Black Female Superintendent]:

I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership program at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Under the direct guidance of Dr. William Malloy, my dissertation chairperson and faculty advisor, I am conducting a study on the perceived gender- and race-related constraints of Black female superintendents with an additional focus on their resilient reintegration processes in overcoming those perceived constraints as part of my dissertation requirements. The primary purposes of my study are threefold: 1) to increase the baseline data on women in the superintendency, particularly Black women; 2) to investigate perceived gender- and race-related constraints of Black females in the school superintendency; and 3) to identify resilient integrative processes Black female superintendents use to overcome identified perceived gender- and race-related constraints. As you may realize, the current literature inadequately addresses the Black female as a school district leader, often melting her experiences with those of females of other ethnicities and cultures. I am inviting you to participate in this study, and I trust that you will recognize the unique contribution you are in the position to make as a Black school district superintendent. Your participation is completely voluntary.

In order to prepare you to fully consider participation in this research study, I would like to provide you with important information relative to your participation. Your participation will involve completing a biographical questionnaire, one (1) audio-taped interview which will last 1-2 hours in length, and I would like to reserve the right for a follow-up interview, if necessary. These items will take place between November, 2006 and May, 2007.

Once the audio-taped interviews have been transcribed, you will have the opportunity to review the transcripts and my interpretations of the interview prior to submission of the final draft of my dissertation. This review will grant you the opportunity to confirm my data including direct quotations and summarized data. The dissertation will be reviewed by the four (4) members of my dissertation committee prior to final publication. It is feasible that portions of this research project may appear in educational publications and/or related presentations.

Enclosed, you will find the biographical questionnaire which consists of demographic information and six open-ended questions that will give us a context to begin our dialogue about your life and professional experiences. If you accept this invitation to participate in this study, please complete both the biographical questionnaire and the consent form, attach a copy of your resume, and return all items in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope no later than (INSERT DATE).

Measures of confidentiality will be maintained throughout this process. No names will be reported or disclosed in this study. The anticipated risks of this study are minimal, if any at all.

If you have additional questions regarding your participation in this study, please feel free to contact me or my faculty advisor, Dr. William Malloy (phone - 919.962.2510; e-mail – wmalloy@email.unc.edu).

I sincerely hope that you will agree to participate in this exciting project highlighting the Black female school superintendent and allowing her to expand her presence in the field of educational research. I fully recognize the many demands requiring your time, and I thank you in advance for your attention and support. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Most graciously,

Teresa J. Daye

APPENDIX B

BIOGRAPHICAL QUESTIONNAIRE

Principal Investigator: Teresa Johnson Daye Phone: 919/544-0716
401 Denton Street E-mail: tdaye@email.unc.edu
Durham, NC 27713

Research Title: *Black Female School Superintendents and Resiliency: Identification of Resilient Reintegration Processes of Perceived Professional Constraints*

I. Demographic Information

Please provide the following personal and district information.

Marital Status

☐ Single
☐ Married
☐ Divorced
☐ Widowed
of children _____

Age Group

☐ Under 35
☐ 35-39
☐ 40-44
☐ 45-49
☐ 50-54
☐ 55-59
☐ Over 60

Degree(s) Earned

☐ B.S.
☐ B.A.
☐ M.S.
☐ Ed.S.
☐ Ed.D.
☐ Ph.D.

District Data

☐ Supt. appointed
☐ Supt. elected
of enrolled students _____
2006-2007 district budget
\$ _____
☐ Urban
☐ Suburban
☐ Rural

II. Open-ended Questions

1. What is your current job title? What year did you begin this position? What are the primary duties of your position?
2. List previous positions you have held in this school district.
3. List previous positions you have held in other school districts.
4. What was your first administrative position?
5. List your professional and educational background including professional, community, and civic memberships/affiliations (if such information is not included in your attached resume).

*Return no later than (INSERT DATE) to:
Teresa Johnson Daye
401 Denton Street
Durham, North Carolina 27713*

APPENDIX C

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Principal Investigator: Teresa Johnson Daye Phone: 919/544-0716
401 Denton Street E-mail: tdaye@email.unc.edu
Durham, NC 27713

Research Title: *Black Female School Superintendents and Resiliency: Identification of Resilient Reintegration Processes of Perceived Professional Constraints*

1. Please tell me about yourself.
2. What factors influenced your decision to become a school district superintendent?
3. What, if anything, have you perceived to be gender-related barriers or constraints in your role as a Black female superintendent?
4. What, if anything, have you perceived to be race-related barriers or constraints in your role as a Black female superintendent?
5. How have you dealt with any perceived gender- and race-related barriers or constraints (i.e., knowledge, skill[s], and/or attitude[s])?
6. What advice would you give a Black female aspiring the superintendency?
7. Please tell me about key events in your superintendency that are related to your race or gender that are prominent in your mind.
8. Where do you see your career going? What is next for you?
9. What metaphor would you use to describe your role/experiences as a Black female superintendent?
10. Is there anything that we discussed on which you would like to reflect or expand?
11. Is there anything else that you would like to say or discuss?

APPENDIX D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE FORM

University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill
Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Adult Participants
Social Behavioral Form

IRB Study # _____
Consent Form Version Date: _____

Title of Study: Black Female School Superintendents and Resiliency: Identification of Reintegration Processes of Perceived Professional Constraints

Principal Investigator: Teresa Johnson Daye
UNC-Chapel Hill Department: School of Education
UNC-Chapel Hill Phone number: 919/962-2510
Email Address: tdaye@email.unc.edu
Faculty Advisor: Dr. William W. Malloy
Funding Source: none

Study Contact telephone number: 919/544-0716
Study Contact email: tdaye@email.unc.edu

What are some general things you should know about research studies?

You are being asked to take part in a research study. To join the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, for any reason, without penalty.

Research studies are designed to obtain new knowledge. This new information may help people in the future. You may not receive any direct benefit from being in the research study. There also may be risks to being in research studies.

Details about this study are discussed below. It is important that you understand this information so that you can make an informed choice about being in this research study. You will be given a copy of this consent form. You should ask the researchers named above, or staff members who may assist them, any questions you have about this study at any time.

What is the purpose of this study?

The purpose of this research study is to learn about Black female superintendents' perceptions of gender- and race-related constraints encountered in their role as school district superintendent, and to identify resilient reintegration processes used in overcoming the perceived gender- and race-related constraints.

You are being asked to be in the study because you are a Black female superintendent.

Are there any reasons you should not be in this study?

You should not be in this study if you are not a Black female school district superintendent.

How many people will take part in this study?

If you decide to be in this study, you will be one of approximately six (6) people in this research study.

How long will your part in this study last?

Your part in this study should last approximately two hours. The principal investigator is requesting the right for a potential, but unlikely, follow-up contact which is not expected to exceed one hour in length, if needed.

What will happen if you take part in the study?

Your participation will involve completing a biographical questionnaire, one (1) audio-taped interview which will last 1-2 hours in length, and a possible, but unlikely, follow-up interview, if necessary.

What are the possible benefits from being in this study?

Research is designed to benefit society by gaining new knowledge. You may not benefit personally from being in this research study.

What are the possible risks or discomforts involved from being in this study?

There are no known risks associated with this study.

How will your privacy be protected?

All collected data will be recorded under a non-identifiable descriptor (i.e., Rural Superintendent 1, Rural Superintendent 2, Urban Superintendent 1, etc.). The names of the participants' cities and states will not be included in the study, only the geographical indicator (i.e., urban, suburban, rural). When not in use, the principal investigator will keep all documents and records (i.e., biographical questionnaires, resumes, audio-taped interviews and transcribed interviews) under lock and key. When the study is completed, all documents that contain identifiable data about the participants will be destroyed by shredding the document(s). Audiotapes will be destroyed and properly disposed of. It is expected that all collected data will be destroyed within thirty (30) days after the completion of the study and approval of the dissertation.

If at any time during the interview you deem it in order to stop tape recording the interview, recording will cease immediately.

Participants will not be identified in any report or publication about this study. Although every effort will be made to keep research records private, there may be times when federal or state law requires the disclosure of such records, including personal information. This is very unlikely, but if disclosure is ever required, UNC-Chapel Hill will take steps allowable by law to protect the privacy of personal information. In some cases, your information in this

research study could be reviewed by representatives of the University, research sponsors, or government agencies for purposes such as quality control or safety.

Will you receive anything for being in this study?

You will not receive anything for taking part in this study.

Will it cost you anything to be in this study?

There will be no costs for being in the study

What if you have questions about this study?

You have the right to ask, and have answered, any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, or concerns, you should contact one or both of the following:

Principal Investigator: Teresa Johnson Daye
919/544-0716
tdaye@email.unc.edu

Faculty Advisor: Dr. William W. Malloy
919/962-2510
wmalloy@email.unc.edu

What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at 919-966-3113 or by email to IRB_subjects@unc.edu.

Participant's Agreement:

I have read the information provided above. I have asked all the questions I have at this time. I voluntarily agree to participate in this research study.

Signature of Research Participant

Date

Printed Name of Research Participant

APPENDIX E

HUMAN SUBJECT REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

TO: Teresa Daye
School of Education
CB: 3500

FROM: Behavioral IRB

APPROVAL DATE: 11/07/2006

EXPIRATION DATE OF APPROVAL: 11/06/2007

RE: Notice of IRB Approval by Expedited Review

Submission Type: Initial

Expedited Category: 7.Survey/group chars

Study #: 06-0738 Reference Number: School of Education(SOE 07-010)

Study Title: Black Female School Superintendents and Resiliency: The Identification of Reintegration Processes of Perceived Professional Constraints

Study Description:

Purpose: 1) to investigate Black female superintendents' perceptions of gender- and race-related constraints encountered in their role as school district superintendent, and 2) to identify resilient reintegration processes used in overcoming the perceived gender- and race-related constraints.

Procedures: Conduct interviews.

Participants: 6-12 Black female superintendents.

This submission has been approved by the above IRB for the period indicated.

Details:

Federal regulations require that all research be reviewed at least annually. It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to submit for renewal and obtain approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without IRB approval. Failure to receive approval for continuation before the expiration date will result in automatic termination of the approval for this study on the expiration date.

This study was reviewed in accordance with federal regulations governing human subjects research, including those found at 45 CFR 46 (Common Rule), 45 CFR 164 (HIPAA), and 21 CFR 50 & 56 (FDA), where applicable.

If you have any questions or concerns about your study, please contact the Behavioral IRB at 966-3113, or email the office at aa-irb-chair@unc.edu.

Stuart Rennie, Ph.D.
Office of Human Research Ethics
Co-Chair, Behavioral Institutional Review Board
CB# 3378, 6th floor, Bank of America Center
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Chapel Hill, NC 27599-3378
aa-irb-chair@unc.edu
phone 919-962-7760; fax 919-843-5576

CC: William Malloy, School Of Education, CB:3500 121c Peabody Hall, Faculty Advisor
Regina Cortina, (School of Education), Non-IRB Review Contact

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