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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXAMINATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF
AFRICAN AMERICAN FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS IN THE STATE OF
ARKANSAS

A Dissertation Submitted
to the Graduate College
Arkansas Tech University

in partial fulfillment of requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

in School Leadership

in the Department of Teaching and Educational Leadership
of the College of Education and Health

May 2023

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents Laumerion Goodwin, Sr. and Ella Mae Hill Goodwin, my sister Marietha Mae Goodwin Neal and my brother Donnie Andrew Goodwin. They taught me life lessons and skills through every experience encountered with them, which I apply to my life now. My parents Laumerion and Ella Mae always instilled in me to get an education, as well as help others along the way.

My sister, Marietha, whom we affectionately called 'Rita' would take me to her summer classes at ASU- Arkansas State University when I was an elementary student. This was so exciting and fun to me and little did I know I was falling in love with learning altogether. I knew at an early age that I wanted to be an educator and help people in any way that I could because knowledge correctly applied is power to me.

I am a firm believer that exposure and travel is another form of education and learning. I consider traveling a classroom. When I was a middle school student my brother Donnie would always take me with him somewhere just to expose me to something new. I know that my parents and my siblings are smiling down on me from Heaven. Your daughter and little baby sister Debra Denise Goodwin Myton have done it again. I have raised the bar higher for our family. It is because of these lifelong lessons that made me a winner that never quits! I hope you all are proud.

Laumerion Goodwin, Jr. (1923 -1986)

Ella Mae Hill Goodwin (1930 -1999)

Marietha Mae Goodwin Neal (1957 – 2016)

Donnie Andrew Goodwin (1960 -1983)

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. One of the major educational issues is the limited number of African American female superintendents in the USA and the state of Arkansas, in particular. African American women venturing into the superintendency are hindered in their goals by their double minority status as women and African Americans (Wiley et al., 2017). A qualitative, narrative research lens was used in this study to capture the individual career advancement of African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. Data collection centered on personal, one-on-one interviews with African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. The primary and guiding research questions for this study were focused on the women backgrounds, experiences, and educational paths that led to their superintendent position. A series of common themes emerged from the interviews and produced a clear understanding of the path the female superintendents traveled to assume the most important decision-making role in their respective school districts. Key themes which emerged were leadership ability, leadership desire, and mentorship. Participants indicated they had developed a keen sense of self-efficacy, which led to broader goals and career advancements. In future research, it is important to analyze opportunities women have which help shape, encourage, and support other African American women moving into the role of Superintendent in the State of Arkansas.

Keywords: Superintendent, African American, women, female, leadership, and Arkansas

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“Education must not simply teach work – it must teach life”! – W.E.B. DuBois

“Challenges make you discover things about yourself that you never really knew.” -

Cicely Tyson

Chapter 1: Introduction

Superintendents have a vital position of influence and power in United States public school districts. According to Wiley et al. (2017), the superintendent position did not appear in American schools until the late 19th century. Bjork et al. (2018) posit that school district superintendents support the labor of principals and teachers at all grade levels. They assist in developing school-based curricula that focus on problem-solving learning and hands-on experimentation. The superintendents serve as district managers, schedule repairers, oversee budgets and compile reports for school boards.

Superintendents serve as instructional leaders across US public schools and ensure professional advancement and collective responsibility (Cadet, 2018). They influence policy, communities, and families.

Wiley et al. (2017) opines that despite female dominance in classrooms, few have managed to ascend to the highest position in K -12 education. Today, more than 80% of superintendents nationwide are male. One of the reasons for male dominance in superintendent positions is the stereotype that only men can lead efficiently (Gullo & Sperandio, 2020). Family commitment, insufficient mentoring, limited work-related experiences, and the male network have resulted in few women pursuing a career at the administrative level.

On the National level the statistical breakdown of the Superintendents position in the United States of America says there are over 191,749 Superintendents currently

employed in the United States with only 6.7% being women and 93.3 % being men. Only 12% are women with only 2.2% being African American women according to Zippia (2022). On the State level Arkansas has a total of 246 Superintendents with only 67 being women and 179 being men with only 12 being African American females according to the Arkansas Department of Education -ADE (2022).

Fewer African American women occupy the highest leadership position in a school district. The shortage of women of color is dire as the baby boomer generation is headed for retirement. Allen and Hughes (2017) posit that the workplace also comprises millennials and Generation X. These generations have distinct characteristics, values, and motivational and leadership preferences. Society is starting to accept differences, and a new generation of African American females might have a chance to participate in the expansion of leadership numbers. According to Allen and Hughes (2017), the millennial generation exhibits a higher acceptance of diversity due to exposure to numerous facets of social change.

Goines-Harris (2020) asserts that African American women face unexplored and exceptional challenges that impede their careers, including insufficient skills required for leadership roles. Preconceived gender leadership behavior ideas have an instant discriminatory effect on the efficacy of African American females. An African American female's leadership profile is not one unique identity. Instead, their leadership style is individualistic and multifaceted. According to Davis (2022), African American females are frequently misconstrued and viewed as having attitude problems, lacking soft skills, and threatening. Instead of being perceived as confident and assertive, African American

females are misunderstood as angry. The negative perception of African American females is a significant disadvantage in their leadership roles.

According to Baker and Judson (2020), most school board members and politicians do not trust African American superintendents to lead their school districts. The lack of confidence in African Americans to lead districts are one of the major examples of oppression. Without an equitable representation of African American female superintendents, districts will lack the agents of changes required, which might result in persistent inequalities in schools. It will result in minimal expectations of students of color (Baker & Judson, 2020). Even when oppression seems inevitable and imposed barricades inhibit African American females from forging ahead, the determination and resiliency in African American women cause them to persevere towards their goal of attaining the superintendent position.

Background of the Problem

According to Rocio (2020), African American females continue to encounter struggles and challenges concerning recruitment, support, and hiring in educational positions of leadership. The upward mobility of African American females is below males and even further below Caucasian females. The credentials, experiences, training, and professional and personal connection of Caucasian males and females offer an upper hand that women of color are not often privy to (Davis, 2022).

Research indicates that 5.3% of the women in leadership roles in higher education are African American out of the total of 38% of all women holding leadership positions. These numbers do not match the diversity of the student population. The barriers to employing and retaining African American female superintendents can be eliminated

from public school district politics through the influence of the civil rights movement and the Black Feminist movement (Goine-Harris, 2020). Women of color encounter cultural, gender, and race biases. Women of color face negative stereotypes and end up in the lower levels of leadership positions which reduces their chances of progressing in their careers.

According to Nickerson (2020), negative stereotypes regarding African American female leadership abilities cause a lack of confidence and stymie their eagerness to pursue higher level leadership positions. African American females have been distinguished in different gender stereotypical groupings that impact their capacity to act efficiently and authentically with others within their workplace. According to Davis (2022), African American females need to counter stereotypical historical images which impact individuals' perception and treatment of women of color in their workplace. They need to align their inner selves with what their outer image means to others. The intersectionality of sexism and racism engrosses African American females' definition of self. The stereotype effect is a natural fact that assists in maintaining Caucasian dominance in the workplace (Davis, 2022). These effects can be emotionally, mentally, and physically damaging for African American females in their goal to become superintendents.

Mentorship and training opportunities offered to men are often not like those offered to women of color who are hardly members of the "good old boys' network" (Davis, 2022). African American females require exposure to various responsibilities and duties through observation and association of leaders with the influence and authority of superintendents.

According to Davis (2022), the lack of social interaction among staff workers who can shape leadership experience can impede leadership identity formation. Male superintendents outnumber female superintendents and concurrently function as mentors to females. This phenomenon influences the female superintendents' interpretation of how to lead (Cadet, 2018). Subsequently, female superintendents often mirror the actions and behaviors of their male counterparts. The male dominance in the superintendent position, in turn, results in a limited number of female superintendents. This study examined the lived experiences of African American females who defied the odds and through grit and resilience attained the role of superintendent.

Problem Statement

This research study utilized a phenomenological examination of the experiences of African American female superintendents in Arkansas. One of the major educational issues is the limited number of African American female superintendents in the US and the state of Arkansas, in particular. African American women venturing into the superintendency are hindered in their goals by their double minority status as women and African Americans (Wiley et al., 2017). Most women of color are forced into a life filled with isolation, estrangement, and a range of unmarked beginnings and endings.

According to Wiley et al. (2017), women of color must transform their persona into one that avoids appearing either too female or too Black. African American females who make it to the superintendent position face numerous challenges as the job is an isolated position (Spears, 2017).

Literature concerning African American female superintendents in Arkansas is minimal in relation to literature dedicated to all superintendents. Wiley et al. (2017) argue

that African American female superintendents are understudied. This research study examined the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in Arkansas to add to this neglected area of research. This study brought to light extra sensitivity and perspective to understanding these participants' lived experiences. The study also included the challenges, personal background, and support that the participants believe played a significant role in their ascension to superintendent positions.

Purpose of the Study

This research study's purpose was to offer an in-depth description of different work-life aspects, including the obstacles and resiliency faced by African American female superintendents. The study focused on the personal background, challenges, and support that influence the African American acquisition of superintendent positions in the state of Arkansas. There is a need to investigate the lived experiences of women of color who have served in rural and urban school districts. Historically, the stories of these women have been silenced and distorted leaving no road map for aspiring female educators (Wiley et al., 2017). However, the accounts of women educators in leadership positions will assist all aspiring females to reflect on their career journey and emulate those before them. It will help aspiring African American females become aware of the challenges and the steps necessary to successfully pursue leadership roles in the public education sector.

Research Questions

This research study addressed the overarching research question, What are the lived experiences of African American female superintendents? The following sub-questions were considered:

1. What challenges and barriers do African American females face as they attain the superintendent position?
2. What (if any) experiences have women of color superintendents lived in where race and gender have impacted their role?
3. What techniques have African American female superintendents used to be efficient in their role as leaders?
4. How do research respondents describe the effect of their self-worth on their experiences as a superintendent in Arkansas?

Definition of Terms

African American or Black: The term “Black” refers to dark-skinned people of African descent, no matter their nationality. "African American" refers to people who were born in the United States and have African ancestry. Many people use the terms interchangeably (Chavez, 2020).

Internalized oppression: Internalized oppression is the belief among historically oppressed people that negative stereotypes about themselves and positive stereotypes about a dominant group are, in fact, true. (Webb, 2017)

Marginalized: Marginalization occurs when groups of people identify another group as different albeit cultural or physical. These differences result in discrimination, exclusion, and unequal treatment. (Akin & Neumann, 2013)

Mentor: This term refers to someone who offers moral support, influence on administrative work, and genuine opportunities for advancement. (Allen, Jacobson, & Lomotey, 1995)

Microaggression: Microaggressions are described by Derald Wing Sue (2010) as “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals because of their group membership, [these communicative acts] are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over”. (Yep & Lescure, 2019)

Oppression: This is a systemic system that is complex with multiple and interlocking oppressive actions toward a group of people via stereotypes, racializing, gender discrimination, and communication exclusion. (Domingue, 2015)

Significance of the Study

Wiley et al. (2017) assert that the daily encounters of African American superintendents have been understudied. According to Valentine (2018), most of the existing research follows the traditional careers of Caucasian males or generalizes the experiences of all women, neglecting the effect of class oppression, race, and gender on African American females striving to be superintendents. Society repeatedly disenfranchises African American females in favor of male Caucasianness (Davis, 2022). Some studies imply that Caucasian females are the accepted behavioral norm of female leadership and the concurrent representation of the womanhood model. There is a significant discrepancy in research concerning the number of African American females serving as superintendents. This gap exists in the literature surrounding the experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Arkansas.

African American females still face inequities and inequalities in executive leadership. According to Cadet (2018), females are more likely to lead districts with higher fiscal inequalities and poverty indexes. The stereotypical notion of gender

ineptness and race coupled with ideological and political complexities in urban districts suggests that African American females cannot lead urban school districts. On the contrary, African American females are more likely to lead school districts successfully because they are familiar with marginalized groups and can influence a change in the education environment (Cadet, 2018).

Building a relationship with African American female leadership is vital in establishing a sense of comfort and inclusion, which boosts successful leadership achievements (Davis, 2022). Paying attention to the stories of these African American leaders is integral to future generations. It will ensure that aspiring African American female leaders are nurtured and have a blueprint for navigating the patriarchal profession. The dual marginality complex can hardly be extricated but coexists. The unique lived experiences of women of color superintendents need to be explored individually instead of being treated as one large group with similar experiences. African American females hardly fit into a similar category as Caucasian females because their lived experiences differ. According to Davis (2022), Caucasian females retain a Caucasian's privilege that results in a Caucasian social hegemony that tends to exclude African American females. The peculiar oppressive history in America is the cause for the different and often oppressive workplace encounters and expert profiles of African American females. This phenomenological research study intended to offer insights concerning the underrepresentation of living experiences of African American females in the state of Arkansas and add to the existing scholarly work.

Assumptions

This phenomenological examination was based on the following assumptions:

1. The research respondents will answer the questions fully and honestly.
2. This phenomenological examination will use a qualitative approach to research the lived experiences of African American superintendents in the state of Arkansas.
3. Phenomenological research is a research method where the researcher brackets their encounters to familiarize themselves with the participation in the research study.
4. The interview will ensure confidentiality by using letters instead of the participants' real names.
5. The researcher will sign consent to the participation letter, which explains the respondents' confidentiality assurance.

Limitations

The following limitations will be regarded in this study:

1. While the study's findings cannot be generalized, the in-depth description in the data analysis should enable females aspiring to similar positions to learn from their lived experiences and apply what is beneficial in their lives.
2. The trustworthiness of the data relied on the information provided by the research participants.

Delimitations

The following delimitations were considered when this phenomenological study was conducted.

1. This phenomenological examination only included retired or working African American female superintendents.

2. The phenomenological study was limited to female superintendents in the state of Arkansas, their lived experiences, career paths, and their insights on the barriers they faced while pursuing their careers to becoming superintendents in the state of Arkansas.

Organization of Study

Chapter one examines the introduction of the topic, the background of the problem, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research question, the definition of terms, the significance of the study, assumptions, limitations, delimitations, and the organization of the study.

Chapter two provides insights into the literature review. The sections in the literature review included the History of Education for African Americans section comprises the nation and the State of Arkansas. The Gender Trends on Leadership segment is divided into Gender Implications and Ethnicity Implications. The Career Positioning/Mentoring section is divided into Mentoring Needs and Mentoring Systems. The African American Women in Leadership Roles section is divided into African American Women Training and African American women Experiences. The theoretical frameworks comprise Black Feminist Thought Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Representative Bureaucracy Theory. Chapter three includes the methodology. It encompasses research questions, research methodology, research design, population and sample selection, instrumentation, and data analysis.

Summary

This chapter outlines the complex and in-depth description of different work-life aspects faced by the background experiences and educational path for African American

female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. In chapter two, the review of literature will provide information concerning the background nationally and locally regarding the educational path of African American women. This chapter is organized according to three major themes: the Gender Trends in Leadership (Gender Implications and Ethnicity Implication's); Career Positioning/Mentoring (Mentoring Needs and Mentoring Systems); and African American Women in Leadership Roles (African American Women Training and African American Women's Experiences).

Chapter II: Literature Review

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” –

***Nelson Mandela** (“I never lose, I either win or learn”)*

The first aspect that this chapter introduces is the history of education for African Americans on a national scale as well as in the state of Arkansas, in particular. Secondly, the literature review chapter addresses gender trends in leadership. The segment is divided into gender and ethnicity implications. Third, gender positioning/mentoring is discussed in the section and is divided into mentoring needs and mentoring systems. Fourth, research related to African American women in leadership roles is presented with a discussion of African American women’s training and African American women’s experiences. Lastly, the chapter will examine various theoretical frameworks, including Black Feminist Thought Theory, Critical Race Theory, and Representative Bureaucracy Theory.

The Keywords used to guide the literature review include Black Education, education milestones in the state of Arkansas, women of color in leadership positions, ethnicity in education, leadership, mentorship among African American females in the superintendency, experiences of African American female superintendents and theory in African American superintendency. The database used during literature review research includes peer-reviewed journal articles, websites, and books.

History of African Americans in Education

Nationally

African American education incorporates formal and informal attempts by people of color to attain literacy and develop skills that enable them to survive in a racial society

(Libretexts, 2021). Since the days of enslavement, constraining black education was used to quell black agency and slave rebellion fears. The denial intensified Black people's desire for education. However, after emancipation in 1863, black education was relegated to poorly funded segregated learning institutions. During the reconstruction era between 1865 and 1877, Caucasian elites and Black leaders debated the Black education issue, and the outcome was second-class citizenship and industrial education. With the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People founding in 1909, legal and political action overturned the segregation codified in *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) (Libretexts, 2021). Education access was a significant focal point in African American education from the late 1800s through the mid-1900s. According to Baker and Judson (2020), freed African Americans demanded schools for themselves and their kids after the Civil War. Presently, school integration has been eroded due to residential segregation, Caucasian flight, and busing abandonment.

The issues linked to African American girls' and women's education shifted tremendously in the later part of the 20th century (Baker & Judson, 2020). African American females have made significant advancements in postsecondary degree attainment since 1862. However, minority females continue to struggle to attain the highest leadership roles, such as the public-school superintendency. Baker and Judson (2020) posit that the prevailing shortage of African American females at the highest level of a field dominated by females as principals and teachers are one of the most troubling leadership issues in public education.

State of Arkansas

The initial state-mandated segregation in Arkansas happened with Act 52 of 1868, which established segregated education for Caucasian and Black students (Jones-Branch, 2021). Racial segregation meant that people of color could take advantage of educational opportunities, and black tutors were assured of work in Black schools. Jones-Branch (2021) asserts that an act passed in 1871 offered a separate but equal school system that required Black faculty training to teach in them. The teaching void was filled with the opening of the Branch Normal College (now the University of Arkansas at Pine Bluff) in 1873.

The early education milestone for African Americans in the state of Arkansas can be attributed to a handful of committed people who knew the way to change the fate of a nation and a generation was through education. McKinney (2022) posits that John Williamson, Floyd Brown, Eliza Ann Miller, Henry Clay Yerger, Dr. Tandy Washington Coggs, and Julius Rosenwald contributed to Black education in Arkansas.

Student segregation by race sometimes reoccurred within integrated schools via internal student assignments. Many Caucasian learners and only a few Black students were tracked into so-called talented and gifted classes (Graves, 2021). By 2000, a report by Grif Stockley indicated that more than 48% of Caucasian K-12 learners in Little Rock attended private schools, and only 45 Black kids of the same age went to private schools.

Gender Trends in Leadership

Gender Implications

According to Campomanes et al. (2022), females encounter difficulties in exhibiting their superintendence capacities and opportunities because of stereotypes and

societal assumptions and views. Women superintendents face challenges because some in the district see the superintendency as inherently a male role (Ivory et al., 2010). Gender plays a pivotal role in shaping leadership, and feminine and masculine roles significantly affect career options and people's choices of their leaders. Campomanes et al. (2022) posits that male-centric norms and models constrained females' aspirations for leadership and their approach to leadership roles. Gender differences emerge in how the sense of belonging changes over time. According to Goines-Harris (2020), a limited number of females and women of color aspire to leadership positions because leadership has been male-dominated.

Males dominate superintendent positions in almost 14,000 public school districts in the US even though K-12 education comprises the majority of females. Goines-Harris (2020) asserts that females comprise the largest number of licensed staff within the education system in the US, however, females account for less than a quarter of all superintendents. Davis (2022) argues that the superintendent leadership position in K-12 public education has mirrored a Caucasian patriarchal system. The school system structures of dominant masculine groups influence female exclusion when women seek upper management positions of power (Davis, 2022). Subsequently, the patriarchal K-12 public school system culture reinforces the status quo and offers minimal chances for African American females to receive promotions.

Ethnicity Implications

Array (2018) indicates a notable under-representation of Black and minority ethnic staff at elite levels within the academy. Racial and ethnically diverse leaders are still underrepresented. Caucasian male leadership hierarchy has marginalized ethnic

minority groups and females. The inequality landscape within academics has sought to ensure that Black and minority ethnic academics remain on the leadership opportunities' periphery. Faculties of color encounter challenges in attaining promotion to senior leadership roles (Arday, 2018). This is usually punctuated against racist micro-aggressive cultures, racism, and discrimination which results in questioning expert capacities.

Anderson et al. (2019) assert that ethnic biases might be subtle and create an atmosphere of distrust and tension that harms teamwork and performance. Pessimistic interpersonal treatment might fall under the aversive racism framework. Racial stereotypes impede African American females' progress in educational leadership. According to Davis (2020), the American culture tends to support social discrimination that reflects male privilege and Caucasian entitlement within the superintendency. The authority and power of the school superintendency are denied to African American females due to social discrimination (Davis, 2022). The fight for equal rights and systemic racism in education has been a continuing battle in the United States of America.

Career Positioning/Mentoring

Mentoring Needs

Mentorship is a valuable aspect of any workplace as it boosts job satisfaction, productivity, and resiliency and minimizes turnover (Spears, 2017). Mentorship is essential in meeting the need for a positive self-concept, which assists African American females in enrolling in programs that mold them for administrative leadership. Mentorship assists in offering advice and counseling to prospective leaders who seek career advancement (McCrimmon, 2022). Meeting the mentoring needs of

superintendents does not have to be face-to-face but can be facilitated via technology. Mentoring can be informal or formal. According to Spears (2017), informal mentoring happens by chance and is monotonous than formal mentoring relationships. Formal mentorship programs are managed by a firm where a mentor is assigned to a protégé or mentee.

McCrimmon (2022) posits that mentors notably impact minority female leaders, even though their presence and visibility in such roles are minimal. Mentors meet the mentoring needs of African American female superintendents by assisting them to stay motivated while pursuing their goals. Sadly, African American female superintendents experience heightened isolation with limited mentorship and networking opportunities. According to McCrimmon (2022), some women hesitate to compete for elite leadership positions because they fear the discrimination inherent in leadership assignments.

Mentoring Systems

Superintendent induction and mentoring systems assist new administrations in bridging the gap between what they know and what they need to know to flourish in their new positions (Spears, 2017). New superintendents require frequent support as they transition into the district leader role. The mentoring systems enable novice superintendents to have a safe and trusting environment, network, reflect on their practices, and build on leadership capacity. Washington (2021) opines that African American female superintendents need to take advantage of forming network opportunities with other mentees and mentors. The steps aim in forming in-depth connections and navigating through the inner workings of the superintendent position. According to Spears (2017), mentoring programs are new to the state of Arkansas. There

is hardly any formal internship component in the preparation programs that proceed to superintendent licensure in Arkansas.

In 2009, the state of Arkansas legislature passed Arkansas Act 222 to strengthen education leadership development (Spears, 2017). The legislators stated that Act 222 would result in an efficient statewide leadership development system that would boost graduation rates, minimize remediation rates, boost student and adult performance, and increase the number of Arkansas citizens with bachelor's degrees. Spears (2017) asserts that Act 586 established a superintendent mentorship program in Arkansas. The mentoring system ensured that each educational cooperative in the state had several trained mentors who would be paired with new superintendents.

African American Women in Leadership Roles

African American Women Training

Cirincione-Ulezi (2020) posits that it is common for Black women to assume additional training and degrees, take additional assignments, and work longer hours to combat the impression that they are less qualified. Organizational management must focus on training staff workers to conduct fair evaluations and extend a widened diversity training initiative concerning employees' treatment from all backgrounds (Anderson et al., 2019). African American female training is vital in improving curriculum instruction. It also introduces new techniques that accommodate diversity within schools.

The training exposes the political perspective of superintendency, media, and budget management (Davis, 2022). Training assists during the leadership transition and strategies to culminate the provision of crucial support and amenities for the school district. African American women's training requires mentorship, sponsorship, and

supervision (Cirincione-Ulezi, 2020). Training through mentorship ensures that African American females acquire guidance through the experience, skills, and knowledge of another person in career progression. Mentors train their mentees and enable them in their professional growth. Training through sponsorship occurs when mentees acquire a direct line to leadership. Sponsors offer advice and groom aspiring superintendents for leadership positions.

African American Women's Experiences

Wiley et al. (2017) argues that examining women of color's experiences is a way of negating invisibility, hostility, and indifferences. Paying attention to their stories and experiences offers valuable perspectives to other eager female educators, especially African American female educators. According to Davis (2020), the role of school superintendents can be a major challenge for females as most experience a lack of organizational support. Black female superintendents encounter the intersectional challenge of gender and race, and these barriers make it challenging to thrive in a leadership position. Women of color in leadership have encountered discriminatory acts of racism and sexism within a firm (Davis, 2022).

Family responsibilities and motherhood impact the career advancement of Black women. Women experience a challenge in choosing their careers, and relationships and family obligations remain constant battles for career women (Davis, 2022). Most women are primary caregivers for elderly parents or young toddlers, which needs a significant amount of time, financial resources, and mental energy. The conflict in the responsibilities and duties makes women less thrilled to aspire for superintendent positions.

Another challenge that African American females in pursuit of superintendent position face are geographic immobility. Most women are less willing to relocate and leave their families and communities (Davis, 2022). Career opportunities to advance to school district leadership position becomes available frequently across the country, and to obtain such a position, one must be willing to relocate.

African American females pose a robust self-image to transcend the professional climate of negativity successfully. According to Davis (2022), the superintendent position includes complex political demands that might result in professional burnout, emotional stress, and anxiety. Despite their underrepresentation, preparation by African American female superintendents results in resilience (Davis, 2022).

Theoretical frameworks

Black Feminist Thought Theory

The Black feminist term has been used to apply to selected African Americans, especially women with a feminist consciousness. According to Collins (2020), Black feminist thought comprises specialized knowledge created by African American females, which illustrates standpoints for and off Black females. Using this theoretical framework, Black women can be a theorist and be viewed as agents of wisdom concerning the interconnectedness of racism, sexism, and class oppression. The emphasis on African American females' experiences differs from the encounters of Caucasian females and males. Wiley et al. (2017) indicate that Black females' perspective needs to be viewed as accounted for because they have outstanding knowledge based on their encounters in a subordinate role in their workplace or within society.

The discussion of Black Feminist thought championed the existence of two levels of knowledge. The first includes taken-for-granted knowledge shared by similar group members. The second comprises specialized knowledge offered by professionals and expresses the group's perspective (Wiley et al., 2017). African American females experience double consciousness and experience the world uniquely from individuals who are neither Black nor female. Black Feminist Thought opines that economic and political institutional changes will eventually promote significant social change.

In 1989, Kimberle Crenshaw, a legal scholar, and Black feminist, first coined the term intersectionality (Goines-Harris). Black feminist thought and activism developed the intersectionality theory concept. The term illustrates how Black females' identities and encounters are marginalized by tendencies to treat gender and race as mutually exclusive categories.

Critical Race Theory

Roithmayr (2019) argues that critical race theory is a revolutionary intellectual movement that places race at the core of the critical analysis. Critical race theory borrows most of its critical legal conventional and scholarship principles from the civil rights movement. According to (Dixon & Rousseau, 2018), critical race theory in education asserts that racial inequality is a logical outcome of a system premised on competition. Critical race theory in education engages in the intersectional analysis that points out how race is mediated by and interacts with other identity markers such as sexuality, class, linguistic background, citizenship status, and gender (Dixon & Rousseau, 2018).

Critical race theory demonstrates the meaning of educational achievements. The workplace disparities are blamed on the differences in educational achievements between

applicants of color and Caucasian candidates (Roithmayr, 2019). Education scholars use the principles of critical race theory to investigate the education field more systematically than legal scholars ever could. Critical race theory offers theoretical justification for critical oppositional accounts of race. This includes counter-stories that challenge integration as the universal move to equalize education for all races. According to Roithmayr (2019), multicultural relationships are vital to attaining racial liberation.

Representative Bureaucracy Theory

According to Vinopal (2020), the theory of representative bureaucracy points out that a public workforce that reflects its constituent population's demographic is better suited to serve the public. Representative bureaucracy theory was developed and validated in various contexts, such as regulatory agencies human services, law enforcement, and education. Vinopal (2020) asserts that the theory of representative bureaucracy originated from Kingsley's social class composition analysis of the British civil system in 1944.

Meier (2019) asserts that the theory of representative bureaucracy differentiates between active and passive representation. Active representation consists of bureaucrats who act for the public that looks like them and seek to alter bureaucratic outputs. According to Meier (2019), passive representation encompasses bureaucrats who mirror the demographic origin of the population in terms of social class, gender, or race.

Summary

This chapter presented the present trends in leadership, mentoring, and experiences that African American woman faced in challenges for leadership positions in education. The literature is clear that barriers, obstacles, as well as historical trends are all

issues that African American female Superintendents face in the State of Arkansas that can hinder their careers to the top position. However, depending on the region and economic circumstances African American females can aspire to the Superintendent position. In chapter three the discussion will be focused on the actual lived experiences of the African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas.

Chapter III: Methodology

“Those who say it can’t be done are usually interrupted by others doing it.” – James Baldwin

This phenomenological study’s purpose is to investigate the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Arkansas. Black Feminist Thought theory, Critical Race Theory, and Representative bureaucracy theory described in the literature review serve as a guiding theoretical framework to familiarize with the lived experiences of African American female superintendents. The significance of this study is evidenced in the disproportionately small number of African American females in the superintendent role despite the increasing number of African American females enrolling in educational leadership programs.

The research study’s methodology relies on lived experiences to study participants of a certain phenomenon. The phenomenological examination enabled the researcher to focus on the participants’ voices. This study used a qualitative research design and used interviews to explore African American females’ lived experiences and perceptions. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to discover the lived experiences of African American females holding the superintendent position in the state of Arkansas.

Research Questions/Hypotheses

This phenomenological study was conducted to answer the subsequent research questions.

1. What barriers and challenges do African American females face as they attain the superintendent position?

2. What (if any) experiences have women of color superintendents lived where in race and gender have impacted their role?
3. What techniques have African American female superintendents used to be efficient in their leadership roles?
4. How do research participants describe the effect of their self-worth on their experience as a superintendent in Arkansas?

Researcher Positionality

As an African American woman working in the field of education for 29 years, my personal and professional experiences provide a unique lens as one who has not only experienced allegations of discrimination made by African American women, but I have personally experienced employment discrimination being blocked from advancement opportunities. These experiences compelled me to learn how some African American women have ascended to the superintendent role in the State of Arkansas. Being a former African American female leader, who did not continue up the leadership ladder, my interest and empathy was in learning more about how the leadership positions embraced by African American female leaders were breaking the barriers that continue to hinder African American female leaders in leadership positions. “Black women’s leadership is not just about their strength and perseverance. It is about how consistently they show up and fight for the common good. “Whether Black women are narrowing the wealth gap, fighting for free and fair elections or gearing up to assume one of the highest offices in the nation, when Black women lead, we all win,” (Schnall, 2020, p. ?). However, it was important to me that my research was separated from personal experience and beliefs related to being an African American female leader. Separation, in this case, is referred

by Creswell (2015) as “bracketing out one’s own experiences” (p. 60). To successfully accomplish such, two processes were utilized including clearly defining the role of the researcher and the process of reflexivity. Reflexivity is the process by which the ‘researcher reflects about how their biases, values, and personal background, such as gender, history, culture, and socioeconomic status, shape their interpretations formed during the study” (Creswell, 2015. p. 233). The primary role of the researcher was that of an investigator. In that, the researcher was charged with investigating the phenomenon in an ethical manner with the primary goal being risk free research. This was accomplished through a statement of biases which included ‘comments on connection between the researcher and the participants and the research site,” IRB approval, and steps taken to “secure permission to study the participants or situation” (p. 177).

Research Methodology

This phenomenological examination used qualitative methodology to explore African American female lived experiences as superintendents in Arkansas. It included the perception of their roles, ethnic and gender biases, mentorship, and strategies that propelled their success in leadership. The technique is effective as qualitative researchers intend to answer questions that highlight how lived experiences influence and give meaning to choosing a particular path in life. Qualitative researchers aim to understand a phenomenon and the individuals’ worldviews.

Research Design

Research design is intended to provide an effective framework for a study (Sileyew, 2019). It encompasses a technique to integrate various elements of the research project coherently and cohesively. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are the

three main research methods to contemplate while conducting a research study. Quantitative research is an examination of human or social problems formulated by assessing a theory comprised of variables and statistical procedures and measured with numbers to determine if the predictive generalization of the theory holds. Qualitative research is the examination procedure of comprehending a human or social problem based on constructing sophisticated, holistic images and reporting a detailed perspective of information in a natural setting. The mixed method approach combines qualitative and quantitative research in a single study to familiarize yourself with the research problem. In this phenomenological study, qualitative research is best suited for the respondents to share their lived experiences as superintendents in the state of Arkansas.

Population and Sample Selection

The participants were six African American women superintendents serving in small to medium size rural school districts in the State of Arkansas. The women were between the ages of 42-61 years of age. The superintendents held at least a Specialist or Doctoral degree. Five of the Superintendents were married mothers with only one not married with no children. Danita, Debra, Deborah, and Donna have doctoral degrees while Denise and Diane have Specialist degrees. They have between 0 – 3 plus years of experience for their position. The researcher conducted one on one interview via zoom with all six of the African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. An informed consent letter was emailed to each participant requesting their participation for this research study.

Instrumentation

According to Phipps and Mrowczynski (2021), interviews range from initiative-taking to unstructured to open-ended methodological tools of social scientific data gathering. Interviews are vital in studying people's experiences, perspectives, justifications, and explanations. Semi-structured interviews offer flexibility and are appropriate for most qualitative research studies. This phenomenological study used a semi-structured interview to address and examine the experiences of African American female superintendents in the state of Arkansas.

While conducting the interviews, the researcher presented semi-structured questions based on the study's research question and the relevant literature. Executing this instrumentation method enabled the researcher to collect in-depth information in a brief period as participants offered insights into their lived experiences.

The researcher examined the backgrounds, experiences, and educational paths of six African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas by asking the interview questions via zoom (see Appendix A and B). The interview questions were developed based on the research questions and input from Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators (AAEA) and my committee chair. The interview questions were comprised of demographic questions, closed-ended questions, and open-ended questions.

The open-ended questions allowed the participants to share information regarding their individual experiences in the educational path to the Superintendent role. The interview demographic questions that included: a) age range, b) marital status c) the number of children d) highest degree earned e) years of experience f) superintendent

position and g) district information contained questions related to the actual background of the Superintendents.

The interview experienced related questions included: a) What barriers and challenges do African American females face as they attain the superintendent position? b) What (if any) experiences have African American women Superintendents lived where race and gender have impacted their role? c) What techniques have African American female superintendents used to be efficient in their leadership roles?, and d) How do research participants describe the effect of their self-worth on their experience as a superintendent in Arkansas?

Data Collection

Adhabi and Anozie (2017) state that interviews are compatible with phenomenological research design. Interviews can be understood as an interactive product where a researcher poses specific questions seeking certain information. The interviews were designed to gain an in-depth understanding of African American superintendents' phenomena.

The purpose of the study was explained along with an invitation to participate. As the researcher I obtained signed consent forms from every participant during the initial contact before starting the interviews. The interviews were scheduled with the participant informing the researcher of the time and date they were willing to be interviewed. Once participants were selected and completed a consent form (see Appendix D), the researcher conducted interviews via Zoom. As the researcher, I sent the zoom link via email regarding the participant requested date and time. Each participant that I interviewed lasted about 90 minutes or less.

The range of questions prompted the females to share their challenges, barriers, and situations they experienced as they soared into the superintendent seat. Based on the information the respondents provided during the interview discussions, it was evident that specific discussed experiences were gender biases and discriminatory.

The researcher read and coded the transcripts while looking for similar patterns and themes. Qualitative research is naturalistic and strives for validation because most of it focuses on quality.

Data Analysis

Data analysis follow data collection. The data analysis procedure encompassed examining relationships between the data and organizing information to determine patterns and themes within the data (Valentine, 2018). This phenomenological examination's main goal fully understood the data and offered a textual interpretation that painted a precise image of the data while providing a genuine account of the respondents' lived encounters.

Every data set examined for these and cross-referenced to identify commonalities within the data from various sources. In the first step, the data analysis procedure included reviewing the interview transcripts from writing journal notes and listening to voice recordings. The information used to determine relevant themes. Coding categories were based on all the collected data, including interviews, observations, and the researcher's notes. The initial coding round included the opening of phrases, keywords, and sentences that represented the respondents' opinions and actions. Open coding is the first step in minimizing research findings. The second step is reducing bias which involved using the researcher's field notes.

Another step is the data analysis procedure that comprised using themes developed to make extra connections between data collection documents. Flexibility ascertained the respondents' lived experiences, perceptions, and beliefs that captured and preserved the reporting. A phenomenological examination identified the similarities of shared experiences and offered a perspective on a particular phenomenon.

Ethical Considerations

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) permission from Arkansas Tech University, participants were contacted through semi-structured interviews. Upon making contact an IRB-approved email was sent to African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. Once participants were selected and completed a consent form (see Appendix D), the researcher conducted interviews via Zoom. Steps taken to ensure confidentiality in the process were identified and each participant was assigned a pseudonym name and recorded Zoom interviews were kept in a secure location. Any information that compromised the respondent's identity was intentionally excluded from this research study. Any information suggesting the superintendent's real name, their school district's name, or cities where the African American superintendent lives or is employed is left out. All the collected data is stored in a safe place within the researcher's home office and used only by the researcher for the purpose of this study. The data will be maintained until the completion of this research study and later destroyed.

Summary

This chapter outlined the study design including methods, procedures, and data analysis. The purpose of this study was focused on the lived experiences of African American female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas. In chapter four the findings of

the lived experiences of African American female Superintendents are defined through the interview process, district and community demographics, and the research questions that the six participants addressed regarding their lived experiences.

Chapter IV: Findings

Defining myself, as opposed to being defined by others, is one of the most difficult challenges I face. – Carol Moseley - Braun

As Black women, we are always given these devastating experiences – experiences that could absolutely break us. But what the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls the butterfly. What we do as Black women is take the worst situations and create from that point. – Viola Davis

The purpose of this study was to examine the lived experiences of African American female superintendents in the State of Arkansas. The study examined the lived experiences that these six women discussed as an in-depth description of different work-life aspects, including the obstacles and resiliency that they faced on the path to the superintendency in Arkansas. The study examined the personal background, challenges, and support that influence the African American acquisition of superintendent positions in the state of Arkansas. Through one-on-one interviews, the women spoke candidly about their backgrounds, experiences, and educational paths that led to their superintendent position.

The six superintendents, who were working and had retired from the position consented to a visual and audio-taped interview. Appendix A provides a list of the demographics and interview questions that were posed to each African American superintendent participating in the qualitative research. The questions were designed to reveal the lived experiences of their paths to the superintendent position in the State of Arkansas. These interviews provided solid insights of African American female superintendents who reached the goal of superintendent in the State of Arkansas.

The interview questions helped shape and direct the discussion with the superintendents and to answer the following research questions:

1. What barriers and challenges do African American females face as they attain the superintendent position?
2. What (if any) experiences have women of color superintendents lived where in race and gender have impacted their role?
3. What techniques have African American female superintendents used to be efficient in their leadership roles?
4. How do research participants describe the effect of their self-worth on their experience as a superintendent in Arkansas?

The Interview Process

African American people, especially women whose career paths are eyeing the superintendency, will always view and approach this position differently as they are already pinned within a particular norm of social injustice, racism, and sexism in their bid for candidacy. The overall requirement for these ambitious educators is that for male educators, it would take them only five years before they could pursue superintendency. In comparison, 60% of women would take them ten years before pursuing superintendency. The path to the interview is often choosy as these candidates must have at least followed through the typical way to a career as a superintendent in a public school for them even to be considered by the school board. These school boards often influence the candidate to be chosen and are usually guarded by headhunters, who make most of the hiring and recruitment (Harris, 2020).

Those in power will often have a majority stake in who will get the position. This makes them work twice as hard by making themselves marketable through community outreach, mentoring, and network support. Some of these female African American educators often felt intimidated by the nature of the interviews and how they were conducted. After an application for the position, a phone interview is set up to narrow down their list of candidates and then move to the Board meeting for successful candidates to be shortlisted. Community interviews are also followed up soon after to ensure that they have a say and influence in appointing the right fit and candidate for the position where every candidate shortlisted had their night with the District community. In other schools, some of the superintendents did report being appointed directly by the Board without any interview process, which often brought an uproar among angry parents and the community who rallied strikes in protest to the executive decision by these school boards (Taylor, 2021).

The interviews were conducted on zoom with each participant. The participants were professional, cordial, and excited about my study. The time limit for each interview was 90 minutes or less per superintendent.

District and Community Demographics

Rural places in the United States have often been plagued with numerous issues in the education system as they have had to cope with unique circumstances and conditions. The Rural Trust in 1995 was a solution for over 700 schools in 35 states. Arkansas is part of the sample rural state, which is reported to have 233 districts, which host 474,826 students in a total of 989 public schools. It is said that approximately 90% of the teachers in Arkansas are Caucasian, while 63% of the student population is Black. Data from the

United States Census Bureau published in July 2022 states that the total population of Arkansas is estimated to be approximately 3,045,637, representing a 1.1% increase from 2020 data published at 3,011,555 (Williams & King, 2002).

Of noticeable interest was the high percentage of the Caucasian community in Arkansas, which stood at 78.6%, which African Americans followed at 15.7%. Recent data published reported that the total number of currently active school superintendents stands at 7,194, with 71.5% male and 28.5% are female. It is also further reported that the average age of this prestigious school leadership position is 46 years old. Most of these school superintendents are Caucasian, approximately 68.6% in total, followed by those of Hispanic ethnicity at 14%. A subsequent 10.2% of the total capacity of these school superintendents make up the Black community, and Asians make up 4.6% to make the complete whole. There has been a consistent decline in the general appointments of Black school superintendents all through 2010, from a high of 12.25% (Zippia, 2022).

The school districts were similar in size, ethnic, cultural, and socio-economic makeup. The communities of each school district were slightly diverse. The sample used was contrary to what the literature suggests that African American women superintendents lead urban school districts. The school district and communities were rural based with a few Superintendents having worked in urban school districts and diverse cultural school districts but not as a Superintendent. Each superintendents expressed their commitment to helping others as their reason for becoming an educator.

Research Questions Addressed by African American Superintendents

Attaining the superintendent position in the State of Arkansas has been quite a challenge as an African American female leader. There is low student achievement

expectancy and a lack of professional development for leadership and administration for these top management positions in the public school system. However, a significant positive is an ability to effect change and function as an example and model for accepting African American female superintendents based on merit, not race and ethnicity. A significant issue has been the subtle comments, the lack of support, and insults directed towards my administration and me, due to my appointment to this position (Harris, 2020).

Available redundancy in the public schools in Arkansas was my primary motivation for applying for the leadership position, as I saw a need for holistic change in the education system to improve student outcomes. However due to the Arkansas public school demographics, I could only apply where the region was culturally appropriate to apply if I were going to have a real chance at getting the job. There is no way I could apply for a public school district in the state of Arkansas that is all Caucasian or mostly Caucasian and expect to be hired for the superintendent position. As a superintendent in the district, the entire public school system has adopted hiring more African American instructors not based on race but rather merit, which has improved the community and state consequently. Another key achievement is the ability to have a fully incorporated community outreach program which is essential for the school to include their support and break the racial and sexist barriers in the public-school education system. The board, school principal, and teachers agree with the impact achieved over the current period since being appointed to the position. They recommend that fellow African American females apply for more superintendency appointments in Arkansas to effect change and oppose racism and sexism in our public education system (Williams & King, 2002).

Research Question 1: *What barriers and challenges do African American females face as they attain the superintendent position?*

Interview Protocol Questions 7 -10

7. How many attempts did you make before getting the superintendency?

8. Have you served more than one district as superintendent? If so, what motivated you to seek a different position? Did being a sitting superintendent help or hinder your securing new positions?

9. Do you feel that being an African American female helped or hindered your securing the position?

10. What has been the most positive aspect of being a superintendent? What has been the most negative aspect of being a superintendent?

These African American women superintendents' professional backgrounds were similar in the sense that all of them were classroom teachers for ten or less years before becoming a school district leader. Debra was a middle school teacher that elevated to the high school level, she said, "I was a middle school teacher for six years before becoming an Assistant Principal in another school district." She further stated, "I always wanted to leverage and influence so I expired to become a high school principal." Diane, Donna, Deborah, Danita, and Denise started their classroom experience at the elementary level. Except for Diane and Denise everyone got an Assistant Principal and then Principal Job before getting a school district administrative job. Diane left the elementary classroom and became a Gifted and Talented Director for the school district. Denise who left the elementary classroom started at the district level as the Guidance Counselor Director for the school district. Diane served ten years in the classroom before arriving at a district level position which was the Gifted and Talented Director. Whereas Debra only served six years in the classroom before becoming a school leader, however, it took her 15 years to get a district level position in another school district. Donna elevated to the district test coordinator after serving as Assistant Principal and Principal for nine years in the same school district.

Deborah served six years in the classroom before becoming an Assistant Principal and then Principal. She worked in other capacities within education before she applied for a district level position, and she was hired on her first attempt as a district level leader. Danita worked in the classroom for ten years before becoming a district curriculum director. Denise was in the classroom for seven years before she became a district level employee. She served as Principal and Superintendent at the same time in her school district. She had to go back to college to obtain a Superintendent certification. The experiences of their paths to the district levels are different and unique to each of them as the school districts that they serve offers a different background and culture for each of them.

Denise explained that “I am a product of my school and community, therefore, I have a true love for the community and students in the area.” She was a teacher in the school district that she was a Principal and Superintendent of in the dual roles. As Deborah had worked in an urban school district, she was pleasantly surprised to apply for a Superintendent position and get hired on her first attempt. Diane was not so lucky because it took her four attempts for the Superintendent position and Debra made three attempts. Donna, Danita, and Denise were fortunate like Deborah, it took them one attempt for the job. Denise was already in place for the job and since she was the principal and a product of her community the school board decided to give her a chance because of her love for the community. Danita was in the role of Assistant Superintendent and when the Superintendent retired, she was already in line for the job and her all male school board decided to give her a chance especially since she was all about following policy and procedure. Debra, who had spent five years at the district

level in one school district and left to pursue a Deputy Superintendent in another school district was pleasantly surprised to become the first African American Superintendent of another school district.

Donna on the other hand was working as a Deputy Superintendent and when the Superintendent left the district, she recommended Donna for the job and the school board gave Donna the job. However, Diane, Debra, Donna, and Deborah felt that being an African American female hindered them in getting the job because their school boards wanted men for the positions. Debra felt like the job she really wanted hindered her as an African American female but the one she got was ready but still wanted a male. Whereas Diane, Donna and Deborah felt they had to prove themselves to be firm, fair, and lenient because the board/district wanted males.

Danita and Denise felt that it did not hinder nor hurt their chances for the job because they were already doing the job and the work, they displayed was positive withing their school districts. All the superintendents felt they had improved their districts in positive ways by improving academics, showing good leadership with staff, community, and school board; as well as being welcomed positively into the district they were leading. However, they felt like the press, media, being blamed for everything even if they inherited the problem and their school board demanding immediate results were tasks that posed a negative aspect of their jobs.

The professional background and path to the superintendent position posed some positives as well as negative aspects. Diane, Donna, Deborah, Danita, and Denise felt they made a positive impact on their district and Debra felt her district was so happy to have her leading the district. However, their negative aspects were similar in that

Deborah, Denise and Donna felt as though they must do everything and take the blame for everything although they inherited the negative problem. Debra felt overwhelmed with her district wanting immediate results from her leadership in the first year of being a leader. Whereas Diane felt as though the press was the issue for making the school district seem like a bad school district.

Findings

These educators faced an uphill challenge whereby their race and their gender often collided in a system that has seen a significant increase in these female African American superintendents in these public schools. This is not only evident in retention and recruitment, but it is widely evident in the overall suppression of culturally diverse approaches in the United States education to the point that Caucasian's has become almost unnoticed. Despite numerous efforts to bring to light the plight of equal opportunity for other students in marginalized communities, especially African American students, Caucasian supremacy reigns in these public schools where antiracist approaches fail to yield benefits as the disease itself is still not adequately attended to and heard (Matias & Mackey, 2016).

The barriers and challenges of these African American women superintendents were difficult because of their race and gender. However, being in the school districts that they were in some of the obstacles were removed because of the culture of the school district as well as the environment of the area. Their recruitment and retention were met with minimal suppression because the culture was not too diverse.

Research Question 2: What (if any) experiences have African American women superintendents lived where race and gender have impacted their role?

Interview Protocol Questions 1- 2

1. Why did you decide to become an educator?

2. What did you teach? How long did you teach in the classroom before you decided to become a school leader?

All the African American superintendents gave the exact same response when asked, “Why did you decide to become an educator?” which was “I wanted to help others.” Debra and Deborah had educators in their family and decided that this was what they wanted to do early on in their careers.

Debra taught six years in the classroom before becoming a school leader. She credits her family and experience as a school leader and district office employment as the natural progression to her success as a superintendent.

She felt confident and ready to take on a mostly Caucasian school district, but they would not grant her an interview. However, the school district that welcomed her with excitement was happy to obtain her leadership. Deborah was in the classroom for six years and credits her family and experience as a school leader for her success as a superintendent.

Diane, Donna, Danita, and Denise experienced other career fields in their families but saw education as the way they wanted to help people. Diane was in the classroom for ten years before becoming a district person in which she served as a deputy and interim superintendent before becoming the superintendent. Donna feels like education became her passion once she decided to pursue the career. She was in the classroom five years before becoming a school leader and district person. She volunteered and worked at every level to learn about how the schools and district functioned which led her to be recommended and hired for the superintendent position. Danita was in the classroom for ten years and decided to work at the Arkansas Department of Education. She decided that she wanted to give back to her community and returned to her hometown to work in the

school's district office as a federal program coordinator. She moved up to become an Assistant Superintendent which led to her being hired as Superintendent when the Superintendent retired from the district.

Denise was in the classroom for seven years before becoming a school leader. She was always intrigued with helping people, so she became a district counselor leader that led to her becoming a principal and eventually the superintendent. She had the unique opportunity of working as a principal and superintendent because the district was small.

Findings

These African American women recognized early on their desire to help people which was a passion to give back to others as well as have influence in others' lives. Their early decisions came from family, other parental figures like teachers, and their educational experiences along the way to the position of superintendent. They believed their social experiences, passionate desires, and their roles as leaders prepared them for the educational profession to be the leader of a school district.

Research Question 3: What techniques have African American female superintendents used to be efficient in their leadership roles?

Interview Protocol Questions 3 -6

3. What roles in school leadership did you hold before pursuing superintendency?
4. What motivated you to seek superintendency?
5. Describe your pursuit of superintendency. What did you do to prepare yourself for the position?
6. What was something you remember about the application and interviewing process that stands out?

Donna felt that her previous experience from the classroom to being Assistant Principal, Principal, parental involvement coordinator, the district test coordinator, and

School improvement specialist prepared her for the superintendent position. She was passionate about becoming an educator in all levels of education and the superintendent role was her most transparent role. She spoke very candidly about the techniques she used. She said, “I was asked, “What is your sacrifice to the district.” Her response was “God, family and job in that order.”

Danita was able to highlight her experience of being an ADE curriculum specialist, Assistant Superintendent, and Federal Program Coordinator as the consistent policy and procedure candidate for the superintendent job. She wanted to give back to people, help people, and make her previous family members proud of her because she had followed them of being an educator. Danita techniques were different in that when she left the classroom, she decided to work at the Arkansas Department of Education which allowed her to learn how schools work across the state of Arkansas. She encountered an all-male school board which was difficult in that they wanted a male superintendent and not a female. She was able to promote herself in the most positive way by following district policy on every aspect of the school district which landed her the superintendent job.

Debra believes her roles as teacher, Assistant Principal, Principal, District language coordinator, Chief Academic Officer, Deputy Superintendent and now Superintendent prepared her for the Superintendency. She feels like women should advertise themselves and their educational growth experiences and not hold back on their work performances. She has always wanted leverage and influence in her educational roles. Debra found a program that prepares you for the superintendent roles for school

districts that gave her the confidence to apply for a Deputy Superintendent role that she worked before applying for the Superintendent position for which she was hired.

Denise feels her role of teacher, school district counselor, Assistant Principal, and Principal prepared her for the role of Superintendent. She was certified in the small school district which motivated her to seek the superintendent position. After landing the Superintendent role she was given the opportunity to return to college for Superintendent Certification.

Diane had school leadership roles as Deputy Superintendent, Federal program coordinator, and Assistant Superintendent that prepared her for the Superintendent role. The fact that she was working in the role as Interim Superintendent already was motivation for her to pursue the superintendent position. She applied online for her first try at a superintendent position and the experience was not good because the online question were not in-depth questions for the position.

Deborah worked as an Assistant Principal, Principal, Literacy Coordinator, and now Superintendent. She was elated to be able to go to a Superintendent position from being a Principal. She always wanted to impact a school district and becoming a superintendent was fulfilling her goal. As a person who always wanted to learn more, do more and impact others through education Deborah traveled statewide promoting a statewide school improvement plan. She applied for a superintendent position in a rural district having had educational experience in an urban school district which was different and a challenge for her educational leadership.

Findings

These six African American women all obtained at least ten years or less experience in the classroom before pursuing school leadership positions. Their prior

experience prepared them for what they would experience on their journey to the role of superintendent. It was evident that each female felt they were qualified and ready for the role of superintendent. Each of the superintendents found motivation in the experience of their previous roles to be an excellent superintendent for all their stakeholders.

Research Question 4: How do research participants describe the effect of their self-worth on their experience as a superintendent in Arkansas?

Interview Protocol Questions 11 – 14

11. What do you feel that you have accomplished as a superintendent in terms of improving your district?
12. How do you think your school board sees your performance?
13. How do you think your principals and teachers see your performance?
14. What would you recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking a superintendency in Arkansas?

Debra felt that she had improved her district with the implementation of PLC's (Professional Learning Communities), hiring qualified teachers, and introducing the first fleet of electric buses to her district. She was praised by her school board with new leadership ideas that she brought before the board in that they added another year on her contract January 2023. She shares the philosophy of student-centered contact from the board down to parents in the community. She has everyone on board with her philosophy except her Principals seem to be slow to get on board. When asked what she would recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking the superintendency in Arkansas Debra replied, "Seek mentoring from people who know the challenge. It is political so you will have to know how to navigate the political relationship. Go the route of preparing yourself in every facet of education. Do your best work where you are right now. Look outside of Arkansas to get resources you need. You must be intentional about seeking out learning. Look for mentors to build yourself up and find women who are

doing the job to be inspired by other women (women empowering women). Lastly, you must continue the work when you get here!”

Diane believed her improvement was when the state approved district she was leading gave her shared leadership of the district. She in turn gave people in the district the authority to make decisions which led to improvements such as academic improvements and financial improvements. She started a student cabinet group in each school to include the students as well as implementing a parental involvement center. She wanted to include every voice from the community to know what was working and what was not for the school district. She experienced a lot of challenges from the school district, but she was able to overcome because the state was helping in the leadership process. She was never evaluated by her board, so she did not know what they thought of her performance. However, the teachers and principals felt empowered because of the shared authority and decision-making input that they had regarding the academic challenges they faced within their school buildings. When asked what she would recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking the superintendency in Arkansas Diane replied, “Reach out to other African American female superintendents to see if that person will be a mentor for you. This is crucial, you must choose a person who is not going to be intimidated by you.”

Deborah believed she improved her district by following the standards for the first six months on the job. She felt pressured from her school board because the community was pressuring the school board. This situation was difficult and different for her to maneuver because she was trying to find her way as a new and first-time superintendent. When asked what she would recommend to aspiring African American females in

seeking the superintendency in Arkansas Deborah replied, “It is a rewarding job but not easy. You should get as much experience as possible to be prepared for the position. It is on the job training and a lot of different personalities which means you must have tough skin. You will be blamed for everything even the things you inherit coming to the new position. Find a mentor on the job that can give insight into the day-to-day operations. The job will be tough because you want get respect like a male superintendent and some will feel it is easier working for males than females.”

Danita was able to improve her district by having her district salary become competitive to attract and hire qualified teachers. She also worked to improve student academics as well as being consistent with policy and procedures to run the district. She is close with her principals because she supports them if they follow policy and procedures. When asked what she would recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking the superintendency in Arkansas Danita replied, “Believe in yourself. I recommend that you believe that you can with GOD all things are possible let no one tell you that you cannot because it can be done. The road is not easy can be rocky but remain steadfast and unmovable.”

Denise believes that the upgraded technology that she implemented in the district improved communication and academics among the students and staff. She was praised and recognized from her faculty, staff, and school board as having growth in improving the district academics and finances. She served the first three years as Superintendent and Principal which allowed her to experience a dual role of school and district leadership in her district. When asked what she would recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking the superintendency in Arkansas Denise replied, “Research the

community structure and leaders in the district because community support is valuable in the superintendent position.”

Donna believes in her first three years as superintendent she got the school district finance on track improved academics in the district and started district wide professional development for everyone. Her school board likes that she keeps the mission and vision of the school district in front of them during every school board meeting. Her faculty and staff see her as an instructional leader who collaborates with them in all areas of education in the district. When asked what she would recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking the superintendency in Arkansas Donna replied, “I would tell them to get in and help at any level that they are currently working in education and do not be afraid. Engage to help the administration at your school. Apply your expertise in every way possible and do duty to interact with the students and teachers. Being a leader requires you to participate in all aspects of the school. Lastly, do not judge a seat that you have not set in.”

Findings

These six African American female superintendents in the State of Arkansas shared their lived experiences on the road to the superintendency as an opportunity for others to use as a blueprint. They shared leadership improvements, their education philosophies and most importantly that novice African American Superintendents should seek mentorship for the position. Lastly, that the job is tough, and it is not easy because you will not get respect like a male superintendent just because some workers will feel it is easier working for males than females.

“History has shown us that courage can be contagious, and hope can take on a life of its own.” Michelle Obama

Chapter V: Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

The purpose of this research paper has gone beyond a reasonable doubt to ascertain the various real-life experiences that African American school superintendents undergo in Arkansas school districts. The African American women superintendents who participated in the study discussed their lived experiences in detail as well as their challenges in the Arkansas educational systems. According to data published in 2022 by the Bureau of Legislative Research Adequacy Study report, Arkansas has only 7% of the total of Black teachers compared to the 90% that Caucasian teachers dominate (BLR, 2022).

These female school superintendents are not just faced with issues of racism and basic stereotypes but also face issues of sexism. In a Caucasian-dominated education system, female superintendents, both Caucasian and African American, face sexism though the latter faces intersectionality, which is a blend of both ethnic discrimination and gender discrimination intertwined (Harris, 2020).

Educational Preparation, Disciplines, and Certifications

Research studies have revealed that over time, there is a high teacher turnover rate for those with little training preparation, three times more than those who have sought professional training. Formal training is essential as it offers student teaching techniques, how to obtain proper feedback from students on their teaching, and the ability to access multiple courses in students learning. However, certification programs are advised, although teachers can teach for the first time as they undergo their coursework. Unlike alternative certification pathways, the traditional certification program offers comprehensive clinical training, allowing teachers to earn as they study (Harris, 2020).

Teacher residencies have been reported to be a direct and fast method to teacher certification through various university partnerships with the district to provide high-quality clinical practice and pedagogical training for a year for post-baccalaureate candidates. This prepares these teachers to become holistic in their approaches, even though mentorship throughout the year, and ensures they have experience by teaching with fellow resident teachers. This has been a perfect path for districts with shortages and constraints in staffing to acquire a diverse shortlist of potential candidates just for a five-year or three-year commitment after post-residency. Other programs include the Grow Your program, which is bound to prepare teachers to teach in their local communities where they can attain their bachelor's degrees and be able and competent to teach in public schools (Taylor, 2021).

Arkansas educator training programs and the educator preparation program completers for both traditional and alternative programs where it is reported, according to the Educator Preparation Provider Quality Report of 2021, that 21,789 students completed the educator preparation program in 2020. The report further acknowledges that there was a total of 70% of the students who completed the educator preparation program have been enrolled in traditional training programs. Out of the total number of students that completed the educator preparation program in the period 2019-2020 where out of the 1,789 that completed the program, 61% were all employed in Arkansas Public Schools with a total number of 1,099 teachers. For the ultimate school superintendent position, these female African American teachers should further their studies, assume a doctoral degree in education, be very motivated, and be bound to religion or firmer

spiritual beliefs, power, and control within specific community power social groups as well (Harris, 2020).

These superintendents should be able to know every current trend that is in existence in the Department of Education, be able to interact with community organizations, and build relationships and contacts trying to develop a keen sense of self-identity. These superintendents should be politically equipped and able to maneuver their way, even build upon strategies successfully used by women in other fields and handle gender discrimination appropriately. They should be prepared to form alliances with fellow female African American superintendents to form networking systems where they are easily able to address issues of sex discrimination. They should further ensure they possess the necessary educational leadership training certifications to ensure competency for this intensive, highly sought-after position in the education system (Brown, 2014)

Demonstrated Leadership Ability

Women have proven themselves to be up to the task and ready to manage this complex political school superintendent position which would put them in various sections of the system. They would have to portray the strong people skills necessary to manage this political position through delegations, proper judgment and decision-making, proper analysis, and risk management with utmost accountability to these public schools. They have been able to show their utmost professionalism throughout their entire stereotyped tenure as teachers as roles of caregivers and never in a professional capacity which they have and are slowly and steadily outliving even in their dressing. Despite limited access to the various informal networks which often influence ascension to this prestigious position, men educators often land the job due to these network influences,

which women, especially African Americans, are denied. Despite all this, the BLR did publish that there was significant hiring of teachers from the African American community at a significant 7% in Arkansas in 2021 in a region purely dominated by the Caucasian community (BLR, 2022).

The African American female superintendents in this study demonstrated their leadership ability prior to their Superintendent position. Each participant discussed their leadership positions and how it prepared them for their Superintendent role. Their classroom experience, principal roles, and district positions helped navigate them to be successful in the superintendency. Female African American superintendents have had to be bold, fierce, direct, unconventional, and brave against an audience that has typically stereotyped them to the point that they overlook their professionalism, professional development, career achievements, and impact over their tenure. These Black female leaders have been able to rally support in the face of discrimination from school boards despite their overall qualifications due to malicious gatekeeper interests for less qualified candidates, which could attract protests from parents and the community (Zippia, 2022).

High Visibility

Their ability to ensure that their stereotyped nature is not gone and diminished in vain, they provide that they are evident as possible by rallying against social injustices in schools, such as discrimination, even in school feeding programs. Initiatives such as ensuring they mobilize and fight for the benefit of these public schools are high enough visibility to their district as they tend to pass down their agenda and efforts towards achieving these goals. These female African American school superintendents would have to be involved in high-profile cases such as racial discrimination. The African

American female superintendents made themselves known through the work that they did in the school roles that they acquired along the way to the superintendency. Debra enrolled in a program to prepare herself for a superintendent role in Arkansas. Donna, Danita, Deborah, Diane, and Denise prepared themselves through professional socialization, mentoring, networking and community involvement. They believe that being in the spotlight was a chance for them to prove to the entire public that they were capable of the leadership position. These African American female superintendents have been vocal about providing a high degree of visibility in the district to ensure they fight for equality even at work.

Mentoring

There is a primary emphasis on mentoring, although the education system's education preparation program where mentoring is included during the professional development of their teaching degree. However, research studies have outlined general neglect and discrimination based on gender for both Caucasian and Black educators in training programs, the baccalaureate program. These female educators get to be sidelined from these exclusive informal networks that ensure direct endorsement for this superintendent position. This then leaves the men educators chance to show evidence of sexism and racism, especially against the African American female community of potential superintendents. Research has been extensive and has shown that over the years, African American female educators wishing to become superintendents have failed to acquire mentors or have had to get mentors on their own. Gaps in the formal mentorship system initiated in the educational preparation programs, or later through the traditional mentorship programs, have ensured that these female-African American potential

superintendents' unique needs are not addressed and even met. This is with keen consideration that potential female candidates of African American would need potential long-term mentors and sponsors who would help guide them toward the superintendent position (Matias & Mackey, 2016). The African American female superintendents spoke about being mentored as well as recommended that any future African American female superintendents need to acquire a mentor for the superintendent role.

Other Findings

A fascinating finding is that most thriving African American female school superintendents were mostly successful due to successful and meaningful mentorship. In contrast, most superintendents from the African American community claimed it was necessary to attain the position and retain the leadership role. All the research participants acknowledged the significance of having a mentor when in education preparation training and also when as a superintendent, as it is often a busy and tedious job that could sometimes make them lonely and in need of self-care and a confidant despite their race or ethnicity and even industry (BLR, 2022).

The Superintendents' View of their Role

The most outspoken role evident is the ability to advocate for their districts in various social issues affecting their operations in school, from racism, sexism, budgetary cuts, administrative differences, and legal matters. However, these female African American superintendents all agree to have assumed an advocate's role and sometimes more than often an activist's position in their districts. These African American women have had to face and fight off discrimination intertwined in race and gender, arising in

complicated intersectionality, which caused their ascension to these crucial leadership positions in schools harder for them (Harris, 2020).

These African American women have become agents of change in regions like Arkansas, where Caucasian is dominated by 90% of the entire population of teachers, with only 7% being African American. These African American female superintendents have had to initiate programs to educate schools and their communities about the need for antiracism and anti-sexism to transform an illiterate region where resources such as teachers are even scarce. These female African American superintendents have acted as role models for the future education system's progress against gender and race discrimination as a basis for the need for a more culturally diverse leadership to ensure societal norms such as racism and sexism do not arrest the development of public schools in Arkansas and the student's outcomes as well (Matias & Mackey, 2016).

Committed Educator of Children

These African American female superintendents have by far proven that they are wholeheartedly dedicated to educating these public-school children and that they are dedicated to improving the overall student outcomes. This is also true as there is evidence that for these female African American educators to ascend to the superintendency, they need to be highly competent professionals and have followed through with the required baccalaureate education preparation programs and followed through with the post-baccalaureate programs subsequently. This continuous dedication to training and professional development is a sign of the faith given towards the commitment to improve the education of their students and their districts in general. They advocate for the best

practices that the education system ought to take to benefit their students all through Arkansas fully (Taylor, 2021).

Confirming or Opposing the Literature

Despite an ever-growing presence of the female superintendent position in public schools in recent times, there has been a low rate of female administrators elected to fill this position in public schools all over Arkansas. Not only is this in Arkansas, but a common trait nationally as female administrators and especially African American female superintendents have been overlooked for centuries just due to their gender, sexual biases, stereotyping, and politics. In the early 1990s, there was reported to be a total of 14,392 supervisory positions vacant in public schools all over Arkansas, and out of the entire total, only 7,605 of those were female supervisors.

This habit continued to the 21st century whereby these female superintendents and especially African Americans were unable to ascend to this prestigious position in public schools due to their reduced role and definition of their capabilities. This political nightmare did sideline highly competent, driven, and enthusiastic female African American superintendents who would have been a great asset to these public schools due to their competency, unlike male superintendents who mostly earned their positions by navigating the political aspects to their favor. Tremendous efforts for women to have equal rights in education have been made. However, the need to provide equal opportunity to female administrators to become superintendents and especially African Americans is the next step.

Confirming the Literature

Extensive qualitative analysis has shown that the plight of these African American females in the school superintendent position is apparent, and many questions exist as to why the numbers are so low. The numbers indicate that in Arkansas Caucasians, primarily male, are preferred over African American women for superintendent positions. There is a general bias against women in Arkansas, where Caucasian males are dominating as superintendents, and African American females are stereotyped and discriminated against based on their gender and race despite their professional competencies, achievements, and developments.

African American females are even distinguished right from the educator preparation programs, whereby they are sometimes denied access to privileges to mentorship from the mentorship program. Their needs as African American women superintendents are also not addressed within the mentorship program to prepare them for the reality of discrimination throughout Arkansas, which is dominated by the Caucasian demographic, even in public schools (Williams & King, 2002).

Recommendations for Future Studies

Despite the research focusing on the discrimination these African American women endure in their pursuit and maintenance of the superintendency in school education, there should be much more emphasis on the solutions to curb this unbecoming trend in these public schools. The focus should be on finding more effective and inclusive strategies to fight these social injustices in the education system all through public schools in The United States, where discrimination has become a norm and culturally accepted in Caucasian communities in Arkansas. Such strategies ensure that these

African American female superintendents are more focused on their responsibilities rather than worry about discrimination and social injustices, which redirect their entire purpose of appointment to the position. In an era whereby teacher shortages are the norm of the day, strategies to alienate racial and sexist discrimination could be vital in attracting many more African American female teachers and superintendents who would be critical in transforming a plagues educational system in Arkansas in the United States (Harris, 2020).

Conclusion

African American female superintendents have been unfairly treated during the efforts to achieve the superintendent leadership position in any public school, especially in Arkansas. Their experiences in Arkansas have been quite challenging compared to any sample population. These women are restricted to small districts in the eastern part of the state. Discrimination is rampant in this region, where Caucasians make up over 68% of the entire population and 90% of the whole student population as of just 2021, which shows the minority status of the Black community. Hence, efforts should be made to ensure equal opportunity for the superintendent leadership position in public schools for every district to ensure appointments are made based on merit, achievement, and professional competency and not racial and gender discriminatory biases (BLR, 2022).

Chapter VI: My Reflections

“Service to others is the rent you pay here for your room on earth” –

Muhammad Ali

Authoring this dissertation has been a journey filled with many feelings and thoughts. I learned many things about myself as a researcher, student, and human. The stories of the participants all have a special place in my heart. They are a part of a collective; they are a part of my journey. I started this journey for personal reasons. If, I am going to be a superintendent in the future, I would need a blueprint on how to navigate to the role of Superintendent, how to perform the job duties and responsibilities and lastly how to help the people that I would serve in that job capacity.

What stood out the most about the participants experience was the stamina they had in pursuing the role and the courage they had in doing the role. Their experiences were all similar in that they had to be gracious and quiet when they did not want to be in many situations that questioned their leadership style. These women performed excellent duties to the school district they served while being second-guessed in their leadership decisions that always turned out to be the right decision for their school district. Arkansas as well as all states in the United States of America can benefit from an increase in African American female Superintendents by erasing double standards that Black women and women in general face on a daily in leadership roles such as micro and macro aggressions, the mistreatment of women being in the leadership role, and the constant battle of erasing racism, sexism, and oppressive tactics.

Arkansas can improve their African American female pool of applicants by simply seeing the African American female as a human being that is capable and

qualified to do the job as well as any other human with the support that is always provided for others. If you are looking for fair, policy minded, and a committed servant to the students, faculty, parents, and community then an African American female can deliver the service with excellence. Another practice to increase African American female Superintendents to school districts is for school boards to advertise for them and recruit for them this will provide a platform for them knowing they are considered as a valuable educator for Arkansas school districts. Like many school districts in the United States of America are made up of 90 percent African American students with 90 percent of the faculty and staff being Caucasian. When African American students see leadership that looks like them, they are less likely to act out in negative ways. It is always better to have leadership that reflects the student body of the school/school district. Culture plays a significant role in the growth and environment of students.

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APPENDIX A. DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Demographic Information

1. Please indicate your age range.

- Less than 30
- 31-41
- 42 -51
- 52-61
- 62 or older

2. Please indicate your marital status.

- Married
- Single
- Divorced
- Widow

3. Do you have children? Yes, or No?

a. If yes, please indicate how many children.

- 1 – 2
- 3 – 4
- 4
- 5+

4. Please indicate the highest degree earned.

- Bachelors
- Masters
- Specialist
- Doctorate

5. How many years of experience do you have in public education?

- Less than 10
- 10 – 20
- 21 – 30
- 31+

6. Is this your first superintendency? Yes, or No?

b. If no, how many other superintendent positions have you held? _____

c. How many years have you held your current position? _____

d. How many total years of experience do you have as a superintendent?

Tell me more about the school district you work for.

7. What is the total student enrollment? _____

8. What is the social and economic level of students in your district this year?

9. Please provide the percentages for the following student ethnicity groups.

African American _____ % Asian _____ % Caucasian _____ % Hispanic

_____ % Other _____ %

10. What are the percentages of students receiving free and reduced lunches?

_____ %

1) APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Interview questions

1. Why did you decide to become an educator?
2. What did you teach? How long did you teach in the classroom before you decided to become a school leader?
3. What roles in school leadership did you hold before pursuing superintendency?
4. What motivated you to seek superintendency?
5. Describe your pursuit of superintendency. What did you do to prepare yourself for the position?
6. What was something you remember about the application and interviewing process that stands out?
7. How many attempts did you make before getting the superintendency?
8. Have you served more than one district as superintendent? If so, what motivated you to seek a different position? Did being a sitting superintendent help or hinder your securing new positions?
9. Do you feel that being an African American female helped or hindered your securing the position?
10. What has been the most positive aspect of being a superintendent? What has been the most negative aspect of being a superintendent?
11. What do you feel that you have accomplished as a superintendent in terms of improving your district?
12. How do you think your school board sees your performance?
13. How do you think your principals and teachers see your performance?

14. What would you recommend to aspiring African American females in seeking a superintendency in Arkansas?

APPENDIX C
ATU APPROVAL LETTER



OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND SPONSORED PROGRAMS

1509 North Boulder Avenue
Administration, Room 207
Russellville, AR 72801

☎ 479-880-4327
🌐 www.atu.edu

November 22, 2022

To Whom It May Concern:

The Arkansas Tech University Institutional Review Board has approved the IRB application for Debra Myton's proposed research, entitled "A Phenomenological Examination of the Lived Experiences of African American Female Superintendents in the State of Arkansas." The Institutional Review Board used an expedited review procedure under 45 CFR 46.110 (6)(7). Please use number I-2022-13 when referencing this study.

Please note that in the event that any of the parameters of the study change, the researcher may be required to submit an amended application.

Please proceed with your research. We wish you success with this endeavor.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Tennille Lasker-Scott".

Tennille Lasker-Scott, Ph.D.
Institutional Review Board Chair
Arkansas Tech University

APPENDIX D

ATU CONSENT FORM

Section 11. Contact Information for Questions or Concerns

You have the right to ask any questions you may have about this research. If you have questions, complaints or concerns or believe you may have developed an injury related to this research, contact Debra Goodwin Myton at dmyton@atu.edu or 501-658-4083.

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant or have concerns or general questions about the research, contact the research participants protection advocate in the Arkansas Tech University's IRB Office at 844-804-2628. You may also call this number (479-964-0583 ext. 3211) if you cannot reach the research team or wish to talk to someone else.

For more information about participation in a research study and about the Institutional Review Board (IRB), a group of people who review the research to protect your rights, please visit Arkansas Tech University's IRB web site at https://www.atu.edu/ospui/human_subjects.php. Included on this web site, under the heading "Participant Info," you can access federal regulations and information about the protection of human research participants. If you do not have access to the internet, copies of these federal regulations are available by calling Arkansas Tech University at (844) 804-2628.

Signature and Consent/Permission to be in the Research (Not required for online surveys)

Before making the decision regarding enrollment in this research you should have:

- Discussed this study with an investigator.
- Reviewed the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the research and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

Participant: By signing this consent form, you indicate that you are voluntarily choosing to take part in this research.

Signature of Participant

Date

Time

Printed Name