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Longevity of Women Superintendents

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Walden University
2014

Abstract

Longevity of Women Superintendents

By

Kim C. Sethna

MS, Duquesne University, 1994

BS, Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania, 1989

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2014

Abstract

Public schools are facing a leadership crisis regarding the lack of women superintendents in the United States. Although, historically, women have dominated the positions of classroom teachers and outnumbered men in receiving administrative leadership certificates, there is a disproportion in the number of men and women superintendents leading the nation's approximate 14,000 public schools. While current researchers describe the complex roles that the superintendency entails, there is little data on gender differences, specifically, how women superintendents achieve longevity in this role. The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the longevity of women superintendents in public school districts and perceived barriers that may influence longevity, using the human relations approach as a theoretical guide. Data were collected using a qualitative, multiple case study of 5 women superintendents, with longevity of at least 6 years, via survey and interview. Data were analyzed for general and emergent themes and related to 3 research questions regarding perceived barriers and longevity. Findings indicated a shift in the perception of barriers over the last 2 decades, with important issues surrounding relationships and possible self-imposed barriers. The women superintendents were no longer worried about breaking the glass ceiling or competing with their male counterparts. Rather, they were concerned with balancing professional and personal responsibilities while maintaining positive relationships at school and at home. Social change may result by addressing perceived barriers of women superintendents to achieve longevity and gender equity. As a result, female perspectives and insights, which have been historically neglected and omitted, may be included in more local and national policy decision-making in educational administration.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this doctoral study to my grandmothers, Margaret Mary O'Neill and Dorothy Theresa Phillips, who passed away during the writing process. Although both women achieved longevity at ages 97 and 88 respectively, both women were leaders in their own right and embraced life with grace and humility. I miss you every single day. To my husband, Farhad, who has supported and encouraged me from the beginning. Your endless love and devotion are immeasurable and treasured.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

The United States will experience a shortage of qualified superintendents in the near future (Wolverton & Macdonald, 2001). With the pressures to achieve high academic performance based on standardized test scores in public schools, boards of education must attract and retain highly qualified superintendents for the approximately 14,000 public schools in the nation. In the current era of promoting gender equality, few educators would be surprised by a woman principal or central office administrator, especially since 76% of all K-12 educators in the United States are women (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Women have proven themselves in educational administration as instructional leaders and the glass ceiling is slowly being broken (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). However, in the most senior leadership position of American public schools – the superintendency – most districts continue to be led by males, with only 21.7% as women superintendents leading the nation's public school districts (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Although the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974 have equalized opportunities for women in educational administration (Brunner & Grogan, 2007), women still lag significantly behind their male counterparts in the role of superintendent (Glass & Franceschini, 2007).

The lack of women superintendents is a national problem, and therefore, the local problem discussed in this study will be inclusive of the United States. Due to the very small participant pool of 21.7% of women superintendents in the nation, one state will be used as a representative sample. Extensive research has been conducted on determining

longevity of superintendents in public schools, as well as on the differences in leadership qualities between the genders in educational administration. What remains to be explored are the perceived barriers women superintendents overcome to achieve longevity (Glass & Franceschini, 2007) and the possible approaches the women used to overcome the barriers. Knowing how women superintendents achieved longevity can make a difference for aspiring women school leaders (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009). By analyzing the perceived barriers and offering personal insight into the approaches of achieving longevity, the glass ceiling can continue to break and the number of women superintendents in the United States can continue to increase.

In this study, I examined the literature and conducted interviews to discover the perceived personal and professional barriers that contribute to the longevity of women superintendents and the approaches used by the women superintendents to overcome the barriers. The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) has indicated that the mean tenure period of women superintendents hovers around 6 years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). For the purpose of this study, I defined longevity as 6 years in the position of superintendent. I have identified gaps in the literature, where there is a lack evidence of the perceived personal and professional factors that contribute to the longevity of women superintendents and the possible approaches women superintendents used to overcome them. Through current literature, personal interviews with women superintendents, and my experience in the role of the researcher in this inquiry, I explored what perceived factors influenced women superintendents to achieve longevity in this field. Also, I explored the approaches each women superintendent used, if any, to help

extinguish any perceived barrier that existed.

Historical Context

Superintendency for Women in the Past

Created in the early 1800s, the position of superintendent was dominated by White males (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women superintendents can be traced back to the early 1900s where women, such as Ella Flagg Young, were elected to replace dishonest males (Funk, 2004). In 1909, Young was leading the Chicago city schools and hopeful that in the near future women would rule the schools of every city. She believed that education was a woman's natural field (Funk, 2004). She was joined by Betty Mix Cowles, the first superintendent in Canton, Ohio, and by Carrie Chapman Catt, who would go on to lead the National American Woman Suffrage Organization (Harris, 2007). Unfortunately, Young's dream of women leading the American public schools as superintendents has not yet come true.

The Women's Movement and Suffrage activism during the early 1930s correlated with a sharp increase in women leaders in education, as women represented approximately 28% of county superintendents and 11% of all superintendents in the United States (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). During the 1940s, women began leaving their careers in educational administration and were replaced by men who were returning from war and who were supported with the aid of the GI Bill (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Attention to gender equity continued to improve with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974, which addressed women's employments rights, allowed for grievances against sex-biased job discrimination, and

penalized institutions who did not comply with policy. Yet in 1970 only 3% of women were acting as superintendents (Glass, 2000). Despite current trends where women are being represented more extensively in politics and executive positions (Lowan, 2010), women continue to hold a dismal 21.7% of superintendencies throughout American public schools. This is quite remarkable since opportunities for women in the United States have drastically increased since Ella Flagg Young became the first women superintendent nearly a century ago (Blout, 1998).

Perceived Barriers for Women Superintendents of the Present

Some experts believe that the difference among men and women superintendents is their career path (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Male teachers often teach at the secondary level, where there is an abundance of coaching and leadership opportunities such as department chairperson, assistant administrator, lead teacher, and so on (Glass, 2000). In June of 2000, the AASA conducted a survey of currently employed superintendents and found that most male superintendents began their career with coaching assignments, acting as department chairperson, or leading a building as assistant principal or principal (Glass, 2000). Six years later, the AASA repeated the survey and found that about 70 % of all surveyed superintendents have some type of background in secondary education where leadership type roles are more accessible than opportunities at the elementary level (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). These same authors indicated that superintendents with secondary education experience had more experience in working daily with school board members and were more closely aligned with superintendent-type tasks (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). These authors did not indicate the gender difference of among the

70% of superintendents that they studied specifically, how many women had secondary experience, and was this a perceived barrier in her career path in educational administration.

Most women who seek the superintendency do so after approximately 10 years as a classroom teacher, and then accept positions as assistant superintendents or directors before tackling the top leadership position, therefore entering the superintendency at a later age (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). For women who have taken this traditional career path toward the superintendency, it was often seen as a disadvantage to have elementary level experience, even though having a knowledge base of elementary education and literacy is essential for a superintendent (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Researchers have shown this may be changing as school boards become more interested and focused on instructional improvement and academic performance (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The mandates of No Child Left Behind included rigorous academic content standards that require knowledge of pedagogy and curriculum implementation (U.S. Department of Education, 2012).

Another reason that many women may not find the superintendency attractive is family life. In 2005, the AASA reported that only 35% of women superintendents raised children under the age of 20 while holding their position, and 36 % waited until after the age of 45 and/or raised a family while beginning their search for a superintendency (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). While there is no question that some women can manage superintendency and raise a family, the research continues to indicate one barrier: marriage. The AASA reported that 13% of divorced women superintendents cited the

pressures and long hours of the job as a reason for the divorce (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Although researchers report that approximately 90% of superintendents are married, it is unclear as to the number of marriages of each participant and the age at when the participant began his or her role as superintendent. (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Therefore, it is unclear in the literature if marriage and parenting are considered perceived barriers to the superintendency, especially for women superintendents. What the literature does indicate is that almost one third of currently employed women superintendents cited that working conditions of the superintendency were not appealing to women, however no specific examples were revealed (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). These specifics will be important to uncover if they are truly barriers for women superintendents.

While the literature provided an abundance of data on career paths, demographic differences, and working conditions between male and women superintendents, research in understanding the voices of women who have held this prestigious position and what factors contribute to their longevity in the field was scarce. In addition, research and understanding of the approaches that employed women superintendents used to overcome perceived barriers remains vague.

Problem Statement

A current problem in United States public schools is the lack of qualified women superintendents who obtain longevity of at least 6 years (approximately two contract terms in the capacity of superintendent). Six years is relevant as the AASA reported that tenure rates traditionally have hovered around two contract terms, or 6 years as

superintendent (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). This problem impacts all students in the public schools since literature shows that women possess leadership qualities that make them outstanding candidates in the field of education such as knowledgeable, motivated, ethical, honest, reflective, and pragmatic (Funk, 2004).

There are many possible factors that contribute to this problem, among which are leadership opportunities for women, family and childcare issues, disagreements with boards of education, and personal factors (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009). With this study, I contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address this problem by analyzing perceived barriers that women superintendents encounter during their superintendency, and the importance of those factors on longevity. Possible approaches to overcoming these perceived barriers are explored as well. If educators and administrators in the United States continue to ignore the reasons of why more women do not find the superintendency attractive, the nation risks losing women's voices and perspectives being heard in decision making and policy changes that effect education in our public school districts (Mahitvanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) stated that many women are motivated by a strong desire to transform the learning conditions and opportunities for those who have been least well served by current educational policies and practices (p.11). The results from the study will enable public school districts to attract and retain successful women superintendents and provide them the means to overcome the perceived factors that may impede longevity.

Nature of the Study

In this qualitative multiple case study, I followed five women superintendents who were

employed by various public school districts in a selected state and have achieved

longevity of 6 years or more as superintendent. To begin the process, all women

superintendents who were currently employed in one state first completed a survey that I

designed that contained 10 likert-type questions revealing attributes that have impacted

the longevity of their career as well as questions regarding the demographics of their

school district (See Appendix A). I used this survey to ensure that selected participants

were currently employed women superintendents with 6 years of longevity. After random

sampling, I conducted in-depth personal interviews with five women superintendents.

The interview contained open-ended questions and I focused on the superintendents'

current perceptions on personal and professional barriers, as well as successful

approaches that they encountered to overcome the barriers, as superintendent. I identified

the overall essence of the experiences described by the participants to show different

perspectives on the issues of barriers making this a multiple case study (see Creswell,

2007). Once I identified common themes or outlying answers, I completed a second

individual interview with each participant for clarification and understanding. I collected

data by audiotape and note taking which, I then analyzed and transcribed. I analyzed the

text, as transcribed, with the goal of understanding what attracted these women into the

role of superintendent, what barriers they perceived, and what methods they used to

overcome barriers and increase longevity in their field. I spent as many hours or days as

needed conducting data analysis to obtain an understanding of the participants'

experiences and developed an objective understanding of participant responses.

Research Questions

In this study, I addressed the following questions:

1. Which personal or professional factors do women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career?

2. What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

3. What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the longevity of women superintendents in public school districts and perceived personal and professional barriers that may influence longevity. Using data that I collected from women superintendents, I compared longevity in public school districts and perceived barriers that may or may not have affected longevity. Also, in my in-depth inquiry, I considered perceived successful approaches as to overcoming the perceived barriers that were identified by women superintendents. My method of inquiry included in-depth, personal reflections of the participants in order to understand the unspoken phenomenon of why so few women superintendents lead public school districts and overcoming perceived barriers that can lead to longevity in this position.

Conceptual Framework

School superintendents are often asked why they entered the field of education. The most common answer is the desire to have a greater impact on student achievement (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). It is certainly not for financial gain. Superintendents are

well aware that they are marginally underpaid compared to their counterparts in the business world for managing equal budgets and employee ratios (Pascopella, 2009). Superintendents are described as the CEO's of a school district who are responsible for the health and welfare of the students in the school and oversee with issues such as organizational change, communication, curriculum and instruction, state standards and assessments, budget and finance, politics, school law, strategic planning, personnel issues and the media (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009). Even at cocktail parties, school leaders are less likely to receive notice or gratitude for dedication to their field as the neurosurgeon or corporate lawyer with whom they share the room (C. Hamilton, personal communication, December 19, 2010).

Marshall and Oliva (2006) stated that school leaders are ready to "conceptualize and explore a social justice framework for educational leadership, both theoretically and practically" (p.1). Moreover, school leaders understand that their leadership style brings about change and encouragement not only to their students but also to their community. Based upon this knowledge, the human relations approach was explored.

Today's school leaders must grapple with several duties that former leaders never imagined. Technology has increased so drastically that districts need to hire technology experts to keep ahead of the students. School violence, aging facilities, unfunded mandates, ESL students, and state assessments are common scenarios leaders must face in addition to scheduling the building and being an instructional leader. Moreover, public schools in the nation have now undertaken several aspects of a child's life that used to be the responsibility of the parents. Hot breakfasts and lunches, before and after care, and

tutoring come to mind as services children are now eligible to receive as compared to students of the last generation. The superintendent's ultimate responsibility encompasses several stakeholders including students, parents, teachers, staff, business owners, and taxpayers who make up a community and the superintendent's role is central to the welfare of the community they serve (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The human relations approach has firmly established the importance of understanding human behavior, especially from group behavior from the perspective of management (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). In this study, I used the human relations approach as a theoretical framework to guide the study and raise questions regarding the comparison of women superintendents and longevity.

The Human Relations Approach: A Historical Perspective

Considered to have begun in 1927, the human relations approach was developed through a series of experiments called the Hawthorne Studies (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Employees at the Hawthorne Plant of Western Electric outside of Chicago were asked to participate in several experiments and interviews about their likes and dislikes in the work environment. Findings concluded that a human-social element operated in the workplace (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Major assumptions of the human relations approach include the following ideas:

1. Employees are motivated by social and psychological needs and by economic incentives.

2. These needs, including but not limited to recognition, belongingness, and security are more important in determining worker morale and productivity

than physical conditions of the work environment.

3. An individual's perceptions, beliefs, motivations, cognition, responses to frustration, values, and similar factors may affect behavior in the work setting.

4. People in all types of organizations tend to develop informal social organizations that work along with formal organizations can help or hinder management.

5. Informal social groups within the workplace create and enforce their own norms and codes of behavior. Team effort, conflict between groups, social conformity, group loyalty, communication patterns, and emergent leadership are important concepts for determining individual and group behaviors.

6. Employees have higher morale and work harder under supportive management. The human relation theory supports believe that increased morale results in increased productivity.

7. Communication, power, influence, authority, motivation, and manipulation are all important qualities within an organization, especially between superior and subordinate. Effective communication channels should be developed between the various levels in the hierarchy. The human relationists emphasize democratic rather than authoritarian leadership (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004).

Transforming these ideals into the educational setting, one would find a school that was student centered where teachers and students create rules and consequences together. Also, diversity and the free exchange of ideas would be encouraged. Administrators would communicate effectively (and often) with all stakeholders and

encourage input to setting educational standards and goals. Measuring outcomes would reach far beyond a set of standards, but rather include more affective qualities such as good citizenship, friendship, sense of community and so forth (A. Driber, personal communication, July, 2010).

Authors of the human relations approach state that employees had higher morale and worked harder under supportive management. The human relations approach was applied in this study to uncover specific areas of motivation and support deemed important for women superintendents (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). This particular conceptual framework was chosen because its research findings are not gender relevant; the focus of the findings consider both men and women (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Affective qualities discussed in the human relation approach such as morale, conflict, loyalty, emotional support, and equality were discussed with each participant and the significance of those qualities in identifying and overcoming perceived barriers.

Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined as follows:

Career path: one's work experience through a progression of time (MacArthur, 2010).

Glass ceiling: an invisible barrier to the professional advancement of women who are qualified for a particular position. Although this term is used to describe women and minorities, this study uses the term in reference to women in educational leadership (MacArthur, 2010).

Personal barrier: an obstacle that exists within one's self (MacArthur, 2010).

Professional barrier: an obstacle that exists within the workplace (MacArthur, 2010).

Superintendent: the chief executive officer of a public school district who is responsible for the health and welfare of the students in their school district communities (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009).

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

For this study I assumed that the selected procedures and methods were appropriate, that participants were honest in their responses, and interviewed participants were currently employed women superintendents who have achieved longevity of at least 6 years.

Initially, this study was confined to surveying all active women superintendents in one determined state and interviewing five women superintendents who have achieved longevity of at least 6 years causing delimitation by narrowing the scope of the study (Creswell, 2003). A limitation to this study potentially existed as the findings could be biased and not necessarily represent all public school districts in the state or in the United States. Other limitations may have arisen from the small sample size and will not necessarily represent rural, suburban, and urban districts equally (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Therefore, this study may have limited generalizability.

Significance of Study

Educator Thomas Sergiovanni promoted leadership as sharing a common vision and shared values and beliefs to bring together students, parents, teachers and principals of schools (Sergiovanni, 2005). Women educators are certainly an integral part of the

shared values and beliefs in today's school systems, which is evidenced by the vast number of women teachers in the nation (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). Past and current researchers have suggested that women do possess leadership qualities, have had the opportunity for leadership roles, and have mentors available to guide them in the process (Gilmour & Kinsella, 2009). Researchers failed to provide perceived personal and professional barriers that may inhibit women from achieving longevity in the superintendency. By understanding and studying what women perceive as personal and professional barriers to the superintendency, efforts can be directed to assist women to overcome the barriers and assume leadership roles as superintendents and achieve longevity. I focused on an advocacy point of view, meaning the researcher believes it is important to have more women in the role of superintendency and to obtain that goal, an understanding of personal and professional barriers must be explored and overcome.

Social Change

Educational researchers Marshall and Oliva believed that social justice begins with educational leaders in our schools and importance should be on creating a more equitable and socially just society (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). To achieve social justice in our classrooms for students, change must take place in the top leadership roles. Specifically, having more women in the role of superintendent will provide role models for women students and encourage them to pursue leadership opportunities that are often occupied by male counterparts.

Positive social change was pursued in this study as I focused on identifying specific barriers for women superintendents and provide insight on how to achieve

longevity in the position. Identifying perceived barriers are important as educators seek to understand why so few women superintendents are in the field and how we can attain gender equity in this powerful position. Once gender equity is attained in this role, women's insight can be provided in more local and national policy decision-making and the women perspective in educational administration will not be neglected.

Summary

In Section 1, I provided the reader with the urgency of examining why there are so few women superintendents in our nation's public schools despite the high number of women educators. I investigated historical data regarding women superintendents and described the continual lack of representation of women superintendents in public school despite the advancement of woman over the last century. In the problem statement, I described the increased need of understanding the relationship between women superintendents and longevity. The nature of the study was a qualitative, multiple case study and identified the specific research questions:(a) Which personal or professional factors do women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career? (b) What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position? and (c) What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

The purpose of the study described possible personal and professional barriers that women superintendents experienced and how it affects longevity. The human relations approach theory was explained and used as a guide in understanding possible perceived barriers participants may encounter and how the barriers may be overcome

with motivation and support described by this theory. I defined operational definitions and assumptions, as well as limitations and delimitations. Detailed discussion of the nature of the study and its components will be discussed in detail in Section 3. Finally, I described the significance of the study as the need to understand why women are underrepresented in the top leadership position in public education and how the findings from this study will increase not only the number of women superintendents in public education but increase their longevity as well. I also discussed social change with the hopes that gender equity will be understood in this area of educational administration.

In Section 2, I will review the literature. Specific emphases will include a historical overview of women superintendents, current statistics of women leaders both inside and outside the realm of education and exploration of possible perceived barriers relating to longevity in this position. I will provide research and perspectives regarding specific barriers women superintendents identify and their importance to achieving longevity in the superintendency. I will consider profiles of women superintendents from the literature to provide understanding of personal and professional barriers to longevity perceived by currently employed women superintendents in the twenty-first century. The human relations approach will be discussed as well as justification for the methodical approach to the research as a qualitative with a phenomenological design.

In Section 3, I detail the methodology for this study and explain the rationale for the use of qualitative analysis with a multiple case study deign. Research questions will be discussed, as well as justification for selection of participants and their ethical protections. The role of the researcher will be described as well as any experiences or

bias that may relate to the topic of study. Data collection procedures and data analysis information will be described in detail, with a comprehensive overview of how the study will be conducted in Section 4.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Public schools in the United States are facing a leadership crisis regarding the lack of qualified men and women aspiring to the superintendency and the current high rate of turnover in the position. (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). While the numbers have remained relatively small, there were certain periods in the early 1900s when women seemed to be on their way to leading public school systems, but research is unclear as to why these women leaders failed to obtain longevity. At the current rate of increase for women superintendents, gender ratio in this position will not be equal until the year 2035 (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Researchers Brunner and Grogan (2007) stated that educational researchers in the past hoped that women in assistant superintendent and central office positions would eventually assume the top position of superintendent. This promotion to leadership has not happened. According to the most recent study by the AASA (2007), the lack of women superintendents leading the nation's schools not only continues, but the perceived barriers that prevent women from obtaining the superintendency and achieving longevity of at least 6 years in the field remain unclear and ignored (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While barriers to the superintendency are documented in literature, it is uncertain if perceptions of barriers for women superintendents have changed over time and if changes for women in educational leadership have occurred (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

In this section, I provide a review of the literature surrounding the history of women superintendents and the possible perceived barriers that contribute to longevity

for currently employed women superintendents. The history of women superintendents will be reviewed as well as possible personal and professional perceived barriers that contribute to longevity of women superintendents. Comparisons of women superintendents in history to those in the twenty-first century were explored through the theory of the human relations approach. Finally, I conclude this section by investigating social inequities that may exist for women administrators, students, and school leadership in general due to the lack of women superintendents' input on educational policy and decision-making at the local and national level.

In this literature review, I used peer-reviewed journals, academic resources, scholarly websites, and published dissertations to obtain information. Occasionally, websites where researchers or organizations presented data regarding gender and postings from women on gender related issues were also used to explore possible common themes in the literature.

Women Superintendents in History

The early decades of the twentieth century can be described as the *golden age* for women superintendents, a time when school districts began adding formal bureaucratic structures and administrative layers that women began to fill (Blount, 1998). The country's first women superintendent was Ella Flagg Young, who took leadership of Chicago Schools in 1909. Her pride and enthusiasm shone as she declared:

Women were destined to rule the schools of every city. I look for a large majority of the big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in

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

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

leadership. As the first woman to be placed in control of the schools of a big city,

it will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been make and to show citied and

friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man. (Blount,

1998, p.1)

During Young's leadership, women accounted for 70% of all teachers; several

suffrage victories had given hope to Young that women would now assume more

positions in the superintendency (Blount, 1998). Author Jackie Blount (1998), in her

book, *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency, 1873-1995*, stated

that even during the era of the golden age, little attention was given to a group of critics

who stigmatized and suppressed women who crossed transitional gender-role boundaries

such as school superintendents. Some critics found that single women teachers who

sought leadership positions were threatening and linked these women to lesbianism and

demise of the (White) race (Blount, 1998).

Because of the lack of historical documentation during this time period, there is

also a gap in narrative documentation of the women superintendents' insights and stories

during this time period (Jordan, Hunter & Derrick, 2008). Soon women in educational

leadership positions found themselves in a quandary. If they performed their leadership

roles well, they were perceived as masculine, which was an undesirable trait for working

with children. Or, if they performed their job with a feminine demeanor, they were

considered weak as a leader (Blount, 1998). Eventually, the hiring of women

superintendents began to decline not only because of this gender-role quandary issue but also because of the ending of World War II. Millions of veterans returned from the war seeking civil service employment. Some districts felt that to be patriotic, they would need to recruit, hire, and promote the men returning from war. Blount (1998) continued to explain that the G.I. Bill created a social pressure for women who had worked outside the home during the war to return home, raise children, and allow their job to go to veterans. As a result of these changes, as well as others, women were less represented in the superintendent's position reaching an all-time low of 3% from 1950 to 1970 (Blount, 1998).

During the 1960s, positions in the workplace included more women and minorities yet they were not equitable with those of white men (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Women and minorities still did not have equal access to conditions, salary, and benefits in the workplace as their male counterparts nor did they have access to the highest leadership positions in organizations and government (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Slowly, social conditions for women began to improve. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy created the Committee on Equal Employment requiring projects with federal dollars include affirmative action and made sure that employment practices were free of racial bias. In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act promising equal wages for the same work; then, in 1964, President Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act and Title VII of this Act prohibited discrimination toward gender. Yet despite these advancements for women, the number of women superintendents in this country remained at 3%. The years from 1970–1990 saw little improvement in the number of women who held superintendent

positions (Blount, 1998). It was not until the late 1990s when gender issues surrounding the superintendency began to be addressed (Harris, 2007).

Longevity in the Superintendency

Longevity of women superintendents and their service to public education is tenuous despite the fact that women are documented in overwhelming numbers at colleges and universities in educational leadership programs (Christman & McClellan, 2008). What remains undocumented are details of the perceived barriers that keep women from attaining the superintendency and the duration of their tenure should they assume this leadership position. Even with advanced technology and numerous websites, it is difficult to get an accurate number of represented women in the superintendency and their longevity because there is an absence of reliable and comparable data both nationally and within the United States (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Currently there are no federal or national organizations that collect or report annual educational administrative data by gender; the field of education relies on membership counts in administrative organizations, surveys from these organizations, or surveys by the national Center for Education Statistics (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Even though the AASA was established primarily for school superintendents and has conducted studies for over 20 years, it has only recently begun to disaggregate the data by gender (Brunner & Kim 2010).

In most educational research, longevity is described as turnover and is an issue of significance to school improvement and reform (Natkin, Cooper, Alborano, Padilla, & Ghosh, 2002). Pascopella (2011) has found a direct correlation between longevity of

superintendents and academic achievement but the study is not gender specific. Several published quantitative studies have addressed superintendent turnover but have been descriptive in nature, presenting statistics for a particular time period (Natkin, et.al.) Current literature in superintendent turnover provides information about average tenure and possible trends but does not discuss specific circumstances that contribute to length of tenure or distinguish between the genders. For example, the most current research from the AASA in 2007 cites comprehensive statistics on average superintendent tenure, the number of years current superintendents have been in their positions, and years of experience, but does not provide gender differences among the participants (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Current sources indicate that there is a disproportion to the number of women who train to become administrators to those who actually assume the position of superintendent but specific reasons are undocumented (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Hargre and Fink (2006) stated that public education should not be treated as a temporary business but rather as a long-lasting enterprise that shapes the generations of the future. Understanding longevity issues of women superintendents will contribute to the enterprise by evaluating the barriers which they encounter and voicing the methodology they use to break them down to successfully achieve longevity.

Perceived Barriers to the Superintendency

Researchers Derrington and Sharratt (2009) stated that perceived barriers for women superintendents have changed over time and it is important to understand the changes. A study was conducted in 1993 to women subscribers to a professional job listing service asking aspiring women superintendents to identify barriers to the

superintendency (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). In April 2007, this fourteen-year-old study was repeated by the original researchers and found a shift in focus regarding perceived barriers. Most specifically, the study found in 1993 the main barriers included sex discrimination and sex role stereotyping as compared to 2007 where perceived top barriers were often self-imposed and women felt failure or avoided the superintendency because of family commitments and the inability to relocate (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). Although this research included possible strategies to overcome the self-imposed barriers, it did not indicate if these aspiring women entered into the superintendency nor did it include the methods used to overcome the barriers. Recurring themes regarding barriers were noted by researcher Wickham (2007) who indicated demands of family, lack of ability to relocate, and exclusion from the *good old boy network* were statistically significant. Wickham's research extended and provided successful perceived strategies by the participants which included increasing visibility in professional circles, obtaining a doctorate degree, adhering to a plan of action, developing a strong self concept, and pursuing opportunities for advancement within the structure (Wickham, 2007). What are unknown are the actual success stories from the participants and whether they had achieved longevity. This continual lack of available comparison data by gender has political and social ramifications. Without knowing if data shows women superintendents representation getting better, getting worse or staying the same, action plans cannot be put in place to remedy the problem of underutilization of women in the schools (Dunlap & Schmuck, 1995). Listed below are the common barriers I discovered that remain consistent in the literature regarding both currently employed and aspiring women

superintendents.

Career Paths

Career paths and gender in the superintendency seem to have the most contradicting information. Researcher Thomas Glass has studied the state of the superintendency for decades. In the article, *Where Are All The Women Superintendents?* (2000), Glass identified several possibilities that discourage woman from seeking the superintendency; mainly that women are not employed in positions in education that normally lead to the superintendency (Glass, 2000). His findings showed the ladder to the superintendency often begins with leadership responsibilities in addition to or after a classroom-teaching role such as that of assistant principal, coach, supervisor, or department chair; opportunities that are not often available in elementary schools. Therefore, most women elementary principals who came from a classroom teaching position lacked opportunities to experience other administrative positions before applying for the superintendency and did not have much leadership experience. In contrast, this same study indicated that nearly 40% of women superintendents entered their position following an assistant superintendent position that did not provide additional administrative leadership opportunities beyond central office giving the women an opportunity to experience a leadership position. Only 18% of women superintendents hold a secondary school administrative background compared to their elementary administrative counterparts (Glass, 2000) contradicting the theory that superintendents need to experience other leadership roles before the superintendency to be successful. With this contradicting data, it is unclear if current women superintendents view an

elementary background as a barrier to the superintendency.

A national report found that women in education take different career paths to the top but do not get there as quickly as men (Holland, 2011). According to this same report, women superintendents were older (on average) and had more formal education and teaching experience than their male counterparts (Holland, 2011).

Grogan & Brunner (2005) stated that many leaders in education see having an elementary background as a disadvantage. This notion can be found in research as early as 1957 when Morris claimed "the chances of movement to administrative posts is seven to ten times greater for men than women" (Grogan, 1996, p.14). As primitive as this statement may seem in the twenty-first century, a 2007 study of aspiring women superintendents noted that developing a stronger self-concept was needed to be successful as a women superintendent and may be barrier in obtaining a superintendency (Wickham, 2007).

Grogan & Brunner (2005) continued to state that familiarity with elementary level teaching and curriculum can be an advantage and can actually prepare superintendents well as they are knowledgeable in the fundamentals of literacy and numeracy that is important to an instructional leader. Glass and Franceschini (2007) also noted in the year 2000 that less than a third of the nation's school superintendents came from an elementary background; however these researchers also noted that in 2007 this trend may change as boards of education are more interested in instructional improvement and higher test scores. The 2007 AASA study did not indicate whether women superintendents felt their elementary or secondary certification was beneficial or a barrier

in their career aspirations. Having this data available may give insight as to if area of certification is seen as a barrier for women superintendents.

Notwithstanding, the lack of preparation for incoming school superintendents is finally being addressed, although few programs exist in the United States which prepares superintendents for the many challenges they face (Orr, 2007). Glass' most recent research (2006) on the subject of career paths for superintendents suggested that many states provide administrative academies for aspiring superintendents, both men and women, despite their area of certification or administrative experience. This would provide superintendents with skills and knowledge needed to be successful regardless of their educational background. Data could not be obtained justifying the successes of the academies by participating incoming superintendents of if lack of preparation was seen as a barrier for women superintendents.

Boards of Education and Gender Discrimination

In the 2006 AASA study, the primary reasons employed women superintendents believed why so few women were in the superintendency was gender discrimination by boards of education and that a glass ceiling was present (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). This contradicts the findings of Derrington & Sharratt (2009) who claimed the perception of barriers have shifted and that women superintendents no longer indicate gender discrimination as a primary barrier. Holland's findings (2011) reported that that the percentage of women indicating they had encountered discrimination in their pursuit of a superintendency was more than three times the percentage of men who said they had experienced it. This conflicting data leads to speculation as to whether women

superintendents still encounter gender discrimination and their personal voices were needed for clarification and accuracy.

While it is impossible to prove that a glass ceiling exists in a particular school system, the perception of a glass ceiling by superintendents was relevant when discussing potential barriers for women. Glass and Franceschini (2007) noted that 16.5% of women superintendents and 8.5% of male superintendents said the presence of a glass ceiling was a reason for formal and informal non-selection of a woman for a particular superintendent position. The researchers further stated that this difference of opinion is important because the women superintendents see the glass ceiling as a barrier or roadblock. By contrast, Gilmour & Kinsella (2009) reported that gender is sometimes a deciding factor in who gets a job, but not all persons experienced this phenomenon. Gilmour (2005) found in her study that several women superintendents did not experience gender barriers when attaining the superintendency. Mixed results of gender discrimination as barriers and perception of glass ceilings have been confusing in the literature and needed to be further explored and documented.

Most of the literature indicated that boards of education see management of fiscal resources to be priority even while publicly claiming the instructional programming should take precedence (Glass, 2000). While there was other research to support the need for a superintendent to be a strong fiscal manager (Bird, 2010), there was no data to indicate which gender has more success with school finance. In the last two ASAA studies of 2000 and 2007, neither men nor women superintendents indicated fiscal-management as the primary reason for hire (Brunner & Kim, 2010).

The most important decision a board of education makes is its choice of superintendent (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). However, expectations and demands of the nation have shifted, and boards of education seek leadership in a world where there is little room for those who lack education (Scherer, 2004). Literature was lacking regarding the compensation boards of education offer women superintendents. There were abundant statistics from local and national organizations detailing compensations packages for superintendents based on education, size of district, and relevant experience, however, I could not obtain salary data based on gender in these publications. Several doctoral dissertations have studied gender discrimination and salary of superintendents and have varied results. One study found there were no major differences in salary for men and women superintendents when they have similar educational attainment and educational experience (Long, 2010) whereas another study indicated that gender difference in superintendent salaries did exist but were subtle rather than systematic (Meier & Wilkins, 2002). Once again, there were inconsistent findings regarding gender discrimination regarding salary and if women superintendents found this discrimination a perceived barrier.

Mentoring

Another barrier that received much attention in the literature was access to mentors in the superintendency. There was a growing regard for women to have stronger support systems in educational administration both among themselves and with other male mentors in order to succeed (Gupton & Slick, 1996). Authors and educators Joyce Dana and Diana Bourisaw (2006) reported that having one or more mentors was essential

for the new superintendent and that the value of a good mentor was well documented.

Other literature supported the notion that maintaining a good mentoring relationship was

essential in educational administration for both men and women (Lindley, 2003).

However, 39% of superintendents interviewed in 2007 stated they had received no

mentoring before becoming superintendent and no data was given as to the gender of the

mentors who were active in districts (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). This led to questions

regarding gender and mentorships; specifically, how many women superintendents had

access to both formal and informal mentorship programs and was it beneficial to have

new women superintendents mentored by a woman. A study led by Cryss Brunner and

Margaret Grogan in 2003 stated men mentored the majority of women superintendents

who had access to a mentor. The authors continued to express that perhaps the

perspectives of both men and women mentors were important if women were to feel

confident enough to be in the masculine role of the superintendency (Brunner & Grogan,

2007). Other studies indicated although women prefer to have women as mentors, there

was no clear suggestions that women necessarily make better mentors to their women

colleagues (Daresh, 2001). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) suggested that a potential

advantage for a woman being mentored by a male superintendent is developing a *good

old boys* network being that men dominated the superintendency; yet Daresh (2001)

suggested that cross-gender mentoring may cause concerns or problems because of the

potential appearance of impropriety. Another point of view in the literature was that

women lack mentorships which men have access to, and that the burden is on women to

make these connections, therefore finding it easier to network and form informal

mentorships with other women (Eagly & Carli, 2009). This belief could not be supported

nor challenged due to gaps in the literature both in academic studies or essays written by

women superintendents regarding their experiences. There was evidence to suggest

women superintendents who do not have access to a formal mentoring program found it

difficult to find other women as mentors – both formally and informally - due to the small

number of currently employed women superintendents (Gupton & Slick, 1996). In

regards to mentoring, Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan (2008) stated that women are still

outsiders in their status as an educational administrator seen as new or different in our

field. The researchers continued to state that women have the ability to transform

leadership through mentoring.

Working Conditions

An overwhelming 98% of U.S. public school superintendents said they have a

high stress job (Johnson, 2004). In the 2007 AASA survey of superintendents, currently

employed superintendents (both men and women) were asked why they believed so few

women were in the superintendency. Results showed that 40.3% of women

superintendents and 50.6% of men superintendents believed working conditions of the

superintendency were not appealing to women and family concerns were the main

reasons for women not in the superintendency (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While there

has certainly been a change in home life over time, women still shoulder the

responsibilities of home and family life (Brunner & Grogan, 2007) that may be perceived

as a barrier for women superintendents. As a result, some women reduced their work

hours after having children, took time off to raise a family or re-entered the work force on

a part-time basis slowing professional progress (Eagly & Carli, 2009). Given the enormous time demands of the superintendency, many women did not want to pursue this top position and take on additional responsibilities. The average superintendent spent more than 50 hours a week at the school including night meetings, student performances, and sporting events (Glass 2000). This possibly presented challenges to women accustomed to child-centered teaching in elementary classrooms and to people who preferred a balance between work and family life (Glass, 2000). Although literature suggested that family issues may be a barrier for women superintendents, Brunner and Grogan (2007) noted that aspiring and current superintendents appeared to be raising more children (between zero and 15 years of age) overall than women educators who were not aspiring to become superintendents. This information contradicted the notion that women may have to choose between motherhood and the superintendency or that it was a barrier to raise children during this stressful and time-consuming position. Johnson (2004) also contradicted current literature stating family issues were not a significant barrier to all women and noted a study of Indiana women in 2005 that stated that stress and lack of support from teachers, parents, and community were major barriers.

Aspiring Superintendents

Despite these barriers and possibly the lack of administrative opportunities for many women in the school setting, women continued to fulfill their aspirations to reach the superintendency. In 2003 a study led by Grogan and Brunner found that 40% of women in central- office administration identified themselves as aspiring to be a superintendent. A follow-up study indicated that 74% had either earned their

superintendent certificate or were working towards completing certification (Grogan & Brunner, 2003). The essential question remained as to why there are so few women superintendents in our schools if the majority of certified candidates were women.

The literature suggested that women do aspire to become superintendents (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). National data indicated that women make up more than 50% of the graduate students enrolled in educational administration programs and obtained their doctorate degree at comparable rates to men candidates (Glass, 2000). These statistics were encouraging when discussing women who aspire to become superintendents yet were disappointing when we consider that large number of qualified women educators who are not considered for a top leadership position. Should attention be given to the phenomenon of career aspiration of women superintendents, perhaps the leadership crisis in our nation's school would lead to future resolution (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

Longevity of superintendents in literature did not specifically include the difference between men and women. The 2007 AASA study indicated that 26% of superintendents had served between one and three years in the position but dropped significantly to 11.8% for superintendents who served 10 to 12 years (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). The 2007 AASA study did not elaborate on reasons for the decline in percentages nor did it provide gender-based data on longevity.

 Perhaps the most current and encouraging news for women superintendents of the twenty-first century was from Grogan & Shakeshaft (2011):

Here we are, a decade into the twenty-first century, and women are getting to a

point where they can lead, as they want to lead, without explanation. At one time

women were not accepted as leaders unless they acted like men, only to learn that

acting like a man was not only uncomfortable but for themselves, unlikely to be

successful. Now women are changing the ideas about appropriate leadership

models just by being themselves (p. 97).

With this in mind, more research was needed to understand the perceived barriers for

women superintendents, the methods used to overcome them, and how to promote

longevity within the position.

Women Superintendents in the Twenty-First Century

Women continually erode glass ceilings by having an increasing presence in

leadership roles and have established women-owned businesses that are growing at twice

the rate of all businesses (Jerome, 2007). While the United States serves approximately

48 million students in public schools, nearly equal by gender, a drastic disparity continues

in the number of women superintendents who act as role models in this important

leadership position (Jerome, 2007). The lack of women superintendents was often

mentioned in literature, yet why so few women currently are in the position as

superintendent was not understood (Harris, 2007). The literature further supported that

women dominate many areas of education including 97 % of preschool and kindergarten

teachers (Eagly & Carli, 2009), 75% of teachers and 43% of principals (Harris, 2007).

As the president of the American Association of School Administrators in 2007–

2008, Sarah Jerome noted hopeful signs of women in leadership roles during her tenure,

which included 11 Fortune 500 women Chief Executive Officers, 90 women serving in

the 110th Congress, the first women speaker of the house in history, and 11 women

leading the world's 193 countries. Yet despite these encouraging statistics, Jerome was quick to note that she was one of only 2,500 women leading the United States 14,000 school districts as a superintendent (Jerome, 2007).

Superintendent Margaret Blackmon told a group of women, "Being the boss is a lot of fun! It would have been so easy to give up. I absolutely love what I'm doing" (ASCD, 2000 p.1). However, becoming a superintendent was not easy for Margaret Blackmon. She applied 16 times for superintendent positions and was a finalist four times. Blackmon wanted to help other women who aspire to be top administrators in education. Unlike some of the current literature, Blackmon recommended that women *work the line,* or put simply, climb the traditional ladder of assistant principal, principal, central office administrator, and assistant superintendent. She also recommended that women should not stay in this position too long, as they may be stuck there because they do such a great job (ASCD, 2000).

There is no doubt that the superintendency is a rigorous position in education. The expectations continue to grow yet they are often conflicting and confusing (ASCD, 2001). Although there were resources accounting experiences of women superintendents of the twenty-first century, there was a lack of personal connection regarding the superintendents and the barriers they faced on a daily level which questioned the authentic voice of women superintendents (Jordan, Hunter, & Derrick, 2008).

Human Relations Approach

The human relations approach developed after a series of experiments conducted by Elton Mayo at the Hawthorne Plant of Western Electric near Chicago between 1927

and 1933. The studies, also known as the Hawthorne studies, have greatly influenced

administrative theory (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Although several experiments were

conducted with more than 20,000 employees, particularly interesting was an experiment

known as the relay assembly test room experiment, which was conducted with two

groups of women workers. Each group completed the same tasks but in different rooms

with the same amount of lighting. The control group had no changes in lighting or other

environmental factors whereas the experiential group worked with varied lighting and

various changes in environmental factors. Results indicated that regardless of the light

changes, rest periods, and changes in the length of workdays and workweeks,

productivity in both the control and the experiential groups improved; in fact, the worse

the conditions, the more increased productivity (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Mayo not

only found this to be true in the relay assembly test room experiment, but other

experiments as well. To understand this phenomenon, Mayo and associates interviewed

the employees who participated in the experiments over a 6-year period. His findings

showed that a human-social element existed in the workplace. The increase in

productivity was a result of an outgrowth of group dynamics and effective management.

In the relay assembly test room experiment, researchers discovered that the improvement

in the productivity of the women participants was a result of such human-social factors

such as morale, a feeling of belonging, and an effective management that promoted

interpersonal skills, motivation, leadership, participative decision-making and effective

communication. Mayo concluded that the importance of understanding human behavior,

especially group behavior, was essential from a management perspective (Lunenburg &

Ornstein, 2004).

The human relations approach was explored in this study as I collected data from a group of women superintendents to understand whether human-social conditions were relevant when considering personal and professional barriers to the superintendency. Group dynamics were explored in relationship to morale, motivation, sense of belonging, and effectiveness in the school system. I also determined if certain authentic human reactions existed within each participant. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) stated that women leaders are often described as modeling authentic human reactions; meaning there is a relationship between maternal skills and leadership in schools for women. I discovered that qualities such as nurturing, organizing, motivating, and listening were used when participants described perceived barriers and possible methods to overcome the barriers. I explored with each participant several content questions to determine if longevity is affected by human-social conditions (See Appendix B).

Social Justice and Longevity of Women Superintendents

There has been an increased focus on social justice and educational leadership and whether or not leadership preparation is including social justice on both a practical and research level (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Educational researchers indicated that universities needed to promote a broader and deeper understanding of social justice, democracy, and equity (Gaetane, Normore, & Brooks, 2009). To have women superintendents contribute to a more equitable movement, the number of women superintendents must increase.

The AASA studies over the past decade have gained substantial media attention,

prompting leaders throughout the nation to consider why there are so few women superintendents when the majority of educators and at least half of the students in educational leadership programs are women (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Most importantly, without women in superintendent positions, their input cannot be considered in national decision-making and local policy changes (Mahitvanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Tom Peters (2001) states:

"American women possess leadership abilities that are particularly effective in today's organizations, yet their abilities remain undervalued and underutilized. In the future, what will distinguish one organization and one country from another will be its use of human resources. Today human resource utilization is not only a matter of social justice but a bottom-line issue."

Educational leaders Gilmour and Kinsella (2009) stated that fundamental philosophies of social justice expressed by superintendents involved focusing on not just teaching and learning but also meeting the needs of every child, every day. Women with new leadership styles are desperately needed in schools utilizing their unique strengths, including collaborative and transformational leadership, focus on curriculum and instruction, shared decision making, empowerment of school community, and articulation of new visions which could change public school districts and ensure successful changes in education (Funk, 2004). Much research existed on the qualities of women leaders including the 2005 Caliper Study, which summarized findings into four statements about women's leadership qualities:

1. Women leaders are more persuasive than their male counterparts.

2. When feeling the sting of rejection, women leaders learn from adversity and
carry on with an *I'll show you* attitude.

3. Women leaders demonstrate an inclusive, team building leadership style of
problem solving and decision-making.

4. Women leaders are more likely to ignore rules and take risks (Lowen, 2010).

The findings in the Caliper Study reinforced leadership qualities of women superintendents researched by Carol Funk in 2004. Funk uncovered eight leadership themes of women superintendents that she deemed as important to enrich the educational quality of public schools. Those leadership themes included, being a visionary, acting professionally and ethically, allowing time for dreaming and creating, communicating effectively and often, motivating staff and self, being truly committed to the leadership role and to children, having a strong work ethic, and processing the energy and stamina in order to do their jobs (Funk, 2004).

During the years of 1880 and 2000 the nation had seen improvement and progress toward equity and achieving social justice (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). However, much progress still needs to be made. Women still earn only 78 cents for every dollar a man makes and when considering the ten top paying jobs for women, they earn less than men (Lowen, 2010). Gaps in the literature are evident when comparing men and women superintendents salaries, but Gilmour and Kinsella (2009) noted that several women superintendents they studied did not want to appear greedy, so they took a lower salary when negotiating their original contract while citing their male counterparts were more firm about their salary demands. Still, while national gender comparisons of salary put

women at a disadvantage, other research indicated that salary trends revealed positive increases for superintendents and other top administrators. Pascopella (2009) reported that superintendents and other top administrators had seen as much as a 40% salary increase over the last decade in a survey conducted by Educational Research Service. What the results did not indicate was the gender breakdown of superintendents surveyed and if women superintendents reported the same salary increase as their male counterparts. Another finding also indicated fairness in gender salary. Long (2010) also confirmed that there were no major differences between male and women superintendents regarding salary whey they have similar educational attainment and educational experience.

Educational administrators can and should have a significant impact on the leadership for the social justice movement (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Women superintendents can use their influence to promote leadership and gender equity in educational administration at the national and local level. Beginning as role models for women students and progressing to mentors for teachers and administrators, women superintendents have the ability to address inequities in the public school system. Having a women superintendent is certainly healthy for young girls for their being able to aspire to the position of leadership (Holland, 2011). Their voices and presence will offer unique perspective on educational issues.

Methodological Approach

In this study I used a qualitative, multiple case study approach to understand the phenomenon of underrepresentation of women at the superintendent level. Qualitative

research is a powerful tool for learning more about our lives and the sociohistorical context in which we live (Merriam & Associates, 2002). I selected a qualitative study because there is a lack of theory, or an existing theory, to adequately explain the phenomenon of gender imbalance in the superintendency. I focused on taking a social science behavioral approach to seek the essence of perception of lack of women superintendents in the United States from currently employed women superintendents. In addition to the social science behavioral approach, I selected an advocacy/participator paradigm in hopes that the research contained an action agenda for reform that could change the lives of the participants (Creswell, 2007). Specifically, if my research can provide a voice for the participants, in this case the voice of women superintendents, change and reform are possible to increase the number of women superintendents in the United States who achieve longevity.

Once I determined the need for a qualitative study, five major approaches were considered: narrative, phenomenology, grounded theory, ethnography, and case study which are all considered qualitative approaches with systematic procedures for inquiry (Creswell, 2007). A narrative approach was first considered, as I wanted the study to emphasize the experiences of the women superintendents for their perceptions of barriers through testimonials. However, this approach entailed unfolding the experience in a chronology that includes social, historical and personal experiences that detracted from obtaining the true essence of perceptions of barriers the participants' experience. A restory or biographical study was not appropriate for this study, as it would concentrate more on the several aspects of the participants' experience as a superintendent rather than

finding an essence of their experiences with perceived barriers only.

Ground theory research is used when the researcher wants to move beyond description to generate or discover a theory (Creswell, 2007). Unique to this approach is that all participants must have experienced the process, or in this study, participants would have all experienced the same barriers as a women superintendent. It was unknown to me if participants had all experienced similar barriers as superintendents. Assumptions would have been made that all women superintendents shared common experiences with barriers and a theory would be developed. Whereas grounded theory would generate and develop an explanation, I preferred to have participants describe and give meaning to their experiences with perceived barriers. Therefore, ground theory was not appropriate for this study.

Ethnographic researchers focus on an entire culture or group and are used when discovering cultural similarities and differences and the interaction of its members. Researchers immerse themselves in the group to form a holistic cultural portrait that includes views from the participants. Although ethnography can be used in some cases with a small number of participants, the group of participants is usually very large. For this study, the primary interest was not the ethnic or socio-economic culture of women superintendents but rather looking at a subset of women superintendents who have achieved longevity and their perceptions regarding barriers. Because women superintendents do not work in groups and have varied cultural backgrounds, an ethnographic study would not be feasible for me to discover perceived barriers for women who have obtained longevity of 6 years.

Another qualitative approach I considered was phenomenological research. Phenomenology is a tradition in German philosophy with a focus on the essence of lived experience (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). Phenomenology finds significant statements and themes to uncover phenomenon but often, according to Moustakas (1994), included the researchers experiences and the context and situations that have influenced their experiences (Yin, 2009). Although I did have experience in the role as superintendent, it was not the intent of the study to include my experience or influence data in the findings of the study. I was not interested in studying the entire experience of women superintendents who obtained longevity, but rather wished to obtain descriptive data on perceptions of barriers. Therefore, I rejected the use of the phenomenological paradigm.

For this study, I chose a multiple case study design. In this approach, I developed an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases to understand an issue or problem using the case(s) as a specific illustration (Creswell, 2007). As a research method, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, groups, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena to understand complex social phenomena (Yin, 2007). I discovered that current literature lacks case studies of women superintendents who have obtained longevity of 6 years and their perceptions of personal and professional barriers. Therefore, I decided to study five cases – each women superintendent representing a case – to understand the complex phenomena of factors that were considered barriers that lead to longevity in the superintendency. Through the case studies, I illustrated the phenomenon of barriers in a descriptive mode to form broad generalizations based on case study evidence (Yin, 2007).

Although a variety of methodical designs were considered, the need for richly descriptive narrative and the desire to understand the meaning the participants have about their experiences, I concluded a qualitative approach would be used (Hatch, 2002). For this study, I analyzed several individuals with shared experiences and began to understand the essence of the experience inclusive of analyzing the data for significant statements and common themes; data which are common characteristics of a case studies (Creswell, 2007). I continually focused on the essence of lived experiences of currently employed women superintendents to determine specifically personal and professional barriers that may contribute to the gender imbalance in our nation's public school system.

Because I conducted in-depth interviews for the qualitative study, several sources on narrative studies were considered. Chase (1995) used a narrative approach when studying the interviews of women superintendents for a study regarding empowerment. Using open-ended questions to highlight the relationship between culture and experiences as it is expressed by the individual's narrative, Chase focused on the narration itself as a significant life activity that is cultural and personal. Although a narrative approach was not used exclusively in this study, elements of a narrative approach were used to gather and interpret the stories of women superintendents and their individual experiences (Hatch, 2002).

In-depth interviewing has received increasing attention as a qualitative genre (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). I chose to use a model called responsive interviewing which emphasizes that the interviewer and the participant are both human beings, not recording machines, and that they form a relationship during the interview that generates ethical

obligations for the interviewer (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). This model allowed me to delve into important personal issues, describe the social and political processes, and allowed for decision makers to use the data to shed light on old problems. It was my desire to create qualitative inquiry to longevity of women superintendents by having general questions asked in a very informal manner.

Qualitative studies with a multiple case study approach came with challenges. Mainly, I needed to have some understanding of the study's problem and the broader philosophical assumptions within the study yet not be overly critical or closed-minded (Creswell, 2007). Simply stated, I must have knowledge about the topic of the study yet be open to receive all data from the participants. The participants in the study needed to be randomly chosen, and all had achieved 6 years of longevity as a woman superintendent. I have had experience as a superintendent, yet did not obtain longevity. Furthermore, I needed to temporarily set aside, or bracket, personal attitudes or beliefs about the phenomenon (Merriam & Associates, 2002). Thus, I needed to decide how, and in what way, my personal understanding would be introduced in the study (Creswell, 2007). Rossman and Rallis (1998) described this bracketing on the part of the researcher as exquisite sensitivity to personal biography. Precisely, the qualitative researcher values his or her unique perspective as a source of understanding rather than something to be cleansed from the study (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). By having a second reader of my findings, an interrater reliability detracted bias from the findings. Furthermore, by removing myself from a position of authority or expert, the study could concentrated producing new accounts of the phenomenon and add new perspectives (Grogan, 1996).

Summary

In this section, I reviewed the literature pertaining to the history of women superintendents and compared women superintendents of the past to those of the twenty-first century. I introduced the theme of longevity, as it pertains to women superintendents, and discussed in terms of superintendent turnover that showed inconsistent data as to why so few women achieve longevity as superintendent. Factors which led to perceived barriers to the superintendency for women were also explored and specific barriers were discussed. I showed contrasting research theories as to specific and detailed reasoning surrounding longevity of women superintendents. I introduced the human relations approach as a conceptual framework and provided a connection between working conditions and the human-social factors that contribute to successful leadership. Findings of attributes and qualities of women superintendents were highlighted. I cited research and explored the methodology of the study and emphasized why a qualitative study with a multiple case study design was selected above other possibilities. I concluded Section 2 with attention to social justice issues and the importance of input from women superintendents regarding policy changes and decision-making.

I will now transition to Section 3 and introduce the methodology of the study. Included in this section are details for research design, research questions, context of the study, selection of participants, instrumentation, ethical considerations, role of the researcher, data collection procedures, and a data analysis plan.

Section 3: Methodology

Introduction

Almost two-thirds of the nation's teaching workforce is comprised of women (Mathitvanichcha & Rorrer, 2006) yet only 21.7% are employed as public school superintendents (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). While women have made great strides in leadership roles in the United States in business and politics, the superintendency remains a male dominated position in education (Harris, 2007). The absence of women in the public school superintendency means that women's influence on policy changes, decisions, and practice in the field will be limited (Mathitvanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). To ensure gender equity in policy changes and decision-making regarding public education, it is important that women superintendents have established longevity in their position. Only then can their voices be included and their ideals considered. In this section, I highlighted and discussed the details of research obtained using a qualitative study with a case study design.

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between the longevity of women superintendents in public school districts and perceived personal and professional barriers that may influence longevity. In addition, approaches used to overcome the barriers, if any, were identified and explored. Although much research has been published about longevity and the superintendency (Glass & Franceschini, 2007), there is little evidence or data of women superintendents in particular. In this multiple case study, I primarily concentrated on personal reflections and dialogue of currently

employed women superintendents to focus in-depth on the meaning of their experience in this role (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). According to Creswell (2007), case study research involves the study of an issue explored through on or more cases with a bounded system. In addition, Merriam (2002) cited that a case study as an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit as individual, group, institution, or community. By concentrating upon a single phenomenon or entity (the case), this approach seeks to describe the phenomenon in depth (Merriam, 2002). In this case study, I attempted to articulate the meaning, or essence, of why there are so few acting women superintendents and the possible personal and professional perceived barriers that effect longevity.

Research Questions

In this study, I utilized the following research questions to provide answers to the proposed study:

1. Which personal or professional factors do women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career?

2. What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

3. What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

Context of the Study

In addition to a survey, I identified and interviewed five women superintendents who were employed by various public school districts in one determined state and had achieved longevity of 6 years or more as superintendent. The five women superintendents

were randomly selected of all currently employed women in the selected state. Superintendents working in K-12 public school districts were chosen to study because of the lack of literature that acknowledges their representation in the field of educational administration. The data I collected from the women superintendents compared current longevity in public school districts and perceived barriers that may or may not affect longevity. Also, my in-depth inquiry considered perceived successful approaches as to overcoming the barriers identified. The method of inquiry included in-depth, personal reflection of the participants to understand the unspoken phenomenon of why so few women superintendents lead public school districts and overcoming perceived barriers that can lead to longevity in this position. By understanding and studying what women perceive as a personal and professional barriers to the superintendency, efforts can directed to assist women overcome the barriers and assume leadership roles as superintendents in education and achieve longevity. My perspective of this study focused from an advocacy point of view, meaning I believe it is important to have more women in the role of superintendency and to obtain that goal, an understanding of personal and professional barriers must be explored and overcome.

Ethical Considerations

Because of the small numbers of women superintendents in the United States, anonymity may be an issue for some participants. As a result, I realized that some participants might be hesitant to share personal experiences in their current position. Therefore, extra consideration to ensure confidentiality with each participant was established so that data could be candid, honest and relevant to the research questions.

Before conducting the interview process, participants received a consent form that described the purpose, nature and benefits of the study. All participants were informed that their participation was completely optional for this study and they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or obligation. To ensure anonymity, each participant was assigned a pseudonym in lieu of his or her name. I placed original documents in locked storage containers and computer data was password protected.

This study included human participants and required approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) from Walden University before I could proceed. Once I gained IRB approval, participants completed a consent form prior to completing any surveys or interviews. I carefully maintained confidentiality of all participants.

Role of the Researcher

I had several roles throughout the study. My primary role was to serve as the person who distributed all surveys and conducted interviews with participants. It was important for me to listen and gather information from each participant as well as develop a level of comfort with the participants that enabled her to give detailed and accurate data. Interviews were used as a method for discovering patterns and meanings from statements. Transcriptions were reviewed often for accuracy, validity, and reliability for a deeper understanding of the participant's experience.

During my career I was a state certified teacher and administrator who held a temporary superintendent's license while fulfilling the role of interim superintendent. I did not achieve longevity as superintendent; however, my experience in the role did bring bias to the process. Under no circumstance did I have a supervisory relationship with the

participants. Personal experiences as an interim superintendent were not shared with participants unless specifically requested. My experiences were bracketed off from the interviewees throughout the study process. By bracketing the personal experiences, attitudes and beliefs, bias that might influence the methodology and evaluation of this study was eliminated.

Selection of Participants

I began this research study process by surveying all women superintendents currently employed for the 2011-2012 school year in the selected state in a public school district and have held the position as superintendent for at least six years. A preliminary review suggested that there were approximately 100 individuals that would meet the initial qualification as currently employed women superintendent, however, it was not known how many participants meet the requirement of longevity. Names of participants were selected through the State Department of Education website and represented women superintendents serving in urban, suburban and rural school districts in the state. Ethnicity and age were not criteria for selection. All women superintendents who meet the criteria received a likert-type survey of ten questions pertaining to school demographics, number of years served, and perceived issues of personal and professional barriers during their superintendency. Upon reviewing the completed surveys, a random purposive samplings strategy procedure was used by the researcher to select five women superintendents for in-depth interviews. The purposive sampling strategy was used to add credibility to sample size when potential purposive sample was too large (Creswell, 2007). Selecting knowledgeable and experienced participants was important because the

first-hand experience of the interviewees were critical for accurate results (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The participants were experienced, as they all had at least six years in the role of superintendent. Although it was difficult to determine the amount of knowledge the participant has before an interview, Rubin & Rubin suggested choosing a person who is in the appropriate position and then after interviewing them decide if you have obtained the information needed for the study.

Instrumentation & Materials

For the survey I developed a self-constructed survey that was cross-sectional (Creswell, 2007). The survey consisted of ten statements that examined women superintendents' beliefs and attitudes regarding personal and professional barriers that may influence longevity as well as basic information about the participant and demographics of the school district. The survey was a likert-type survey where participants responded by specifying their level of importance to the statements (See Appendix A). The survey was brief, confidential, and easily completed in written form or on the Internet. Comprised results of the study were available to all participants as an incentive to completing the survey. This survey had content validity because it contained a reasonable sample of facts, words, ideas and theories commonly used when discussing personal and professional factors that may influence longevity in women superintendents (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006). Content validity was established by reviewing literature from experts from the AASA on emotions, behaviors and personalities regarding this subject.

Based upon the returned surveys, five women superintendents were identified through random selection and asked to participate in an in depth interviews lasting approximately

two hours. The interviews were qualitative in nature and consisted of three main questions that elicited the overall experiences and understandings of the participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Follow-up questions were used to build on what participants said to gain a deeper and better understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). To ensure accuracy during follow-up questioning, I used probes to help manage how interviewees answer questions. Continuation probes, elaboration probes, clarification probes, steering probes, sequence probes, evidence probes, and slant probes were used throughout the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I created probes to guide the interview, however, I determined during the interview which probes need to be used and may inject other probes as necessary (See Appendix B).

Data Collection Procedures

Creswell (2007) described the data collection process as a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering good information to answer emerging research questions. This included (a) locating site/individual, (b) gaining access and making rapport, (c) purposeful sampling, (d) collecting data, (e) recording information, (f) resolving field issues, and (g) storing data. I followed Creswell's data collection activities for this study.

Data collection took place during the month of January 2013. This enabled me to secure updated information on superintendents' placement in the school districts before distributing the survey. Using the U.S. Postal Service, I mailed all participants a survey with a cover letter describing the purpose of the study and directions for completing the survey. A return self-addressed envelope was included with the survey for the convenience of the participants and included my personal contact information should a

participant have any questions. The participants were asked to complete the survey and return via postal mail within 1 week. After 2 weeks, nonrespondents were sent reminder e-mails along with an attachment of survey. After 2 weeks, nonrespondents received a phone call from me asking the participant to complete the survey either by Internet or verbally, by telephone with me.

Upon receiving the survey data, I randomly selected five participants for in-depth interviews. I arranged for face-to-face interviews with the five participants at a location of their choice. Follow-up interviews and phone calls were conducted as necessary in order to gather enough detail and actual data to take myself inside the phenomenon (Hatch, 2002). All interviews were digitally recorded and stored. I then carefully transcribed and reviewed the interviews for accuracy.

Data Analysis Plan

Data analysis is a systematic search for meaning (Hatch, 2002). It is an ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data (Creswell, 2002). In this qualitative study the research questions guided the data analysis. The questions asked in the survey and the interview processes were carefully designed to relate to the research questions and are mostly comprised of open-ended questions that allowed the participants to expand and evolve on various topics and themes. Data from the participants was carefully transcribed, coded by theme, and analyzed to identify patterns and significant statements that lead to the understanding of the phenomenon of longevity of women superintendents. I used inductive analysis with the data to identify domains and search for themes within the domains (Hatch, 2002). After organizing the data, I felt a sense of the whole database,

immersed myself in the details and broke the whole data into meaningful parts. A top-down approach was used to first analyze the data by having the conceptual framework elaborate on important categories from the participants' responses. New theories and emergent themes had a bottom-up approach and built a new understanding of the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 1998).

I then provided interrater reliability as a resource to validate the data. Interrater reliability is the extent to which two or more individuals agree on the data. This additional reader was a retired women superintendent with a doctorate degree who is not involved in the study. Having this additional reader offered feedback and ensured that I bracketed personal beliefs and experiences that did not taint the data and that the data analyzed was credible. The primary purposes of the second reader was to verify the themes and subthemes found by myself and justify data through verification of interview transcripts and interview notes. The interrater reliability was computed as an agreement between the researcher and the second reader with the intention of reaching an agreement of at least 80%.

Member checking was also used in the study to ensure the data collection process was both consistent and stable (Vockell, 1994). Participants (or members of the study) validated (or checked) a summary of their interview verify plausibility. Participants received a summary of the interview and not the entire transcribed interview so that the length of the transcript did not overwhelm participants but rather participants concentrated on the accuracy of the themes (Carlson, 2010).

Validity

To ensure validity, the researcher utilized the following strategies:

1. Triangulation of the data: Data was collected through multiple sources including interviews, surveys and analysis of my field notes during the interview process.

2. Clarification of researcher bias: At the outset of the study I articulated any bias under the heading " Role of the Researcher".

3. I used rich, thick description to convey data findings (Creswell, 2007).

4. I examined similar studies regarding women superintendents conducted by AASA and individual researchers before interview process to develop further understanding of the essence of the study.

5. An interrater, or second reader, was used for credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2007).

6. Reliability was addressed in this study by obtaining detailed field notes both in written form and with a good-quality digital tape recorder for recording and transcribing the data. After coding was complete, broad consistent themes from the participants was collapsed into smaller themes and used with quotes from the participants. Significant statements were developed and analyzed to compare common language among participants as well as with current themes in the literature. Follow-up interviews occurred, as necessary, to ensure understanding and reliability of the data from each of the participants.

7. Member checking was used where each participant reviewed a summary of the interviews for accuracy of content analysis.

To ensure trustworthiness, I used the responsive interviewing approach that emphasized both the interviewer and the participant as human beings that form a relationship during the interview process that generated ethical obligations for the interviewer that was flexible and brought a depth of understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Much time was taken to cultivate a positive relationship with each participant before, during, and after the interview that encouraged respect, honesty and trustworthiness.

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope and Delimitations

I carefully considered limitations and delimitations in this study. This study was confined to surveying and interviewing women superintendents in one selected state. This presented a possible delimitation because the study was limited to one selected state in the United States. A possible limitation in this qualitative study was that the data and findings may be subject to interpretations from participants and readers of the study and therefore I ensured validity by triangulating the data.

Summary

In section 3 I outlined the research methodology needed for this study and provided justification for a qualitative, multiple case study design as the best paradigm to be used. Three research questions were stated which guided the interviews and I explained the data collection process with participants. Measures for ethical protection were explained through the IRB process at Walden University as well as ethical considerations between myself and the participants to ensure confidentiality. The role of the researcher was explored and possible challenges with my previous experience in the

role of superintendent were described.

In this section I also discussed criteria for the selection participants; specifically, how participants were accessed and justified. I explained data collection and analysis procedures as tape-recorded in-depth interviews and then transcribed them for coding. The coding process consisted of myself looking for both repetitive and extreme themes within the data using rich, thick description. The next section, Section 4, will outline the findings of the data from the study.

Section 4: Results

Introduction

Extensive research has been conducted regarding public school superintendents and the complex responsibilities it entails, however, very little information is available regarding women superintendents and their perceived barriers in achieving longevity (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). With only 21.7% of superintendents being women and even fewer achieving longevity of 6 or more years, it is important to understand the perceptions of barriers of women superintendents so that more women aspire to the superintendency. By understanding and studying what women perceive as personal and professional barriers to the superintendency, efforts can be directed to assist women to overcome the barriers and assume leadership roles as superintendents and achieve longevity.

In this qualitative case study, I examined the relationship between longevity of women superintendents and their perception of personal and professional barriers. Specifically, the study addressed three research questions:

1. Which personal or professional factors do women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career?

2. What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

3. What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

This section is an account of the findings and themes of data collected from the initial survey sent to all women superintendents in the selected state and interviews from

five women superintendents who have achieved longevity of 6 years. Additionally, data gathered included current perceptions regarding gender discrimination, career paths, glass ceiling, mentorships, working with boards of education, and family issues that may influence longevity. Furthermore, since probing questions focused on the human relations approach paradigm, affective qualities were uncovered from the personal interviews that included topics of morale, conflict, loyalty, emotional support and equality that provided rich data for the study. This section includes a description of the participants, how the data was collected and analyzed, as well as the finding of this study.

Process of Generating, Gathering and Recording Data

Following approval by the Walden University Review Board (IRB number 12-10-1200655552, December 9, 2013), participant recruitment began and data collection steps were initiated to conduct research on January 7, 2013. First, I obtained a list of names and addresses of all public school women superintendents in the selected state from the state generated Department of Education website via the Internet. There were 102 women superintendents identified from that list. Each women superintendent was mailed - via the U.S. Postal Service - a letter of intent (Appendix A), consent form (Appendix B), and survey form (Appendix C) regarding her perceptions of barriers in the superintendency. The survey questions were created by myself based on current literature that identified current themes and concerns in the area of the superintendency (Section 2). A self-addressed stamped envelope was included for rapid return. After 2 weeks, I sent a reminder email (Appendix D) to those participants who had not responded.

I received a total of 36 completed surveys, which is a return rate of 35%. Results

from the survey questions were charted in order of importance of perceived barriers by

the surveyed participants (Appendix E). A second chart was created to show the order of

importance of perceived barriers by longevity; comparing participants with four or more

years of experience with participants with three or less years of experience (Appendix F).

Next, I identified 13 participants who had achieved longevity as a superintendent for 6 or

more years. Out of these 13 participants, 5 were randomly selected for a personal

interview. Each selected participant was contacted by telephone and all five women

agreed to a personal interview at the location of their choice. All who participated in the

survey and interview process were volunteers and no incentives or monetary

compensation was offered in order to gain participation. Confidentiality was maintained

by assigning each interview participant a pseudonym (e.g., Superintendent 1).

       Preparation for the interviews began by determining the exact location of the

school districts and, specifically, the preferred meeting location determined by the

participants. Next, using the most recent publication of the AASA Center for System

Leadership as a guide, probing questions were created in relation to the research

questions regarding perceived barriers for the researcher to use as an interview guide

(Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Interviews were scheduled and held between March 12 and

April 22, 2013. Interviews lasted from 45 to 90 minutes and contained the research

questions as well as probing questions as predetermined in the interview guide (Appendix

E). Research questions were open-ended and allowed for detailed description regarding

the participants' experiences. During the interview process, I took notes citing themes

described by the participants.

Interviews were digitally recorded and stored on a password-protected computer that only I could access. Within 24 hours after each interview, the interview was transcribed on a personal home computer. Transcribing the data so quickly after the interview allowed me to pay attention to details as to what the interviewee said and have the opportunity to clarify information quickly with the participant if necessary (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). After each interview, I sent a transcript summary of the interview within 48 hours -via email- to each participant for clarification and accuracy. Three of the five participants made corrections or clarifications to the transcript and sent responses to via email. Follow up interviews via telephone were not necessary. This member checking process ensured validity and consistency in the data collection process.

All transcripts were then sent to a second reader for the purpose of analyzing and verifying themes. The second reader was a retired woman superintendent who achieved longevity for more than 6 years during her career. The second reader received uncoded transcripts on May 1, 2013, approximately 3 weeks after the final interview. The second reader signed a confidentiality agreement (Appendix G) for this study and met personally with me on May 14, 2013 in a public location to analyze findings and compare themes for approximately three hours. To begin the process, the second reader shared her findings without influence from me. The second reader had taken the uncoded transcripts and created a document that had eight major themes regarding perceived barriers among the case study participants which included:

1. glass ceiling and issues of self awareness,

2. family balance,

3. mentoring,

4. morale,

5. relationships with the board of education,

6. salary issues,

7. longevity issues, and

8. methods of overcoming barriers.

Listed along with the eight themes were supporting details the second reader found in the documents including quotations from the participants. I then shared my findings and described nine major themes with the second reader including specific quotations from the participants. While I concurred with second reader's eight themes, I also documented support of personnel as part of the findings. After comparing data of the major themes, together we then correlated the themes to the three research questions. Nine themes were agreed upon between myself and the second reader and included:

1. relationship with board of education,

2. support of family,

3. glass ceiling/gender issues,

4. availability of mentors,

5. morale,

6. methods to overcome barriers,

7. longevity issues within the superintendency,

8. self-awareness responses

9. contract/salary issues.

The second reader and I decided that glass ceiling and self-awareness issues should be separate themes. While I found extensive data from the transcripts regarding support of personnel as a potential barrier, the second reader briefly mentioned this in her findings. I decided to include support of personnel as the tenth theme for the study as the findings from the survey and interviews indicated this was relevant and important to the participants and important data for the study.

This correlation calculated to 90% agreement between myself and the second reader regarding the data. Following the calculation of agreement, we discussed extensively details of the transcripts which lead to clarity and validity of the themes which were identified; specifically the major themes where then discussed in relation to the three research questions.

Of the 10 themes that were identified, four of the themes were directly discussed during the interview process as part of the interview guide and included the themes of glass ceiling, morale, importance of mentorships and methods to overcome perceived barriers. However, the remaining themes of relationship with the board of education, support of family, longevity issues, personal or self responses, salary/contract issues, and support of personnel were identified indirectly by the participants after I asked open-ended questions. For example, when asked if it was important to have emotional support both professionally and personally, all five participants discussed the relationship with the board of education and support of their family as important and potentially a barrier in their career. Themes including nurturing and confidants were identified when participants were asked if they perceived themselves as a successful superintendent. I then identified

emergent themes from the case studies including importance of relationships, self-imposed barriers, balance, and self-reflection.

Keeping Track of the Data

The data for this study included completed surveys and interview transcripts from the case study participants. Transcriptions from interviews took place within 24 hours so that discrepancies and clarifications could be addressed (Hatch, 2002). Interviews were conducted using a digital recorder and then transcribed by the researcher on a personal home computer. The digital recorder was placed in a locked storage cabinet when not in use. All physical data including consent agreements, surveys, printed transcripts, and physical field notes were kept in labeled folders in a locked storage file cabinet. All documents on my home computer were protected by a password.

I carefully analyzed data from the interview participants by rereading the individual transcripts and then color coding interview responses by theme. Inductive analysis was used to identify domains and search for themes with the domains (Hatch, 2002). First, a top-down approach was used to analyze the data by having the conceptual framework elaborate on important themes from the participants' responses. This allowed me to identify major themes from the case study participants and compare results with data from the surveyed participants. These themes were highlighted in each of the participant's interview transcripts and assigned a color using nine different colors to code the transcripts. Next, new theories and subthemes were identified using a bottom-up approach and helped to provide new understanding of the phenomenon (Rossman & Rallis, 1998). This approach allowed for the discovery of emergent themes and provided

detailed understanding from actual quotations from the participants. A highlighter was used to note new theories or specific quotes on the transcripts that were relevant to the research questions. Quotes from the case study participants were then correlated with the themes identified to provide specific detail regarding the participants. Actual quotes from the participants were utilized throughout the study.

Overview of the Findings

Through participant surveys and interviews I attempted to understand and identify perceived barriers. For this study, I surveyed all currently employed women superintendents in a particular state. Thirty-six participants responded to the survey and indicated their level of importance of possible barriers and their relevance to stay in their current position as superintendent. This accounted for approximately 35% of the participant pool.

I revealed through the survey that 18 participants were currently serving in a rural school district, 14 served in suburban districts, and 4 served in urban districts. Regarding areas of certification, 7 participants held secondary certification, 11 participants held elementary certification and 18 participants held both secondary and elementary certification. Longevity of surveyed participants showed that the majority of participants, 13 in all, had achieved longevity of 6 or more years in the superintendency. The survey results were used as a framework to lead an in-depth case study with five currently employed women superintendents with longevity of at least 6 years. The case studies were comprised of a rich discussion on the topic of the three research questions and six probing questions.

Research Question 1: Which personal or professional factors do women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career?

Data was gathered for this question using the five individual case study interviews based upon the framework of the survey. Four probing questions where used as I deemed appropriate to elicit further discussion for this research question:

1. Do you believe a glass ceiling is present for women superintendents?

2. How important is it to have emotional support both professionally and personally?

3. What are your perceptions on morale as it pertains to your superintendency?

4. Describe your experiences, or lack of, pertaining to mentorships and how it has shaped, or not shaped, your superintendency?

Participants discussed barriers that were related to the survey as well as provided personal scenarios including issues of family, marriage, trustworthiness, success, and self-confidence. While many of the perceived barriers correlated with the survey, the findings from the interviews also indicated themes of perceived barriers relating to relationships both personally and professionally. Furthermore, case study participants also discussed the need to prove oneself as a women superintendent as a barrier yet they did not see gender as a barrier to the superintendency. This theme regarding gender and perceived barriers was significant throughout discussion of the first research question and led to emergent themes of self-imposed barriers among the participants. Each participant was then asked specifically about perceived barriers relating to the themes of glass ceiling, morale, and mentorships as they relate to professional and personal barriers.

Themes of morale, self-reflection, and success in the superintendency emerged as important themes of the case study participants. Upon further discussion of the first research question, the participants examined their relationships with the boards of education, personnel, and family members and cited areas of concern of achieving balance with work and family life. Other themes emerged from the case studies such as self-confidence, the necessity to prove oneself, having a confidant, having good morale in the district, and the demands of working harder than their male counterparts. These themes were uncovered during discussion of the first research question and noted in my field notes.

Research Question 2: What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

For this component of the research study process, I utilized the survey results and established that the majority of women superintendents perceived relationships with boards of education, support of family and personnel, and morale as very important and potential barriers in their career. Also discovered were that issues of salary, availability of a mentor, and the presence of a glass ceiling were less important to the surveyed participants and not seen as a barrier in their career as superintendent. To guide this part of the interview with case study participants, I asked the second research question to participants and compared the findings to the results of the survey. Findings from the case studies correlated with the overall findings from the surveyed participants and provided deeper meaning to the researcher. All five case studies signified that relationships with boards of education, family, and personnel were considered the most important barriers to

overcome to be a successful women superintendent. Other themes documented for research question two included the need to nurture important relationships both personally and professionally, affective qualities expressed by the participants, and self-reflection statements made by the participants regarding longevity.

Research Question 3: What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

This open-ended question allowed the case study participates to converse about past and present approaches of overcoming perceived barriers. I relied solely on the information from the case studies, as this question was not part of the survey. Two probing questions were used to further guide discussions with case study participants for this research question:

1. Do you perceive yourself as a successful superintendent? Why or why not?

2. Do you see the superintendency as a long-term career position? Why or why not?

Findings from the case studies featured the importance of relationships and the need to eliminate self-imposed barriers to achieve longevity; specifically, finding a balance with work and family life and proving yourself as a successful superintendent. Noted were themes of using relationships as support and the ability to self-reflect on decisions in the superintendency as notable. During discussion of this research question, the participants revealed possibilities of gender discrimination during their career and the extra pressure sometimes experienced as being women in the top leadership position in the district. Patterns, relationships, and common themes emerged from the survey findings and

individual case studies. A top-down analysis approach was used to identify six themes the

participants perceived as barriers. A bottom-up analysis was then used to identify themes

which emerged indirectly from the data which included the importance of relationships to

increase both longevity and success in the superintendency, nurturing relationships, the

importance of a confidant, the pressure to achieve balance, and possible self-imposed

barriers. The theme of *self* emerged and was reoccurring throughout the case study

interviews and was an important contribution to the study as participants provided in-

depth personal responses to the researcher questions.

Patterns, Relationships, and Themes

The following patterns, relationships and themes were derived from participant

responses to interview questions, probing questions, and emerging themes. The six major

themes are explored in order of importance from all surveyed participants and included

detailed accounts from the five individual case studies. Emerging themes were then

identified through the data of the case study participants and analyzed to explain current

perceptions of barriers for women superintendents. Although the participants did not

identify the notion of career path as a perceived barrier, interesting data was collected to

show the changes occurring currently within educational administration as it pertains to

the superintendency for women. Lastly, the data will conclude with the themes and how

they contribute to longevity in the superintendency.

Theme 1: Relationship with Board of Education

Overwhelmingly, 75% of surveyed participants indicated that the relationship

with the board of education was the most important factor and could be a potential barrier

in their career. Only three of the thirty-six surveyed participants rated the relationship with the board of education as neutral or of little importance. Of the five women superintendents interviewed, all five expressed having "good boards" and were generally satisfied with the current relationship. Superintendent 1 indicated that, "I have had four different boards of education since coming to this district. Ones that you struggle with, ones that you do not struggle with, and it always seems to work out ok. They have held my attention." Superintendent 2 stated that, **"**It is very important to me to have a good relationship with the board of education. And being in a small community, usually our board members are well known. Superintendent 3 who stated, "My relationship with the board of education is very important to me and very good. It's all about relationships and building trust," detailed similar experiences. Superintendent 4 said, **"**The relationship with the board of education is critical to me. It is critical not only from the standpoint that obviously they renew my contract but it is also critical because they are a small community and people feel free to talk to the board." Lastly, Superintendent 5 recounted, **"**I believe the relationship with the board of education is critical for a superintendent. And I have an amazing board. I am very blessed that I've never had any controversy with my board. I can't imagine going through a rough time with the board."

However, all five women also spent much time nurturing and building relationships with school board members to ensure a positive relationship that the researcher noted as an emerging theme. Because each superintendent considered this relationship vital to their success, extensive time and resources were given to the board of education. According to Superintendent 2:

I brought in the ESC (Educational Service Center) to do some training on roles and responsibilities of the school board. That made a huge difference. I needed to provide them that training and background so they understand their role as a school board member. The relationship with the board can make all the difference in the world to your superintendency.

Superintendent 4 had a similar comment. According to her, "It (the relationship with the school board) is critical to me. It's important to me that the board feels comfortable coming back to me and talking to me."

Although all five women identified the relationship with the board of education as the highest-ranking perceived barrier, none felt that the board of education was a barrier in their current position. All five women believed they had formed a positive and effective relationship with their current school board. Also, all five women stated that they felt open communication was the most important factor when forming a positive relationships with board members.

Theme 2: Family Support and Balance

The second greatest barrier that was identified by the surveyed participants was family support and balance. Nearly 56% of the surveyed participants rated family support as a very important perceived barrier and only two participants responded as not important. Of the five interviewed case study participants, only one participant rated family support as very important. One participated gave the rating as important while the remaining three rated family support as neutral. Although there was a slight difference between the surveyed and interviewed participants on the perception of family support as

a barrier, all five interviewed participants shared extensively their personal thoughts on family support during the interviews. Themes identified during discussion of family support were balance and the self-imposed barrier of *having to do it all and do it well*. Of the five interviewed participants, one woman was single, one woman was married and three women were divorced. Four of the five women had children who all were currently young adults. Superintendent 5, who rated support of family as neutral, contributed the demands of the superintendency to the failure of her marriage:

> It was really difficult because you are in the spotlight all the time. You can't go anywhere without being married to the superintendent. And that is kind of a role reversal; and I think that people sometimes are just not ready for that role reversal. My husband could not deal with the whole *Mr. Superintendent* in a small town.

Four of the case study participants had school age children during their tenure as superintendent. Superintendent 2 and Superintendent 5 expressed that their children found it difficult to have their mother in the top leadership position in their school district, often feeling that they were *under a microscope*. Superintendent 3 did not see having a school age child as a barrier during her superintendency and was able to balance her work and family life. The final participant with school age children, Superintendent 4, chose not to work in her home school district stating that it was not fair to her children and chose to work in a nearby school district. Superintendent 4 further stated that she wanted to have her own professional life and her children needed their own lives as well.

The challenges of parenthood are unknowable, as are the challenges of sustaining

a fulfilling career (Meers & Strober, 2009). The case study participants spoke extensively about their personal challenges regarding personal and professional balance, and an emergent theme of self-pressure often dominated the conversation. All five participants indicated the importance of having family support to be successful in their superintendency and maintain balance in their personal and professional life even though they may have not indicated this perception on the survey. Superintendent 1 said **"**You have to take on the responsibilities and realize that there are things that are not going to get done," while Superintendent 2 echoed**, "**It's trying to find balance, all of your responsibilities that you feel at home as a wife and mother; and at work and all the multiple time commitments you have with the job." Superintendent 5 concluded by saying **"**I think having a strong, positive support system is critical at home and at school to remain balanced in the superintendency."

Although Superintendent 2 had support from her spouse, she often struggled with the balance of work and family life; sometimes having to make a choice between work and family. The data showed from the individual interviews that regardless of marital status, family support and balance was important to the participants and, without it, a barrier to longevity and success was likely. The notion of balance was significantly relevant among the case study participants regardless of their marital status or child rearing responsibilities. All of the case study participants cited the difficulty of maintaining personal and professional balance as a superintendent. Even with family support, Superintendent 2 often had self-imposed guilt regarding work and family balance while Superintendent 5 noted that it was often difficult attending all school wide

events with balancing her family responsibilities. She also experienced guilt as she described going in the front door of a school basketball game as superintendent to greet everyone and then sneaking out the back door to go home in time to have dinner with her children. The case study participants did not directly compare their balance issues with that of their male counterparts, but rather self-imposed the pressure to work harder to achieve balance. Superintendent 5 stated,

> I think people expect women not to handle things as well as a man. So you almost have to keep more balanced in your compassion when dealing with people but still have that brave face out front. And on one hand you want to be compassionate and sensitive as to what that means (for them) but you still can't be the weak women that is crying at a board meeting.

Theme 3: Support of Personnel

The surveyed participants agreed that support of personnel was equally as important as the support of family and could be a potential barrier in their career. Nineteen of the surveyed participants rated support of personnel as very important, 13 participants rated support of personnel important, and only four participants were neutral. Not only did the interviewed participants agree that this relationship among personnel was essential to their success, all five women felt their gender may be a barrier to overcome in this area and they had to work harder to succeed and prove themselves as women superintendents which the researcher noted as an important and emerging theme which derived from the data. The participants were not told directly to work harder nor did they experience gender discrimination by personnel, yet all five participants indicated a need to prove

themselves in the position of superintendent to personnel and other stakeholders in the school community. This was evident from Superintendent 1 when she said, "It's a barrier to be women because it's harder for people to follow you; because you have to explain yourself and you have to be clear in direction, and in my opinion you have to work twice as hard as men." Again mentioning the need to prove oneself, Superintendent 2 stated, "Earlier in my career, there were not as many women in the superintendency or administration; and so it was overcoming the barrier and proving myself to others. Superintendent 3 and Superintendent 5, respectively, affirmed, "Women do not have some of the networking opportunities (as men). That is why women need to work harder," and "I think there is a natural tendency to wonder if women can be strong enough to take on tougher, bigger, more political districts; and I think people expect women not to handle things as well as a man."

Not only did the participants feel the need to prove themselves at the professional level to gain support and respect in relationships with personnel, but two of the five participants felt an added barrier in dealing with other women in the superintendency and higher administration: "It is difficult for women to look at other women even in leadership positions and that is probably more critical and difficult – just the general competitiveness of it – women to women," said Superintendent 1. Superintendent 4 said, "Because we were both women and because of my position; I probably had the most difficulty with her actually being a woman than I encountered with any other man I had to work with. Probably a little power struggle."

The above examples of the importance of positive relationships with personnel

are consistent with the 2007 AASA study which indicated that the most important factor to superintendent effectiveness was interpersonal relations skills (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Although the AASA study is not gender specific, the data from this study indicated that there is still a high importance on relationships with personnel among women superintendents, however, an added pressure to prove themselves professionally – because of gender – is a reality, and a barrier, among current women superintendents that is highlighted in this study. I noted this pattern of self-imposed barriers while analyzing data regarding importance of personnel and noted its relevance as a theme for the study.

Theme 4: Morale

There is a lack of research regarding morale and how it affects the superintendency, as morale is difficult to measure and defined differently by each person. However, 32 of the 36 surveyed participants identified morale as a very important or important barrier to overcome in the superintendency. The latest study of superintendents by the AASA identified nine areas of professional development needed for effectiveness that included interpersonal relations/group dynamics. This is perhaps the closest measure of comparing morale to perceived barriers in recent studies. In the AASA study, nearly 25% of superintendents found interpersonal skills/group dynamics as a roadblock to improvement and effectiveness in their career (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Two of the five interviewed women stated they entered their superintendency when morale was very low in their districts: Superintendent 2 stated,

> When I first came here, there was a real mistrust of administration. We worked very hard to overcome that. Within two weeks of me becoming a superintendent I

was presented with a strike notice. We were in the midst of negotiations and

things were not going well. But after three years (of building relationships) they

began to trust us and work as a team. We went a completely different path and

that built the trust.

Superintendent 3 stated, "When I came there they came off of a really bad strike and the

board was looking for a person who could handle the grief; they wanted a strong person."

A common theme among the interviewed participants was the significance of morale

within the district and a common emergent theme was the importance of nurturing the

relationships by the case study participants used to achieve positive morale. Perceptions

of low morale among personnel were considered a barrier to the women in their

superintendency. **"**Morale comes and goes with your decisions. Everyone can say there is

good morale and bad morale. It is what people make of it. We can be positive. That is a

battle in of itself," recalled Superintendent 1. Superintendent 2 also expressed positivity,

"I think you have to force yourself to stay positive. No matter how much beating you're

taking publicly. And that is challenging at times. I have seen morale in this district

probably at all levels; it overall has been pretty good." Lastly, regarding morale,

Superintendent 4 said,

It's really important for your staff to have good morale. So, I try to go above and

beyond. I do tasks that other superintendents probably do not do. It is not above

me to generate elementary reports for teachers. I process our vision claims. There

is just so much that I do. Everyone has to pick up.

Theme 5: Availability of Mentors

Well-documented studies have shown that having one or more mentors for superintendents is valuable in the superintendency (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Perspectives of male vs. women mentors for women superintendents have been explored by Brunner & Grogan (2007) and Daresh, (2001) and indicated the necessity of a mentor for superintendents to ensure success in the early years. Yet in the AASA 2007 study nearly 40% of the superintendents surveyed did not have access to a mentor. Although current literature conveyed positive outcomes from working with a mentor, only three of the 36 surveyed participants in this study indicated that it was very important to their success as a superintendent and less than half of the participants rated availability of a mentor as important. The remainder of women did not see the lack of a mentor as a barrier.

Of the five case study participants, only two were assigned a formal mentor when they became superintendent but all participants had identified a person who served as an informal mentor early in their career. Although the case studies showed not having an assigned mentor was not considered much of a barrier, the relationships with the informal mentors, or confidant, proved valuable and important to the participants, Superintendent 1 stated, " He (my unofficial mentor) gave me some gems! Even after I left (the district) I called him up one night for advice." Superintendent 2 said, "I was never assigned an official mentor. I tried to build a network so there were people I could call upon." Lastly, Superintendent 5 reported, " I was assigned a mentor, who was helpful, and it was a man. But overtime I think having the network of women has been really important and very helpful as a superintendent."

The women superintendents interviewed did not indicate preference of gender when discussing mentors, rather, it was the relationship with the person who served as a confidante that made the difference in their superintendency. All five women went on to serve as either formal or informal mentors to both men and women new superintendents. The findings showed a pattern that availability of a mentor was not a perceived barrier, however, a theme emerged from the data that having a positive relationship with a professional who acts as a confidante was very important to success in the superintendency.

Theme 6: Glass Ceiling

The least important factor that the surveyed participants identified was the presence of a glass ceiling. Only four of the thirty-six participants felt that that presence of a glass ceiling was important to consider as a barrier and twelve participants indicated it was not important at all when discussing barriers. Overall, 83% of the surveyed participants rated the presence of a glass ceiling as neutral, little importance or not important.

The case study findings revealed that currently employed women superintendents do not perceive the presence of a glass ceiling as an important barrier. **"** I don't think there is the presence of a glass ceiling because I don't believe enough women aspire to go to that level (as superintendent) so it is not an issue," said Superintendent 1 while Superintendent 2 stated, "It depends (on the presence of a glass ceiling). I think it is much less than it used to be." Similar findings were echoed by Superintendent 3, "The only area where I think a glass ceiling exists is in the area of coaching. There is a good old

boys network there." The only participant not in agreement with the others was

Superintendent 4,"I don't think a glass ceiling exists because more women are in the

superintendency. It is not important to me as a women superintendent." Contradicting

Superintendent 4, Superintendent 5 stated, "I absolutely think a glass ceiling exists. There

is a natural tendency to wonder if women can lead. But I do not consider it a barrier in

my career at this time."

However, this did not mean that a glass ceiling did not exist for some of the case

study participants. In fact, many of the interviewed participants experienced gender

discrimination or sex role stereotyping, yet they did not perceive it as a barrier.

Superintendent 1 stated, **"**I don't like to play the woman card, but that is one issue. One of

the biggest barriers is people willing to take the leap of allowing a woman to lead." The

topic of discrimination prompted Superintendent 2 to state, "I think there are districts that

still struggle at times with women and leadership (regarding discrimination), but I think it

is much less than it used to be." Superintendent 3 recalled a very personal account,

"When I came to interview for the job, somebody said, "They will never hire a woman

out there". Superintendent 4 offered thoughts regarding glass ceiling and sexism by

stating,

> I don't think there is (a glass ceiling). I think there has been enough of an influx of
>
> women in administration**.** That gives the perception that women can go as high as
>
> they want to go. I don't think there's any sexism necessarily out there even though
>
> I know they (men in the community) talk about me at the neighborhood bar.

Superintendent 5 was perhaps the most emotional when she recounted, " I once had a

board member say to me, "You look really tired tonight so you might want to freshen up before the board meeting. They never would have said that to a man."

With regards to perception of a glass ceiling, the findings from the surveyed participants were consistent with data from the case study participants. Only Superintendent 5 stated that she believed a glass ceiling was still present for women superintendents. The remaining four participants gave little regard for the presence of a glass ceiling and did not perceive it as a barrier in their career. However, all five case study participants encountered gender issues in their career yet did not attribute the issues to the theme of glass ceiling. This data was interesting because I noted self-awareness among the case study participants that suggested the women did not want to seem unequal to their male counterparts.

Emergent Themes

The case study participants discussed several themes during the interview process that resulted from the study's research questions, probing questions, and data utilized from the survey. This top-down analysis of the data allowed me to explore the six themes regarding perceived barriers and how the participants overcome perceived barriers. The data from the case studies also provided equally important emergent themes that were noted. I defined an emergent theme as a topic of discussion or importance by case study participants that was not asked directly in the interview guide or was part of the survey and resulted from a bottom-up analysis of the data. Emergent themes during the interview process encompassed topics of nurturing relationships, relationships with a confidant, self-reflection, affective qualities of women superintendents, and the pressure to achieve

balance. Also noted were self-imposed barriers by the women. This data was divulged through the case studies in statements made by participants when describing situations where the women superintendents felt the need justify or clarify a decision even though it was not asked of them.

Theme 7: Nurturing Relationships

From both the survey results and the case study interviews, the majority of women superintendents believed relationships were the most important perceived barriers to overcome to achieve success as a superintendent. The case study participants also agreed that personal and professional relationships were important perceived barriers and gave elaborate detail regarding the importance of those relationships in their career. Superintendent 1 said**, "**The superintendency is very busy. You need to realize that when you take on this leadership position, you have to have a support system at home and Superintendent 2 said, " I think you have to build a rapport and relationship with your community. They have to know you not only as a professional but as a person as well." Regarding relationships, Superintendent 3 stated, **"**I think it was important to have (a relationship with) a mentor or another professional you can trust. Someone to call, someone to contact," while Superintendent 4 stated, "I think it is very important to have (professional) support. You have to have somebody – whether it is a neighboring superintendent or someone on a professional level." Adding the final thought to nurturing relationships, Superintendent 5 stated, **"**I would say having both emotional support both personally and professionally is a critical factor for women in the superintendency. You need to have positive relationships. "

Not only did the case studies reveal the importance of relationships both personally and professionally as perceived barriers, but also the participants in each case study took extra care to nurture relationships so that they would be successful as a superintendent. Regardless of their marital status or number of children, each participant exhibited a nurturing quality, as described in the human relations approach, when it came to cultivating relationships both personally and professionally. Superintendent 1 discussed the need to include the community as a valuable stakeholder and believe in the common good of the community. Superintendent 2 believed trust was very important and worked hard to develop a trusting relationship with her personnel. Nurturing the relationship with her young daughter was essential to Superintendent 3 who took much effort to make sure her daughter was included in all aspects of her life. Both Superintendents 4 and 5 felt the need to nurture individual relationships within the work place. Superintendent 4 worked closely with her board members to develop open communication whereas Superintendent 5 tended to nurture the relationships she formed with other women superintendents in her state. All five women felt that by nurturing these important relationships, it would eliminate potential barriers in their career and aide in the success of the superintendency.

Theme 8: Relationship with a Confidant

I found it interesting that the findings from the study showed that relationships were important yet a relationship with a mentor was not as important as a perceived barrier. Due to the lack of available quality mentor programs, all five case study participants developed a relationship with a confidant or created an informal network

with other women as a substitute for a formal mentor. Researchers Eagly & Carli (2009) believed women superintendents form these informal network groups because they do not have equal access to mentors as compared to male superintendents. This was not true from the findings of this study. Case study participants did not believe the lack of a formal mentor was a gender issue, but rather a lack of quality mentor programs available to all superintendents at the state and local. This discrepancy was further explored in the case study interviews where participants noted that it was important to have a relationship with a trusted confidant regardless of gender or position and not necessarily a mentor. All five case study participants had a relationship with a confidant outside of their school district. All of the confidants identified by the participants were educational administrators, but not necessary superintendents. The relationships with the confidants were identified as both male and women; the participants considered neither gender nor position as important as trustworthiness and honesty when discussing their confidant.

Theme 9: Affective Qualities Considered Important to Success

Patterns were also discovered from the case studies that centered on themes of morale, motivation, and effectiveness. This is consistent with the human relations approach where assumptions included that people are motivated by social and psychological needs and consider recognition, belongingness, and security as important in determining worker morale (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Another assumption of the human relations approach was that an individual's perceptions, beliefs, motivations, cognitions, responses to frustration, values, and similar factors might affect behavior in the work setting (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). I found that the case study participants

placed a great amount of importance of being happy both personally and professionally to achieve longevity. They perceived any factor that threatened their professional and personal relationships as a barrier. All five case study participants described affective qualities regarding their career that they deemed important. Superintendent 1 stated,

> I had to make a decision early in my career (regarding a student) that was a moral issue for me. Morally and ethically I had to do the right thing, even if it was unpopular with the parent. I made the right decision.

Superintendent said, "I have worked hard to build trust with the staff. We (the administrative team) went a completely different path (with the staff) to build that trust and increase morale" and Superintendent 3 said, "I think it is important to always have a positive attitude for success in the superintendency. Always be smiling and collaborative in leadership." More affective qualities were evident in statements made by Superintendents 4 and 5," It's really important for your staff to have good morale; and honesty is very important to me" and "I am proud that I have been able to resolve several major personnel issues without negatively impacting academics. I have been fair with personnel."

Theme 10: Self-Reflection

Data from the case study participants also conducted much self-reflection regarding their superintendency. The notion of self-reflection found in this study correlates with research regarding leadership qualities of women leadership. Themes including motivating staff and self, being a visionary, allowing time for dreaming and creating, and being committed to the profession were highlighted by the case study

participants (Funk, 2004). The case study participants used the process of self-reflection as a method to overcome stress and other perceived barriers in their career.

"I had to decide if I was willing to take on the issues of the district. If you decide it's not worth your effort, it will not happen. In my case, the district has held my attention and that is huge for me," stated Superintendent 1. Superintendent 2 stated,

> I have not gotten stale but I am winding down (in my career). It's getting harder sometimes not to respond to some people when they try to personalize things. They (the community) should be saying I'm so proud that we have somebody (superintendent) who stayed and moved us forward.

Self-reflection was an important component to Superintendent 3, " I have been a long-term superintendent because I believe it is consistency and doing the job right. And having good relationships with the board." Superintendent 4 was reflective about her future; " I see the superintendency as a long-term career. I would like to go to 35 years, not because of the new retirement system, but because I would like to do some things in the district and I like the job." Self-reflection for Superintendent 5 included tending to her current needs,

> As my kids got older, I tried to build a more social life outside of the (school) community. And now with technology, those friendship supports are easy no matter where they are. So that has been a big issue for me; to find balance with personal and professional life.

Theme 11: Self-Imposed Barriers

The research also suggested that many of the barriers the case study

participants described were actually self-imposed when it came to discussing gender and glass ceiling issues. Balancing family and work, having to appear positive at all times, the need to prove themselves in the job, and having to work harder than their male counterparts were all expressed barriers in the case study even though the case study participants did not label this as gender issues. I observed that the case study participants had actually imposed "extra pressures" on themselves to create an image of balance, perfection, and equality with male superintendents. Superintendent 5 recounted a self-imposed barrier when she stated, "Another one (barrier) is people feel more comfortable making judgments about a women as how they mesh their personal life with their professional life". Superintendent 5 indicated that someone told her she needed to be sensitive, like a woman and strong, like a man. This self-imposed barrier added stress to her current role as superintendent and at times caused her to question her decision-making.

All of the case study participants recounted a situation in their role as superintendent where they indicated a self-imposed barrier. Superintendent 1 voiced, "You have to work twice as hard as men. I still believe that cliché. And I do work twice as hard at my job" Superintendent 2 stated, "I believed I had to overcome the barrier (of being women) and proving myself to others. I had to overcome the stigma of being just a gym teacher." Superintendent 3 recounted, "I think it was a barrier that I wasn't a coach. And you do see the profile generally of the male superintendent. Not having been a coach was a barrier for me," and Superintendent 4 believed, "I think being a women superintendent is more politically based than it is gender based. For example, our

governor decides who the State superintendent will be. Superintendent 5 gave a powerful statement:

> I received a piece of advice from another women superintendent that I believe to
>
> be true: (As a women superintendent) you don't have to be at everything, but we
>
> have to be at everything and look good. People notice how (the women
>
> superintendent) looks- they don't worry how a man looks.

Career Paths

Research in the area of career paths and the superintendency are abundant yet very contradicting when it comes to women and perceived barriers to the superintendency. Past research suggest that one possibility which discourages women from aspiring to the superintendency is that they are not employed in positions in education that normally lead to the superintendency such as elementary teacher or principal (Glass, 2000). Some research even suggested that an elementary background was seen as a disadvantage when seeking the leadership position of superintendent (Grogan & Brunner (2005). With the changes in NCLB (No Child Left Behind Act) and more emphasis on state standardized testing and academic content standards, superintendents and boards of education realize the importance of knowledge in elementary literacy and curriculum.

This study revealed that the trend is changing regarding careers paths to the superintendency and that there is simply not one path to follow; nor is it beneficial to hold one type of certificate over another. Of the 36 women superintendents surveyed, 18 held both elementary and secondary licensees, 11 held an elementary license and only 7

held a secondary license.

Also, all five case study participants proved that it was not necessarily a straight ladder to climb to the superintendency, but rather a jungle gym; meaning it was not always necessary to take an advanced position, but rather have a wide range of educational experiences before taking the position of superintendent. All of the case study participants had classroom teaching and administrative experience prior to the superintendency. Each of the five case study participants hold a master's degree in educational administration and completed the necessary requirements to obtain both a principal and superintendent license from their state. All five case study participants held the position of building principal at some point in their career. Three participants had both elementary and secondary teaching and administrative experience, one had elementary experience, and the final participant had secondary experience before accepting the superintendent position. Only one participant held a doctorate degree in educational administration. Administrative positions prior to the superintendency were varied among case study participants and included personnel director, district coordinators, and assistant superintendent. One case study participant received a law degree before embarking on a career in education and found her law degree very beneficial in her position as superintendent especially during contract negotiations with personnel. Although each participant had a different path to the superintendency, they felt their previous teaching experience and administrative roles properly prepared them for their current position.

Outlined below are the career paths of the five interviewed superintendents:

- Superintendent 1*:* middle grade science teacher, secondary principal, superintendent

- Superintendent 2*:* K-12 health and physical education teacher, secondary electives teacher, elementary principal, assistant superintendent, superintendent

- Superintendent 3: secondary language teacher, professional outside of education, ESL coordinator, personnel director, superintendent

- Superintendent 4*:* special education teacher, junior high science teacher, elementary principal, superintendent.

- Superintendent 5*:* secondary teacher, elementary assistant principal, elementary principal, superintendent.

The 2007 AASA study reported that women superintendents were much more likely to have entered the superintendency from an assistant superintendent position in their career path (Glass & Franceschini (2007). The reason cited in the study was that fewer women superintendents jump directly from an elementary school principal position to the superintendency. Data from this study contradict the AASA findings. Both Superintendent 4 and Superintendent 5 went from being an elementary principal to superintendent; and only two participants, Superintendent 2 and Superintendent 3, had central office experience before their superintendency. All five participants stated they did not feel their career path or area of certification was a barrier to gaining a position as superintendent. However, two superintendents felt that they may have entered the superintendency too young or too early in their career. Superintendent 1 stated**, "**For me it

was too young, too soon. That is something to explore." Superintendent 5 had reflected

on the topic of career paths and stated:

> I used to chuckle when they would say don't get into the superintendency too
>
> soon. Now I believe that's true. So I would not go into the superintendency too
>
> soon because it is a barrier trying to go backwards.

This sentiment seems to be shared nationally by women superintendents. Data from the

AASA in 2010 showed that men were considerable more likely to have become first-time

superintendents before age 46 than were their women counterparts who mostly likely

enter the superintendency after the age of 46 (Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2011).

Longevity and Success

Each of the five selected interviewed participants had achieved longevity as a

superintendent for at least 6 years. Ranges in longevity for the interviewed participants

ranged from 6 to 16 years of service and all participants, without hesitation, believed they

had been successful as a superintendent. Interestingly, when asked to give an example of

their success, all five women noted student achievement or student academic growth as

an example. A shared value among the participants regarding longevity or success was

the relationship with stakeholders in their district. Superintendent 1 stated,

> I believe I have done well but I haven't done it by myself. The reason I feel
>
> successful is because I don't feel success at every task or in every message I
>
> deliver, but I think we have a good vision and it's a group vision and it has taken
>
> all of us to move it forward.

Superintendent 2 stated, "You have to build rapport with your community. They have to

know you not only as a professional but also as a person. They have to see your vested interest in the school and the community." Superintendent 3 mentioned her staff when she said, " I always say you will shine at the top if you have a lot of shiners underneath you. I have hired good people – solid people who take pride in their work." Lastly, making her philosophy known, Superintendent 4 stated, "They (the school community) know that my philosophy is kids first; not teachers first, not me first, not the community first."

Although the participants enjoyed success in the superintendency, a common theme was the tremendous demands of the job. When asked if they thought the demands of the job would deter women from entering the superintendency or hamper longevity, Superintendent 1 stated, "There are a lot of people who don't want to be superintendent because of the nature of it. People are unpleasant. Is it worth the fight and being under a microscope all of the time?" Stress was prevalent to Superintendents 4 and 5, "Maybe they just don't want the headaches (that come with the job)," and " You cannot begin to comprehend the stress that comes with the job."

The participants also discussed how they handled the demands and high stress level of the superintendency. Having outside interests and relationships along with an inner personal strength seemed to be a common theme with the participants. "I believe if you throw out positive, you get positive. It's very personal to me. It is what it is and you have to figure your own path to keep your own sanity," said Superintendent 1. Adding a personal statement, Superintendent 2 said, "You have to develop a thick skin; you can't personalize everything that everyone says about you. It is not easy. It doesn't mean that it doesn't hurt. But you try very hard not to take it personally." With a smile,

Superintendent 3 added," I am always having a positive attitude, always smiling."

Findings also revealed that the importance of above defined barriers did not change with longevity. According to both surveyed and case study participants, relationships with boards of education, family and personnel continued to be the highest of importance to currently employed women superintendents regardless of years of service in the superintendency.

Discrepant Cases

Hatch (2002) stated that when data is discovered that run counter to the finding, it must be identified. In this study, the only non-confirming data discovered was the topic of contract and salary and the probability of a long-term career as superintendent. Three of the five interviewed participants identified salary as very important or important on the survey. However, the issue of salary was never discussed by four of the participants even when probed by the researcher. Only one of the five interviewed participants mentioned salary as a perceived barrier or even an important topic during the interview; despite their level of importance of salary indicated in the survey.

When asked if the superintendency was a long term career, only one participant said no and had plans of leaving the superintendency at the end of this school year to seek a central office position in another distinct. The remaining four superintendents had plans to continue as superintendent in their distinct and perceived the superintendency as a long-term career.

Evidence of Data Quality

At all times I upheld ethical standards to protect the rights of participants and

ensure quality and validity according to the guidelines of Walden University. Upon approval from IRB, each participant in accordance with the guidelines of studying human participants, granted informed consent. Interviews were scheduled at the convenience and desired location of the participant, free from distractions. The purpose of the study was reviewed verbally with each participant prior to the scheduled interview and explanation of opting out at any time during the study was explained and permitted without prejudice. Confidentially was reiterated to each participant to ensure trustworthiness.

I began data collection first with the survey and then collected, via audio recording, from personal interviews and was secured using member checking to ensure validity. Each interview was transcribed within twenty-four hours and a summary transcript was sent to all participants for clarification and review. Color codes were developed to identify themes and patterns within the data. After careful review and interpretations of the findings, I felt confident with the perceptions of the participants.

A second reader, or interrater, was utilized to help analyze themes and patterns and offer a neutral perspective to the findings. The interrater, who is a retired women superintendent with longevity over 6 years, analyzed the summary transcripts and compared themes and patterns. The interrater then met with me to analyze the data and discuss the findings and found that a 90% correlation existed between the interrater and myself. This added validity to the study and further validated the findings.

Field notes that were used in conjunction with the survey and interviews to triangulate the data and ensure accuracy. Trustworthiness was obtained using the responsive interviewing approach that emphasized both the interview and the participant

as human beings that form a relationship during the interview process that generates ethical obligations for the interviewer that is flexible and brings a depth of understanding (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Rich, thick descriptive data was used throughout the study to convey the shared experiences among the case study participants. Actual quotes from the case study participants were embedded throughout the study for accurate, quality data.

Summary

I began Section 4 by presenting the reader with how the data from this study was generated, gathered, and recorded as well as how the data was kept regarding protocol and confidentiality. I shared findings from the survey and interpretations of personal interviews conducted with five women superintendents. The three main research questions and six probing questions were reviewed and findings were summarized. Patterns and themes were identified and described and included six themes analyzed by a top-down approach and included a) relationships with boards of education b) support of family, c) support of personnel, d) importance of morale, e) availability of mentors and f) perceptions of a glass ceiling in the role of superintendent. Emerging themes analyzed by a bottom-up approach from the case study participants included a) importance of nurturing relationships, b) importance of a confidant, c) affective qualities in women superintendents, d) process of self-reflection, and e) self-imposed barriers. Methods used to overcome barriers were explained. Career paths were identified of all interviewed participants as well as data and findings regarding longevity and success. Discrepant findings were noted in this section as well as findings from the data that were compared to the human relations approach. Evidence of data quality was reviewed to ensure

trustworthiness, reliability and validity to the study.

       In Section 5, I provide an interpretation of the findings, implications for social change, recommendations for action, dissemination of results, and recommendations for further research. I will also reflect on my role during the study and how biases were overcome. Lastly, I will draw conclusions from the survey data and the findings from the five individual case studies.

Section 5: Summary, Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

Public schools are facing a leadership crisis regarding the lack of women superintendents in the United States. This qualitative case study revealed the perceptions of personal and professional barriers of women superintendents in a selected state as it pertains to longevity and the possible approaches the women used to overcome the barriers. This study included data gathered from a survey sent to all currently employed women public school superintendents by the researcher in a selected state as well as data collected from five personal interviews – or case studies - with women superintendents who have achieved longevity of at least 6 years.

The purpose of this multiple case study was to examine the relationship between the longevity of women superintendents in public school districts and perceived personal and professional barriers that may influence longevity. The data from this study could be used to understand perceived barriers that inhibit aspiring women superintendents from undertaking the leadership role of superintendent. Particularly, having more women in the role of superintendent can provide encouragement to aspiring women superintendents as well as render a women perspective and more insight on local and national policy decision-making in education. The following research questions where used to guide this study:

1. Which personal or professional factors do women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career?

2. What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to

overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

3. What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

The conceptual framework for this study was the human relations approach, which has greatly influenced administrative theory. The human relations approach encompasses several affective qualities and finds that a human-social element operates in the workplace (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). I found that certain authentic human reactions existed when discussing perceived barriers with the participants who included a need for a sense of belongingness, nurturing, organizing and the importance of relationships. Participants revealed several themes when discussing perceived barriers that included relationship with the board of education, support of family, support of personnel, morale, availability of a mentor, and the presence of a glass ceiling. Emergent themes were also discovered and included self-imposed barriers, nurturing relationships, self-reflection, affective qualities of women superintendents and the need for balance in personal and professional responsibilities.

Findings from the study indicated a shift in perceptions when comparing perceived barriers with women superintendents from nearly two decades ago. No longer are women superintendents identifying sex role stereotyping or gender discrimination as a barrier but rather see personal and professional relationships as potential barriers to longevity. For example, 75% of the surveyed participants consider the relationship with the board of education the most important relationship in their career and a perceived barrier; whereas none of the participants considered the presence of a glass ceiling as an important perceived barrier. Participants also indicated many self-imposed barriers, such

as the need to prove themselves to personnel or work harder than their male counterparts.

When asked how they overcome noted barriers, the participants cited the importance of

relationships both personally and professionally and the ability to self-reflect.

In the remainder of Section 5, I focus on the interpretation of the findings,

implications for social change, recommendations for action, and recommendations for

further research. I will conclude this section with reflections from the duration of the

study.

Interpretations of the Findings

I was able to answer research questions by utilizing data from a Likert-type

survey as well as five individual case studies. The case studies included in-depth personal

interviews with five currently employed women superintendents working in public

schools in a selected state who have achieved longevity as a superintendent for at least

six years. Findings indicated a shift in perception of barriers over the last two decades

with important issues surrounding relationships and possible self-imposed barriers.

Research Question #1: Which personal or professional factors do women

superintendents perceive as barriers in their career?

Results from both the survey and the five individual case studies indicated that

relationships, both personally and professionally, were the most important factor to

women superintendents. This included relationships with the board of education, family

members, and personnel. Findings from the participants indicated that meaningful

relationships with all stakeholders and the need to have a connection with a confidant

were essential to women superintendents and considered a perceived barrier if

relationships or morale were not positive. This is consistent with research from McGee (2010) who found similarities in her study. McGee concluded that women administrators, many of them superintendents, rated family anxiety, willingness to relocate, and need to find meaningful connections were perceived as barriers for current superintendents (McGee, 2010).

The importance of relationships was paramount to the case study participants as they judged the success of their superintendency on the state of the relationships with stakeholders in the school community and at home. Detailed and concise planning was maintained by the women to build relational trust with people at school and at home. Relational trust views the social exchanges of schooling as organized around a distinct set or role relationships (Sergiovanni, 2005). Each participant furnished examples of promoting morale and involvement among persons in the school community to create a sense of belongingness. Not only did the women build relational trust with personnel but carried this notion into their personal life ensuring that relationships with family members were not neglected. Attending their children's school and extracurricular activities, being active in community events, and allowing quality time with spouse or friends were instances that proved to be essential in the daily lives of the participants. This was noted as an extra pressure for the women in the study.

Findings from the study also indicated that women superintendents continue to struggle with balance while striving to achieve positive relationships and pursue a high level position in educational administration. Surprisingly, with current trends promoting equality in both the workplace and at home, all of the case study participants felt the need

to single-handedly balance work and family, often without expressing the frustration of doing so (Meers & Strober, 2009). While the theme of balance was perceived as barrier, none of the women stated they did not solicit partners or family for help nor did they complain at work for fear of not being perceived as competent. Recent literature concurs, "They're doing too much housework and childcare. They're compromising their career goals for partners and children – even when such partners and children do not exist" (Luscombe, 2013, p. 36). The participants in this study continually acknowledged the pressure of having to *do it all*, yet did not voice this frustration in their district. I also noted that the participants choose not to elaborate on the struggles of balance, instead, they accepted the added pressure as not to appear weak or having this pressure perceived as a gender issue. The women superintendents in this study accepted the belief that a balanced life still is more elusive for women than it is for men in leadership positions that is consistent with and relevant with current literature (Slaughter, 2012). Furthermore, they did not express the desire to change this notion or begin a conversation publicly with other women superintendents on how to overcome the barrier of balance.

Several successful women, in a variety of fields, are attempting to reboot feminism and dispel the myth that women cannot balance family with high-powered positions like the superintendency. In the business and political arenas, women are documented as successfully balancing work and family commitments; it is time for the women superintendents to follow (Westfall & Adato, 2013). Findings from the study revealed that participant's self-imposed barriers such as attempting to achieve balance, working harder than their male counterparts, and trying to appear as if they could *do it all*

were apparent even though they were not directed or expected to do so. Two participants

verbally stated that it was unfair that male superintendents did not have the added

pressure of achieving balance but all participants accepted and developed strategies to

overcome the barrier of balance. Although all participants stated they needed to prove

themselves or work harder in the superintendency than males, they did not perceive this

as a discrepancy between the genders but rather self-imposed the barriers into their daily

routine. Findings from this multiple case study also contradict research from a decade ago

stating that family issues were not a significant barrier for women superintendents

(Johnson, 2004). Family issues were relevant and considered essential to all of the

women superintendents regardless of their marital status or child raising responsibilities.

This study also denoted that women superintendents were not comfortable taking the lead

in changing the social norms that exist in relation to work and family balance. While the

participants were willing to discuss the theme of balance, they were not comfortable

making the theme public and seeking support of school stakeholders.

The theme and importance of relationships was evident in all five case studies as

was the ability by the participants to use utilize those relationships to make positive

changes within their school district. Proudly, the participants cited student achievement

and technological advancements despite a weak economy, pressure to pass state

achievement tests, and ongoing collective bargaining issues. What I concluded was that

the participants were not willing to publically acknowledge negative undertones

regarding their status as a women superintendent or become proactive in addressing

personal accounts of gender discrimination. Each of the case study participants

encountered some form of negative comments about their gender during their superintendency varying from an off-handed joke to a statement regarding appearance. Superintendent 5 in this study disclosed a specific situation regarding possible gender discrimination during her tenure and chose not to fully disclose the situation during the interview. Although she felt clearly discriminated against, she chose not to discuss details during the interview or pursue further action in her school district. Instead, she took it upon herself to change her behavior so that she would not encounter the same situation.

The case study participants were willing to ignore the negative comments and recounted the stories to the researcher as if it were unimportant. Specifically, they were unwilling at this point in their career to challenge social norms that were present in their district. Recent literature articulates the need for women to change the message and stop constructing self-imposed barriers (Sanberg, 2013 & Luscome, 2013). Facebook CEO, Sheryl Sanberg, tells her employees she will leave the office everyday at 5:30 to have dinner with her family instead of sneaking out the back door for fear of seeming lazy by coworkers and hopes current women leaders do the same (Sanberg, 2013). Changing the culture of work and family balance for women includes a more flexible attitude among men who are willing to share home responsibilities (Meers & Strober, 2009). Moreover, the women themselves need to initiate the change.

Although all five case study participants described various situations of self-imposed barriers during their superintendency they did not link, or label, the situations as gender related or the presence of a glass ceiling. When asked why there are not more women superintendents in public education, Superintendent 1 stated, "I'm not sure our

gender has tried." Author Sheryl Sandberg (2013) described this thinking as an internal barrier that prohibits women from advancing in leadership opportunities. Sandberg continues to state that self-imposed barriers, such as fear of overreaching, continually holds women back from seeking leadership positions and demanding equality in the workplace (Sandberg, 2013). Authors Gillespie and Temple (2011) stated that these feelings of trying to reach unrelenting perfection as a wife and working mother is a liability, and although there are very real challenges, women are realizing that the biggest obstacle is themselves. The idea of self-imposed barriers is again noted by author Luscombe who stated, "The sisters are doing some of it to themselves. For a variety of reasons they're not aiming high enough. They're underestimating their abilities" (Luscombe, 2013, p. 36).

Research Question 2: What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

Data for this research question was collected through the survey and elaborated upon by the case study superintendents. The following themes were identified in order of importance by the 36 surveyed women superintendents of perceived barriers based on results of the survey:

1. relationship with board of education

2. support of family

3. support of personnel

4. morale

5. salary

6. availability of a mentor

7. presence of glass ceiling.

The case study participants' perceptions of barriers correlated with the survey results and presented personal accounts to support the survey results. Past literature showed family demands, exclusion from the *good old boy network,* and the lack of ability to relocate as primary barriers for women superintendents (Wickham, 2007). This study found that a shift in perceptions have taken place for currently employed women superintendents.

I compared the survey and case study findings with the Derrington and Sharratt's (2009) study and found that perceptions have shifted over the past two decades regarding barriers for women superintendents. In 1993 researchers Derrington and Sharratt determined that aspiring women superintendents indicated that sex role stereotypes and sex discrimination were the top perceived barriers. Derrington and Sharratt conducted the exact study with new participants in 2007 and found that the top barriers identified where often self-imposed by the women themselves, especially citing family issues and relocation barriers. The study showed that when comparing the perceived barriers from 1993 to the perceived barriers of 2007 by women superintendents there was a definite shift. Then I compared the data from the 36 surveyed participants and case study participants with Derrington and Sharratt's studies and found similarities that support this shift. Current women superintendents were more concerned with barriers regarding relationships, both personally and professionally, as opposed to issues of stereotyping and sex discrimination or those issues related to the presence of a glass ceiling.

In the 2006 AASA study, the primary reasons employed women superintendents

believed why so few women were in the superintendency was gender discrimination by boards of education and that a glass ceiling was present (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Case study participants in this study disclosed the need to form a positive working relationship with the board of education, though they did not reveal that the board of education presented gender discrimination or the presence of a glass ceiling. Instead, case study participants worked assiduously to form a relationship that would be more of a collaborative partnership. The AASA study also found that both men and women superintendents sited working conditions of the superintendency and family concerns unappealing to woman and a main reason why women do not pursue the superintendency (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). New data from this study showed women superintendents sited difficulty with work and family balance yet did not want the struggle to seem as a personal weakness in their career and did not publicly site their concern even though they considered it a barrier. Whereas perhaps women in the past were more likely to express their concern of achieving work and family balance, women today shoulder a multitude of personal and professional responsibilities without voicing frustration for fear of not being equal with their male counterparts; thus imposing barriers on themselves.

Having positive relationships and the support of family and personnel were essential to the participants and they perceived these barriers could hamper longevity in their current position. Less important to the surveyed participants were salary and contract issues, availability of a mentor, and the perception of a glass ceiling. All five case study participants agreed with the surveyed participants indicating that external barriers such as availability of mentors, gender role issues, and monetary compensation

were not considered barriers. I interpreted from the data and my field notes that external factors such as compensation and contract agreements were less important and not perceived as a barrier. This shift in thinking is a notable trend among current women superintendents. During the individual case studies, the participants did not represent issues of salary or contract terms as important. In fact, only two participants mentioned salary incidentally and all five participants did not indicate salary as a perceived barrier in their position. Data regarding superintendent salaries is best documented by the Educational Research Service (ERS), however, to date, there is no comparison of superintendent salary by gender by ERS. Salary comparisons include size of district and student enrollment and do not include fringe benefits (Glass & Franceschini, 2007). Several doctoral dissertations have studied gender discrimination and salary of superintendents and have varied results. One study found there were no major differences in salary for male and women superintendents when they have similar educational attainment and educational experience (Long, 2010) whereas another study indicated that gender difference in superintendent salaries did exist but were subtle rather than systematic (Meier & Wilkins, 2002). Once again, there are inconsistent findings regarding gender discrimination regarding salary and if women superintendents find this discrimination a perceived barrier. Interesting findings from this study only indicated that issues of salary were not perceived as very important or a barrier to their success.

In this study, perceptions of relationships as very important and perceptions of glass ceiling as least important did not change with longevity. When comparing participants who have four or more years of experience with participants of three or less

years of experience, the results were similar. Relationships with boards of education, family, and personnel remained equally important to both groups. In contrast, the survey showed a significant difference between the groups when discussing the presence of a glass ceiling as a barrier. The data showed that 25% of surveyed participants with four or more years of experience as superintendent rated the presence of a glass ceiling as not important as compared to 38% of participants with three or less years of experience rating the presence of a glass ceiling as not important. This trend indicates that newcomer superintendents enter their career with less priority or attention given to the presence of a glass ceiling but may have different perceptions of a glass ceiling later on in their career. Regardless of longevity, the presence of a glass ceiling remained, by far, the lowest factor of perceived barriers in both the survey and with the individual case studies.

Research Question 3: What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?

The final research question asked the five case study participants to explain any approaches they have used to overcome the perceived barriers in their careers. Studies by Margaret Grogan (1996) discussed the importance of woman networking and forming relationships with other professional women to help overcome barriers in their career. Results from this study take relationships in a new direction. Having genuine relationships, regardless of gender, which offer both personal and professional support were important to the women to overcome barriers. The women defined their success as a superintendent by the positive relationships both personally and professionally. Furthermore, the data found that the participants were successful in overcoming barriers

if they had positive and meaningful relationships with one or more confidants regardless of gender or position.

Overwhelmingly, the case study participants believed that owning one's success was key to achieving more success as superintendent and overcoming barriers. Literature supports that women want to be comfortable with their choices and also want to feel validated by coworkers (Sandberg, 2013). The case study participants believed they needed personnel to feel part of a team and that their role as superintendent was to create a positive work environment for each member to contribute to the team in the best interest of students. This correlates with the findings from this study, both in the survey and the case studies that morale was very important to current women superintendents and lack of morale in a district was a perceived barrier. This reflects current research that state women leaders often elude passion about their work; personally conquering adversity to achieve success (Jordan, Hunter, & Derrick, 2008). Participants showed evidence of passion about their work and I noted that the case study participants were genuinely happy in their position by their tone, excitement and body language throughout the study.

I also interpreted the data and established a connection between morale and overcoming barriers. Further validation of the human relations approach was found in the study, as participants believed their perceptions and motivations directly affected the workplace environment (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). All five case study participants believe an outward positive attitude to all stakeholders in the school community was important. The case study participants saw a school district with low morale as barrier to

their success as a superintendent and overcame many barriers by focusing on how to bring positive morale to the district.

Perhaps the most prominent method to overcome perceived barriers by women superintendents was the ability of the participants to self-reflect both personally and professionally. Discoveries regarding professional decision-making and personal choices through self-reflection were evident by the participants. Each woman described a process of self-reflection to help analyze decisions or consider various solutions to a problem that included, journal writing, talking with a confidant, reflecting while exercising, and joining networking groups. Additionally, I noted that all five case study participants inherited an acute sense of self-awareness and willingly implemented changes based upon the self-reflections. This notion of self-awareness conflicts with McGee's research (2010) that states in the last ten years more women educational administrators, including superintendents, discussed a barrier of lack confidence in their ability to lead which was not evident in this study. The case study participants never implied a lack of confidence nor an ability to lead.

Women Superintendents and the Human Relations Approach

The human relations approach has firmly established the importance of understanding human behavior, especially from the perspective of management (Marshall & Oliva, 2006). Its major assumptions included several affective qualities of people and that a human-social element exists in the workplace encompassing the affective qualities. This study found significant similarities between the data collected and the human relations approach.

For example, one assumption of the human relations approach is that employees are motivated by psychological needs such as belongingness, security, and recognition rather than the physical conditions of the work environment and that workers have higher morale and work harder under supportive management. An overwhelmingly number of surveyed participants and all of the interviewed participants believed having the support of personnel and high morale amongst employees was an essential barrier to overcome to ensure success in their superintendency. Much evidence was shown by the five interviewed women superintendents in this study as to how they establish a sense of belongingness and created high morale among personnel in their school district. Superintendent 1 stated, "I believe my role for the teachers is to give them what they need for the student to get the best education," and Superintendent 3 stated, "I use collaborative leadership. Servant leadership on one end but I think collaboration with my administrators." Having a very clear vision of the workplace, Superintendent 4 said,

> I have tried to have an open door policy. I think that if you asked any of them they
> would say that I'm a pretty easy read. They know when I'm upset and they know
> exactly where I stand – no guessing games. So I try and to go above and beyond
> (with the employees).

Lastly, considering personnel at all times, Superintendent 5 said " I like to make sure that I'm supporting others now that I have been in it (the superintendency). To be able to reach out to others to make sure they are ok." Another assumption of the human relations approach is that an individual's perceptions may affect behavior in the work setting. Again, all five women superintendents extensively discussed how they personally

handled the high demands of their job. Each woman found it important to have a sense of self to be effective in her leadership role.

Lastly, the human relations approach emphasized democratic rather than authoritarian leadership (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). All five women seemed to flourish in creating a fair, positive, and democratic community within the total school setting. Unanimously, the women created this democratic community by promoting the affective qualities and focusing on relationships found in the human relations approach.

Data from the case studies and my observations confirmed that human-social conditions are important when discussing morale. All of the case study participants believed students would benefit academically from a having staff with high morale. This particular data connects with the human relations approach that stated an increase in productivity is a direct result of an outgrowth of group dynamics and effective management (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). Findings from this study revealed that women superintendents believe that if morale is high among personnel, the district will be successful; and low morale among personnel is perceived as a barrier. This affective quality is believed by some educational experts to be an important relationship between maternal skills and leadership in schools for women (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). Also noted were several affective qualities regarding the case study participants including honesty, trustworthiness, dedication, and loyalty and believe these qualities have abetted the woman to successful careers. Predictably, the affective qualities noted were qualities that helped overcome perspective barriers of the participants and increase longevity.

Implications for Social Change

Findings from this study on perceptions of barriers of women superintendents and how it relates to longevity leave important implications for social change. Literature has already revealed that women dominate the classroom as teachers and are obtaining advanced degrees in educational administration with the desire to become superintendents (Glass, 2000, Grogan & Brunner, 2005). This study contributed to the body of knowledge of identifying perceived barriers of currently employed women superintendents and how perceptions have changed over the past two decades. This study found current women superintendents do not perceive a glass ceiling as barrier; they believed they are just as educated and capable of performing the duties of superintendent as well as their male counterparts. They are confident in their abilities and eager to share career accomplishments. What has changed are the self-imposed barriers women often incurred during their career that many men do not consider. Feelings of having to prove themselves, achieve perfect balance, and not show emotion were examples from the study that current women superintendents perceived as barriers. Several possibilities for this thinking are explained in literature. One possibility is the lack of feminist perspective on leadership in administrative preparation classes (Grogan, 1996). This includes having non-traditional approaches to the superintendency discussed in the universities and dissociating the job of superintendent from its persistent white male image (Grogan, 1996). Another perspective is that women have been made to feel guilty by social norms that by holding a high-powered position, such as the superintendency, woman are not giving due diligence to their families. These social norms can lead to women feeling inadequate and less confident. Author Leslie Bennetts (2007) calls this thinking *the*

feminist mistake, where women feel forced to give up leadership aspirations to care for the family. A more current theory, and one I concur with, is the idea of a new feminist agenda. In this theory, we applaud and appreciate the women's movement of the past, but believe society needs to change – again- with regards to how our culture regards women, work, and family (Kunin, 2012). With this theory in mind, women will not feel isolated when making decisions regarding balance; rather they will express their concerns to partners and employers to find a comfortable solution. For this to happen in the superintendency, social norms need to change. Only then can women overcome the self-imposed barriers and achieve success in the superintendency.

This study further served as a framework for aspiring women to overcome personal and professional barriers to achieve longevity in the superintendency. Findings from the study showed women superintendents functioned using a human-social approach to leadership described in the human relations approach and utilize several affective qualities to guide their decisions (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2004). With this in mind, social norms can shift by encompassing a work environment where women are free to express personal and professional barriers without the fear of judgment. Case study participants divulged self-imposed barriers with the researcher yet were hesitant to share these reflections with other professionals. Simply by having women superintendents begin the conversation regarding self-imposed barriers, social norms can slowly shift.

Perhaps the most important implication for social change from this study will be that of public policy. Without having an increase in women superintendents in our nation's public schools, their input cannot be considered in national decision-making and

local policy changes (Mahitvanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). As such, the information collected from this study on perceptions of barriers can be used to create a culture of discussing self-imposed barriers among women leaders. Findings from the study indicated current women superintendents are reflecting and privately voicing self-imposed barriers. Social norms can begin to change only when we begin to recognize self-imposed barriers, voice the perceived barriers, and provide options to all stakeholders in public education on how to overcome the barriers.

Recommendations for Action

If women are ever to achieve real equality as leaders, we must insist on changing social policies and bending career tracks to accommodate women's choices (Slaughter, 2012). The first recommendation from the results of this study would be for currently employed women superintendents to share the results from this study with other women superintendents to begin a discussion on perceived barriers and possible methods to overcome the barriers. An open, honest discussion would include self-imposed barriers in the superintendency and possible methods to overcome the barriers with their peers. This discussion can begin to change the way women superintendents approach barriers both external and self-imposed.

Women superintendents need to empower potential educational leaders. Senator Barbara Mikulski encourages women to empower other women and states, "I want these women to know the hallways of power and also those back channels that help get the job done" (Westfall & Adato, 2013, p.128). The discussion can further lead to identifying leaders among the women teaching in our public schools and encourage them to pursue

the superintendency. By first having currently employed women superintendents discuss the data from the study, they can begin to empower and mentor aspiring women to take on the superintendency and increase the number of women in this important position. It is recommended that the dialogue between current and aspiring women superintendents would include developing and implementing a quality mentor program that current superintendents say is lacking.

The next recommendation would be to take the results from this study and provide professional development opportunities at the state and local levels regarding perceived barriers of women superintendents. Again, focusing attention on how self-imposed barriers can be overcome and how affective qualities of women superintendents are strength to the profession. Departments of Education in each state can use the results from this study to begin to address the lack of women superintendents in their states through state conferences and determine how their state, specifically, can provide support to aspiring and currently employed women superintendents by addressing the barriers. Local Educational Service Centers can use the data to provide more meaningful, quality mentoring programs in their districts for both male and women superintendents and begin to highlight awareness of barriers for women superintendents. Educational support agencies can use the results to inform boards of education in training sessions on the perceived barriers and begin to understand the need to provide opportunities for women in leadership positions at the local level. School board policies can be studied to ensure opportunities equal for both women and male superintendents. By focusing on the findings, districts can begin propose detailed action plans for their districts and increase

the number of women leaders in their district. This study can inform boards of education as they prepare to hire a superintendent for their district and familiarize and address the concerns of perceived barriers for women applicants. By having this important dialogue with aspiring women superintendents in graduate courses before a woman accepts a superintendency, perceived barriers can be identified and overcome so that self-imposed barriers can be eliminated and possibly increase longevity of the women superintendent. Hence, more women superintendents would be encouraged to apply for positions of superintendent.

One benefit from this study that can be utilized to begin to change society norms is that universities can begin to acknowledge the perceived barriers and begin an important dialogue among students regarding the barriers among genders both external and self-imposed. Understanding the unique abilities of women, how they function using a human-social element, and methods used to overcome self-imposed barriers, a new generation can gain perspective and acceptance of perceived barriers. This needs to happen not only in educational administration programs, but in general studies as well if we want to truly change social norms. Literature shows that many women in high-powered political positions are already having conversations regarding barriers (Westfall & Adato, 2013). It is time to begin to have the same conversation among educational leaders. Also the results of this study can be used for young women who aspire to be educational leaders. Having a women superintendent is certainly healthy for young women as a role model in a position of leadership (Holland, 2011). A recommendation would also be for local school districts and higher education institutions to modify

curriculum to help educate young women to the needs of an ever changing work force; that possibilities in educational leadership are available and encouraged.

One final recommendation is for superintendents, board members, administrators, and family members to be part of the collaborative process in encouraging and promoting women leadership within the school system. This will aid in the changing of social norms. According to executive and mother Vicki Gault, society does not groom girls to be achievers the way it grooms boys to be achievers (Bennetts, 2007). Both men and women in leadership positions need to begin to encourage and provide leadership opportunities to girls and women, especially in education. By having understanding of the perceived barriers of women superintendents, society can begin an open dialogue and create a shift in thinking and policy making that relieves some of the self-doubts and self-imposed barriers that often hold women back. Women can then have self-confidence, raise their hands and lean in instead of holding back (Luscome, 2013).

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations for further research should be considered. Most importantly, continued research is needed on perceptions of barriers of women superintendents who have achieved longevity in various parts of the nation in public school districts. Being that the data show a shift in perceptions of barriers, it is important to renew the commitment in understanding the importance of having women superintendents in the public school system. These women will be valuable assets to current and future women superintendents by providing their insights, perceptions, and methods used to overcome perceived barriers. This qualitative study

could be repeated using a larger sample size or a quantitative study could be used to survey all women superintendents across the country to supplement the findings. This information may determine if perceptions vary depending on demographics or size of the school district.

Research can also be conducted to examine how the public schools are assisting girls and young women to prepare and aspire to leadership positions. With the advancement of technology available to young people, it would interesting to understand what social media and other sources are conveying to girls and young woman about leadership as well as self-imposed barriers. Specifically, whether social media provide information on mentors for young women and provide information on how to become leaders; or, does social media intimidate young women as potential leaders and impose self doubts or self-imposed fears.

Given the importance of relationships that was uncovered in this study, further research is needed on how districts can encourage women administrators and teacher-leaders within the district to take on leadership roles in educational administration and consider the possibility of superintendent. Narrative case studies focusing on relationships within the school district would provide detailed accounts of women superintendents and their stories could be shared. Programs and professional development training opportunities can be presented and implemented as an outcome of the narrative studies to encourage aspiring women superintendents and present methods to overcome barriers to achieve longevity in this position. Studies on school district stakeholders' perceptions of women superintendents can contribute to the understanding

of way so few women currently hold the position of superintendent or what factors contribute to their apprehension. Thought-provoking data can be added to the literature regarding the many districts that have never had a women superintendent and what factors are the causes.

Although much research has been conducted comparing male and women superintendent leadership styles, specific data is not available regarding perceptions self-imposed barriers and self-reflection, specifically for men. Comparisons can be made on the use of self-reflection for decision-making both personally and professionally. Also, interesting data could be collected regarding perceptions of barriers for male superintendents to contrast and compare data with this study of current women superintendents. It was beyond the scope of this study to compare and contrast male and women superintendents and their perceptions of barriers; however, this type of study would be recommended for the future.

A final recommendation would be for an ethnographic study that followed several first year women superintendents and record their journey with attention to perceived barriers and methods used to overcome the barriers. The study would (hopefully) follow the women superintendents past six years to understand how the women achieved longevity. Not only could this type of study uncover perceived barriers, it could also discuss the interview process, leadership styles, and moral standards of participants. By understanding the perceived external and self-imposed barriers throughout the journey, specific methods to overcoming at each stage can be explored.

Researcher's Reflections

I have served in the field of education for the past 20 years as an elementary teacher, principal, curriculum director, interim superintendent, and school board member. Currently, I serve as an educational supervisor for a state university evaluating student teachers in the early childhood and middle childhood education programs. Throughout my experiences, I have encountered strong, effective women administrators who have impacted my beliefs about education and leadership. I have personally experienced many personal and professional barriers during my career, especially during my tenure as interim superintendent. During my superintendency nearly a decade ago, I also struggled with balancing work and family life. The time commitment required by the district was at times overwhelming while trying to be involved with my two teenage children as well as a toddler. Making the decision to leave the superintendency to pursue a part time career in education so that I could be more involved with my family was difficult and I had feelings of failure when I left the district. I continue to struggle with the idea of "having it all" as an educator and a mother and was somewhat surprised that several of the participants felt the same way during their career. This unexpected revelation has allowed me to reflect as to why women feel the unexpected burden to achieve all things possible and have feelings of failure when we cannot.

As a result of my experiences, I had my own opinions regarding perceived barriers that were addressed at the beginning of this study. Having prior experience as a women superintendent, I was extremely careful to set aside any personal bias, perceptions, and feelings. Although the case study participants were aware of my previous position as interim superintendent as stated on the consent form, neither the

participants nor I discussed this during our interview. As the researcher of this study, I wanted to ensure that I accurately reflected the case study participants' feelings and experiences without bias. Therefore, my personal experiences and knowledge of the superintendency was not mentioned.

It was my intention that the interview with the case study participants be natural and comfortable and more of a conversation than an interview. The five case study participants shared with me that they were anxious to speak with me and that they felt my research topic was relevant and important. At first, my intention was just to ask the three research questions to keep the conversation as open as possible. What I learned was that having probing questions allowed me to have a more structured interview with each case study participant and additionally made it easier to find emergent themes and compare participant responses. At first I was apprehensive about coding and analyzing the data because of the vast amount of data. Having the color codes made this process efficient and I was able to find both themes and subthemes within the transcripts.

I learned that by conducting face-to-face interviews the participants were more willing to share personal experiences. What surprised me was that many of the discussed barriers were self-imposed. I was expecting that many of the women would have overcome barriers and adversity regarding gender issues, which they did. However, the feelings of guilt and self-doubt were not results I expected to find in this study. This changed my thinking regarding perceived barriers. Specifically, more understanding is needed between internal and external barriers and how these barriers relate to longevity for women superintendents.

Conclusion

Superintendent Deborah Jewel-Sherman once said, "I'm the woman for the job even if they didn't know it" (Jordan, Hunter & Derrick, 2008, p.150). This attitude of confidence helped her lead a large city school district as superintendent where her talents were an asset to the school community even though she faced many barriers during her tenure. Many women have become effective, confident school superintendents, as has been presented in this multiple case study. However, the number of women superintendents in the United States needs to increase if we want women perspectives in educational policy and decision-making. This study has revealed that perceptions of women superintendents have shifted from gender discrimination to an importance of relationships both personally and professionally considered necessary to achieve longevity. No longer are women superintendents worried about breaking the glass ceiling or competing with their male counterparts. Rather they are concerned with balancing professional and personal responsibilities while maintaining positive relationships at school and at home. This study further revealed that my addressing self-imposed barriers through connected relationships and self-reflection, woman can, and will, be successful superintendents. Positive and emboldening data from this study disclosed that social norms are changing and woman are more accepted and respected as the CEO of public school districts.

Although the changing of these social norms is evident, our society has progress to make in promoting and encouraging women to pursue the superintendency. Society needs to hear from these women superintendents so that we can learn their methods to

overcoming barriers so that more women aspire to the superintendency. For this to happen, women superintendents need to recognize and acknowledge self-imposed barriers. I began a conversation that needs to be continued; among superintendents, boards of education, administrators, teachers, and most importantly – women themselves. No longer should women superintendents ask if they could have it all. Like Ella Flagg Young stated in 1909, they should no longer be satisfied doing the greatest part of the work and yet be denied the leadership.

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Appendix A: Letter of Intent

January 11, 2013

Dear Superintendent,

My name is Kim Sethna, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University in the Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning Program. **I would like to cordially invite you to complete a brief survey and, if selected, join me in a private interview to talk about the issues of barriers as it pertains to your superintendency.**

The purpose of this study is to understand what women superintendents perceive as barriers in their career and how they relate to longevity. By gathering this data from women superintendents, I hope to understand the phenomenon of why so few women superintendents achieve longevity and what possible methods currently employed women superintendents are using to overcome such barriers. Your identify as a participant will remain confidential. Furthermore, you may withdraw from the study at any time.

If you choose to participate in this study, please complete the enclosed consent form and survey and return in the postage paid envelope provided.

Should you be selected for an interview, you will receive a telephone call from me directly to arrange a date, time and private location of your choice for the interview. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will proceed no longer than 90 minutes unless you choose to continue. I will also conduct a follow up interview with you, by telephone for clarification, if necessary. This follow-up interview will last approximately 30 minutes in length.

Thank you for considering being a part of this study. If you have any questions, please feel free to call me at (▮▮▮▮▮▮▮) or via email at (▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮) If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott . She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮, extension ▮▮▮. Walden University's approval number for this study is **12-10-12-00655552** and it expires on December 9, 2013.

Sincerely,

Kim Sethna

Walden University Doctoral Student

Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning Program

Appendix B: Consent Form

You are invited to take part in a qualitative research study of **Longevity of Women Superintendents: A Phenomenological Study**. The researcher is inviting all women superintendents in the State of Ohio who have achieved longevity of at least six years as superintendent to be in the study. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Kim Sethna, who is a doctoral student at Walden University in the Ed.D. Program for Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning. Mrs. Sethna is a former principal, curriculum director, and interim superintendent for Berkshire Local Schools in Geauga County, Ohio. She is currently an Educational Supervisor for the Early Childhood Education Department at Kent State University.

Background Information:

 The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between the longevity of women superintendents in public school districts and perceived personal and professional barriers that may influence longevity.

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:
4. Compete the enclosed survey as well as this consent form and return the documents in the enclosed postage paid envelope.
5. If selected, the researcher will contact you by telephone and arrange to meet with the researcher for approximately 30 to 90 minutes at the site of your choice for a private in-person interview. The interview will be audio recorded by the researcher.
6. Approximately one week after the interview, review a summary of the interview transcript for clarification and accuracy.
7. Participate in follow-up interview, by telephone, for approximately 30 minutes regarding the accuracy of the transcript summary.
8. The total time commitment will be approximately three hours including the private interview, transcript verification and follow-up telephone conference. Your time and commitment to the study will be most appreciated.

Here are some sample questions:
8. Which personal or professional factors do you perceive as barriers in your position as superintendent?
9. What approaches (if any) have been successful to overcome the barriers?
10. What barriers do women superintendents perceive and consider important to overcome to achieve longevity in this position?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:
This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind during or after the study. If you feel stressed during the study you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions

that you feel are too personal. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or repercussions of any kind.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:
It is expected that the study will pose only minimum risk to the participant. The benefit of participating in this study is that your responses contribute to the body of knowledge regarding perceived barriers for women superintendents. As a participant, the researcher will share the findings of the study with you personally so that you may have a better understanding of perceived barriers and possible strategies used by other women superintendents to overcome the barriers. The researcher is a mandated reporter, therefore, if illegal matters are discovered, the researcher will stop the interview and withdraw participant from this study.

Payment:
No compensation will be given for your participation in this study.

Privacy:
Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or any other data that could identify you in the study reports. A pseudonym will be used in place of your name. Data will be kept secured in a locked file by the researcher in a home office, and the researcher will be the only person to have a key. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university. All data will be destroyed after five years, which is required by law.

Contacts and Questions:
You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ or by email at ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is ▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮, extension ▮▮▮. Walden University's approval number for this study is **IRB will enter approval number here** and it expires on **IRB will enter expiration date.**

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I am agree to the term described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent   _____

Participant's Signature   _____

Researcher's Signature   _____

_____

Appendix C: Survey

Factors That May Influence Longevity for Women Superintendents

Thank you for taking the time to respond to this important survey. Your answers will remain confidential. As you know, women superintendents are rare in the field of educational administration. Your participation in this survey will enable further understanding of the personal and professional factors that influence longevity and may help attract and retain more women superintendents, like yourself. Please mail back your survey in the envelope provided.

Directions: Please darken the circle next to the answer that best describes your current situation.

11. How long have you been superintendent in your current school district?
○ Less than two years
○ Two years
○ Three Years
○ Four years
○ Five years
o Six or more years

2. How would you describe your current school district?
○ urban
○ suburban
○ rural

3. Which administrative certificate/license do you currently hold?
○ Elementary
○ Secondary
○ Both

For questions 4 through 10, please indicate the level of importance each factor has regarding your desire to stay in your current position:

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Little Importance	Not Important
4. Perception of glass ceiling	○	○	○	○	○
5. Morale of district	○	○	○	○	○
6. Relationship with BOE	○	○	○	○	○

7. Support of personnel   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

8. Support of spouse/family   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

9. Salary/Contract agreement ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

10. Mentoring opportunities   ○   ○   ○   ○   ○

Appendix D: Reminder Email to Participants

Date:

Dear Participant,

Recently you were mailed a survey regarding participation in a study about perceptions of barriers and how it relates to your role as a women superintendent. I would very much like to have your ideas and opinions regarding this important issue for women superintendents as part of my doctoral study.

I have attached the letter of invitation, consent form and survey as part of this email.

Please complete the consent form and survey and return to me either via e-mail at: ███████████████ or via the U.S. Postal Service at: ███████████████████████████ in the stamped self-addressed envelope which was initially sent to you.

I appreciate your cooperation and participation. Please feel free to contact me with an questions or concerns.

Thank you,

Kim Sethna, Doctoral Candidate
Walden University
█████████

Attachments: Letter of Invitation, Consent Form, Survey

Appendix E: Results of Survey

All Participants (n=)

	Very Important	Important	Neutral	Little Importance	Not Important	No Response	Total
Relationship with BOE	27	6	2	1	0	0	36
Support of Spouse/Family	20	10	4	0	2	0	36
Support of Personnel	19	13	4	0	0	0	36
Morale	16	16	3	1	0	0	36
Salary/Contract	7	18	8	3	0	0	36
Availability of Mentor	3	12	13	5	3	0	36
Presence of Glass Ceiling	0	4	11	7	12	2	36

Appendix F: Survey Results Based on Longevity (n=)

4 + yrs of experience	Very Important	Not Important	20 total participants
Relationship with BOE	14	0	
Support of Spouse/Family	9	0	
Support of Personnel	8	0	
Morale	8	0	
Salary/Contract	3	0	
Availability of Mentor	2	0	
Presence of Glass Ceiling	0	5 (25% of participants)	

3 – yrs of experience	Very Important	Not Important	16 total participants
Relationship with BOE	14		
Support of Spouse/Family	11	1	
Support of Personnel	10		
Morale	8		
Salary/Contract	4		
Availability of Mentor	1	3	
Presence of Glass Ceiling	0	6 (38% of participants)	

Appendix G: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer:

I have agreed to serve as the inter-rater (or second reader) for the doctoral study of Kim Sethna who is a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. Program at Walden University. During the course of my role as inter-rater for this research: *Longevity of Women Superintendents: A Phenomenological Study,* I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

9. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
10. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
11. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
12. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
13. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
14. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
15. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to

comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: **Date:**

Curriculum Vitae

Kim C. Sethna

EDUCATION:

Walden University

Ed.D. Administrator Leadership for Teaching and Learning. *pending,* 2014

Duquesne University of Pennsylvania

M.S. Educational Administration, May 1996

Principal's Certificate, May 1996

Slippery Rock University of Pennsylvania

M.S. Elementary Education, December 1989

Elementary Teaching Certificate, December 1989

B.A. Dance

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Educational Supervisor – Kent State University – January 20011- present

Currently supervising and evaluating student teachers in the early childhood and middle childhood education programs. Responsible for all aspects of supervision including scoring student Teacher Performance Assessments.

Board Member - Cuyahoga Valley Career Center - January 2011 – January 2012

Served as school member for this technical career school in Brecksville, OH with 20 million dollar budget. Served as the chairperson for the curriculum committee as well as on the committee to hire a new superintendent.

School Board Member – Nordonia Hills City School District - January 2008 – January 2012

Served as a school board member in addition to participating on the Board's curriculum committee, policy committee and OSBA student liaison chairperson. Responsible for evaluating superintendent and treasurer as well as overseeing five year forecast of district's 40 million dollar budget.

Director of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment – Berkshire Local Schools –2001-2006

Responsible for curriculum revising/writing for K-12, supervising and inservicing district teachers and coordinating state mandated and standardized assessments. Also responsible for recruiting, hiring and evaluating personnel. Coordinated federal programs and grant writing opportunities.

Interim Superintendent - Berkshire Local Schools - 2003-2004 school year

Responsible for five district buildings with a 12 million dollar budget. Negotiated successful teacher contract as well as assisted with two levy campaigns. Supervised staff of eighty certified staff members and over one hundred classified employees. Direct all employment/staffing functions and coordinated professional develop for K-12 staff. Designed and implemented new teacher orientation program and participated in strategic planning committee.

Elementary Principal - Berkshire Local Schools - 1998-2001

Responsible for students in grades K-6; reorganized building schedule, collaborated with Parent Teacher Organization, coordinated school wide activities, participated in IEP and 504 Planning sessions, conducted faculty and non certified staff meetings, etc.

Elementary Principal - Interfaith Family School - 1997-1998

Responsible for students in grades K-8 in a private school setting. Coordinated fundraising activities, collaborated with Akron Public Schools for federal grants and taught Spanish to all students in K-8.

Teacher - St. Agnes School – 1994 - 1997

Taught inner city students in grades 1-4 in all subject areas. Implemented new phonetic/decoding program in collaboration with University of Pittsburgh. Served as a CARE team member and teacher mentor. Started a library club and hip-hop dance club as part of an after school program.

COMMUNITY/VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE:

Cleveland Women Who Care Volunteer Program 2011 – present

Lollipop Cooperative Preschool – Board Member, Curriculum Chair 2007 - 2008

Nordonia City Schools Continuous Improvement Plan - Parent Member 2006

Nordonia City Schools - Levy Committee - Participant/volunteer 2004 – 2008 - 2011

Friends of Nordonia Hills Branch Library – President 2004 - 2007

Tom & Susana Evert Dance Theatre - Board Member 2002-2005

Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) for abused and neglected children

Pittsburgh, PA 1994-1996