2021

Factors Influencing K–12 Female Educators' Decisions Not to Apply for the Superintendency

Tiawana Giles
Walden University

Walden University

College of Education

This is to certify that the doctoral study by

Tiawana Giles

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Salina Shrofel, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty
Dr. Mary Hallums, Committee Member, Education Faculty
Dr. Christina Dawson, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost
Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University
2021

Abstract

Factors Influencing K–12 Female Educators' Decisions Not to Apply for the Superintendency

by

Tiawana Giles

MEd, Bowie State University, 2005

BS, Chaminade University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2021

Abstract

Despite holding 75% of certified positions in K–12 schools in the United States, women hold just 24% of public school superintendent positions. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel attained superintendent credentials and have not yet applied for a superintendent position. The conceptual framework for the study was feminist standpoint theory, which is often used to guide research regarding the knowledge and understanding of marginalized groups. Two research questions were used to explore why female K–12 principals attained their superintendent license and why they decided not to apply for the superintendency. Data were collected in a midAtlantic state via semistructured interviews with eight women leaders who obtained their licenses yet decided not to apply for the role at this point in their careers. In vivo and pattern coding were used to support thematic analysis. Key themes include professional and personal goals, encouraged by others, lack of experience or preparation, discrimination, and satisfaction found outside the superintendency. Participants identified the importance of encouragement and support and acknowledged ongoing gender discrimination, work-life challenges, position politics, and racial and gender biases. Recommendations include mentoring and internships for women to develop their leadership skills at the district level. Implications for positive social change include school district personnel and their school boards using these findings to adjust the ways they promote, mentor, and prepare women for leadership roles, especially the superintendency.

Factors Influencing K–12 Female Educators' Decisions Not to Apply for the Superintendency

by

Tiawana Giles

MEd, Bowie State University, 2005

BS, Chaminade University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2021

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

Superintendents are the chief executive officers of school districts (Guajardo, 2015) responsible for the education of students in their communities (Sampson et al., 2015). In the United States, women hold 75% of all certified positions in K–12 schools, serving as approximately 82% of elementary, middle, and high school teachers; 51.6% of all principal and assistant principals; and 78% of all central office administrators (Copeland & Calhoun, 2014; Superville, 2017; Wallace, 2015). However, women fill fewer superintendent positions compared to men (Copeland & Calhoun, 2014; Maranto et al., 2018; Superville, 2017; Wallace, 2015). In fact, of the nation's 13,728 school districts, women hold approximately 24% of 1,984 public school superintendent roles (Burkman & Lester, 2013; Superville, 2017). Although the percentage of female superintendents in major cities has increased, the overall percentage of female superintendents has increased by only 0.7% annually (Callahan, 2018; Wallace, 2015).

Statistics for the Mid-Atlantic U.S. state, where this study took place, are similar to those for female K–12 educators across the nation. According to this state's Department of Education in 2018, of the 135 K–12 school superintendents in the study state, 96 (71%) are men and 39 (29%) are women. Although there is little evidence suggesting men are more effective in carrying out the role of superintendent, men continue to dominate these positions and account for nearly 86% of all public K–12 superintendents in the study state (Burkman & Lester, 2013; Copeland & Calhoun, 2014; Wallace, 2015). According to the U.S. Department of Education (2014), at the current

rate of increase, it will take at least 80 years for the percentage of female superintendents to reach that of their male counterparts.

The fact that women hold at least 50% of all certified positions in K–12 education but are underrepresented in the superintendent is a phenomenon in need of investigation (Copeland & Calhoun, 2014; Dent, 2018; Maranto et al., 2018; Sampson, 2018; Superville, 2017; Wallace, 2015). In this research study, I explored why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials but have not applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers.

In Chapter 1, I describe the background of the study, problem statement, and purpose of the study. This chapter presents the two research questions that guided the study, the framework, and the nature of the study. I also describe the assumptions, scope, delimitations, limitations, and significance.

Background

Despite the high percentage of women holding K–12 educator positions, women are underrepresented among school district superintendents. This study was a means to explore that discrepancy by obtaining the perceptions and explanations of eight women who had attained superintendent credentials yet chosen not to apply for the position at this point in their careers. Blair (2016) and White (2017) suggested that women find it challenging to maintain a balance between meeting the requirements of traditional roles and fulfilling superintendent responsibilities. Similarly, Wyland (2016) explored the underrepresentation of women in Minnesota superintendent positions, finding that female superintendents viewed their ability to perform duties as mothers and wives to be

daunting while serving as superintendents. Robinson and Shakeshaft (2015) wrote about stress and other factors that negatively affected the health of female superintendents. Burkman and Lester (2013) investigated barriers that led to the disparities between male and female superintendents in the state of Texas. Their findings showed obstacles such as a lack of mentorship, gender bias, work-related conflicts, discrimination, favoritism, work-life conflicts, and low expectations. Bernal et al. (2017) found the role of parenting posed a significant obstacle for women aspiring to become school superintendents; Angel et al. (2013) also identified barriers including oppression, the selection process, and disconnection from professional networks. Robicheau and Krull (2016) argued that race, the need to prove qualifications, and microaggression stood in the way of superintendent roles for women in Minnesota.

Sampson et al. (2015) identified self-imposed barriers related to self-perception, self-efficacy, and mistrust and jealousy in women's relationships with other women, otherwise known as woman-to-woman gender bias. The gap in practice that I addressed was the lack of understanding of why female principals and central office personnel have attained superintendent credentials but not yet applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers.

Recent statistics show that women predominantly comprise the study state's K–12 principal and central office workforce (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Grissom et al., 2013; National Center of Education Statistics [NCES], 2016; State Department of Education, 2018). However, men outnumber women in school superintendent positions, which are at the highest level of administration within a school district (Burton & Weiner, 2016;

Grissom et al., 2013; NCES, 2016; State Department of Education, 2018). In fact, there are almost three times as many male school superintendents in the United States as there are women (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Grissom et al., 2013; NCES, 2016; State Department of Education, 2018). With 135 K–12 school districts, the study state has 135 school superintendents, 96 (71%) of whom are male and 39 (29%) are female (State Department of Education, 2018). Of the 3.6 million teachers in the United States' workforce, 77% are female and 23% are male (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Grissom et al., 2013). In 2016, the NCES indicated that, of the approximate 90,400 K–12 principals in the United States, 54% were female and 46% were male. Although female educators dominate the U.S. K–12 teacher and principal workforce, they are underrepresented in K–12 school superintendent positions (Burton & Weiner, 2016; Grissom et al., 2013; NCES, 2016; State Department of Education, 2018). Specifically, 24% of the country's K–12 school superintendent positions are held by women; in turn, men make up 86% (NCES, 2016; State Department of Education, 2018). There is an underrepresentation of women among K–12 school superintendent positions across the United States. Similar to the gender disproportionality among school superintendents across the United States is the underrepresentation of women in state superintendent positions.

The masculine leadership portrait of power and control is not always effective in the field of education (Watson et al., 2016). Men are more inclined to use an authoritative style, one that may be less successful when scrutinized by families and communities. In turn, women are more likely to solicit feedback and buy-in, thus empowering colleagues

and stakeholders by recognizing and drawing upon the knowledge and expertise of others (Watson et al., 2016).

Whereas men spend fewer years as educators before assuming superintendent roles, women generally work their way up from teacher to assistant principal, principal, or central office personnel before applying for the position of superintendent (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Lexia, 2018). This alternate path to top leadership is an asset for women, better preparing them for the superintendency. The additional years of teaching provide a better understanding of the fundamental concepts of student learning, furthering female superintendents' success in the secondary role of instructional leader (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

Another strength many women in education leadership roles share is a nurturing, protective nature (Flanagan, 2017). Rather than demand staff and students behave in a certain way, women leaders are more likely to provide guidance, reassurance, and firm support to help individuals determine the best course of action (Flanagan, 2017). In refuting societal perceptions of men being strong and women being weak, Flanagan (2017) argued, "Women are already tough. It just looks different" (para. 11).

As a means of social change, findings from this study will advance the understanding of women in K–12 education leadership, their professional aspirations, and the career-limiting choices they make. Such knowledge may be helpful for school administrators and boards of directors in making promotion decisions and providing career training and support for women in superintendent positions. Subsequently, students may benefit from having more gender diversity in the superintendent role.

Problem Statement

The problem that underlies this study is the underrepresentation of female K–12 school superintendents in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic study state. To become a K–12 school superintendent in the study state, an individual must possess an active division superintendent license. Although some female central office personnel and principals currently hold the credentials deemed necessary for a K–12 school superintendent role, they have elected not to apply for the position. In this study, I explored why K–12 female principals and central office personnel in the study state who currently are eligible and hold an active division superintendent license have chosen not to apply for the position at this point in their careers. The gap in practice that I addressed was the lack of understanding why K–12 female principals and central office personnel have attained superintendent credentials but not yet applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel pursue and attain superintendent credentials but subsequently decide not to apply for the superintendent position. To achieve this understanding, I interviewed a representative sample of female educators who have attained the credentials for the superintendency but have not yet applied for the position at this point in their careers.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this qualitative study:

Research Question 1 (RQ1): How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain why they attained the certification?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain what factors influenced their decisions not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers?

Framework

My study was framed within feminist standpoint theory. This theory provided a lens through which I achieved an understanding of the participants' constructed knowledge of the superintendency based on the specific context from which the women constructed their own understanding. Standpoint theory emphasizes that individuals construct knowledge from a combination of resources available within the specific context of their experiences (Sprague, 2005). Standpoint theorists argue that understanding a world perspective is best accomplished through understanding the personal experiences of the marginalized individuals represented by that perspective (Smith, 2015; Sprague, 2005). Feminist standpoint theory, as modified by Harding (2004), was the framework grounding this study. Feminist standpoint theory gained prominence in the 1970s and 80s as a critical theory used to guide research regarding the relationship between knowledge production and practices of power (Harding, 2004). In the case of this study, the individuals who have been marginalized were women aspiring to the superintendency. Given women's history of social and cultural subordination in the

public, an understanding of marginality theoretically informs feminist standpoint theory, which highlights personal experience (Gardiner et al., 2000).

The feminist standpoint theory can account for differences in the experiences of men and women not otherwise automatically or consciously observed (Stovall et al., 2015). Feminist standpoint theory provides a lens through which differences in the identities and experiences of men and women are visible in society and in the workplace, facilitating identification and examination of possible causes and specific circumstances for the gender disproportionality, disparity, and inequities found in the superintendency (Pasque, 2013).

Feminist standpoint theory was an appropriate framework for this study, in which I explored the reasons why female K–12 principals and central office personnel attain superintendent certification yet have not yet applied for the superintendency. Answering the two research questions, which pertain to members of this population and their decisions to both obtain superintendent certification and not to pursue the role at this point of their careers, also depended upon feminist standpoint theory to explore women's perceptions and experiences. Finally, I drew upon feminist standpoint theory to craft the interview protocol, and I returned to this framework to analyze data and discuss findings.

The crux of standpoint theory is that marginalized populations—in this case, women—can contribute much to the understanding of the world put forth by dominant populations (Robinson, 2016). The foundation of feminist standpoint theory enabled me to focus on the experiences and perceptions of the marginalized population of female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained their superintendent

certification yet elected not yet to apply for the position. The study's two research questions aligned with feminist standpoint theory in that they allowed exploration of the eight participants' explanations for these decisions.

As a means to answer the research questions, the open-ended interview questions were also in line with feminist standpoint theory. To explore the topic under study, I developed 10 interview questions, which I posed to all eight participants. Following transcription of each interview, I used feminist standpoint theory to guide data interpretation, coding, identification of themes, and final analysis. The conceptual framework is further developed in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This study was completed using a qualitative case study design, with data gathered from interviews with eight K–12 female central office personnel and female school principals in an urban school district in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic study state. Researchers use qualitative methodology to explore the lived experiences of participants with a shared phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Whereas quantitative researchers seek to obtain statistics and other quantitative data to test findings, qualitative scholars are interested more in the how and why of individuals' perceptions (Yin, 2017). Qualitative research is descriptive, which was appropriate for the present study. Qualitative inquiry was best suited for this study, as it enabled the collection of detailed information about why K–12 female principals and central office personnel who have attained superintendent certification have chosen not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers.

The study design was a qualitative case study that included personnel from one school district. The case study design is appropriate for researchers to investigate an issue in a particular setting or context using one or more cases (Creswell, 2013). Case study researchers isolate their study within a bounded system with clear delimitations and criteria. Interviews are an appropriate method of data collection in the case study design. In the present study, data came from one-on-one, semistructured interviews with eight female principals ($n = 4$) and central office personnel ($n = 4$) who have attained superintendent certification but chosen not to apply for the position at this point in their careers. Upon completion of all interviews, I analyzed the resulting data relevant to answer the research questions for this study.

Definitions

The following definitions help to clarify the current study.

Central office personnel. The central office serves as the administrative center of a school district. Central office personnel are members of the senior leadership team who work in district leadership (Sampson et al., 2015).

Glass ceiling. The glass ceiling is an unseen yet impassible barrier that keeps minorities and women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements (Pruitt, 2015).

Superintendency/superintendent. The school superintendency is the complex and political office held by the senior educational leader in a K–12 school district (Wallace, 2015). The superintendent is the chief executive officer of a school district who plays a

major role in the launching and sustaining of initiatives for instructional improvement in the district (Guajardo, 2015).

Assumptions

Assumptions of a research study are aspects accepted as true by the researcher, although unproven. One assumption associated with this study was that participants honestly and openly responded to the interview questions.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study was the perceptions of K–12 female educators who hold superintendent licenses, with a sample of eight principals ($n = 4$) and central office personnel ($n = 4$) employed in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic state of the study. The scope is a clear definition of the extent of content that was covered in the study to reach logical conclusions and give conclusive and satisfactory answers to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016). Recruitment was bounded to the study state by selecting participants who have attained superintendent certification and who had not yet applied for the superintendency.

Delimitations are boundaries within the researcher's control (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016). To be eligible for the study, participants were required to identify as female, had been in their current role for at least 2 years at the time of the study, had obtained a superintendent license, and had decided not to apply for a superintendent role at this point in their careers.

Limitations

As in any study, limitations merit consideration (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor et al., 2016). The focus of this study, a single school district in a U.S. Mid-Atlantic state, was a limitation, as results may not be directly transferable outside the district. The sample size of eight participants was another limitation that further impacted generalizability. In addition, as all participants worked for the same school district, they may have had similar experiences or perceptions that would not be accurate or true in another district. The study may be limited by any biases the researcher may possess. However, every effort was made to eliminate researcher biases.

Significance

The job of superintendent involves addressing issues related to student achievement, politics, organizational change, state and federal mandates, school law, budget and finance, and the media (K. K. Robinson, 2014). Women who reach leadership positions in education experience both triumphs and tribulations during their tenure as superintendents (Cassidy, 2018; Noppe et al., 2013). It is important to study this phenomenon to gain a better understanding of the lack of parity to determine the steps necessary to increase opportunities for women who aspire to hold educational administration and superintendent roles. The positive social change as a result of this study may apply to current and future female school superintendents through actions by school districts, leadership programs, and policy decisions regarding hiring practices and advertising of positions.

Implications for positive social change affect many stakeholders. First, female K–12 principals and central office personnel may better understand the realities of the superintendent position and the obstacles they may face in aspiring to it. Such knowledge could inspire them to not only attain certification for the superintendency, but to apply for the position. School administrators and boards of directors may draw upon this study's findings in promotion decisions, perhaps by looking for the best candidate and not only at the male candidate and creating training opportunities for under-represented populations. If school leaders implement these findings, achieving better gender diversity in K–12 superintendent positions might extend positive social change to students in the district as well as members of the community overall.

Summary

The problem addressed by this study was the underrepresentation of female K–12 school superintendents in a U.S. Mid-Atlantic state. Although 75% of certified positions in U.S. K–12 education are held by women, only 24% of school superintendents are women. The qualitative case study approach allowed me to explore the phenomenon under study. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials yet have not yet applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers. Feminist standpoint theory served as the framework. In Chapter 1, I also presented the two guiding research questions, relevant definitions, as well as the assumptions, scope, delimitations, and limitations pertaining to the research. This study is significant in that uncovering female educators' perspectives and decisions regarding

application to the K–12 superintendency is one step toward increasing the opportunities for women in achieving such roles. Current and aspiring female superintendents will benefit from the findings of this study.

Women face many challenges in achieving work-life balance, especially with regard to highly demanding professions such as that of a K–12 superintendent (Blair, 2016; Coats, 2020; White, 2017; Wyland, 2016). Women encounter many barriers and challenges in aspiring to the superintendency, including gender bias, discrimination, favoritism, and a lack of professional networks and mentoring (Angel et al., 2013; Burkman & Lester, 2013). In addition, some of these barriers are self-imposed, as women may have negative self-perceptions and self-efficacy, as well as a concern for sacrificing their personal lives in favor of their professional lives.

Chapter 2 includes an overview of the literature search strategy, including sources consulted and keywords searched. Further exploration of the framework entails a discussion of key theorists and scholars, as well as its application to this study. Following, I thoroughly review and synthesize the existing research base and the framework to position this study in the body of research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The problem that underlies this study is the underrepresentation of female K–12 school superintendents in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic study state. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials but have not yet applied for the superintendent position. The population was female K–12 principals and central office personnel in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic study state. Although women hold 75% of certified K–12 positions in U.S. schools, less than 24% of U.S. school superintendents are female (Burkman & Lester, 2013; Superville, 2017). This disparity has been a topic of study since the 1970s (Fuller et al., 2018).

Employment parity in the field of education would be in alignment with society's basic notions of equality and fairness (Fuller et al., 2018). Not only do students notice when there is more equitable leadership, but families are appreciative as well, viewing women in superintendent roles as an example that women and minorities can achieve and succeed in upper-echelon educational leadership roles (Lexia, 2018). The presence of women in superintendent roles helps to alter the longstanding male-only image of a school superintendent (Lexia, 2018).

This chapter begins with a description of the literature search strategy, including databases accessed and search terms used. A discussion of the framework follows with more information on feminist standpoint theory, which underlies this study. Next, I provide an extensive review of literature related to the key variables and concepts associated with this study. Topics of interest include a history of the superintendency and

women in these roles, as well as challenges of the superintendency and those specific to women in educational leadership.

Literature Search Strategy

Conducting a thorough review of recent literature related to this topic was essential to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Searches of the Walden University Library centered on the following databases: EBSCO, ERIC, SAGE Journals, and Academic Search Premier. Key terms and combinations of terms searched in all databases and in Google Scholar were *superintendent*, *superintendency*, *women in leadership*, *superintendent challenges*, *underrepresentation of female superintendents*, *history of the superintendency*, *history of female superintendents*, *path to the superintendency*, *female leadership challenges*, *feminist theory*, *Marxist feminist framework*, *professional isolation*, *glass ceiling*, and *central office higher education personnel*. In reviewing search results, I gave priority to peer-reviewed scholarly journal articles published between 2016 and 2020.

Framework

Feminist standpoint theory served as the framework for this study. The theory is useful when researchers wish to explore the roles, expectations, and biases relevant to genders across a range of systems, including family, religious, and political (Wallace, 2015). Feminist standpoint theory allows an examination of women's lived experiences (Gardiner et al., 2000); the objective of this study is one such examination, using a sample of eight female K–12 principals ($n = 4$) and central office personnel ($n = 4$) who

have earned certification for the superintendency and opted not to pursue the position at this point in their careers.

As a critical theory, feminist standpoint theory emerged in the 1970s as a means of guiding research regarding women's knowledge, ability, and leadership (Harding, 2004; Hekman, 1997). Proponents of feminist standpoint theory called for equal rights and representation of women, with women serving as equal contributors in creating knowledge and policy (Sherman et al., 2008). Under the lens of feminist standpoint theory, scholars have also investigated the reasons for gender disparity in both society at large and the workplace in particular (Pasque, 2013). As it relates to the current study, feminist standpoint theory enabled understanding of the lack of representation of women in K–12 superintendent positions.

Many scholars have relied upon feminist standpoint theory to study women and K–12 superintendent positions. As identified by Ramazanoğlu and Holland (2002), "A feminist standpoint has to take account of diversity in women's experiences and the interconnecting power relations between women" (p. 66). K. Robinson (2016) conducted a qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of 20 women who had left K–12 superintendent positions in Virginia. In doing so, the researcher relied upon the concept of feminist standpoint theory to keep the participants and their experiences at the center of the study. In a study of pathways to the superintendency, Brookins (2018) explored the relationship between knowledge and power as understood by female assistant superintendents in accordance with feminist standpoint theory. Smith (2015) used feminist standpoint theory and feminist poststructuralist theory to explore the low

numbers of female superintendents in K–12 schools in Mississippi through interviews with 15 female superintendents during the 2014–2015 school year. Chief among Smith's findings was the impact of gender discrimination on not only the superintendents' professional roles, but their personal lives as well. In addition, Smith suggested that women may have contributed to the discrimination by denying the presence of any gender-related challenges. To mitigate the ongoing lack of representation of women among Mississippi K–12 superintendents in line with feminist standpoint theory, Smith recommended that both undergraduate and graduate educational leadership programs incorporate gender consciousness into the curriculum.

According to standpoint theory, the perspectives of dominant groups are insufficient to understand the world. Rather, outsiders and marginalized individuals contribute multiple meanings, all of which factor into humans' understanding (K. K. Robinson, 2014). The use of feminist standpoint theory allowed K. Robinson (2014) to maintain a focus on the study subjects: 20 women who had left the superintendency in Virginia. The researcher conducted a qualitative narrative study to understand the reasons why women left the position and the stories they told about their experiences. After analyzing interview data, K. Robinson identified four major themes as justification for why women departed their roles: (a) unrealistic expectations, (b) work-life imbalance and exhaustion, (c) stakeholder conflict, and (d) wanting to leave on their own terms. Finally, Brookins (2018) examined the obstacles and motivators of female assistant superintendents using the framework of feminist standpoint theory. In the qualitative study, Brookins conducted semistructured interviews with 12 female assistant

superintendents in a metropolitan area to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding their career paths. Similar to other researchers (e.g., Connell et al., 2015; Manfredi, 2017; Martin, 2017; Peterson, 2017; Sampson et al., 2015; Smith, 2015), Brookins identified gender bias, stereotypes, and social roles and expectations as barriers to women's career advancement. The female assistant superintendents related having to own their professional choices, as career advancement usually meant sacrifice at home. Common traits among all 12 participants were the presence of self-motivation and leadership qualities (Brookins, 2018).

Literature Review Related to Key Variables and Concepts

A search of the literature returned a number of peer-reviewed studies, articles, and books relevant to the current study. These include the history of the superintendency and women in such positions, as well as obstacles and challenges faced by women aspiring to superintendent positions. The following literature review includes discussions of these topics informed by prior research.

Research on the Superintendency

Establishment of the school superintendent position came from a need for accountability in the spending of state-issued funds for education. Initially, the superintendency was a supervisory position for overseeing fiscal matters; however, the role has continued to change and expand to include multiple other personnel and instructional leadership responsibilities (K. K. Robinson, 2014). Current research about the superintendency relates to performance, challenges and barriers, gender bias and stereotypes, mentoring, inadequate preparation, and longevity (Blair, 2016; Brookins,

2018; Coccia, 2019; Connell et al., 2015; Hajek & Ahmad, 2017; Morillo, 2017; Superville, 2017; White, 2017). The basis for this research is primarily the experiences of men in the role of superintendent.

The modern-day school superintendent carries out a majority of the roles and duties of the office in a very public manner (Polka & Letchka, 2018). This presence is becoming increasingly more acute in communities across the United States, as school leaders focus on implementing the key accountability provisions of state and federal legislative acts reforming education (Brandt, 2015). There is now a demand for effective and inspired leadership (Polka & Letchka, 2018). With the increasing need for knowledgeable, skilled, and responsible citizens, the pressure on schools intensifies. Making sure every child is successful requires everyone's best effort (Marzano et al., 2005).

Role of the Superintendent

Copeland (2013) found that superintendents serve many roles within their practice, such as manager, planner, listener, communicator, and community liaison. Of these roles, the communicator appeared to be the most vital (Copeland, 2013; Henry et al., 2006). Successful superintendents can influence staff and student behavior and promote school reform through effective communication (Kowalski, 1995). Despite the potential for positive impact, the role of superintendent, although prestigious, comes with many challenges.

In an attempt to better understand the role and effectiveness of the superintendent, Devono and Price (2012) studied how principals and teachers perceived their leaders. The

researchers found a superintendent must fulfill multiple roles to successfully bring about change while relying on district stakeholders to effectively improve the learning environment and education within the classroom (Devono & Price, 2012). Superintendents cannot merely develop one model that works well in all contexts, nor can they work in isolation. Halevy et al. (2011) found that a visionary superintendent attracts more followers, especially in the midst of change.

School superintendents hold a broad set of administrative and supervisory responsibilities that vary based on the size of the school district. Hiring and firing of senior staff, addressing teacher and staff disciplinary matters, and managing the budget are their primary administrative responsibilities (Meador, 2014). A superintendent must partner with the district's board of education, maintaining an open, two-way line of communication, attending board meetings, and making recommendations regarding the district's day-to-day operations (Meador, 2014). In most districts, superintendents are also responsible for overseeing the implementation and enforcement of all state and federal statutes and programs relating to schools (Browne, n.d.; Meador, 2014).

Superintendent Leadership Traits

Effective leaders must have a clear sense of purpose, use strategies to mobilize many people to solve problems, be accountable in measured and debatable indicators of success, and undergo assessment of their success in engaging employees' intrinsic commitment (Cole, 2018; Fullan, 2017; McCaffery, 2018; Nash, 2018). As district leaders, superintendents incorporate these traits into their daily practice (Davis & Maldonado, 2015; Martin & O'Meara, 2017; Morillo, 2017; Sperandio & Devdas, 2015).

A school superintendent is, in effect, the chief executive officer of a school district (Guajardo, 2015), holding general management responsibilities, including hiring senior staff (Browne, n.d.). Superintendents typically oversee education standards and student achievement, plan budgets and allocate resources, and serve as the primary point of contact for interactions with government agencies (Meador, 2014).

Women in the Superintendency

Glass (2012) identified a typical pathway for women to the superintendency, from teacher to principal, to central office position, and then to superintendent. Although teachers, the majority of whom are women, may rely on research and past practice to improve their craft, few published individual accounts, biographies, histories, case studies, or ethnographies about female superintendents are available (Brunner, 2015). The four characteristics of effective teachers as identified by Cruickshank and Haefele (2014) are competent, reflective, respectful, and analytical. However, as female teachers move up the administrative ranks to superintendent, the qualities that define them as effective are unclear due to the lack of research.

Using a qualitative narrative design, Morillo (2017) administered semistructured interviews to a sample of eight female superintendents in New Jersey to learn about the women's lived experiences in their positions and career progression. Specifically, the researcher explored how gender and social norms intersected with participants' career development into leaders. Morillo also wanted to examine barriers to success as well as strategies to mitigate those challenges. Morillo identified three elements necessary for

women to develop their professional and personal leadership skills: motivation, job opportunities, and mentoring.

In the K–12 setting, Blair (2016) conducted a qualitative narrative study to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of three female urban middle school (Grades 6–8) administrators: a principal, vice principal, and business administrator. Using a range of positions, the researcher sought to obtain perspectives of women with different levels of experience within the same field. Upon analysis of collected data, Blair identified five themes: (a) male colleagues perpetuated gender dominance; (b) women often doubted themselves; (c) having a mentor, or being a mentor, was crucial; (d) the women had to maintain their determination and drive; and (e) women faced an ongoing struggle regarding work-life balance. Blair did not, however, identify whether any of these women held superintendent certification.

History of Women in the Superintendency

From the colonial period through the mid-19th century, schoolteachers and leaders were primarily men (Brunner & Grogan, 2017). By the 1850s, female teachers were becoming more prevalent; however, local and state officials held school administration roles only for men (Blount, 2013). The first female superintendents appeared in the early 1900s, elected to the positions to replace dishonest men (Funk, 2014). Appointment to the superintendency was by election, and soon women held almost 28% of the positions nationwide (Funk, 2014). The perception of women in this role was that they were honest, credible, and successful (Brunner & Grogan, 2017). In an attempt to regain control, however, male superintendent groups began a national effort to

have school positions appointed and not elected (Blount, 2013). These groups were successful in their quest and, because it was men who were appointing superintendents, the percentage of female superintendents rapidly declined (Funk, 2014).

Appointment of the first woman to hold a superintendent position did not occur until after the U.S. Civil War, when men leaving to fight in the war created multiple teaching vacancies that women ultimately filled. Sudlow, an experienced teacher, attained the position of principal and then became the first women school district superintendent in 1874 (Iowa Pathways, 2012). Her appointment led to more women seeking and obtaining leadership positions in education. However, despite increased numbers of women from culturally diverse backgrounds achieving certifications in educational administration and superintendent positions, women are still underrepresented in the role of school superintendent (Kowalski et al., 2011).

Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974 proposed equal opportunities for women in educational administration (Brunner & Grogan, 2017), women still face an array of job-embedded challenges that keep them from attaining the roles. Funk (2014) studied the characteristics of a small group of successful female superintendents and found eight recurring themes, as follows: being a visionary, acting professionally, being creative, communicating effectively, motivating others, being committed to their job and the students, and possessing the stamina to sustain their role.

Women's Success in the Superintendency

Dobie and Hummel (2016) studied women who had achieved the position of superintendent and what they believed led them to a successful career. The following five categories arose from their study: (a) awareness of a need for spirituality, (b) dependence on a trustworthy person, (c) cognizance of leadership styles and power, (d) an inclination to use metacognition, and (e) silence caused by denial or repression (Dobie & Hummel, 2016). Folta et al. (2012) examined the skills of women leaders who have successfully created change. They found that successful leaders favored a transformational style of leadership consistent with the female gender role, providing a vision and inspiring others. Contrary to their male counterparts, women often delegate or lean toward facilitative leadership (Kelsey et al., 2014). Other researchers found mentors to be a tool for overcoming barriers and obtaining advice for career advancement (Garn & Brown, 2018; Hajek & Ahmad, 2017; Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2015; Morillo, 2017).

Because teaching is a female-dominated field and the superintendency is a male-dominated position, research regarding women in the role of superintendent is essential. Brunner (1998) agreed that women can succeed in the superintendency and serve as role models for other women aspiring to the role. Because of the lack of women who currently hold superintendent positions, there is a lack of role models, mentors, and networks for women (Chisholm-Burns et al., 2017; Hoyt & Murphy, 2016; White, 2017), which may be one reason they do not aspire to be superintendents.

Challenges, Barriers, and Isolation

School leaders face an array of challenges, from raising student achievement to managing facilities with limited funding, along with barriers as a result of a nontraditional career path and prevailing gender bias in the field. Superintendents are leaders who will fulfill the organization's strategic requirements as well as meet the needs of all employees. Since the 1950s, there has been a significant decline in the average tenure of a superintendent, from over 20 years to about 5 years (Carter & Cunningham, 1997). Longer superintendent tenures, however, have a more positive effect on student achievement (Pascopella, 2011). Succession to the top leadership positions in an organization can be isolating, in that it separates leaders and leaves them without peers (Rokach, 2014; Sehorn, 2020). In isolation, leaders often have no one to tend to their needs (Rokach, 2014).

Challenges of the Superintendency

Becoming a new superintendent has both opportunities and challenges. Surrounded by staff, courted by the media, and highly visible in the community, new superintendents may still feel abandoned and isolated (Farrell, 2013). Being a superintendent means balancing intense and often competing pressures. In 2011, the Elementary & Secondary Education Act waiver replaced No Child Left Behind, requiring school districts to either show an increased level of growth within all subgroups or face the possibility of financial sanctions (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). In the current educational climate, chief administrators must revamp controversial teacher evaluation systems and implement extensive curriculum changes to adhere to standards (Farrell,

2013). The vast challenges associated with the superintendency multiply for individuals in the minority, including women.

For at least 4 decades, researchers have been interested in determining what challenges lead superintendents to leave their school districts (Iannaccone & Lutz, 1970). On the whole, however, superintendent turnover lacks a well-developed research base (Natkin et al., 2012). In an ever-changing and complex academic environment, researchers have noted the need for studies of superintendent turnover with recent data that allow consideration of the roles and relationships of superintendents and school boards (Fusarelli, 2005; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2018). To overcome the many challenges associated with the superintendency, effective leadership is essential.

Another common challenge superintendents describe when discussing their work is that there is too much to do, with new mandates and policies contributing to already-overloaded job roles (Glass et al., 2015). Superintendents are interested in curriculum and instruction and understand their importance; however, the daily realities of their jobs subvert even the most committed professionals (Bredeson & Kose, 2017). According to Thomas (2014), the predominant issues superintendents face are instability, school board relations, and the politics of public school governance. In addition, superintendents receive further responsibilities through both state and federal mandates (Sharp & Walter, 1997). Once considered the instructional leader and teacher of teachers, the role of superintendent has shifted to politics and collaboration focused on educational excellence (Thomas, 2014).

More recently, federal accountability measures have intensified demands for superintendents to attend to assessment and student learning outcomes in their districts (Brandt, 2015; Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015). Performance-based accountability is the direct measurement of student performance, disaggregated by school and by type of student (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). The use of those data to make judgments about how well schools perform has created another challenge for superintendents, directly altering how school leaders manage their school systems (Choy, 2013).

A result of the challenges faced by superintendents is turnover. In the early 1990s, the average superintendent tenure was 2.5 years in large urban districts (Rist, 1990). Between 1970 and 2015, Björk (2015) found that the mean tenure of superintendents ranged from 5.6 to just under 7 years. Similarly, Glass and Franceschini (2017) measured turnover rates at an average of 6 years. Examining the figures for 2016, Glass and Franceschini found the mean tenure was 5.5 years, with 42.2% of superintendents staying for 3 years or fewer. Important to note, however, is that the majority of studies concerning the impact of administrative turnover on student achievement also included school administrators (Baker & Cooper, 2005; Bista & Glassman, 1998; Hallinger & Heck, 1997).

Barriers to the Superintendency

Following an extensive literature review, Connell et al. (2015) identified a number of barriers women face in their pursuit of achieving the school superintendency. In general, they found women often lacked career planning services, mentoring relationships, proper preparation, and the support of selection committees. Brookins

(2018) focused on the scarcity of assistant superintendents in a qualitative exploration using a framework of feminist standpoint theory. In the study, 12 female assistant superintendents participated in semistructured interviews to relate their career paths. From the interviews, Brookins identified common barriers, such as gender bias and stereotypes, societal roles, gender expectations, and cultural norms. Positive traits displayed by the women were clear leadership qualities, strong motivation, and positive self-perception (Brookins, 2018).

Although more women are entering senior-level leadership, research on the actual experiences, challenges, and barriers individuals encounter while serving as district leaders almost universally involves men. There is also limited knowledge from women leaders on the factors associated with their decision to enter the superintendency, as well as the challenges and barriers women encounter while serving in a senior leadership position (Pascopella, 2011). A primary barrier is the field's prevailing gender bias, forcing women to employ strategies to overcome inequity. Insight into this experience will be beneficial to women who aspire to any senior-level leadership position (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2015).

Amid the challenges faced by all superintendents, female superintendents encounter additional barriers. As of 2012, just 23% of all school superintendents were women, a number growing at only 0.7% annually (Wallace, 2015). As suggested by Shakeshaft (1989), the U.S. system of public education is a direct reflection of society as a whole, pointing to a great deal of stratification among women in education. Robinson (2018) found that women leave the superintendency because they expected to make an

instructional impact and discovered the primary purpose of the position was otherwise. The pressure of the school board attempting to micromanage female superintendents was also a key factor in their departure (Brunner & Grogan, 2017).

Women reported feeling they had to excel in all areas of their lives when serving as superintendent, in essence becoming a "superwoman" (K. K. Robinson, 2014, 2018). Not only is it important to excel in their professional role, but women put additional pressure on themselves to feel fulfilled in their home and personal life (K. K. Robinson, 2018). Although the traditional expectations of women as the primary caregiver have weakened, Dana and Bourisaw (2016) noted that such expectations have not entirely subsided. Loder (2005) found that a woman's stress in education leadership positions comes from her struggle of having to be an instructional leader, wife, mother, and caretaker, among other roles.

In an attempt to prove themselves as a superintendent, women often take on more than the average workload associated with the position (Robinson, 2018). Self-imposed expectations arise from a perceived need to be an expert in all areas, especially those seen as weaknesses for women, such as the budget and school operations (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Women have reported that it is essential for them to be perfect in such a competitive environment (Dana & Bourisaw, 2016). However, women are leaving the superintendency prematurely due to gender disparity (Brunner & Grogan, 2017). Capable women are disadvantaged as a result of various combinations of social and cultural isolation (Brunner & Grogan, 2017). Women are marginalized by their gender because so few of them hold superintendent roles (Brunner & Grogan, 2017; Funk, 2014). Also,

female superintendents have to work harder at networking and gaining acceptance from their predominantly male peers (Brunner & Grogan, 2017).

Similar to studies of women choosing not to pursue the superintendency, Steyn (2015) explored the reasons teachers initially aspired to be school principals, yet ultimately chose not to pursue the position. To investigate these abandoned aspirations, Steyn conducted a qualitative case study of 15 teachers, drawing upon a feminist theoretical foundation. Through individual interviews, the researcher explored participants' ideas, perceptions, and experiences related to the phenomenon. Three themes emerged as dissuading teachers from pursuing the principalship, as follows: (a) the experiences of other women in similar roles; (b) obstacles faced by other female principals, both intrinsic and extrinsic; and (c) a lack of training and support to prepare them for such a role (Steyn, 2015).

Bias and Inequality

Brunner (2015) interviewed 12 female superintendents to determine if patterns in and discussion about their superintendency experiences contained evidence of inequality. In general, the women in the study had difficulty speaking about the power that came with being a superintendent. Participants were unclear as to why they were uncomfortable talking about power, which they admitted was not a word in their regular vocabulary. Wolf (1994) contended that women struggle in speaking about power because they feel it is not culturally acceptable. Brunner (2015) also found that female superintendents experienced an unnatural silence in various ways. For example, when female superintendents spoke, board members would not give them the attention they

deserved. Female superintendents also recalled board members not paying attention when they gave a presentation, something they suspected would not happen with male superintendents. Lastly, female superintendents reported being either ignored or interrupted often at meetings with colleagues in a male-dominated room (Brunner, 2015).

Dobie and Hummel (2016) found that educational leaders are deeply and subconsciously involved in perpetuating a system designed to keep women out of top leadership positions. The U.S. public school superintendency continues to be the most gender-stratified executive position in the country, with men 40 times more likely than women to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in schools (Skrla et al., 2015). As noted by Brunner (2015), beliefs and actions exhibited by male superintendents were unnatural for women because of the gender-specific expectations inherent in U.S. culture. Women reported adverse experiences resulting from a social norm that having a female in the role of superintendent is unnatural, owing to cultural beliefs about whether a particular job is acceptable for a woman. Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2015) contended that, regardless of the growth women experience, they must learn to function in a male-dominated leadership culture where it is difficult for women to break through the glass ceiling.

In the field of education, parity has not yet occurred in regard to the hiring and representation of women in positions such as principal, assistant principal, and superintendent (Kerr et al., 2018). Women continue to be overrepresented in the classroom yet lag in numbers in administrative roles. In an attempt to achieve equity in the education field, Guy and McCandless (2012) suggested prioritizing studies on gender-

based distribution of high-level public education positions. However, Kerr et al. (2018) noted that any improvements to the current numbers would be incremental.

According to Nadler and Stockdale (2012), women are significantly disadvantaged and mistreated in the workplace compared to their male counterparts. Top positions—and the benefits that accompany those top positions—often bypass women and go to men (Nadler & Stockdale, 2012). Explicit gender bias favoring men leads to hiring, promotion, and career opportunities not available to women (Sarsons, 2017). Nadler and Stockdale determined that, when applying for a higher-level position, men appear competent and likable, whereas women seem merely competent. For this change to surface, however, there needs to be more attention directed toward measuring the representation of women in administrative roles. Furthermore, researchers must identify the factors that influence this gender-based inequity. However, as shown in the literature review, much of the research regarding administrative roles comes from the perspectives of men.

While serving in the role of superintendent, women encounter challenges solely based on gender bias and stereotypes. Wallace (2015) found board member perceptions of women were that women were not capable managers and were unqualified to handle budgets and finance. Women affirmed the "good old boy" network still existed in the superintendency (Brunner, 2015; Hajek & Ahmad, 2017; Wallace, 2015). Participants in Wallace's (2015) study reported that board members needed to have experience with a woman superintendent, giving her a chance to prove her ability, before a change in attitude would occur.

Isolation in the Superintendency

The greatest challenge some superintendents face is professional isolation due to administrative demands, political challenges, and operational duties, which often remove them from daily interaction with teachers and students (Hatch & Roegman, 2012; Jazzar & Kimball, 2014). Many social theorists have studied and analyzed the concepts of isolation and loneliness. Rook (1984) saw isolation as an enduring condition of emotional distress taking place when a person feels estranged from, misunderstood by, or rejected by others. Zavaleta et al. (2014) defined isolation as the deprivation of social connectedness. Mercer (1996) viewed isolation as self-induced, purporting that leaders isolate themselves from colleagues to avoid implications for their authority if they were to be emotionally close with colleagues. Guptill (2013) identified isolation as emerging from the bureaucratic structure of educational institutions, resulting in stress and seclusion.

Upon entering the field of education as a teacher, women in most cases find many peers with whom to build social and emotional bonds. Moving up the ranks into leadership positions leads to less peer interaction. Because women are underrepresented in the superintendency, they may struggle to build relationships with their new peers. Furthermore, women may be outcast from male cliques as a result of gender differences (Shakeshaft, 1989). When coupled with the feelings of isolation inherently in the superintendency, women often experience extensive loneliness.

The culture of isolation is inherent in education, where the hierarchy lends itself to keeping members departmentalized and away from one another (Guptill, 2013).

Superintendents are unable to share their triumphs and tribulations with like-minded peers, as they hold the only position at that level. Mercer (1996) contended that feelings of isolation and loneliness are elements of top leadership positions in which individuals have sole responsibility for some or all elements of an organization. Although the image of the isolated leader has become well known, reasons for the isolation remain overlooked (Cook et al., 2015). The feeling of isolation is a problem for anyone holding a senior management position in which the responsibility of the organization falls solely upon that individual (Mercer, 1996). This notion of isolation in a top management position correlates with the role of school superintendent.

The transition into the superintendency is quite abrupt for many individuals. Even when new superintendents learn about the danger of isolation, the reality of loneliness becomes clear only after stepping into the role. The further individuals advance in education administration, the more susceptible they become to scrutiny and criticism. Adverse actions affecting superintendents include failed proposals, terminated contracts, and poor budget planning (Jazzar & Kimball, 2014). In interviewing school leaders, Cook et al. (2015) found the following four common themes: (a) education is not a collaborative industry, (b) school districts do not allocate enough time for collaboration, (c) social media can further isolate leaders, and (d) there is no physical space to connect with other leaders experiencing similar isolation. Bauer and Silver (2018) administered a survey to 203 U.S. new school principals to measure four factors related to their work: isolation, self-efficacy, job satisfaction, and burnout. Findings showed isolation to be a predictor of the three measured variables and the greatest determinant of principals'

intention to leave their employment. These findings supplemented those of a previous study (Stephenson & Bauer, 2010) that showed isolation as a predictor of quality of work life.

Because of women's domination of lower roles in the field of U.S. education, they presumably are entrenched with feelings of isolation upon advancing in an organization (Shakeshaft, 1989), posing another challenge to success. Even though female superintendents spend more time with their staff and students than do their male counterparts, women experience a great deal of loneliness as the leader of the school (Shakeshaft, 1989). Furthermore, female superintendents reported that they are not included in all-male activities and do not experience comradeship as much as men, two more factors leading to social isolation (Shakeshaft, 1989).

Social isolation framework can assist with exploring the challenge of isolation and how it affects female superintendents. The alienation of being the sole superintendent—the chief school officer—lends itself to the feeling of isolation. Being a female superintendent, a minority in the field, is socially synonymous with isolation. The quality and quantity of interactions female superintendents have with others merit further study, analysis, and discussion. According to Forrest (2017), superintendents' success is based on how well they build relationships with others, such as staff, school board members, and the community. The absence of these relationships creates isolation, which can lead to poor job performance, depression, and a lack of success (Hatch & Roegman, 2012).

In an attempt to overcome the inequity that prevails in the role of superintendent, many women use silence as a coping mechanism. Choosing silence can further exacerbate a woman's feelings of isolation in an already isolating role. Succession to the top leadership position in an organization is necessarily isolating, leaving women without peers (Rokach, 2014). The expectation is that a leader will provide support to others; however, support is not always available. Silence and isolation may lead to anxiety and affect the leader's overall performance (Brunner, 2015; Rokach, 2014)

Summary and Conclusions

Although women hold the majority of teaching and office administrative positions in education, they are in the minority with regard to school superintendent roles (Superville, 2017). According to gender stereotypes, women are unselfish, friendly, and emotional (Steffens et al., 2019); men, in comparison, are assertive, independent, and masterful (Wilson, 2015). As a result, women may appear less able to assume leadership roles than do men. Women who achieve the superintendency often struggle with the conflicting demands of professional and personal life, feeling they must perform each role to perfection (Robinson, 2018).

The majority of research on K–12 superintendent positions has been with men. This disparity is in part because women did not hold such roles until the early 1900s (Funk, 2014), and even then only in small numbers. With only 24% of U.S. superintendents being female (Superville, 2017), there is a need to investigate this population's perceptions of challenges, barriers, and decisions for advancement.

Challenges of the superintendency are not unique to women. Superintendents face an array of challenges, including organizational strategy, student achievement, staff hiring and development, and governmental policy adherence (Meador, 2014; Rokach, 2014). New superintendents, in particular, can feel isolated and abandoned, with a lack of peer support (Farrell, 2013). However, the challenges specific to female superintendents are greater (Connell et al., 2015; Martin, 2017; Martin & O'Meara, 2017; Steyn, 2015). Therefore, additional study is imperative to understand the role responsibilities and struggles of female superintendents, as well as the reason some women achieve certification but choose not to pursue the superintendency.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the qualitative methodology selected for this study, as well as a rationale for the case study design. The role of the researcher appears, followed by a thorough description of the methodology, including participant selection, justification for a sample size of eight female K–12 administrators, instrumentation by way of a researcher-created interview protocol, and data collection and analysis. Following an overview of ethical procedures, Chapter 3 concludes with a look toward Chapter 4.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The problem that underlies this study is the underrepresentation of female K–12 school superintendents in a U.S. Mid-Atlantic state. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials but have not yet applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers. Chapter 3 includes a discussion of and rationale for the qualitative case study research design as well as an overview of the role of the researcher. A description of the methodology and process follows, including criteria for participant selection, sampling strategy, participant recruitment procedures, and instrumentation. Collection of data occurred through semistructured, one-on-one interviews with the eight participants, with subsequent qualitative data analysis through three cycles of coding: in vivo coding, pattern coding, and thematic analysis. A discussion of trustworthiness follows, with specific attention paid to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. I describe how I designed my study to be ethical, including supplying participants with an informed consent form detailing the study purpose and process and participant protection.

Research Design and Rationale

Two research questions guided this study.

RQ1: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain why they attained the certification?

RQ2: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain what factors influenced their decisions to not yet to apply for the superintendency?

The phenomenon of study was why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials and have not yet applied for the superintendent position. The framework was feminist standpoint theory as explained by Sprague (2005) and Smith (2015), which is appropriate for study members of a marginalized group and their career decisions. The concept behind feminist standpoint theory is that women, as marginalized individuals, provide a better perspective from which to study a phenomenon due to their personal experiences with and understanding of the world (Smith, 2015; Sprague, 2005).

Within qualitative methodology, five designs merit consideration: narrative, ethnography, phenomenology, grounded theory, and case study (Creswell, 2013). Narrative researchers are more interested in storytelling than in exploring lived experiences (Yin, 2017). Because I reported participants' perspectives and decisions and did not tell their stories, I did not use a narrative design. Using ethnography, scholars seek to uncover truths about members of a chosen culture (Yin, 2017). I did not attempt to explore the culture of female K–12 principals and central office personnel, but rather the reasons behind the decisions they have made, thus rendering ethnography inappropriate. With grounded theory, researchers seek to collect and analyze data to create a new theory (Creswell, 2013). I relied upon the existing feminist standpoint theory and drew themes from data; as such, I rejected the grounded theory design.

Phenomenology was also inappropriate for this study. Despite being a design used for investigating individuals' lived experiences of a specific phenomenon, phenomenology is not ideal when a researcher wishes to explore the *how* and *why* of a topic (Creswell, 2013), as I did in this study.

I used a qualitative case study design to explore the phenomenon and answer the research questions. By using a case study design, a researcher can investigate participants in a single setting (Creswell, 2013). Yin (2017) described a case study as an exploration of a bounded system, such as individuals separately or in a group, to understand a situation deeply. A case study allows for the understanding of complex social experiences, such as small group interactions and organizational procedures, within a real-world context (Yin, 2017). The qualitative case study design was an appropriate means to learn why female K–12 principals and central office personnel have attained the superintendent certification and decided to not yet apply for the superintendent position.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher in this study, my role was to plan the qualitative case study of eight participants (four principals and four central office personnel) and subsequently conduct the interviews, collect and analyze data, identify themes, and discuss the results. In a qualitative study, the researcher is often the sole instrument of data collection (Leedy & Ormrod, 2013). Upon selecting participants and scheduling interviews, I served as the data collector; I asked questions and recorded responses with an audio recorder supplemented by handwritten notes. I analyzed the collected data through coding and

thematic analysis, and then discussed the results in accordance with the research literature and the framework.

As a current elementary school principal, I work closely with others in the school district, eight of whom were participants in this research study. Despite this familiarity, I hold no supervisory or power relationships over the participants. On a daily basis, participants view me as a district employee; in this study, they saw me only as the researcher. Although I was interested in and open to the findings, the fact that I am a female comes with necessary biases. I believe that women applicants for leadership positions face outdated attitudes toward their gender, a fact that may play a role in hampering their career advancement. Another bias is my belief that women can be great leaders. With the aid of bracketing and reflexivity, I endeavored to remain open-minded during data collection and analysis, allowing each participant to reveal her considerations and decisions without imposing any of my personal biases.

Bracketing is a means for researchers to acknowledge their personal beliefs and prejudices, and then set those beliefs aside so as not to influence data collection or analysis (Tufford & Newman, 2012). I used journaling as a means of bracketing, recording my opinions and expectations so as to carefully examine and then reject them. Similarly, reflexivity entails ongoing reflection over the duration of the study, critically examining processes, data collection and analysis, and findings (Fusch et al., 2018). Reflexivity, too, was part of my journaling exercise throughout the study. In remaining objective, a researcher achieves greater depth and breadth of understanding of the phenomenon under study (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Methodology

A qualitative single case study is the most appropriate approach when a researcher seeks to explore a current phenomenon in a real-life context (Yazan, 2015). According to Yazan (2015), a case is one or more individuals within a bounded system, which in this study was a sample of female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification yet decided not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers. Case study results allow a researcher to explain the situation or phenomenon's background, current state, actions taken, and reasons for the actions (Yazan, 2015).

Participant Selection

Participants selection for this study came from the population of 36 female K–12 principals and central office personnel in the school district. All participants hold a leadership position within the district and served as a K–12 principal or central office personnel at the time of the study. The number of participants interviewed for this study was eight, including four principals and four central office personnel.

Researchers who have conducted similar studies regarding principal preparation and program development used an average sample size of 12 (Anderson, 2017; Hackmann & Malin, 2016). Small sample sizes in qualitative case studies are typical due to the focused and in-depth nature of case study design (Schoch, 2016). In addition, smaller sample sizes are appropriate given the flexibility of case study designs to allow the researcher to delve deeply into the phenomenon, or case.

I used purposive sampling to select the eight female educators who participated in this study. According to Lewis (2015), purposive sampling is appropriate when a researcher seeks to recruit participants with the specific characteristics needed to answer the research questions. I sent a personal e-mail to the identified persons, indicating the purpose of the study, criteria for participation, confidentiality and participant protections, and a request to take part in the study. To qualify, participants must have met the following criteria: (a) identify as a female, (b) hold a superintendent license from the State Department of Education, (c) serve as a K–12 principal or central office personnel at the time of the study in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic state school district of study, and (d) not have applied for a superintendent position.

Unlike quantitative research, there are no required sample sizes for qualitative studies (Yin, 2017). Considerations when sampling include the study purpose and research questions (Yin, 2017). Estimates for case study research range from a sample size of three to 16 (Yin, 2017); however, some researchers have defended the use of just one participant in a single case study (O. C. Robinson, 2014). Since the present research was a qualitative case study with data collection through semistructured interviews, a sample size of eight participants was sufficient.

Sampling comprised the following steps:

1. I gained access to participants by securing permission for my research from the district superintendent. Obtaining access entailed contacting the district superintendent to explain the purpose of the study, the population of study, the

research process, and the possible risks and benefits to both participants and the district overall.

2. Upon district approval, I sent a personal invitation to participate to all 34 principals and central office personnel, providing a brief background of the study and posing three qualifying questions. I also included the informed consent document in the e-mail to provide detailed information for each individual to review.
3. After 7 days elapsed, I sent another invitation to those who had not yet responded, requesting a response and thanking them for their consideration.
4. Had I received more responses than necessary to fulfill the purpose of this study, I would have selected the first eight qualifying responses. If I had not yet received eight responses, I would wait 7 days and send another invitation to invitees who had not yet responded.
5. At the close of participant selection, I sent all 34 qualifying women a thank you letter for their consideration of my invitation.
6. Upon selection of the eight women who would take part in the study, I e-mailed each participant a letter of informed consent that included interview procedures, the voluntary nature of the study, the risks and benefits of being in the study, and participant privacy.
7. After I received the signed consent forms, I again contacted each participant by e-mail to discuss their participation in the study and schedule a date, time, and location for an interview. Since an in-person interview was not feasible, I

instead scheduled a remote interview via Zoom, Google Hangouts, or telephone, according to the participant's preference. I also reminded participants that I would be audio-recording all interviews.

Instrumentation

As this was a qualitative study comprising semistructured interviews, the data collection instrument was a researcher-developed interview protocol (see Appendix A) that I developed. I created 11 questions designed to elicit responses sufficient to answer the research questions. I asked three principals who had completed their doctoral degrees to review these questions and provide feedback about how the protocol questions aligned with the research questions. These principals offered suggestions and helped to revise the wording of the interview questions. These researchers also suggested that I ask some probing questions for maximum data return. After implementing their changes and adding one suggested question and probing questions, I returned to the researchers for another review. All reviewers were satisfied that the interview questions would enable me to obtain the necessary information from participants (see Appendix A).

I asked the same 11 questions of all participants to ensure consistent application of the protocol. The open-ended nature of the questions left room for me to pose any follow-up queries as necessary.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Upon receiving IRB and district approvals, I selected eight of the 34 women from the population of female K–12 principals and central office personnel who had attained their superintendent certification and decided not to apply for the superintendency at this

point in their careers. From my Walden University e-mail account, I sent via e-mail a recruitment letter to each woman, providing a brief background of the study and posing three qualifying questions:

1. What is your current role in the district?
2. Do you have a current superintendent license?
3. Have you ever applied for the superintendency?

I included my telephone number in case the women had questions or needed clarification. After they expressed interest and I confirmed their qualification to participate, I provided each individual with an informed consent form that described in detail the purpose and nature of the study, methods of data collection and storage, procedures, participants' rights, and assurance of confidentiality. When we met for the interview, I again presented the informed consent form and reviewed it in person with each participant to ensure a complete understanding of the process. I stressed the steps I would take to ensure her privacy, her right to refuse to answer any question with which she felt uncomfortable, the voluntary nature of her participation, and the ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Each individual affirmed her commitment to participate by signing two informed consent forms, with each of us retaining a copy.

Interviews were planned to take place outside of work hours in a private room at a local public library, by telephone from my home, or by means of a virtual meeting platform. Scheduling was in accordance with participants' availability and preferences. Each semistructured interview lasted 45 to 60 minutes. I obtained each participant's

agreement to audio record each interview to ensure accurate capture of the discussion. In addition, I used note-taking to document any nonverbal observations not captured by the audio recorder. After completion of the interview, I asked if there were additional questions or comments, thanked the participant for her time, and encouraged her to contact me if she had questions later. I also reminded each participant that she would receive a copy of the transcribed interview to confirm its accuracy, a process known as transcript checking.

Following each interview, I uploaded the audio file to Rev.com, a web-based transcription company that guarantees confidentiality. Upon receipt of the transcripts, I read through each one while playing the audio to ensure accuracy and to absorb the material, after which I solicited participant review to confirm the accuracy of the transcript. On subsequent reads, I highlighted words, phrases, and themes common among participants' words, a process known as coding. I used qualitative analysis software NVivo to help with coding and themes. When I was sure I coded thoroughly and accurately, I categorized the codes into related code sets from which I developed a set of themes that became the findings of the study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves examining participants' words and experiences rather than measuring a set of numerical data (Miles et al., 2014). According to Creswell (2012), data analysis entails "preparing and organizing the data, exploring and coding the data, describing findings and forming themes, representing and reporting

findings, interpreting the meaning of the findings, and validating the accuracy of the findings" (p. 236).

Organizing and Managing the Data

Organizing and managing study data allows a researcher to make sense of the data and identify patterns and themes (Creswell, 2013). I transcribed the individual interview audio recordings into a Microsoft Word document within 4 days of each interview. After coding the transcripts, I input codes into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, giving each code its own worksheet. I added participant quotes to each page according to the relevant code, which allowed for easy data organization and management. I then created a separate Microsoft Excel file with codes and quotes entered into two worksheets, one for each research question:

RQ1: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain why they attained the certification?

RQ2: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain what factors influenced their decisions not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers?

Data Coding

The process of coding entails "assigning meaning to data" (Ravich & Carl, 2016, p. 248). Researchers usually conduct two or more rounds of coding to ensure the accuracy of their interpretations (Saldaña, 2015). First-cycle coding is a means to take note of words or phrases in participant responses; second-cycle coding allows a

researcher to organize numerous initial codes and conduct analysis across participants (Saldaña, 2015). I conducted both first- and second-cycle coding.

First-Cycle Coding

During the first cycle, I began coding data with the first-cycle technique of preliminary coding. Based on my findings from the literature review, I developed a set of preliminary codes (Appendix B). These codes were useful as I conducted preliminary coding of the interview transcripts.

Second-Cycle Coding

During the second cycle of coding, I open coded the data, which is a means to condense a large amount of data into more manageable words, phrases, and commonalities. In vivo coding is an appropriate open coding technique for qualitative researchers who seek to identify the words, ideas, or stories of participants rather than to assign codes generated by the researcher (Manning, 2017). Open coding results are by no means final codes; rather, they are subject to change as a researcher conducts subsequent rounds of coding and refinement (Theron, 2015). In the present study, in vivo codes were the exact words of participants, which I annotated as I first read through the transcripts. In addition to highlighting sections of the text and making notes in the margins, I used colored Post-It notes to indicate similar words, phrases, or topics across transcripts. I also took notes in a separate journal through analytic memo writing. I continued to populate these memos as I reflected upon the transcripts I reviewed and what information seemed evocative, unique, or especially insightful.

After I completed the in vivo coding, I then used pattern coding. Pattern coding is a type of second-cycle coding by which a researcher groups similarly coded material from the first round into broader categories or labels (Saldaña, 2015). Beyond enabling a researcher to gather relevant material, pattern coding allows for the development of meaning from similar phrases and concepts (Saldaña, 2015). Researchers use pattern coding to identify causes and explanations for actions, decisions, or events (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which was something I did as I reviewed participants' transcripts. I performed pattern coding as I reread transcripts, taking a closer look at the words and phrases I noted. Patterns may emerge from similarities, differences, frequencies, or sequences (Saldaña, 2015). I created a table in Microsoft Excel, where I listed all my open codes and pattern codes in two columns. Excel allowed me to view the codes in a single location rather than paging through transcripts to locate my annotations.

Thematic analysis. In thematic analysis, a researcher seeks to identify patterns of meaning, or themes, in data (Nowell et al., 2017). Thematic analysis is a means to identify, organize, describe, and report related topics among collected data (Nowell et al., 2017), in this case, from participant responses. Preliminary codes were developed from participants' responses. After preliminary coding, in vivo and pattern coding were used to identify a set of themes that represented all of the participants' responses.

Trustworthiness

To ensure rigor in qualitative studies, a researcher must apply specific criteria to increase the study's trustworthiness. The most cited criteria are credibility, transferability,

dependability, and confirmability (Ravich & Carl, 2016). Findings that meet these four conditions are believable, replicable, reliable, and transferable.

Credibility

Credibility pertains to the extent to which the findings in a qualitative study are believable (Cohen et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013). Findings have credibility when they are a credible interpretation of the information provided by participants (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravich & Carl, 2016). Following the two cycles of coding, I used inductive analysis to determine categories. From these categories I identified themes from participants' responses. To ensure credibility, I performed multiple rounds of coding and categorizing to ensure the themes emerged from the data and not from personal bias. Additional tools for credibility included member checking and peer review.

Member Checking

Researchers use member checking to confirm their initial findings. The process entails asking participants to validate study results, thus ensuring the credibility of the research (Birt et al., 2016). After I coded all data and identified emergent themes, I shared with each participant a transcript of her interview with my interpretations in accordance with the preliminary codes and themes to review. I analyzed the member check responses and would have considered and applied any suggested changes to the findings, as applicable; however, there were no changes requested.

Peer Review

A peer debriefer is a qualified outsider who can help a researcher with data analysis by encouraging alternate interpretations and discouraging erroneous assumptions

(Lodico et al., 2010). A peer debriefer asks the researcher questions that may lead to different means of data analysis (Lodico et al., 2010). Accordingly, I enlisted the aid of a peer debriefer to ensure the findings drawn from my study were accurate and authentically represented the words and experiences of participants. My peer debriefer was a graduate of the EdD program at Walden University who was also an experienced qualitative researcher. I passed all transcripts, coding, and thematic analysis to the peer debriefer for examination to double-check my analysis. During this review, the peer debriefer confirmed alignment between coded data and analyzed data, keeping an eye out for the reliability and validity of my analysis. In the data analysis section of Chapter 4, I will discuss the peer debriefer's examination and any changes I made as a result of this information and guidance.

Transferability

According to Yin (2017), transferability relates to the generalizability of findings of a qualitative study. Transferability is the degree to which qualitative results are applicable to other settings or samples (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Since my results were clear enough to be applied to other settings or samples, I achieved transferability (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). As the researcher, I enhanced transferability through thick, rich description, describing in detail the steps of this study, including sampling, context, demographics, and participant characteristics (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I achieved transferability by using an inductive approach when analyzing the data, establishing the context of the study in accordance with the research questions.

Rich, Thick Description

Maintaining rich, thick description is also a way to ensure the transferability of a study's results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I used rich, thick description to thoroughly document the context and setting, recording my observations, thoughts, and interpretations regarding participants' experiences. I maintained thick description by writing memos and taking notes about each interview, recording the day and time (e.g., before school, after school, weekend), the comfort of the room (e.g., temperature, seating, lighting, noise), and the participant's mood. Richly detailed information allows readers to draw their own conclusions based on the information a researcher has provided (Ravich & Carl, 2016). By describing participants' behaviors, the context of the study, and the participants' experiences, I added to the interpretation of a reader or a future researcher seeking to apply my findings to a different context (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Through the incorporation of details and perspectives, rich, thick description boosts a study's validity (Creswell, 2012).

Succinctness in a researcher's presentation of results improves the validity and transferability of results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). All evidence put forth must derive only from the data, thus supporting the transferability of presented findings (Wu et al., 2016). Transferability is also increased when the underlying theory is in line with the researcher's findings (Wu et al., 2016). In presenting the findings of this study, I drew a clear connection with the framework of feminist theory. I also connected my findings to the scholarly literature on this theoretical foundation and the overarching topic of study.

Variation in Participant Selection

Additional ways I improved transferability were by the sampling process and strategy, qualification criteria, and participant characteristics. I used purposive sampling to select female K–12 principals (n = 4) and central office personnel (n = 4) serving in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic state school district of study who met the qualification criteria of holding a superintendent license yet not having applied for a superintendent position at this point in their careers. Setting clear delimitations to obtain a sample sufficient to answer the research questions is a necessary component of achieving transferable results (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Dependability

Dependability in a qualitative study refers to the stability of the findings and the consistency of the research process (Elo et al., 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Riege, 2003; Whittemore et al., 2001). Research findings that have dependability are stable over time, signaling that results derive from the data, not personal bias or preconceptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). I achieved dependability, as another researcher could replicate my study and arrive at similar findings and conclusions.

Audit Trail

One way to achieve dependability is by maintaining an audit trail, enabling later replication by which results should remain stable (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Accordingly, I used thick description to create an audit trail, clearly documenting the steps I took and the decisions I made so that another researcher can follow and repeat, thus indicating the consistency of my study. The audit trail also included my reflections, sampling details, data management, and study findings.

Triangulation

Triangulation entails gathering and cross-checking multiple sources of data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Accordingly, I collected and triangulated data from two groups of K–12 female educators—four principals and four central office staff—who held superintendent licenses and were employed in the Mid-Atlantic U.S. state of study. Triangulation requires a researcher to use data collected from two or more sources to provide confirmation of the themes drawn, something that also contributes to a study's credibility (Creswell, 2012). According to Merriam (2010), a researcher uses triangulation to cross-check data provided by people with similar backgrounds but different perspectives. Thus, I implemented triangulation into my study by conducting interviews with two sets of individuals, increasing the credibility and accuracy of my findings.

Confirmability

A study has confirmability when future researchers can replicate the process and arrive at similar results, thus indicating that study interpretations and findings are supported by the data (Ravich & Carl, 2016). Confirmability pertains to a researcher's objectivity and neutrality (Elo et al., 2014). As I coded and categorized the data, I implemented ongoing self-checks to make sure I drew conclusions from participants' transcripts and not from any expectations I may have found myself having, thus ensuring impartiality. The thickly described audit trail is another means to improve confirmability, just as it was to ensure the dependability of my findings.

Reflexivity

Researchers perform reflexivity through continual reflection throughout planning, data collection and analysis, and presentation of results (Fusch et al., 2018). Reflexivity entails taking a critical look at processes and procedures, thus contributing to the confirmability of findings (Fusch et al., 2018). I practiced reflexivity throughout the study; I began by carefully considering my role as a researcher and my relationship with the research questions and participants, and continued through data collection, coding, analysis, and conclusions. As I progressed through the stages of the study, I made an ongoing practice of self-checks to assess for bias, preconceptions, or anything else that may have influenced data collection and analysis. I used ongoing journaling to practice reflexivity, thus contributing to the confirmability of my study's results.

Ethical Procedures

To ensure I operated in accordance with ethical procedures, I submitted the study proposal to the Walden University Institutional Review Board for approval before beginning recruitment or data collection. Walden University's ethics approval number for this study is 04-27-20-0756210. As a part of the informed consent process, I conveyed to all participants the purpose of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and the means of protecting them from harm. I made participants aware of their ability to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. All participants received an informed consent form via e-mail and acknowledged receipt of such information, thus affirming their voluntary participation.

Maintaining confidentiality is of utmost importance to prevent the connection between data and participant identity, as well as the misuse of information through a

breach of privacy. I guaranteed the confidentiality of participants and the security of their data by storing all electronic data, transcripts, and digital consent forms in password-protected files on my home computer, which was also password-protected. I used generic identifiers in all transcripts in place of participant names. Hard copies of consent forms and field notes remained in a locked filing cabinet. After 5 years, I will delete and destroy all data in accordance with Walden University guidelines.

Summary

Under exploration in this study were the reasons female educators who have achieved superintendent certification have elected not to pursue the position at this point in their careers. The qualitative case study research design provided an opportunity to address the problem with individuals who have lived experiences with the phenomenon. As the researcher, I was the sole data collection instrument in this study, administering 11 interview questions I created. Although I was familiar with the participants—four female K–12 principals and four female K–12 central office personnel in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic school district of study—I had no supervisory relationships with any of them, which limited the potential for bias. In addition, I used bracketing and reflexivity to acknowledge any preconceptions and set them aside before beginning data collection or analysis. Data collection occurred via semistructured interviews, which I audio-recorded to ensure accurate capture of participants' responses; I also took handwritten notes of nonverbal cues accompanying those responses.

I implemented a number of processes to ensure the trustworthiness of findings by way of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Some of these

methods included bracketing, triangulation, transcript checking, thick description, audit trail, and reflexivity. I followed all ethical procedures as outlined by the Walden University Institutional Review Board to protect all human participants.

Chapter 4 presents the setting, data collection, data analysis, and results. A detailed data analysis process will appear, followed by a presentation of results sufficient to answer both research questions. I will again review the evidence of trustworthiness in my findings before concluding the chapter and providing a transition to Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials but have not yet applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers. Two research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain why they attained the certification?

RQ2: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain what factors influenced their decisions not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers?

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the study setting as well as the data collection and data analysis procedures. A discussion of the results follows, with five themes emerging from participant interviews to answer the two research questions. Next, the chapter presents evidence of the trustworthiness of the study specific to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, as initially discussed in Chapter 3. A preview of Chapter 5 follows a summary of the answers to the research questions.

Setting

The eight participants in this qualitative case study were four K–12 female central office personnel and four female school principals in an urban school district in a U.S. Mid-Atlantic state. All women had been in their current role for at least 2 years, obtained a superintendent license, and decided not to apply for a superintendent role at this point in their careers. Although recruiting the eight participants was not difficult, the COVID-19

pandemic significantly influenced the women's availability for interviews; thus, collecting data took longer than anticipated. In addition, taking part in the study was likely more stressful for the participants, whose schedules were already overly full due to the sudden shift to remote learning.

Data Collection

Four K–12 female central office personnel and four K–12 female school principals took part in semistructured, one-on-one interviews to provide data for this study. The initial plan was to conduct interviews online or in person, the latter in a private room at a local public library. However, the COVID-19 pandemic and the immediate shift to remote learning meant that physically close interviews were no longer possible. Accordingly, I conducted all eight interviews via Zoom from my home, with the office door closed and locked. Each participant took part in one interview. Interviews lasted an average of 53 minutes. I used an interview protocol to structure the conversations and to ask the same questions of all participants.

I recorded the interviews by means of a digital audio-recording device for later transcription and analysis. By recording interviews, researchers can accurately capture participants' words (Creswell, 2018). Recording also frees an interviewer to focus on the speaker rather than having to document everything the interviewee says (Creswell, 2018). I supplemented the audio recordings by taking notes of nonverbal communication, including visible gestures and facial expressions. I encountered no unusual circumstances during data collection.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis entails performing statistical tests to arrive at numerical findings. However, qualitative researchers analyze data by reviewing the words individuals use in describing their lived experiences (Miles et al., 2014). Creswell (2018) identified steps in the qualitative data analysis process:

1. Preparing and organizing the data,
2. Preliminary coding,
3. In vivo and pattern coding,
4. Describing findings and forming themes,
5. Representing and reporting findings,
6. Interpreting the meaning of the findings, and
7. Validating the accuracy of the findings (p. 236).

Data analysis of the transcripts began with coding that Ravich and Carl (2016) described as "assigning meaning to data" (p. 248). Saldaña (2015) recommended qualitative researchers conduct at least two rounds of coding to ensure they interpret the findings accurately. Accordingly, I performed two rounds of coding, the first allowing me to identify words and phrases and the second to organize my initial codes and analyze each transcript.

Coding

Open coding is a way for researchers to condense large amounts of data into more manageable pieces. In vivo coding is an appropriate open coding technique for qualitative researchers who seek to identify the words, ideas, or stories of participants rather than to

assign codes generated by the researcher (Manning, 2017). Beginning researchers often use first-round in vivo coding to focus on participants' voices and remove researcher bias or expectations (Saldaña, 2015). I used in vivo coding to let codes emerge from participants' words rather than fit the collected data into predetermined themes (Manning, 2017). This open coding technique was an appropriate approach to explore why female K–12 principals and central office personnel attained the superintendent certification but chose not to apply for the position at this point in their careers. Using in vivo coding to code the eight interview transcripts, I read through the transcripts, highlighting what appeared to be important words, phrases, and concepts while taking note of my reactions and responses in the margins. Upon repeating this process for all eight participants, I then reread the transcripts and used colored Post-It notes to document similar wording across the interviews. Throughout first-round coding, I wrote analytic memos to keep track of my thoughts and processes.

A common second-round type of coding is pattern coding that entails combining similar first-round codes into broader categories (Saldaña, 2015). During this second-cycle coding process, I imported the transcripts and my notes into NVivo, carefully considering each of the first-round codes and determining whether they were related to any of the others. To keep track of the codes and patterns, I used NVivo's organizational features (see Appendix B for a complete list of codes).

Thematic Analysis

The process of thematic data analysis involves reviewing the data and narratives, interpreting the text, preparing the material for analysis, coding the information, and

making meaning of the data (Creswell, 2018). Thematic analysis is a way to narrow codes into patterns of meaning or themes (Nowell et al., 2017). In this study, data analysis entailed reviewing the documented codes for emerging patterns and themes.

The first level of identification occurred during the initial review of each interview. Upon receiving the transcripts from Rev.com, I read each file, analyzed the data for each interview, and then conducted open coding utilizing NVivo software. NVivo is an analytic tool to facilitate the coding process, which entailed the following steps:

1. Review all interview transcripts.
2. Import the data into NVivo.
3. Code the data in NVivo using open coding.
4. Define the properties of the codes to identify themes.
5. Further categorize themes, as needed.

The use of in vivo and pattern coding showed commonalities in the words used by participants, leading to the identification of 19 codes (see Appendix B). There were no discrepant cases. After I coded all data, identified subthemes, and grouped topics by similarity, five final themes emerged: (a) professional and personal goals, (b) encouraged by others, (c) lack of experience or preparation, (d) discrimination, and (e) found satisfaction outside the superintendency (see Table 1).

Table 1

Themes, Subthemes, and Preliminary Codes

Themes	Subthemes	Preliminary and Open Codes
1. Professional and personal goals	Attained the superintendent certification because of professional and career aspirations and goals	career aspirations and goals, credibility, personal goals, more education, family
	Attained the superintendent certification because it was a personal goal	
	Attained the superintendent certification to have more credibility in current and future roles	
2. Encouraged by others	Mentors or colleagues advised them to obtain the superintendent certification	family encouragement, advisement, network, relationship
	Family encouraged them to attain the superintendent certification	
3. Lack of experience or preparation	Felt more experience was needed before applying for a superintendency	more education, more experience, no mentoring, lack of training and preparation, support
	Lack of mentoring is a barrier to feeling prepared to apply for a superintendency	
	Did not apply because they felt they needed a more advanced degree	
4. Discrimination	Few women attain the superintendency because of gender discrimination	difficult environment, difficulty for women, few women, gender bias, hiring process, no district support, politics, racial bias, unconscious bias, self confidence
	Did not apply for a superintendency because it is a difficult environment for women	
	Did not pursue a superintendency because of racial bias	
5. Found satisfaction outside the superintendency	Found pathways to serve outside of a superintendency	no interest, other pathways, work-family balance, travel

Results

The themes that emerged from coding and data analysis were sufficient to answer the study's two research questions:

RQ1: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain why they attained the certification?

RQ2: How do female K–12 principals and central office personnel who have attained the superintendent certification explain what factors influenced their decisions not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers?

Five major themes emerged from thematic analysis. These themes were (a) personal and professional goals, (b) encouraged by others, (c) lack of experience or preparation, (d) discrimination, and (e) found satisfaction outside the superintendency. Following are summaries of the findings by theme, with text from the interviews to support the themes.

Theme 1: Professional and Personal Goals

The most frequently occurring theme was *professional and personal goals*, as mentioned by all nine participants. Participant 1 stated,

> After doing the 3 hard years of getting my doctorate, I wanted to add (it) to my license in case this is something I wanted to do later in my career. It was something I would always have, and that door is always open if this were something I choose to pursue. I didn't have a mentor; I just thought, "Why wouldn't I?"

Participant 2 said,

> I think [it was due to] my role as the Assistant Superintendent. I held that role for 7 years and I had been over Human Resources, over instruction, and I was thinking, "What is the next step for me to get my own school division at some point?" I wanted to be ready when the [superintendency] opportunity presented itself, so that's why I did it.

In another example of this theme, Participant 3 explained,

> I thought, at one point, I wanted to apply or become an assistant superintendent or superintendent eventually. I had the qualifications for a long time, but I did not apply at first, because . . . I like the principalship. I went into the principalship and I applied, thinking I wanted a change.

Participant 6 described her reason for pursuing certification as "twofold. My long-term vision is to serve as a superintendent somewhere. I knew I needed to get it eventually."

Participant 4 fulfilled a personal goal in achieving her superintendent certification. She explained,

> I didn't have any goals [for the superintendency]. I don't know if any of the positions I have gotten past the principalship if anybody has asked me for it. [The certificate is] on my wall in my office. I am proud of it.

Participant 5 said,

> I finished in 2014–2015 with a doctoral degree in educational leadership. I wanted to spend more time with my children, and I was looking for more of a balance. That was something I promised myself, that once I finished, I would spend more time with them, as they were getting older and starting high school. I never looked

> into anything while they were in high school; I never really thought about it. I got the license after I finished my degree.

Participant 7 noted, “The goal was just to have the opportunity. My goal is to be ready. I am very picky. I want to be prepared.” Participant 2 wanted to expand her career options, saying, “I felt like having the certificate would broaden my scope.” Participant 4 explained,

> I don’t ever let a piece of paper stand between you and what you can do. There are certain doors that would not be open for me if I didn’t have the superintendent license. It’s really silly, but this means I am eligible for the position.

She later added, “It was a box to check. I had no expectations. Hopefully, let’s see what it leads to.” Participant 5 said, “I applied for everything. I guess I wanted to leave my options open; I never wanted to or thought about being superintendent, but I wanted to leave my options open in case it was something I was interested in.” Participant 6 further illustrated this theme:

> I expect having the license would help me get to the table to interview for a superintendent position when the time comes. You get it in hand because you know, at minimum, the hiring committee cannot say you do not have the criteria based on that. Once I get to the table, I have to make my way from there.

Other participants discussed how it was a box to check and that they were eligible after completing their doctorate degree.

Theme 2: Encouraged by Others

The theme of *encouraged by others* arose in all eight interviews. Participant 1 indicated applying for the superintendency because others in her doctoral cohort had applied, saying, "I talked with other people I got my doctorate with [who were] in my cohort. And all of us applied, and some were more so apt to pursue it." Participant 2 recalled that a colleague advised her to apply:

> The other person I reached out to was a former superintendent who had been my superintendent for 5 years. She had encouraged me when she was there to apply, but I went back to her again to get her feel for where I was. When I worked for her, she was the person who moved me out of HR and into instruction and really prepared me and gave me opportunities, so it was important to me to get her feedback. She was encouraging and told me that I needed to get [my superintendent certificate], and then she told me to stay where I was, and when the current superintendent left, she recommended that I become the next superintendent.

Participant 5 remarked, "Great mentors have helped, just providing guidance and assistance whenever needed. Like I said, support is the biggest thing you could possibly get." Mentors also advised Participant 6 to apply, as she recalled, "I had great female mentors who encouraged me and said, 'Don't wait. You can't win if you don't play.' It helped me to get where I am." Participant 7 pursued her superintendent certification at

> the advice of a mentor. The advice was to apply as soon as possible because the criteria may change. Once I earned I my EDD [Education Doctorate Degree], I

> was encouraged to pursue, knowing I had met the requirements of 30 hours beyond a master's degree and 3 years' experience as a principal.

Finally, Participant 8 reflected, "I would probably go ahead and apply if someone said, 'I think this would be a good opportunity for you.'"

Participant 1 recalled, "I also spoke with my husband about my career path, and he was very supportive. He would like to see me do something like that one day." Participant 2 stated,

> I discussed with my [husband] first because we always do things together to make sure he would be in support of me doing the superintendency, knowing that more than likely we would have to move or that it would—you know, when you become a superintendent, it becomes a great part of your life. I wanted to be sure he would be supportive of that, knowing that he has always been supportive of what I do.

Participant 3 said, "Well, of course, my husband wanted me to pursue that." In another example, Participant 6 noted, "My family has been the biggest support. Beyond that, I had great female mentors who encouraged me. . . . It helped me to get where I am." Other participants also mentioned receiving encouragement from mentors and colleagues.

Theme 3. Lack of Experience or Preparation

The next theme was *lack of experience or preparation*, as mentioned by four participants in their interviews. Participant 3 identified the necessity of experience before applying for a superintendent role, saying, "I think going out the first time is rare. You would need to start out as an assistant superintendent." Participant 6 noted, "I want more

experience. I have seen men sit in the assistant principal position 1 year, principal 2 years, and superintendent the next year. I am still learning new things, so I wonder how that happened." Finally, Participant 8 indicated,

> I just haven't pursued [the superintendency] yet. I am just following the traditional steps and hoping to get some experience in other central office roles before I apply. I am stuck where I am. I think, just this year, some people have gone from one step up from the principal to superintendents, so why can't I? I am just trying to figure out if this is where I want to be and something I want to do.

Participant 1 reported,

> No one sat me down and said, "Here is what you will be doing. Here's the reality." Sometimes you like to make a list and check things off. There are times when you will not be able to do what you want to do because it's what the party line would do. No one teaches you how to be a team player. You have to be able to read people and know that "Okay, I need to be quiet and go along."

Several participants stated they wanted to take all the traditional steps that led up to the superintendency before they applied. One such example came from Participant 3:

> There is no succession plan. There is not mentoring for such or something like the superintendency; most of it is done based on—I don't want to say behind the scenes, but that is exactly what it is—behind the scenes. It is behind the scenes that these movements happen, and you look up and notice that person got the job when it was posted. There has not been very much opportunity for mobility.

Participant 3 stated, “If having my EDD will give me more to stand on in terms of qualification. Very few superintendents do not have an EDD.” Participant 6 reported,

> Short-term goals: I finish my EDD. I had 3 years’ success at a school; this probably would have been the time I would have been looking for some upward mobility, such as associate superintendent, director of school improvement—one of those types of positions, that was my goal. Three to 5 years at this school.

Theme 4: Discrimination

The next theme was *discrimination*, which emerged in all the interviews. In one example, Participant 1 stated,

> I think that I thought, once upon a time, I might want to be a superintendent. But after being in this position [of Leadership Department Director] for 3 years, there is so much politics, and so much “good old boy” network. It’s not something that interests me anymore.

She later added,

> My current district has never had a female superintendent. I don’t think we had any higher than Assistant Superintendent, and so, I am not sure how that would be received. I am at a stage in my life where I am not willing to be dictated by the school board 24/7 with my life.

Participants 4, 5, and 6 explained how they felt some discrimination in meetings. They believed others did not always take their ideas seriously. Also, they were often unsure how to obtain the feedback they needed to develop and grow.

Participant 2 noted, "[The superintendency] is seen as a male role. Females have not been as confident in terms of where the bucks stop. Females have always been behind." Participant 3 said, "This position was held for many years by men; about 10 years ago, a woman assumed the position. I didn't feel as though the environment was friendly toward obtaining that, so I created other pathways of leadership." She continued,

> [Having] women in the superintendency was not very [welcoming]. It wasn't viewed as possibility. I think that has changed and some women have been able to break through that, but in many areas, some women have not. This state is one of the examples. We had four superintendents that retired after 40 years. It was not a friendly environment for women, but things are changing.

In another illustration of this theme, Participant 7 stated,

> I would say [discrimination] is not the case for most men; that is just my personal opinion. I have seen that happen. On average, men are able to move up quicker than we are, whether we are White or Black, no matter the color as far as being female. I think men can get away with some things we can't. I think [it's] just because society sees this as a male-dominated world when we talk about people in power. Folks look at men as the one who is making the rules, and I think they expect them to make the rules and lead us, just like the head of household. This is what our norm is, and people are somewhat content with it being this way. There is a system, I think, that females are not necessarily a part of and that the men keep a different language. They know how to make moves and create a system

> that only allows for what they want to happen. I think it makes it hard for women to elevate in different positions, [but] it's not impossible.

Participant 3 explained,

> One of the reasons I guess I have not put myself out there is because the environment is not friendly toward women. I hate to say this, [but] the environment is not friendly toward African American women. We have never had an [African American woman as] Assistant Superintendent of Instruction; never had. This position was held for many years by men; [it was] about 10 years [before] a woman assumed the position. I didn't feel as though the environment was friendly toward obtaining that, so I created other pathways of leadership.

She later added,

> African American women are not viewed as superintendent worthy. It is something that has to change. Not sure what it will take. We see African American assistant superintendents. Rarely do you find a woman [superintendent], and I can speak to that. Through my advocacy work, I met a lot of people. This has been a concern. Women in the superintendency is not where it should be—especially, African American women are not given opportunities.

Participant 8 also spoke about the role of racial bias in her decision not to pursue a superintendency:

> I haven't experienced any outright bias because the majority of the folks over me have been women. However, I do think there are some ethnic biases, depending on certain situations. If we are in a meeting, and if a question is posed and

> someone of a different race poses the same question, there might be a different response due to the other race.

She continued,

> Unfortunately, African Americans are still seen as second-class citizens, even though we are in high places and make critical decisions. We still don't get the respect that we should. There is still not enough minority senior leadership. I am not sure how they can understand the cultural differences and be fully culturally competent.

Theme 5: Found Satisfaction Outside the Superintendency

Eight participants mentioned the theme of *found satisfaction outside the superintendency*. Participant 1 explained,

> I really, really like what I do. I feel like I make a difference, and I am not at the point where I feel like I would like to do something different. But I know that the itch will come. I would not see myself being anything higher than, like, a Chief of Schools or—I don't really see myself doing that. Maybe school improvement or professional development, something that keeps me rooted with the schools on a daily basis. I have not enjoyed the aspect of my life that keeps me out of school, so I don't really know what the next [step] will be.

Participant 2 enjoyed her current role and had no interest in the superintendency at this time. She reported,

> Just because I just changed positions, I will probably be where I am. This is the right position. This is my first year in this position. I don't see myself going for

> the superintendency in the next 3 years. I am content in what I am learning now, and I am enjoying the work. This is what's important, that I enjoy the work and know that I am making a difference. I am a member of the cabinet. I know what's going on in the division. I feel like I have a seat at the table.

Participant 3 stated, "I didn't feel as though the environment was friendly toward obtaining [a superintendency role], so I created other pathways of leadership." Participant 4 said, "I am not sure [the superintendency] is the way I am called to serve." To explain her decision to not pursue a move at this time, Participant 5 remarked, "I haven't given [the superintendency] any thought. I feel like I am making a difference in the job I am in right now." Participants 6, 7, and 8 discussed the impact they are making in their current roles by mentoring other female administrators and being a positive role model for young girls.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research findings must have trustworthiness if they are to be believable, reliable, replicable, and transferable. I took steps to ensure the trustworthiness of my results through four criteria, as noted by Ravich and Carl (2016): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

Credible research findings are believable interpretations of data (Cohen et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2013; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Ravich & Carl, 2016). One way I ensured credibility in this study was by performing multiple rounds of coding. I also conducted member checking with participants, allowing them to review my

interpretations of their words. Member checking entailed sharing with each participant a transcript of her interview as well as a copy of my interpretations in accordance with the initial codes and themes. I would have considered and applied any suggested changes to the findings, as applicable; however, there were no changes requested. Finally, I engaged a peer debriefer to confirm the accuracy of my data analysis. Like member checking, the peer review also affirmed my findings; therefore, I continued with my analysis as written. I engaged a Walden University EdD graduate and experienced qualitative researcher to serve as a peer debriefer and review all transcripts, coding, and thematic analysis for accuracy. The peer reviewer discussed with me and ultimately supported my findings, confirming the reliability and validity of the study.

The peer review process occurred in a series of steps. First, I identified an individual with a conferred terminal degree who was available and qualified to serve as a peer reviewer. Next, I invited the peer to give feedback on my study. Upon approval, I provided the peer reviewer with a copy of the dissertation draft. The selected individual made notes on the document as deemed appropriate and then discussed with me the reasons for the suggestions. After this conversation, I made edits to the dissertation based on peer input.

Transferability

Qualitative research has transferability if the findings are generalizable to other individuals in similar settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018; Yin, 2017). I took steps to improve the transferability of my results, including thick, rich description and inductive data analysis. Thick description involved maintaining a detailed audit trail, documenting

every step of this study to facilitate its replication by another researcher. I used inductive analysis through multiple transcript readings, identifying patterns and categories and increasing the transferability of results.

Dependability

A qualitative study has dependability if its results hold over time, indicating that findings came from data, not from the researcher's preconceptions or biases (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). If my findings are dependable, future researchers could repeat this study and reach similar conclusions. The first way I ensured dependability was by maintaining an audit trail to document every step, from planning and sampling to data collection and analysis. I used thick description in the process, providing details on not only the process, but my observations, reflections, and perceptions. I also boosted dependability through triangulation, which Korstjens and Moser (2018) describe as gathering and cross-checking multiple data sources. I accomplished this by using two groups of participants—central office personnel and principals—and corroborating the information provided by individuals having similar backgrounds but different perspectives (cf. Merriam, 2010). I compared the answers of both groups to determine whether there were differences or similarities and determined if the responses of the two groups were similar through triangulation.

Confirmability

A study with confirmability is one that future researchers could replicate and achieve similar results (Ravich & Carl, 2016). Confirmability indicates that the findings come from data, not the researcher (Ravich & Carl, 2016). I used self-checks and

journaling throughout the data coding and categorization process to ensure I kept my expectations and opinions out of the analysis. I further increased confirmability through reflexivity—which included writing memos to take note of my decisions, considerations, and processes—and by maintaining thick description through a detailed audit trail.

Summary

In summary, five themes were identified during the analysis, answering both research questions. The identified themes were (a) *professional and personal goals*, (b) *encouraged by others*, (c) *lack of experience or preparation*, (d) *discrimination*, and (e) *found satisfaction outside the superintendency*.

This chapter included a summary of the data analysis, followed by a detailed discussion of the themes using examples from participant interviews. I discuss the results in Chapter 5, including how my findings confirm and extend the knowledge found in prior literature regarding the difficult paths women seeking to attain the superintendency face. I also present the limitations of the study, followed by recommendations for further research and implications for positive social change at the individual, family, organizational, and societal/political level, along with recommendations for practice.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of why female principals and central office personnel have pursued and attained superintendent credentials but have not yet applied for the superintendent position at this point in their careers. The study was necessary due to the underrepresentation of female K–12 school superintendents in the U.S. Mid-Atlantic state under study. Although some female central office personnel and principals currently hold the credentials necessary for a K–12 school superintendent role, they elect not to apply for the position.

Data analysis indicated five themes across the eight participants' transcripts, answering both research questions. The themes associated with RQ1 pertained to the participants' motivation for achieving the superintendent certification and were less relevant to the literature review. However, for many of the themes in response to RQ2, participants' words supported prior research and findings.

Interpretation of the Findings

Professional and personal goals was the first theme identified. This relates to the research of Blair and White (2016) who found the balance between professional and personal goals to be important to job satisfaction and for determining whether women will pursue more demanding leadership roles. Bernal et al. (2017) emphasized the role of parenting as an obstacle for women. K. K. Robinson (2014, 2018) also found that women feel as though they need to excel in all areas of their professional and personal lives to be successful. Dana and Bourisaw (2016) found that the expectation of the caregiver was an important factor as to whether women applied for the superintendency. The literature

supports the findings of the present study that women's professional goals led them to obtain the superintendent license, but ultimately their personal goals (such as the role of the caregiver) led them to decide against applying for the superintendent position at this point in their career.

Encouraged by others was a common theme in the literature and this study. Chisholm-Burns et al. (2017) attributed the lack of female mentors to the limited number of women in the superintendency. Similarly, Burkman and Lester (2013) identified a lack of mentoring for women as one component of the gender disparities between male and female superintendents. The participants in this study spoke of being encouraged by others either directly or peripherally. Participant 3 proclaimed, "There is not enough encouragement for such or something like the superintendency; most of it is done based on—I don't want to say behind the scenes, but that is exactly what it is—behind the scenes." Participant 1 reported, "No one sat me down and said, 'Here is what you will be doing. Here's the reality." Participant 8 reflected, "I would probably go ahead and apply if someone said, 'I think this would be a good opportunity for you.'"

In an exploration of gender and social norms related to the career development of eight female superintendents in New Jersey, Morillo (2017) found mentoring a necessity for the women to develop leadership skills. From a qualitative narrative study with three female urban middle school administrators, Blair (2016) found that mentorship, either having one or being one, was crucial to the women's professional success. In the feminist standpoint theory, women feel left out and that they need more support to become of aware of the opportunities available to them.

Participants discussed how mentors had assisted them along the way, specifically encouraging them to apply for the superintendent certification. Participant 5 said, "Great mentors have helped, just providing guidance and assistance whenever needed. Support is the biggest thing you could possibly get." Participant 6 shared, "I had great female mentors who encouraged me and said, 'Don't wait. You can't win if you don't play.' It helped me to get where I am." Participant 7 also pursued her superintendent certificate at "the advice of a colleagues."

Lack of experience or preparation was also a theme that emerged in this study. As with any upper-level position, advancing to the requires a level of experience and preparation. Many participants reported lacking such experience and preparation, which ultimately contributed to their decision to not apply for the superintendency. Connell et al. (2015) found that barriers to women obtaining the necessary experience were due to a lack of mentoring, career planning services, preparation, and selection committee support. Participant 3 demonstrated this finding and mentioned needing to obtain sufficient experience before applying for the superintendency. Similarly, Participant 6 stated, "I want more experience." She continued, illuminating the gender bias that persists: "I have seen men sit in the assistant principal position 1 year, principal 2 years, and superintendent the next year. I am still learning new things, so I wonder how that happened." This finding also supports the feminist standpoint theory, illustrating that women feel as though they do not have the same opportunities as their male counterparts.

Discrimination was the fourth theme found in this study. Based on the literature showing gender discrepancy in superintendent and other high-level administrative

positions, it was not unexpected that participants addressed gender discrimination. In a study of school board members, Wallace (2015) found perceptions of a still-present good old boy network. Participant 1 used the same term in discussing reasons she had not yet applied for the superintendency, saying, "There is so much politics and so much good old boy network. It's not something that interests me anymore." The good old boy network, by definition, excludes women and as a result, women do not feel empowered to take on additional leadership roles. The politics of the superintendency were not lost on the participants of this study as evidenced in Theme 4, discrimination, as prior researchers have indicated. Thomas (2014) identified three chief issues facing superintendents, one of which was the politics of public school governance. Hatch and Roegman (2012) and Jazzar and Kimball (2014) also noted the political challenges inherent in the position, which lead to feelings of professional isolation. Participant 1 reported appreciating her current role because "If you do a good job, people pretty much leave you alone. But in [the superintendent] position, you have to answer to so many people above you on a daily basis." Participant 7 related, "I am not one that enjoys playing the political aspects that come with the superintendency. The politics is the reason I have not pursued the superintendency."

Some participants addressed gender bias. Prior literature was more about bias against women in upper administrative roles in K–12 education. Participant 3 shared, "One of the reasons I guess I have not put myself out there is because the environment is not friendly toward women." The participant later observed, "females are not viewed as superintendent worthy. It is something that has to change. . . . Rarely do you find a

woman [superintendent]." Participants' responses illustrated why women do not apply for the superintendency, citing gender biases.

The superintendent hiring and promotion process is perhaps more biased against women. The literature showed a faster path to the superintendency for men than women (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Lexia, 2018). In comparison, women hold the intermediate roles of educator, assistant principal, and principal or central office personnel before they even apply for a superintendent role (Glass, 2012). Further, Dobie and Hummel (2016) identified deep-seated, often subconscious support of a system designed to keep women out of top leadership roles in education. Participant 3 related, "After looking at everything and the structure of my district setup, there is no opportunity for mobility or movement or to move up in leadership." Participant 4 preferred to avoid the frustration, saying her reasoning for not applying for superintendency was that "Deep down, the process is daunting, and I don't want to put myself through [it]."

Found satisfaction outside the superintendency was a common theme in the literature and among participants' responses. Blair (2016) and White (2017) discussed the challenges women face in balancing their traditional roles of wife, mother, and daughter with the demanding responsibilities of the superintendency. Similarly, Burkman and Lester (2013) identified work-life conflicts serving as barriers for female superintendents in Texas. Due to the limited number of women in such high-level school district roles, those who achieve the superintendency often feel obligated to prove themselves, taking on more work than the position demands (Robinson, 2018). Some participants preferred

to remain in a support role to the superintendency and forgo the additional job demands, indicating that they found satisfaction without pursuing the superintendency.

The findings of this study supported prior literature specific to the conceptual framework of feminist standpoint theory. According to Wallace (2015), feminist standpoint theory underlies studies of gender roles, expectations, and biases across a range of societal systems; similarly, Gardiner et al. (2000) noted how the theory facilitates the exploration of women's lived experiences. Robinson (2016) wrote about the application of feminist standpoint theory to marginalized populations and their contribution to a world guided by dominant groups. The findings of this study are consistent with the research in that the participants expressed how they do not feel as though they are viewed as leaders. They also discussed that the role of the superintendency would interfere with their role as a caregiver.

Limitations of the Study

The limitations outlined in Chapter 1 remained relevant in the execution of data collection and analysis. Because the sample came from a single school district in a U.S. Mid-Atlantic state, results are not directly transferable to K–12 upper-level administration in other school districts, areas of the state, or national regions. I was also unable to know whether participants had discussed their concerns with one another prior to this study, given that they all worked for the same district. Such conversations and shared grievances could have affected their responses to the interview questions. Finally, I had to rely upon the assumption that participants would answer all questions honestly and to the best of their ability. Any human-devised study has potential researcher bias;

however, the instrument was designed and protocols were followed to limit researcher bias.

Recommendations

The results of this research provide information helpful to a number of groups. Beneficiaries might include female school principals and central office personnel, women considering a career in postsecondary education administration, and school district personnel seeking to hire and mentor female employees. Based on the findings of this study, I have provided recommendations for school districts, partners, and future researchers.

School Districts and Partners

District leaders should consider creating and implementing formal or informal paths to encourage more women to apply to the superintendency. This may include university training programs for females. Additionally, school district personnel could create clear pathways to career advancement, providing such information to all employees and adhering to the guidelines when making promotion decisions. School districts could also offer mentoring positions and internships to provide opportunities for women to develop their leadership skills at the district level. This could entail supporting a division-wide intervention plan to support women who aspire to the superintendency. Based on the results of this research, such a plan should accommodate the themes of (a) *professional and personal goals*, (b) *encouraged by others*, (c) *lack of experience of preparation*, (d) *over-coming discrimination*, and (e) *found satisfaction outside of the*

superintendency. This plan could be a supportive pathway for women who have not yet pursued the superintendency.

Future Research

The findings of this study lay the groundwork for future scholarly exploration of this and other closely-related topics. First, due to the restricted population of the study, future researchers might use my audit trail and procedures to replicate the study in another school district, either within the study state or beyond. Collecting additional and perhaps more diverse data could come from sampling female K–12 principals and central office personnel from multiple school districts, allowing for comparison and broader transferability. Qualitative studies incorporate smaller sample sizes and participant perceptions rather than statistical data. For this reason, they are less generalizable to other populations. The use of quantitative or mixed-methods approaches would produce statistical data from a significantly larger sample, perhaps providing more useful information to district leaders and boards of directors regarding the barriers women face in their paths to the superintendency.

Social Change Implications

This study has to potential to affect positive social change on several levels. First, at the individual level, women who are considering or have obtained their superintendent certification might recognize the barriers other members of this population face and adapt their career paths and approaches to promotion. Women who are principals or central office personnel might see themselves in the words of this study's participants and recognize that they are not alone in their struggles for advancement.

This study could also affect social change at the organizational level. Boards of directors and hiring and promotion committees might recognize the biases they have perpetrated unintentionally through practices that favor male candidates. School district personnel could create mentoring programs, recognizing the importance of mentors to provide female educators with guidance, advice, and encouragement. State department of education personnel could implement oversight to prevent gender discrimination in school district-level hiring and promotion practices. By encouraging and supporting female instructors through career counseling and mentorship, education providers will likely attract even more talented personnel and retain top performers.

When the workforce looks like the population they serve, others may be inspired to achieve higher-level positions. With a clear path for women to become superintendents, students of all genders will see that positions of power need not be held only by men. Gender parity in high-level education positions would show those within the community that they have opportunities inside and outside education.

Conclusion

Despite holding 75% of all certified positions in K–12 schools, just 24% of public school superintendent roles are held by women. In the state of study, these statistics are only marginally better, with approximately 29% of superintendent roles held by women. Although women achieve superintendent certification, many of them choose not to apply for the position.

This qualitative case study was an exploration of the perceptions of eight female African American K–12 principals and central office personnel regarding why they

attained certification and what influenced their decision not to apply for the superintendency at this point in their careers. Two cycles of coding and thematic data analysis produced five themes to answer the study's two research questions. The findings showed the importance of encouragement and the presence of ongoing gender discrimination, work-life balance challenges, position politics, and racial and gender bias. K–12 educators and school district leaders can use this study to create more diverse and inclusive environments and paths to the superintendency.

References

Anderson, M. (2017). Transformational leadership in education: A review of existing literature. *International Social Science Review*, *93*(1), 4. https://digitalcommons.northgeorgia.edu/issr/vol93/iss1/4/

Angel, R. B., Killacky, J., & Johnson, P. R. (2013). African American women aspiring to the superintendency: Lived experiences and barriers. *Journal of School Leadership*, *23*, 592–614. https://doi.org/10.1177/105268461302300402

Baker, B., & Cooper, B. C. (2005). Do principals with stronger academic backgrounds hire better teachers? Policy implications for improving high-poverty schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *41*, 449–479. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X04269609

Bauer, S. C., & Silver, L. (2018). The impact of job isolation on new principals' sense of efficacy, job satisfaction, burnout and persistence. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *56*, 315–331. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-07-2017-0078

Bernal, C., Monosov, N., Stencler, A., Lajoie, A., Raigoza, A., & Akhavan, N. (2017). Gender bias within the superintendency: A comparative study. *Journal of School Administration Research and Development*, *2*(1), 42–52. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1158072.pdf

Birt, L., Scott, S., Cavers, D., Campbell, C., & Walter, F. (2016). Member checking: A tool to enhance trustworthiness or merely a nod to validation? *Qualitative Health Research*, *26*, 1802–1811. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732316654870

Bista, M. B., & Glassman, N. S. (1998). Principals' approaches to leadership, their antecedents, and student outcomes. *Journal of School Leadership*, *8*, 109–136. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F105268469800800204

Björk, L. G. (2015). Introduction: Women in the superintendency—Advances in research and theory. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *36*, 5–33. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00131610021968877

Blair, D. (2016). *Giving a voice to women in K–12 educational leadership: A narrative analysis* (UMI No. 1872333632) [Doctoral dissertation], Northeastern University. ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global. https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:cj82pb10b

Blount, J. M. (2013). *Destined to rule the schools: Women and the superintendency.* State University of New York Press.

Brandt, R. S. (2015). *Education in a new era.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED438621

Bredeson, P. V., & Kose, B. W. (2017). Responding to the education reform agenda: A study of school superintendents' instructional leadership. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, *15*(5), 1–26. http://epaa.asu.edu/ojs/index.php/epaa/article/download/53/179

Brookins, H. M. (2018). *Women rising: The pathway to becoming a female superintendent in a metropolitan area through the lens of assistant superintendents* (UMI No. 2138380756) [Doctoral dissertation], Mercer University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED591219

Browne, C. (n.d.). Duties of a school superintendent. *Houston Chronicle.* https://www.chron.com

Brunner, C. C. (1998). *Benefit or bane? Critique of the usefulness of research about women superintendents*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED424647.pdf

Brunner, C. C. (2015). Unsettled moments in settled discourse: Women superintendents' experiences of inequality. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *36*, 76–116. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X00361004

Brunner, C. C., & Grogan, M. (2017). *Women leading school systems*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Burkinshaw, P., & White, K. (2017). Fixing the women or fixing universities: Women in HE leadership. *Administrative Sciences*, *7*(3), 30. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7030030

Burkman, A., & Lester, D. (2013, September). Superintendent salary study: Is there gender equity in Texas? *National Forum of Educational Administration & Supervision Journal*, *31*(1), 38–54. www.nationalforum.com/Journals/NFEASJ/NFEASJ.htm

Burton, L. J., & Weiner, J. M. (2016). "They were really looking for a male leader for the building": Gender, identity and leadership development in a principal preparation program. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *7*, 141. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00141

Callahan, D. (2018). *The effects of mentoring on female superintendents' success in an urban school district* (UMI No. 2039531527) [Doctoral dissertation], Fordham University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://search.proquest.com/openview/2d931cf79f60f324a1f0e37a96b7b7f9/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&+}iss=y

Carter, G. R., & Cunningham, W. G. (1997). *The American school superintendent: Leading in an age of pressure.* Jossey-Bass.

Cassidy, M. (2018). *Gender differences in perceived barriers of aspiring superintendents* (UMI No. 2055705868) [Doctoral dissertation], Northern Illinois University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED585566

Chisholm-Burns, M. A., Spivey, C. A., Hagemann, T., & Josephson, M. A. (2017). Women in leadership and the bewildering glass ceiling. *American Journal of Health-System Pharmacy*, *74*, 312-324. https://doi.org/10.2146/ajhp160930

Choy, C. P. (2013). Reconnecting superintendents to instruction: An interview with Anrig Professor Richard Elmore. *Ed.* Harvard Graduate School of Education. https://gse.harvard.edu

Coates, S.M. (2020). *Pathways to the superintendency: The experiences of Albertan female superintendents*. Arlington VA: American Association of School Administrators.

Coccia, J. P. (2019). *The journey to leadership: A phenomenological study of the lived experiences of six women in K–12 school administration* (UMI No. 2175705736) [Doctoral dissertation], Drexel University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://search.proquest.com/openview/c1bee69a25f9d5a926d9d7e5760e9b3d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2013). Validity and reliability. In *Research methods in education* (7th ed.; pp. 203–240). Routledge.

Cole, M. L. (2018). Research review and notes: Lawrence Technological University "leaders in the making": An effective leader is a learning leader. *Practitioner*, *20*(2), 91-98. https://doi.org/10.12781/978-1-907549-35-9-16

Connell, P. H., Cobia, F. J., & Hodge, P. H. (2015). Women's journey to the school superintendency. *Alabama Journal of Educational Leadership*, *2*, 37–63. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1097535.pdf

Cook, S. C., Johnson, J., & Stager, T. (2015). *Breaking out of isolation: Becoming a connected school leader*. Corwin Press.

Copeland, J. D. (2013). One head – many hats: Expectations of a rural superintendent. *Qualitative Report*, *18*(39), 1–15. http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol18/iss39/1

Copeland, S. M., & Calhoun, D. W. (2014). Perceptions of mentoring: Examining the experiences of women superintendents. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, *9*(2), 28–46. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1048072.pdf

Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (5th ed.). Sage.

Cruickshank, D. R., & Haefele, D. (2014). Good teachers, plural. *Educational Leadership*, *58*(5), 26–30. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ622997

Dana, J. A., & Bourisaw, D. M. (2016). *Women in the superintendency: Discarded leadership*. R&L Education.

Davis, D. R., & Maldonado, C. (2015). Shattering the glass ceiling: The leadership development of African American women in higher education. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *35*, 48-64. https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/awl/index.php/awl/article/view/125

Dent, L. (2018). *Effects of gender on school board perceptions of superintendents and the superintendent selection process* (UMI No. 2042927472) [Doctoral dissertation], Northwest Nazarene University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://nnu.whdl.org/effects-gender-school-board-perceptions-superintendents-and-superintendent-selection-process

Devono, F., & Price, T. (2012). How principals and teachers perceived their superintendents. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, *29*(4), 1–14. http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Devono,%20Frank%20How%20Principals%20and%20Teachers%20Percieved%20NFEASJ%20V29%20N4%202012.pdf

Dobie, D. F., & Hummel, B. (2016). Successful women superintendents in a gender-biased profession. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *34*(2), 22–28. https://doi.org/10.1080/1066568010340204

Elo, S., Kääriäinen, M., Kanste, O., Pölkki, T., Utriainen, K., & Kyngäs, H. (2014). Qualitative content analysis: A focus on trustworthiness. *SAGE Open*, *4*(1), 2158244014522633. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F2158244014522633

Every Student Succeeds Act. (2015). Pub. L. No. 114-95 § 114 Stat. 1177 (2015-2016).

Farrell, E. F. (2013, September). Superintendent survival guide. *Scholastic Administrator*. https://search-proquest-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1439942789/fulltextPDF/FFDAAE26F6F64417PQ/3?accountid=14872

Flanagan, N. (2017, April 18). We need women in education leadership roles. *Education Week: Teacher*. https://www.edweek.org/leadership/opinion-we-need-women-in-education-leadership-roles/2017/04

Folta, S. C., Seguin, R. A., Ackerman, J., & Nelson, M. E. (2012, December). A qualitative study of leadership characteristics among women who catalyze positive community change. *BMC Public Health*, *12*(1), 383. https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-12-383

Forrest, G. L. (2017). *Job satisfaction of female superintendents: Role conflict and role commitment* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Virginia Polytechnic Institute. https://vtechworks.lib.vt.edu/bitstream/handle/10919/76741/Forrest_GL_T_2017.pdf?isAllowed=y&sequence=1

Fullan, M. (2017). *The new meaning of educational change*. Teachers College.

Fuller, E. J., Pendola, A., & LeMay, M. (2018). Who should be our leader?: Examining female representation in the principalship across geographic locales in Texas public schools. In E. McHenry-Sorber & D. Hall (Eds.), The diversity of rural educational leadership [Special issue]. *Journal of Research in Rural Education*, *34*(4), 1-21. https://jrre.psu.edu/sites/default/files/2019-06/34-4_0.pdf

Funk, C. (2014). Outstanding women superintendents: Profiles in leadership. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *15*, 1–11. file:///Users/tiawana/Downloads/180-Article%20Text-331-1-10-20170619%20(1).pdf

Fusarelli, L. D. (2005). Future research directions and policy implications for superintendent-school board relations. In G. J. Petersen & L. D. Fusarelli (Eds.), *The politics of leadership: Superintendents and school boards in changing times* (pp. 181–195). Information Age.

Fusch, P., Fusch, G. E., & Ness, L. R. (2018). Denzin's paradigm shift: Revisiting triangulation. *Journal of Social Change*, *10*(1), 19–32. https://doi.org/10.5590/JOSC.2018.10.1.02

Gardiner, M. E., Enomoto, E., & Grogan, M. (2000). *Coloring outside the lines: Mentoring women into school leadership*. State University of New York.

Garn, G., & Brown, C. (2018). Women and the superintendency: Perceptions of gender bias. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, *6*(1), 49–71. https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1055&context=jwel

Glass, T. E. (2012). *The 2012 study of the American school superintendency.* American Association of School Administrators.

Glass, T. E., Björk, L., & Brunner, C. C. (2015). *The study of the American school superintendency: A look at the superintendent of education in the new millennium.* American Association of School Administrators.

Glass, T. E., & Franceschini, L. A. (2017). *The state of the American school superintendency: A mid-decade study*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Grissom, J. A., Loeb, S., & Master, B. (2013). Effective instructional time use for school leaders: Longitudinal evidence from observations of principals. *Educational Researcher*, *42*, 433–444. https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X13510020

Grogan, M., & Brunner, C. C. (2005). Women leading systems. *School Administrator*, *62*(2), 46-50. https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/education_articles/183/

Guajardo, L. A. (2015). *Women and the superintendency: A study of Texas women superintendents* (UMI No. 1774582174) [Doctoral dissertation], University of North Texas. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc804929/

Guptill, A. M. (2013). *Succeeding with support: Women superintendents in New York State* (UMI No. 305265193) [Doctoral dissertation]. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=5709070

Guy, M. E., & McCandless, S. A. (2012). Social equity: Its legacy, its promise. *Public Administration Review*, *72*(s1), S5–S13. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6210.2012.02635.x

Hackmann, D. G., & Malin, J. R. (2016). If you build it, will they come? Educational leadership program coordinators' perceptions of principal preparation redesign in Illinois. *International Journal of Educational Reform*, *25*, 338–360. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F105678791602500401

Hajek, N., & Ahmad, S. (2017). A review of the career preparation of female school administrators. *Journal of Administrative Management*, *Education and Training*, *13*(1), 167–174.

Halevy, N., Berson, Y., & Galinsky, A. D. (2011).The mainstream is not electable: When vision triumphs over representativeness in leader emergence and effectiveness. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *37*, 893–904. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0146167211402836

Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1997). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, *9*, 157–191. https://doi.org/10.1080/0924345980090203

Harding, S. G. (Ed.). (2004). *The feminist standpoint theory reader: Intellectual and political controversies*. Psychology Press.

Hatch, T., & Roegman, R. (2012). Out of isolation: Superintendents band together to improve instruction and equity in their districts. *Journal of Staff Development*, *33*(6), 37–41. https://www.tc.columbia.edu/ncrest/publications--resources/HatchThomas_-RoegmanRachel-_-OutofisolationSuperintendentsbandtogethertoimproveequityandinstructionintheirdistricts_2012.pdf

Hekman, S. (1997). Truth and method: Feminist standpoint theory revisited. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *22*, 341–365. https://doi.org/10.1086/495159

Henry, L., Reidy, B., Kirby, N., Held, G., Willis, J., & Westfall, A. A. (2006). Characteristics of effective superintendents. National School Public Relations Association.https://www.nspra.org/files/docs/CharacteristicsOfEffectiveSuperintendents.pdf

Houghton, C., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2013). Rigour in qualitative case-study research. *Nurse Researcher*, *20*(4), 12–17. https://journals.rcni.com/nurse-researcher/rigour-in-qualitative-casestudy-research-nr2013.03.20.4.12.e326

Hoyt, C. L., & Murphy, S. E. (2016). Managing to clear the air: Stereotype threat, women, and leadership. *Leadership Quarterly*, *27*, 387–399. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2015.11.002

Iannaccone, L., & Lutz, F. W. (1970). *Politics*, *power and policy: The governing of local school districts*. Charles E. Merrill.

Iowa Pathways. (2012). The first woman superintendent. http://www.iptv.org/iowapathways/mypath/first-woman-superintendent

Jazzar, M., & Kimball, D. P. (2014). Lonely at the top: A first year administrator. *School Administrator*, *61*(2), 42–44. http://www.aasa.org/SchoolAdministratorArticle.aspx?id=13986

Kelsey, C., Allen, K., Coke, K., & Ballard, G. (2014). Lean in and lift up: Women superintendents share their career path choices. *Journal of Case Studies in Education*, *7*, 1–11. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1060633.pdf

Kerr, B., Miller, W. H., & Ritter, G. (2018). School performance measurement politics and equity. *American Review of Public Administration*, *38*, 100–117. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0275074007304387

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice*, *24*(1), 120–124. https://doi.org/10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kowalski, T., McCord, R., Peterson, G., Young, P., & Ellerson, N. (2011). *The American school superintendent: 2015 decennial study.* Rowman & Littlefield Education.

Kowalski, T. J. (1995). *Keepers of the flame: Contemporary urban superintendents.* Corwin Press.

Lane-Washington, L., & Wilson-Jones, L. (2015). Women superintendents: Challenges, barriers and experiences as senior level leaders. *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*, *27*(4), 2–7. http://www.nationalforum.com/Electronic%20Journal%20Volumes/Lane-Washington,%20LaForrest%20Women%20Superintendents%20NFEASJ%20V27%20N4%202010.pdf

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2013). *Practical research: Planning and design* (10th ed.). Pearson Education.

Lewis, S. (2015). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. *Health Promotion Practice*, *16*, 473–475. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1524839915580941

Lexia. (2018, April 3). Should more women become superintendents?. https://www.lexialearning.com/blog/should-more-women-become-superintendents

Loder, T. L. (2005). Women administrators negotiate work-family conflicts in changing times: An intergenerational perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *41*, 741–776. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0013161X04273847

Lodico, M. G., Spaulding, D. T., & Voegtle, K. H. (2010). *Methods in educational research: From theory to practice* (Vol. 28). John Wiley & Sons.

Manfredi, S. (2017). Increasing gender diversity in senior roles in HE: Who is afraid of positive action?. *Administrative Sciences*, *7*, 19. https://doi.org/10.3390/admsci7020019

Manning, J. (2017). In vivo coding. In J. Matthes (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of communication research methods*. Wiley-Blackwell. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118901731.iecrm0270

Maranto, R., Carroll, K., Cheng, A., & Teodoro, M. P. (2018). Boys will be superintendents: School leadership as a gendered profession. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *100*(2), 12–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/0031721718803563

Martin, A., & O'Meara, K. (2017). Conditions enabling women's leadership in community colleges. In P. L. Eddy, K. Ward, & T. Khwaja (Eds.), *Critical approaches to women and gender in higher education* (pp. 61–86). Palgrave Macmillan.

Martin, A. D. B. (2017). *What are the experiences that influence the hiring and retention of women superintendents* (UMI No. 2186840248) [Doctoral dissertation], Howard University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://search.proquest.com/openview/f0d754840adef3fd9e9e5c160fdf5644/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y

Marzano, R., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. (2005). *School leadership that works.* Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

McCaffery, P. (2018). *The higher education manager's handbook: Effective leadership and management in universities and colleges*. Routledge.

Meador, D. (2014, December 15). The role of a superintendent of schools. *ThoughtCo.* http://teaching.about.com/od/admin/a/Superintendent-Of-Schools.htm

Mercer, D. (1996). 'Can they walk on water?': Professional isolation and the secondary headteacher. *School Organization*, *16*, 165–178. https://doi.org/10.1080/0260136960160204

Merriam, S. B. (2010). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis*. Sage.

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (3rd ed.). Sage.

Morillo, M. N. (2017). *A narrative study on the leadership development of female superintendents in New Jersey* (UMI No. 1884991358) [Doctoral dissertation], Seton Hall University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://scholarship.shu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=3306&context=dissertations

Nadler, J. T., & Stockdale, M. S. (2012). Workplace gender bias: Not just between strangers. *North American Journal of Psychology*, *14*, 281–291. https://search.proquest.com/docview/1013609952?pq-origsite=gscholar

Nash, J. (2018, July). Developmental factors influencing effective leaders. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, *2018*(1), 10551. https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2018.10551abstract

National Center of Education Statistics. (2016). Characteristics of public elementary and secondary school principals in the United States: Results from the 2015–16 National Teacher and Principal Survey. https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2017/2017070.pdf

Natkin, G., Cooper, C., Fusarelli, L., Alborano, J., Padilla, A., & Ghosh, S. (2012). Myth of the revolving-door superintendency. *School Administrator*, *59*(5), 28–31. https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sujit_Ghosh4/publication/234637421_Myth_of_the_Revolving-Door_Superintendency/links/55ccdaea08aeeaab209b4b9d.pdf

Noppe, R., Yager, S., Webb, C., & Sheng, B. (2013). Decision-making and problem-solving practices of superintendents confronted by district dilemmas. *International Journal of Educational Leadership Preparation*, *8*(1), 103–120. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1012999.pdf

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, *16*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847

Pascopella, A. (2011). Superintendent staying power. *District Administration*, *47*(4), 31–36, 38, 40. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ929893

Pasque, P. A. (2013). (Re)membering and (re)living: A methodological exploration of postmodern and constructivist feminist approaches to interviewing women leaders in higher education. NASPA *Journal About Women in Higher Education*, *6*(1), 99–126. https://www.degruyter.com/view/journals/njawhe/6/1/article-p99.xml

Petersen, G. J., & Fusarelli, L. D. (2018). Systemic leadership amidst turbulence: Superintendent-school board relations under pressure. In T. L. Alsbury (Ed.), *The future of school board governance: Relevancy and revelation* (pp. 115–134). Rowman & Littlefield.

Peterson, M. (2017). *Stress and the female superintendent: Contributing factors and stress management strategies from the voices of California female superintendents* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Brandman University. https://digitalcommons.brandman.edu/edd_dissertations/153/

Polka, W. A., & Letchka, P. R. (2018). *The dark side of educational leadership: Superintendents and the professional victim syndrome*. Rowman & Littlefield.

Pruitt, J. L. (2015). *The underrepresentation of African American female public-school superintendents: Breaking through the glass ceiling of race and gender* (UMI No. 1705875519) [Doctoral dissertation], University of Missouri-St. Louis. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://irl.umsl.edu/dissertation/172/

Ramazanoğlu, C., & Holland, J. (2002). *Feminist methodology: Challenges and choices*. Sage.

Ravich, S. M., & Carl, N. M. (2016). Validity: Process, strategies, and considerations. In N. M. Carl & S. M. Ravich (Eds.), *Qualitative research: Bridging the conceptual, theoretical, and methodological* (pp. 185–214). Sage.

Riege, A. M. (2003). Validity and reliability tests in case study research: A literature review with "hands□on" applications for each research phase. *Qualitative Market Research: An International Journal*, *6*(2), 75–86. https://doi.org/10.1108/13522750310470055

Rist, M. (1990). Race and politics rip into the urban superintendency. *Executive Educator*, *12*(12), 12–15. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ418171

Robicheau, J., & Krull, M. (2016). Career advancement for African American school district leaders: A qualitative study on aspirations, barriers, and trust. *AASA Journal of Scholarship and Practice*, *13*(3), 23–37. http://www.aasa.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/JPS-Fall2016.FINAL.pdf#page=23

Robinson, K. K. (2014). Interrupting no more: Why women leave the position of superintendent. In W. S. Newcomb & K. C. Mansfield (Eds.), *Women interrupting, disrupting, and revolutionizing educational policy and practice* (pp. 175–191). Information Age.

Robinson, K. K. (2016). *What have we learned from the departures of female superintendents?* University of Tennessee.

Robinson, K. K. (2018). Why do women leave the superintendency? In E. C. Reilly & Q. Bauer (Eds.), *Women leading education network: Challenges and barriers for women leaders* (pp. 55–82). Rowman & Littlefield.

Robinson, K. K., & Shakeshaft, C. (2015). Women superintendents who leave: Stress and health factors. *Planning and Changing*, *46*, 440–458. https://search.proquest.com/openview/80dabe17ce7c98ee9054b6cc72586e7d/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=47169

Robinson, O. C. (2014). Sampling in interview-based qualitative research: A theoretical and practical guide. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *11*, 25–41. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2013.801543

Rokach, A. (2014). Leadership and loneliness. *International Journal of Leadership and Change*, *2*(1), 46–59. http://digitalcommons.wku.edu/ijlc/vol2/iss1/6

Rook, K. S. (1984). Promoting social bonding: Strategies for helping the lonely and socially isolated. *American Psychologist*, *39*, 1389–1407. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.39.12.1389

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Sampson, P. M. (2018). Female superintendents' longevity: Their experiences. *Leadership and Research in Education*, *4*, 114–126. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1174428.pdf

Sampson, P. M., Gresham, G., Applewhite, S., & Roberts, K. L. (2015). Women superintendents: Promotion of other women to central office administration. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *35*, 187–192. https://scholarworks.sfasu.edu/elementaryed_facultypubs/30/

Sarsons, H. (2017). Recognition for group work: Gender differences in academia. *American Economic Review*, *107*(5), 141–145. https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/aer.p20171126

Schoch, K. (2016). Case study research. In G. J. Burkholder, K. A. Cox, & L. M. Crawford (Eds.), *The scholar-practitioner's guide to research design* (Vol. 1; pp. 5886–6283). Laureate.

Sehorn, Gary. Dr., "Not for the Faint of Heart: An Informal Review of the Literature on Stress Among School Administrators" (2020). *Faculty Publication- School of Education. 253.* https://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/soe_faculty/253

Shakeshaft, C. (1989). *Women in educational administration.* Newbury Park, NJ: Sage.

Sharp, W. L., & Walter, J. K. (1997). *The school superintendent: The profession and the person*. Technomic.

Sherman, W. H., Muñoz, A. J., & Pankake, A. (2008). The great divide: Women's experiences with mentoring. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, *6*, 239–259. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/jwel/25

Skrla, L., Reyes, P., & Scheurich, J. J. (2015). Sexism, silence, and solutions: Women superintendents speak up and speak out. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, *36*, 44–75. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F00131610021968895

Smith, D. J. S. (2015). *Gender inequity in the representation of women as superintendents in Mississippi public schools: The "no problem problem"* (UMI No. 1712956293) [Doctoral dissertation], University of Southern Mississippi. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://aquila.usm.edu/dissertations/149/

Sperandio, J., & Devdas, L. (2015). Staying close to home: Women's life-choices and the superintendency. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *53*, 335–353. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEA-08-2013-0088

Sprague, J. (2005). *Feminist methodologies for critical researchers*. AltaMira.

Steffens, M. C., Viladot, M. A., & Scheifele, C. (2019). Male majority, female majority, or gender diversity: How do proportions affect gender stereotyping and women leaders' well-being?. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *10*, 1037. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01037

Stephenson, L. E., & Bauer, S. C. (2010). The role of isolation in predicting new principals' burnout. *International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership*, *5*(9), 1–17. http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.994.6908&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Steyn, G. M. (2015). The challenges facing women aspiring for school leadership positions in South African primary schools. *Gender and Behaviour*, *13*(1), 6607–6620. https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC172605

Stovall, H. A., Barker-Sperry, L., & Dallinger, J. M. (2015). A new discourse on the kitchen: Feminism and environmental education. *Australian Journal of Environmental Education*, *31*, 110–131. https://doi.org/10.1017/aee.2015.11

Superville, D. R. (2017). Few women run the nation's school districts. Why?. *Education Digest*, *82*(6), 14–19. https://search.proquest.com/openview/3c731c8377e4012cbbcee60d8330c897/1.pdf?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=25066

Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. L. (2016). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. Wiley.

Theron, P. M. (2015). Coding data analysis during qualitative empirical research in practical theology. *Skriflig*, *49*(3). https://doi.org/10.4102/ids.v49i3.1880

Thomas, D. (2014). The contamination of the effective schools movement. *School Administrator*, *58*(3), 55. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ624719

Tufford, L., & Newman, P. (2012). Bracketing in qualitative research. *Qualitative Social Work*, *11*, 80–96. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1473325010368316

U.S. Department of Education. (2014). *Teacher attrition and mobility: Results from the 2012–13 Teacher Follow-up Survey* (NCES 2014-077). https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf

U.S. Department of Education. (2015). Elementary and Secondary Education Act. https://www2.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/non-public-education/files/nclb-essa-equitable-services-comparison.pdf

Wallace, T. T. W. (Ed.). (2015). Increasing the proportion of female superintendents in the 21st century. *Advancing Women in Leadership*, *35*, 42–47. https://awl-ojs-tamu.tdl.org/awl/index.php/awl/article/download/116/102

Watson, T. N., Hodgins, D. W., & Brooks, J. S. (2016). Paradigm shift or paradigm stasis? An analysis of research on US women in educational leadership from 1980 to 2004. In *Racially and ethnically diverse women leading education: A worldview* (pp. 1–22). Emerald Group.

White, N. (2017). *Work-family balance: A narrative analysis of the personal and professional histories of female superintendents with children* (UMI No. 1893704559) [Doctoral dissertation], Marquette University. ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. https://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations_mu/707/

Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research 11*, 522–537. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F104973201129119299

Wilson, F. M. (2015). *Organizational behaviour and work: A critical introduction* (3rd ed.). Oxford University.

Wolf, N. (1994). *Fire with fire: The new women power and how to use it*. Fawcett Columbine.

Wu, Y. P., Thompson, D., Aroian, K. J., McQuaid, E. L., & Deatrick, J. A. (2016). Commentary: Writing and evaluating qualitative research reports. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, *41*, 493–505. https://doi.org/10.1093/jpepsy/jsw032

Wyland, C. (2016). Underrepresentation of females in the superintendency in Minnesota. *Planning and Changing*, *47*(1), 47–62. https://search.proquest.com/openview/8d32c2e2baa9fc6fc925835d6dbaf58c/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=47169

Yazan, B. (2015). Three approaches to case study methods in education: Yin, Merriam, and Stake. *Qualitative Report*, *20*, 134–152. http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR20/2/yazan1.pdf

Yin, R. K. (2017). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods* (6th ed.). Sage.

Zavaleta, D., Samuel, K., & Mills, C. (2014). *Social isolation: A conceptual and measurement proposal*. http://www.ophi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/ophi-wp-67.pdf

Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Date:
Time:
Interviewee Code #:
Location of Interview:

Parts of the Interview	Interview Questions and Notes
Introduction	Hi, my name is Tiawana Giles. Thank you very much for participating in this interview today. As you know, the purpose of this interview is to explore Factors Influencing K–12 Female Educators' Decision Not to Apply for the Superintendency. This should last about 45 to 60 minutes. After the interview, I will be examining your answers for data analysis purposes. However, I will not identify you in my documents, and no one will be able to identify you with your answers. You can choose to stop this interview at any time. Also, I need to let you know that this interview will be recorded for transcription purposes. Do you have any questions? Are you ready to begin?
Question 1	What made you decide to obtain your superintendent certification? Probing question: • Did you discuss this decision with anyone (e.g., spouse, family members, colleagues) before pursuing certification? Is so, what kind of responses did you get? • When did you apply? • Have you shared with your direct report you have a superintendent certification? Why or Why not?
Question 2	How long were you in your current position before you obtained the certification? Probing question: • Why did you apply early/late *(as applicable)* in your career? • Tell me about some of your experiences in your current position?

	• How is this position helping you grow and develop as a leader?
Question 3	What kinds of gender discrimination, if any, have you experienced in your K–12 career? Probing question: • What did you do when faced with gender discrimination? • What other positions have you applied for? • Why do you think you did or did not get the positions you applied for?
Question 4	What did you hope to achieve by obtaining the superintendent certification, expect in getting your certification? Probing question: • What were your goals in getting your certification? • Did you have any other expectations.?
Question 5	What are your short- and long-term goals now that you have superintendent certification? • Could you tell me more about…. • Has your goal changed since • What have you learned since getting the certification? • What can be accomplished.
Question 6	Why haven't you yet pursued the superintendency? Probing questions: • Was there a specific incident that led to you not pursuing the position? If so, what? • What situations could lead you to pursue the superintendency? • What role has gender played in your decision?
Question 7	What have been your experiences in balancing your personal and professional lives in your current position? • Is there anything that you have learned? • If you had to do this all over again, how would you do it differently.
Question 8	What supports, if any, have helped you over the course of your career? Probing question: • What supports could help you pursue the superintendency?

	• What professional organizations are your currently active in? • What role will these professional organization play in you applying and getting a superintendency position?
Question 9	How well do you feel your career path prepared you for the superintendency? Probing question: • How could you have been better prepared? • What are you doing now to make sure you are ready? • Mentor?
Question 10	What do you think would change your mind to apply for the superintendency? • Tell me why?
Question 11	What have you learned in this experience that you would like to share with other women educators? • What recommendations would you have for other women who aspire to the superintendency position? • What positions and connections if any should they make? • What role does mentorship play in getting a superintendency position?
Close	Thank you for your answers. Do you have anything else you'd like to share? Do you have any questions for me? Thank you for your time. Goodbye.

Appendix B: Preliminary Codes

advisement
career aspirations and goals
credibility
difficult environment
difficulty for women
family encouragement
few women
gender bias
hiring process
more education
more experience
no district support
no interest
no mentoring
other pathways
personal goals
politics
racial bias
work-family balance