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Career Pathway Experiences of Three Female School Superintendents: A Phenomenology

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CAREER PATHWAY EXPERIENCES OF THREE FEMALE SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENTS: A PHENOMENOLOGY

A Dissertation

Presented to

The Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

University of Denver

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Liann M. Hanson

June 2011

Advisor: Susan Korach, Ed.D

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Abstract

Women represent 75 to 80 percent of the teachers across the U.S. (Glass, 1992), and the percentage of female superintendents is not in alignment with the female workforce. Research indicates that the career pathways of male and female superintendents differ. While male superintendents often have a sequential pathway to a superintendency, women tend to take more of a labyrinth type of pathway resulting in a longer, indirect path to the superintendent position (Eagly and Carli 2007). This study examined the career pathways of female superintendents, and the support needed to increase gender equity for the superintendency. This dissertation examines the career pathways of three superintendents in a Southwestern state of the United States. Standpoint theory framed the identification of female superintendents as a phenomenon, and qualitative interviews elicited the voices of the female superintendents.

The results of this study were somewhat surprising. The female superintendents had similar career pathways as male superintendents, had male mentors, were not intentional about the superintendency, and perceived themselves as innovative. The linear pathways of these female superintendents contradict earlier research, and their self identification as innovators gives them an identity that is focused around a need. This research provides insight into how to support women in their pathways toward the superintendency.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background and History of School Superintendents

There are troubling statistics about the number of female school superintendents in the United States. The percentage of female superintendents in the United States varies by state and district but nationally it remains under 15 percent of the total population of superintendents (Tallerico, 1999). Other resources (Brunner, 1999) support these numbers reporting that men occupy 93 percent of superintendency positions. Recently, there has been an increase in the number of female superintendents in the United States, mostly, in very small school districts for white women and in troubled urban school districts for women of color (Tallerico, 1999). According to Glass (1992), twenty eight percent of female superintendents versus fourteen percent of male superintendents lead schools districts that have 300 or few students. There is only one other area in which women are dominant in numbers in the superintendency. This occurs when the school district has more than 25,000 students; women take the helm of those school districts 11 percent of the time compared to 8 percent of men (Tallerico, 1999). This study is grounded in the history of women in the school superintendency.

School superintendency began with the evolution of American public education in the mid-1800s and has continued until today (Chapman, 1997). As public schools were first being formed, there were influenced by the industrial revolution and its models of efficiency and process orientations. As schools were pushed to perform more efficiently

and more cheaply, schools went from having decisions made by laypersons, or non-educators, and an untrained board of education to trained “industrial managers”, namely to professionals that resembled those of the industrial revolution (Chapman, 1997). As the decision-making powers in schools were changing, a new profession of school superintendents was formed; the position borrowed tactics of action from business and government (Grogan, 1996). The majority of these early superintendents were men; single female educators were classroom teachers. The images of superintendents during this time invoked images of warrior and priest (Grogan, 1996). As the role of superintendent emerged in the public view, a change in the function of the superintendency also occurred. Grogan (1996) stated, “While pioneer superintendents worked to establish the concept of the common school district and differentiate the roles of superintendent and school board, they were also greatly concerned with the professional preparation of future superintendents” (p. 21). While this shift occurred, school boards began to look at the educator role of the superintendency, rather than the industrial role, to coordinate the day-to-day operations of schools.

The early superintendencies were widely held by men, but a shift occurred in the United States that affected women and the role of superintendent. Blount (1999) summarizes this journey with a quote from historian Margaret Gribskov, stating, “The rise and fall of the woman school administrator approximates the peaks and valleys of the first American feminist movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s, and the feminist movement was a crucial factor in producing the large numbers of women administrators of that period” (p.21). Although there was a white, male dominance of the superintendency of public school districts since their creation in the late nineteenth

century, the early feminist movement of the nineteenth century started changing the role of the superintendency (Tallerico, 1999).

School districts had been hiring female teachers since the mid-nineteenth century, and it was the only profession that women could pursue using a formal education. However their male students enjoyed better educational prospects with more opportunities post-graduation than their female teachers (Blount, 1999). Although there were a plentitude of female teachers, they did not have the opportunity for leadership opportunities above and beyond teaching (Blount, 1999). Because women at the time were not allowed to vote and the superintendency was a political position in which men ran for office, there was no chance for women to obtain this position. Schools boards collectively saw effective superintendent's skills to include financial and bureaucratic control (Grogan, 1996). These skills were very much in the political and business realm, which was more accessible by men.

This story changed when women, particularly teachers, started forming the women's suffrage movement in the attempt to get the right to vote. A number of women teachers organized around the women's suffrage movement. One of the earliest gatherings of women was in Seneca Falls in 1848. As women started organizing to obtain the right to vote, they also joined the movement in which to take the superintendency out of politics (Blount, 1999). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) stated, "It was during the latter part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century that strong women activists worked diligently and continuously to influence political support of women's right to vote" (p. 2). Slowly, many states began allowing women the right to vote. Wyoming allowed women the right to vote in 1869. Additionally, sixteen states also started

allowing women to run for elected school offices before they even had the right to vote. As women started running for school offices, they also started winning seats as school superintendents. Women in the state of Colorado won suffrage in 1893 and then ten years later the majority of superintendents in Colorado were female superintendents. Wyoming elected Estelle Reed, according to Blount (1999), to be the State Superintendent of Instruction in 1894, which made her the first woman in the country to hold a state office” (p. 10). Blount also found:

The overall number of women superintendents increased quickly around the turn of the century. In 1896, women held 228 county superintendencies, two state superintendencies, and twelve city superintendencies (Wood, 1929, 1, 517). Just five years later, the Report of the Commissioner of Education indicated that 288 women held county superintendencies for a 26 percent increase (Anonymous 1902, 1228-29). By 1913, there were 495 women county superintendents—more than doubling the 1896 figure in less than twenty years (p 16).

Blount (1999) supports this in saying, “Women’s work in public schooling, then, provided important justification for their eventual right to full suffrage” (p. 13). In 1919, the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified and this helped the status of women superintendents because until that point women superintendents depended solely upon men to vote for them (Dana and Bourisaw, 2006). Women now could vote for other women. Women continued to move forward in their superintendency positions and saw that the public help them to a higher standard of performance than they did of men (Blount, 1999). “In the end, women school superintendents emerged as part of the broad-based women’s movement of the late 1800s and early 1900s,” according to Blount (1999, p. 21).

From the 1920s until the early 1960s the role of the superintendency did not change much in the United States. Superintendents and principals, whether male or

female and were perceived as the educational experts of districts and schools. Women's capacity to serve in this role was not questioned by the public at this time unless a political question was at hand (Chapman, 1997). Also, Chapman (1997) stated, "A sidelight to scientific management was that, by the 1930s, most states had spelled out in statute that the role of the local school superintendent and the board of education. Codification more clearly drew lines of authority, making the superintendent responsible to the board of education, thereby specifying the current organization for today's school districts" (p. 22). The superintendent of this era was likened to the new executive in peacetime America (Grogan, 1996).

The social conflicts of the 1960s and 1970s greatly affected school districts and their superintendents. Many changes in the United States fueled these changes for superintendents, but more specifically, for women. According to Dana and Bourisaw (2006):

- In 1961, President John F. Kennedy created the Committee on Equal Employment, requiring that projects financed with federal dollars "take affirmative action" to "ensure that employment practices are free of racial bias" (Brunner, 2004, p.1).
- The Equal Pay Act was passed by Congress in 1963 promising "equitable wages for the same work, regardless of the race, color, religion, national origin, or sex of the worker" (National Women's History Project, 1997-2002, p. 3).
- In 1964 the Civil Rights Act was signed by President Lyndon B. Johnson. Title VII of this Act prohibited discrimination toward race, color, religion, national origin, or sex (p. 5).
- The following year on June 4, 1965, in a commencement speech, President Johnson helped establish the concept of "affirmative action" by stating, in part: "This is the next and more profound stage of the battle for civil rights. We seek not just freedom but opportunity—not just legal equity but

human ability—not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and a result” (Brunner, 2004, p. 1).

- Affirmative action enforcement became policy with Executive Order 11246 issued on September 24th, 1965 by President Johnson (p. 5).

During this time, school boards changed significantly from members with special interests to members that were blue-collar workers, homemakers, and others elected based on their interest in changing the system (Chapman 1997). Because of the interest in changing the system, school boards looked at superintendents in a different light. Grogan (1996) says,

By 1968, the American Association of School Administrators and the National School Board Associations had published the pamphlet *Selecting a School Superintendent* which gave clear indications to board members of what they should be looking for in the main administrator...to include planning and evaluation; organization; management of personnel, business, buildings, and auxiliary services; provision of information and advice to the community; and coordination of the entire school system (p. 13-14).

This indicated a shift from the role as lead educational expert to chief executive officer. Women and minorities started filling certain roles in the workplace, but they were not given equitable access to senior executive roles like the superintendency. There were two workplace issues that were identified hindering women’s access and movement. According to Dana and Bourisaw (2006) those issues were, “(1) access to equity of conditions, salary, and benefits in the workplace and (2) access to the strongest leadership positions in organizations and in government” (p. 6-7). This struggle for women in leadership positions, specifically superintendent positions, continued throughout the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s. Pavan (1985) found that from 1970 through 1984, women superintendents accounted for 3.3 percent of the total population of superintendents. Shakeshaft (1989) shows figures for female district superintendents that range from 1.6

percent in 1928 to 3.0 percent in 1985. “Feistritz (1988) reports a nationwide study conducted in 1987 revealing that 96 percent of public school superintendents were men,” Grogan stated (1996, p. 11). During the 1980s there were significant school reform movements, and some research that looked at the relationship of the superintendency and instruction revealed school superintendents as the culprits who were in the way of true educational reform (Chapman, 1997). Superintendents struggled with reform and change in their role in the school systems.

The Civil Rights Act of 1991 created the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission to conduct a study looking at gender and minority equity in the United States. The findings of the Commission showed a few key points: (1) the single greatest barrier to advancement in the executive ranks was being a minority or a woman, (2) glass ceilings do not allow people to compete successfully for positions of executive leadership, (3) and there are societal, internal, and governmental barriers for both women and minorities (Dana and Bourisaw, 2006). According to Dana and Bourisaw (2006), the “1995 Congress adopted the Gender Equity Education Act to train teachers in gender equity, promote math and science learning by girls, counsel pregnant teens, and prevent sexual harassment” (p. 8). Since the mid-eighties, though, there is still a strong focus on where are the women superintendents since the teacher profession remains heavily populated by women (Grogan, 1996). Grogan (1996) supports this by citing:

Recent nationwide surveys of numbers of women teachers show no significant changes, with figures ranging from 87 percent at the elementary level and 57 percent at the middle level to 52 percent at the secondary level. However, in the middle management level of principals and assistant principals, and increasingly at the central office level, there are growing numbers of women. Quoting from the 1992 publication by the *American Association of School Administrators—Women and Minorities in School Administration: Facts and Figures 1989-1990*, Restine

(1993, p. 17) reports that women account for 20.6 percent of assistant superintendencies nationwide and 27 percent of principalships (p. 20)

Presently, the role of superintendency is changing again to instructional leader, and this change might impact equity amongst female superintendents. There has been close scrutiny of public schools and superintendents and changes in legislation have created a superintendency scenario very different from the early days of superintendency (Chapman, 1997). As the position has become more instructionally based, courses at colleges and universities have been changed to meet those needs of instructional and technological support (Grogan, 1996). Most current literature has regarded the role of superintendent as a gender-neutral position being neither male nor female. Yet, even with the ever-changing role of the superintendency, the discrepancy between male and female superintendents and the perceptions that are held regarding female superintendents has remained fairly constant.

Dana and Bourisaw (2006) state, “Although there clearly is some progress toward equity between 1880 and 2000 in the United States, there continue to be strong cultural constraints on achieving equity and social justice for women” (p. 8). Even though the superintendency has undergone significant changes over this time, the image of a superintendent is still engrained in public image as male (Grogan, 1996). In most school districts, today, social justice does not exist for women. “The causes are rooted in cultural norms and values coupled with systemic overlays of policy and governance that are most difficult to change. What women want is equity of opportunity, equity of access, and equity of treatment” (Dana and Bourisaw, 2006, p. 1). History has proven that there is not equity for women in the superintendency.

Context

The 2000 American Association of School Administrator's survey (Glass, Bjork, and Brunner, 2000) indicates that women made up 13 percent of superintendents in 2000, double their proportion in the 1992 survey. This study takes place in a state in the Southwest portion of the United States that has 29.6% female superintendents. In this state, there are 179 school districts with 53 of those being female superintendents. Within the one major metropolitan area, there are 14 female superintendents. Although this is above the national average, work needs to be done to support the equity for women and their complex journey towards the superintendency.

Statement of Problem

There is a need for equity in leadership positions held by women, particularly in the superintendency position. Research and education regarding women in the superintendency would, according to Brunner (1999),

inform and sensitize all people, men and women, either seeking or already in the position of superintendent, to issues raised by the two major reforms...Further, we believe that drawing attention to the worth of women's practice in the superintendency would increase the number of women in the position (p. 2).

This study examines the career pathways and stories of female superintendents and their perceptions of support.

Dana and Bourisaw (2006) summarized their view of women in superintendency positions saying that the 'glass ceiling' was an apt metaphor for the levels of leadership beyond which women have not been admitted, and it is just the beginning of the complete metaphor. Myerson (2004) pointed out, "It's not [just] the ceiling that's holding women back; it's the whole structure of the organizations in which we work; the foundation, the

beams, the walls, the very air” (p. 8). This research will explore those foundations, beams, walls, and air in which women navigate their way to the superintendency.

Purpose of Study

Through research on the phenomenon of female leadership and the career pathways of women currently in the superintendency, we can learn how to better support female leaders to move into leadership positions. The career pathways that female leaders take shape the roads that future female superintendents will take. These pathways and experiences create a phenomenon that we can learn from and use to enhance others’ pathways. By presenting women’s voices, their stories, we are able to make the hidden visible, provide supports to the now visible, and change the future perceptions and experiences of female leaders. Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that women in the educational field have the same strong career aspirations as men do towards the superintendency. Kim and Brunner (2008) state “research must focus specifically on school administrators’ typical career paths in terms of mobility patterns with an eye on how experiences shape expertise” (p. 76).

Women moving towards the superintendency generally have the same starting point—teaching, but there are different pathways in which these women move towards the superintendency that align with the different barriers that occur in their life (Kim and Brunner, 2008). There are two major career patterns of superintendents (Ortiz, 1982). For a large school district it was “teacher to principal to central office administrator to superintendent” (Ortiz, 1982, p. 6). The common pathway for a small school district was “teacher to principal to superintendent” (Ortiz, 1982, p. 6). In a more recent article, Glass (2000) defined a typical pathway to the superintendency as “teacher to coaching

assignment to assistant principalship or department chair in a high school to central office administrator to superintendent” (p. 29).

Research Questions

A better understanding of this phenomenon allows future female superintendents to be more aware of the pathways and experiences that increase their chances of becoming a superintendent. In seeking to understand the phenomenon of the career paths of female superintendents, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the career pathways that the participants took to the superintendency?
2. How do female superintendents conceptualize their career pathways and performance?
 - a. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do the female superintendents perceive as influential/critical to their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - b. What factors impeded their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - c. How do female superintendents perceive their preparation and performance?

List of Terms

Career path—The steps in a pathway in which a person takes to get to a certain career position.

Glass ceiling—An invisible barrier resulting from discrimination to demographic groups of people that prohibit them from achieving a higher status in a career position (U.S. Department of Labor, 1991).

Glass cliff—A woman who is put into a top leadership position and has the subsequent loss of the high level position (Elacqua et al., 2009).

Glass escalator—Men who are in more female-dominated careers and the men are pushed forward in their careers past the women moving up the glass escalator (Snyder and Green, 2008).

Labyrinth—A maze-like trajectory that makes it difficult for one to find her way. Offers a new image of women confronting different challenges as they travel upward, often on indirect paths, to leadership (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Pathway—A defined career path in which demographic groups take to a career position (Eagly and Carli, 2007).

Shattering of the glass—During the 1960s and 1970s, women did a lot of breaking of the glass. Jagged edges in the glass still cut the aspirations of a new generation (Robinson, 2004).

Standpoint Theory—A theory that looks at creating knowledge from the insights of a woman's experience (Crasnow, 2008).

Superintendent—A person who directs or manages an organization; more specifically a K-12 educational organization.

Superintendency—The act of being a superintendent.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

In this chapter, the literature on leadership, gender differences in leadership, barriers of women leaders, and the concepts of “glass ceiling” and the “labyrinth” will be presented to set the context for fully understanding the study.

Leadership Roles

Leadership plays a part in businesses, schools, and other entities that involve an organization of people. Leadership needs two roles to make it effective: the leader and the follower. The leader must have power to produce results, but the followers must also be willing to accept and act on the leader’s directives (Hogue, Yoder, Ludwig, 2002). The leader of the organization organizes and directs the activities of the followers to achieve a particular goal (Hollander, 1985, as cited in Hogue, Yoder, Ludwig, 2002). There are certain skills an effective leader needs to bring to the organization. They build upon existing strengths of themselves and their followers, they create opportunities for success and achievement, and they care for those they work with (Love, 2005). Leaders collaborate with others, serve as a role model, and present a vision that “delineates the values and goals of an organization” (Eagly, 2007, p. 3). Successful leaders vary their behaviors based upon the context of the situation and the people they are working with. As Eagly (2007) reinforces,

Styles are relatively consistent patterns of social interaction that typify leaders as individuals. Leadership styles are not fixed behaviors but encompass a range of behaviors that have a particular meaning or that serve a particular function.

Depending on the situation, leaders vary their behaviors within the boundaries of their style (p. 2).

Generally, though, effective leadership has been associated with males and male characteristics (Kawakami, White, Langer, 2000). As noted in the historical background section, history has significantly impacted how society sees leadership and how gender fits within those confines of leadership. Around the world, the word leader, according to Crosby (1988), "...continues to evoke a distinctly male image, when in fact women leaders are all around although not in the same places as male leaders" (p. 40). Along with history, Kruse and Prettyman (2008) also note that media images based upon norms and biases that people have also impacted how we view leadership and gender. The term gender categorizes one person into one classification and the other person into the opposite classification (Christman and McClellan, 2007). In this case, men are in the classification of leader and women are not. Although women have made valiant strides in the area of leadership, leaders are still more likely to be men than women (Kawakami, White, Langer, 2000). The definition of leadership has changed throughout history and in most arenas does include women. Women still struggle to be included in leadership because even though the definition of leadership includes women, women are socialized and encouraged through society to have characteristics that do not fit within the definition of leadership (McKenna, 2007). Research presented by Yoder (1988) reaffirms that male characteristics are still a dominant part of leadership and states the needs for organizational legitimacy to counter this stereotype (Hogue, Yoder, Ludwig, 2002). Kruse and Prettyman (2008) emphasize this by stating that, "characteristics or qualities that a leader embodies is still trapped in older stereotypes of power, of men, of women,

and of organizations” (p. 454). Women are struggling within and getting to leadership roles and gender plays an integral role in this struggle.

Gender and Leadership

Yoder (2001) helps put into context gender and leadership:

Both definitions of leadership and the context in which leadership is enacted put gender front and center in our discussion, and we must never lose sight of the facts that the leaders we are discussing are women, that doing leadership may differ for women and men, and that leadership does not take place in a genderless vacuum (p. 815).

Leadership is gendered (Yoder, 2001) and it is important that when looking at leadership we understand that concept and not try to fit women into a male definition of leadership. While the struggle against that male-dominated form of leadership has been ongoing for many years (Christman and McClellan, 2007) and the gender stereotypes that prescribe how women and men should behave in leadership (Hoyt and Blascovich, 2007), there has been positive statements in society recently that are favorable to women and their attributes in leadership positions (Eagly, 2007). Women in leadership positions tend to be problem-solvers. They are task oriented and have high expectations of self and others. They have strong educational background with a focus on curriculum and student growth (Grogan, 1999). “Many women are relationship leaders, that is, leaders get to know students, teachers, and members of the school community” (p. 524), states Grogan (1999). With these strong, positive characteristics that women hold in leadership, it appears that women have an advantage in leadership (Eagly, 2007). Even though women have these strong characteristics in leadership, society still plays a big part in defining good leadership.

It is not only about the characteristics the women bring to the leadership table; it is about the influences that the organization or society has on women leaders. People react to women leaders and have different expectations of women leaders because of how society has internalized leadership and its definition (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen, 2003). Society recognizes and expects women to come in second in leadership positions. They are seen as disadvantaged and suffering in the role of leadership (Eagly, 2007). But, even with societal norms pushing against women, we can overcome the gender gap in leadership (McKenna, 2007).

To overcome these gender gaps, it will take strong, skillful, and persistent women to advance of the hurdles (Eagly, 2007). Women need to exhibit superior competence on tasks, when working with others, and maintain a high strength of confidence (Yoder, 2001). Women will also need to, according to Eagly (2007), “avoid the threats to her confidence that other people’s doubts and criticisms can elicit” (p. 6-7). As we continue our push toward gender equity in the 21st century, there are profound changes taking place in women and leadership roles. Even though women are still struggling with the stereotypic baggage that comes with gender roles, the realization of that struggle brings women a step closer to equity amongst genders. Societal norms are also shifting when looking at women in leadership and will affect how women lead in the future (Yoder, 2001). As we move forward in our gender stereotyping of women in leadership, the next step is to look at models of leadership that women bring and whether or not these models are one of femininity or masculinity. Christman and McClellan (2007) looked at women in leadership and were flabbergasted when they noted:

We expected the leading women administrators to model feminism, to tell us that their feminist leadership—that which has been socially constructed as nurturing, caring, and collaborative—had contributed to their own resiliency. Furthermore, we expected to hear that these women overcame the metaphorical glass ceilings, thin ice, and dances on the sharp-edged sword and roared, “We are women!” We thought that these women would tell us how women leaders use their femininity, putting the traditional masculine for aside, to become a new kind of contender, one that built leadership on an ethic of care, a feminist discourse, a feminine posturing and one more conducive to the postmodern organization (p. 4-5).

How wrong they were. Even though women bring strong characteristics to leadership, they still struggle with how to use what is termed “masculine” and “feminine traits” within leadership.

Male and Female Leadership Traits

Both men and women criticize women for success in male-dominated leadership roles (McKenna, 2007). It has been shown empirically by Yoder (2001) that women leaders are not effective in masculinized contexts. The same is also stated by Kawakami, White, Langer (2000) in saying, “The gender stereotype of women as warm, nurturing, and caring and the corresponding stereotype of men as cold, competitive, and authoritarian may have contributed to popular perception that women are less effective than men in leadership positions” (p. 50). There is a consistency of what society perceives as necessary to a successful leadership (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen, 2003)—these all include male leadership traits (Yoder, Ludwig, 2002). In saying all this, it is not surprising that women have difficulty in leadership positions. Women feel uncomfortable in “masculine organizational culture” (p. 6) and find it difficult to gain authority within the organization (Eagly, 2007). With this discomfort, women try desperately to fit within the culture, which includes taking on masculine leadership traits.

Women that are moving toward or within leadership often live within a paradox in which they are “simultaneously socially invisible while being physically and psychologically visible, an object of gaze” (Tseelon, 1995, p. 54). Leadership is very much a visible occupation in which women are feeling invisible. Because of this paradigm, women are using more masculine behaviors to become more visible and valued in leadership roles (Reay and Ball, 2000). There is growing evidence that women are taking on untraditional leadership tactics in order to feel successful in their leadership positions (Kruse and Prettyman, 2008).

Women feeling pressures to conform to the male hegemony of leadership (Reay and Ball, 2000) adopting masculine models such as being authoritative, assertive, aggressive, uncaring, unemotional, controlling, and hierarchical (Kruse and Prettyman, 2008). In doing so, women learned to ‘play the game’ by taking on traits that fit within what society deemed as necessary for a successful leader. Sometimes, though, “people dislike female leaders who display these very directive and assertive qualities because such women seem unfeminine—that is, just like a man or like an iron lady” (Eagly, 2007, p. 4). Research, according to McKenna (2007), has shown that women who are successful in leadership roles that are traditionally held by men are seen as “more selfish, manipulative, and untrustworthy—your typical ‘bitchy’ characteristics” (p. 11). On the other hand, women that display the traditional feminine traits in leadership have just as much trouble.

“While some women have assumed leadership positions by adopting a traditional masculine model, other women have chosen to emphasize that which is not masculine in

their effort to attain positions and status” (Kruse and Prettyman, 2008, p. 457). These women risk little due to their compliance within society’s norms. Many of these traits include being friendly and kind towards others (Barbuto Jr. Fritz, Matkin, and Marx, 2007). It also includes teamwork, cooperative, student growth and achievement, collaboration, and emotional intelligence (Kruse and Prettyman, 2008). Women that display the more feminine traits of leadership are viewed as ineffective because they don’t display the stereotypical leadership traits—“that is, as not being tough enough or not taking charge” (Eagly, 2007, p. 4). Thus, female leaders face a quandary. They are expected to be feminine enough to be seen as a women and masculine enough to fit within traditional leadership definitions.

It would seem ideal, then, if women used some masculine and feminine traits—a middle path that would not be necessarily masculine or necessary feminine (Yoder, 2001)—together to be a successful leader. Yet, this style of back and forth leadership leaves women feeling a lack of self. What is effective leadership for male leaders is not always effective for female leaders. With demands on women to find a style which meets their own personal needs and the needs of the leadership positions, women are struggling to find “an appropriate and effective leadership style” (Eagly, 2007, p.7). Kruse (2008) looked at women who rejected both the masculine and feminine models of leadership. It was shown that by doing so, it allowed women to “pursue different ends through different means” (p. 458). This model of leadership positions women leaders as the “other” (Kruse, 2008, p. 458). Perceptions of other constituents come in to play when looking at women in leadership as well.

Historically, schools and the educational organizations within which schools function completely separated the roles of teachers and administrators. This has led to a harsh divide within the perceptions of society. It has led to the thinking that women were more well suited teaching in a classroom, while men were suited in the administration field of schools (Fitzgerald, 2006). It led to the unfounded belief the men could do one role and women could do the other role. This belief was founded on perception only. This type of perception has led women to feel, “heightened performance pressures, social isolation, and role encapsulations” (Yoder, Schleicher, McDonald, 1998, p. 210). Also, because of the historical framework about women in leadership there is a prejudice towards women in leadership roles associated by Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and van Engen (2003):

(a) less favorable evaluation of women’s (than of men’s) potential for leadership because leadership ability is more stereotypic of men than women and (b) less favorable evaluation of women’s (than men’s) actual leadership behavior because agentic behavior is perceived as less desirable in women than men (p. 572).

The expectations that people have for women in leadership roles is far different than those they have of men in the same roles (Hoyt and Blascovich, 2007). Other behaviors such as frowns and other negative affective behaviors are also outwardly given towards women leaders (Koch, 2005). According to Kawakami, White, and Langer (2000), research shows that this type of stereotypical behavior toward women is still prevalent today. This has led to women not being included in networks that have assumedly grown out of male organizations (Grogan, 1999). Women are asked to try to fit within a gendered definition of leadership (Ruderman and Ohlott, 2004), and this type of

behaviors limits women's access into the upper echelons of leadership (Grisoni and Beeby, 2007).

Upper Management

Eagly (2007) has found, in a meta-analysis, that female administrators in middle-level leadership positions were found to be quite effective. But there is an innate contradiction for women in the upper ranks of leadership, most notably in the K-12 organizations—superintendents.

Such a position confounds and contradicts traditional notions of femininity. To be a successful professional near the top of an institutional hierarchy involves at the very least the performance of a markedly different femininity to that inscribed in traditional notions of being female (Reay and Ball, 2000, p. 147).

Executive level positions, such as superintendencies, are, again, thought by society to need, according to Hoyt and Blascovich (2007), “an achievement-oriented aggressiveness and an emotional toughness that is antithetical to the female gender stereotype” (p. 596). Both men and women within these upper executive roles in organizations are pushed toward the male traits of leadership (Reay and Ball, 2000). With these forces pushing on women in leadership positions, it is necessary to look towards future development of women, society, and the very leadership positions they wish to accrue.

Support

As noted previously, our images of leadership are based upon the male model of leadership which also includes the belief that women who are in these leadership positions are deeply intimidating. This has had long lasting impacts on women in leadership positions (McKenna, 2007). Part of what can support women wanting to go into leadership positions is the development of leadership education for women. Women

outnumber men in leadership programs for K-12 educational settings, but the numbers of women obtaining high level leadership positions does not correlate (Logan and Scollay, 1999). An overhaul in how we educate both men and women in leadership positions is needed. McKenna (2007) supports this by saying,

By providing young women and men access to powerful women role models across a variety of fields, knowledge about the social and historical roots of discrimination and an understanding of the important of networking and mentoring, we hope for more gender-neutral choices in careers (p. 13).

The education and research of women in leadership positions has begun, but by mostly women (Grogan, 1999). It will take both men and women to make the change. There needs to be a movement from an “us” and “them” to a “we”. We, both men and women, need to make a moral and ethical commitment to look at and change the way we educate each other on education, leadership, and gender. We can be responsible for both women and men in educational leadership (Rusch and Marshall, 2006).

Even though there have been struggles for women moving into educational leadership positions because of the historical implications (Grisoni and Beeby, 2007), we have the opportunity to move our society forward for the betterment of women, men, students, and their education.

Superintendents

The K-12 superintendency is “the most powerful position in public schools” (p. 22) and historically the role has been led by men (Sharp et al., 2004). Since the beginning of the 20th century the role of superintendent has held a prestige similar to lawyers, doctors, and ministers. They were view as the educational experts and treated as such. The early superintendents played an important role in shaping the educational system as

we know it today (Kamler, 2009). As we have gone through history, the role of superintendent has changed drastically in terms of the role that the superintendent plays in school districts. Instead of just a political figure in the community, current superintendents focus more on, “curriculum and instruction, planning for the future, involving others in decision making, improving student’s achievement, managing fiscal resources, and building cultural leadership” (Harris et al., 2004, p. 109). The job demands that are thrust at superintendents nowadays involve more time and resources than found in the typical workday (Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer, 2006). With the most current numbers from the 2000 Study of the American School Superintendency conducted by the American Association of School Administrators reported that women superintendents have struggles with the time constraints within the role (Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer, 2006). The superintendency also has the potential to become the scapegoat for the troubles of the district (Kamler, 2009). Such pressures in the superintendency have lead to the pool of candidates for a position of this nature to shrink dramatically (FeKula and Roberts, 2005). It has also led to a changing demographic of superintendent.

Women in the Superintendency

According to Glass (2000), of the 13,728 school superintendents in the United States, 11,744 are men and 1,984 are women, which is roughly 14%. Research (Glass, 2000) also shows that the overall median age of superintendents is 53.5 with 27% over the age of 50. On top of those statistics, the average tenure of superintendents has decreased from around 13 years in a position to currently being 5 to 6 years in a position (Harris et al., 2004). Whereas women spend 7 to 10 years teaching in the classroom

before moving up to an administrative role, men spend 5 to 6 years doing the same (Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer, 2006). The role of education of future superintendents has also changed.

“Women constitute more than half of the doctoral students in educational administration, yet they occupy about one-fourth of the administrative positions in the field” (Sharp et al., 2004, p. 24). As far back as 1998, women graduated with 63% of the doctoral degrees in the field of education (Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer, 2006). Despite the educational attainments of women, men continue to move into the top educational administrative ranks faster and more often than women. Also, even with more women being qualified to move into a superintendency role, FeKula and Roberts (2005) found that most women rejected the idea of moving into the superintendency. Although there is a strong number of women being prepared for roles such as a superintendent, Harris et al. (2004) also found that there is still a need to change the leadership education of women and design it to better fit a woman’s needs. Even with the change in the roles, the demographics, and the education of a superintendent, the superintendency is still one of the most male-dominated positions of any profession (Kamler, 2009).

Barriers to Female Superintendents

Since those early times of superintendencies, women have been held out of the positions (Alexander et al., 2004). “Studies of female superintendents suggest that females do not experience the same level of encouragement, mentorship or sponsorship as do males, and that they continue to face gender bias and gender discrimination” (Wallin and Crippen, 2007, p. 21). “The high school principalship has shown to be a

direct line to the superintendency and the high school principalship is also a struggle for women to access” (Sharp et al., 2004, p. 25).

Interestingly enough, the educational field is seen as very family friendly in terms of having vacations with time to spend with family, a Monday through Friday job that also correlates to a child’s schedule, and work hours that are earlier in the day.

Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) found that the road to the superintendency is actually “similar to male-dominated fields such as business and law. That is, access within the occupation does not lead to proportional advancement” (p. 486). Unfortunately because of this, women aspiring to the superintendency are more likely than men to be single and with fewer children (FeKula and Roberts, 2005). Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer reinforce this statistic:

In fact, marriage, with the accompanying domestic support, gives male candidates additional leverage of boards, which associate marital status with stability, which is a preferred quality for superintendent candidates. On the other hand, marriage and family for female candidates becomes a liability as boards associate this marital status with domestic responsibilities and dependent-care roles, and as previously discussed, these are qualities that make women less preferred candidates to school boards (2006, p. 498).

Parenting issues are important in shaping the role of superintendency for both men and women, but women expressed that their family is the biggest limitation on the road towards the superintendency (FeKula and Roberts, 2005). Relationships with spouses or partners, “may restrain many women from pursuing higher levels of responsibility, and increased time demands may cause family problems” (Sharp et al., 2004, p. 25). Family problems are a big concern for women in the superintendencies; there are also outside forces that cause strain for women in the superintendency as well.

A superintendent in the 21st century is expected to “be all, for all” people including students, staff, school boards, and their communities. Wallace (2003, p. 40) states that, “boards require superintendents to be politicians, managers, curriculum specialists, counselors, and personnel advisors.” Alexander et al. (2004, p. 184) cited Malone et al. (2000) when identifying additional barriers women have in accessing the superintendency which were, “the absence of mentors, poorly developed professional networks, and a lack of formal and informal training, encouragement, membership in the good old boys network, and sponsors who had influence.”

The Boards of Education also prove to be strong deterrents for women moving towards and in the superintendency. First of all, Boards of Education tend to be male dominated themselves and in turn, hire men superintendents more often. It also works in reverse when the board has a majority of female representatives; they tend to hire female superintendents more often (Sharp et al., 2004). Moreover, board members and their search consultants use their power to often deny the access of women to even interview for a superintendency position (Harris et al. 2004). The power that boards hold denies access for advancement of women in the role of superintendent (Alexander et al., 2004). Secondly, Boards of Education are comprised of members of the community in which they hold the same stereotypical opinions of women, leadership, and the superintendency—women don’t make the grade. “These same market features ultimately influence school boards, particularly with regard to their decisions to hire individuals who fit what is considered market ideals” (Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer, 2006, p. 484).

Glass (2000) summarizes it best when comprising a list of seven additional barriers for women in top leadership positions:

1. Women are not in career positions that normally lead to advancement
2. Women are not preparing for the superintendency
3. Women are not as experienced nor as interested in fiscal management as men
4. Personal relationships hold women back
5. School boards are not willing to hire women superintendents
6. Women enter the field of education for different reasons today
7. Women enter administration at an older age

There are many barriers to women obtaining a top-level administrative position in K-12 school systems. Changing these barriers is a good step in the right direction, but will not sufficiently change the system in which women are working with. Blount (1998) stated that by putting more women in the role of superintendent, it will not necessarily change the segregation that occurs in public education. “Change to the current system will only be possible if, as Blount further argues, we alter the structures that are deeply rooted in the school system, including the social construct and the structure behind the power and control” (Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer, 2006, p. 500).

The Glass Ceiling

The glass ceiling was defined by the U.S. Department of Labor (1991) as, “artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified [women] from advancing upward in their organization into [senior] management level positions” (p. 1). But the term “glass ceiling” was first coined by the Department of

Labor's "Glass Ceiling Initiative" which began in 1989 (Robinson, 2004). Yet, it was Hymowitz and Schellhard (1986) who first wrote in the *Wall Street Journal* in 1986 that women could not break through the glass ceiling. The definition of the term glass ceiling made people aware of the experiences women were going through (Elacqua et al., 2009). Buzzanell (1995, p. 328) cited many researchers (Conrad, 1994; Morrison, White, Van Velsor, and the Center for Creative Leadership, 1987) in a comprehensive definition of the glass ceiling focusing on, "women's historic under representation in powerful organizational positions and the culmination point at which time women recognize the discriminatory practices, gender stereotypes, and individual biases that have hinder their advancement." Despite the positive movement upward made by women in leadership, the term glass ceiling showed that women were still failing at reaching the higher echelon leadership positions (Maume Jr., 1999). It is not an obstacle for just individual women, but of women as a group (Buzzanell, 1995).

Glass implies the image of a clear, see-through, smooth surface (Guyot, 2008) that acts as a barrier for women in upper leadership positions. It brings about stress (Veale and Gold, 1998) in which women can see the other side, but they cannot get to it. Glass in its truest form is breakable, can be cracked, and will shatter by those who wish to move past it (Guyot, 2008).

The definition of the glass ceiling brought to the forefront the issue of women not given the same opportunities as men (Clark, et al. 1999). Many of the concerns revolved around women not obtaining the same top positions in leadership (Elacqua et al., 2009). In the article *The World Needs Women Leaders*, it states:

There are a variety of theories used to explain this phenomenon such as the historical explanation that is traditionally leadership roles that have been held by men, this continues to be the expected norm. Other explanations stress the importance of social opportunities; they fail to develop social relationships that enhance opportunities for corporate or political advancement (2008, p. 27).

Besides the historical explanation, the glass ceiling is also rooted in “cultural and economic” factors of our society (Bain and Cummings, 2000, p. 493). Entrenched in the historical, cultural, and economic factors that lead to the glass ceiling are deeply rooted “normative behavioral patterns and models of successful work behavior” (Buzanell, 1995, p. 330) in which are of male affiliation.

Sprouting from the glass ceiling emerged: the glass cliff, the glass escalator, and the shattering of the glass. The “glass cliff” happens when a woman is put into a top leadership position and “the subsequent loss of the high-level position is likely” (Elacqua et al., 2009, p. 286). The “glass escalator” is a phenomenon that occurs when men are in more female-dominated careers and the men are pushed forward in their careers past the women—moving up the glass escalator (Snyder and Green, 2008). Although men are considered the minority in many female-centered positions (education being one of them), the minority status actually ends up being an advantage for men (Hultin, 2003). “These men thus face good changes for experiencing within-organization upward job mobility; that is, they are “elevated” by their minority status” (Hultin, 2003, p. 35). The glass escalator highlights the subtle process that is seen particularly in the superintendency positions in K-12 education.

The glass ceiling, on the other hand, was shattered by women breaking the glass and moving towards leadership positions not commonly held by women. Some of the

glass has been shattered by groundbreaking women, but there has not been a clean break. “Jagged edges in the glass framework can still cut the aspirations of a new generation. Females who aspire to educational leadership positions must acknowledge the existence of potential external barriers and develop strategies to overcome them” (Robinson, 2004, p. 145). Unfortunately, there is little “gender awareness” by women currently (Clark, et al., 1999, p. 70). Buzzanell (1995) emphasizes that the glass ceiling will continue to be a barrier unless we use it to balance power and organizations.

Snyder (1993, p. 98-100) defines three things that do not cause the glass ceiling: (1) women have lower self- and organization-referent attitudes, (2) women choose family over career, and (3) women don’t manifest the same leadership skills as men. Unfortunately women work within a society that does not believe in them. Society sees female leaders as being unable to “balance all responsibilities and that it is inappropriate for them to even try” (Robinson, 2004, 147). This preconceived notion of women and leadership gives the perception that women have low self-esteem and they themselves feel as if they cannot perform up to par to men. Snyder (1993) has actually found no reliable, empirical evident that shows that a women’s self- and organization-referent attitudes are lower than men’s. For women, “the single greatest barrier [is] the systematic devaluation of women in our society” (Clark, et al., 1999, p. 68).

Women also, in general terms, do not choose family over work and it should not be considered a barrier that causes the glass ceiling. Although the assumption of other top managers is that when women have children, they lose interest in moving up the career ladder, Snyder (1993) found that when women do leave an organization, “family

responsibilities are the primary reason for only a small minority of those who leave” (p. 100).

The last characteristic that does not cause the glass ceiling is women’s leadership traits. Women lead organizations using different traits than men and can be successful in doing so. This is supported by sound empirical evidence (Dana & Bourisaw 2006, Eagly & Carli, 2007, Grogan, 1996), but “its implications for organizational performance are not at all what they are typically believed to be” (Snyder, 1993, p. 100). The evolution of organizations and the future workforce will shape the type of leaders they need and it could well be characteristics that women bring to leadership (Snyder, 1993). The World Needs Women Leaders (2008), points out that women leaders need to imagine themselves in leadership roles and what characteristics they, as women, should exhibit.

Snyder (1993, p. 101-103) also identified three items that will not break the glass ceiling: (1) affirmative action, (2) gender training, and (3) seeding. Affirmative action places a certain number or percentage of minorities, in this case, women, in certain top leadership roles. Some affirmative action programs have worked and increased the amount of women in upper management, but this is marginal at best. Snyder (1993) finds that, “affirmative action programs seem to have actually proved detrimental to women’s advancement rates at the upper management levels” (p. 102). The commitment to affirmative action has also been tepid because there is not appropriate implementation from the organizational level. Women hired through affirmative action also have pressure, “associated with high visibility and an implied requirement to act as a representative of their sex” (Kanter, 1977 cited by Snyder, 1993, p. 102).

Gender training in which men and women are trained in gender development has increased over the past decade. Gender training generally involves a few days of training at most and may not be well or fully implemented. Companies try to “plant the seeds” of information of gender and equity in the workplace by short and misguided trainings spread throughout the company. Another seeding tactic also involves hiring women in mass quantity in certain areas of the organization in the hopes to have a “trickle up” effect (Snyder, 1993, p. 103). The effort to push women up through the system has shown to have minimal results in the number of women in upper management, but it does provide a clogging effect in organizations.

What will help break the glass ceiling? Hogue and Lord (2007), as cited in *The World Needs Women Leaders* (2008), warn,

Single strand solutions are unlikely to be effective in solving what is a multi-faceted problem. Instead they recommend using complexity theory to analyze the problem at all levels. In this way, multiple issues inhibiting women’s leadership potential can be explored and addressed (p. 29).

There is not a clear-cut answer to this question, but there are certain directions in which men, women, and organizations can move towards in an effort to break through limitations. Snyder (1993) makes the case that organizations must realize that the reason for the glass ceiling and all it encompasses is not “entirely attributable to women” (p. 104). Both men and women need to look at the reasons and move forward in changing societal norms. Settings, policies, social interactions, and language of organizations need to supply to women what men already have (Buzzanell, 1995). It can only be through a “culture shift, fully supported by both members [men and women] and senior

management with the authority that the glass ceiling could be smashed” (Veale and Gold, 1998, p. 25). Buzzanell (1995) summed it up by saying:

That the glass ceiling as process and product will not change until feminist beliefs, values, and ways of knowing are valued equally with traditional approaches; that research on the glass ceiling must be explicit in political and value implications; and that social issues such as the glass ceiling require fundamental, rather than surface, change (p. 328).

Veale and Gold (1998) think that a change will occur when we look at the gender leadership stereotypes with “different discourses and different metaphors which are more liberating than the story of the glass ceiling” (p. 25).

The Labyrinth

Eagly and Carli (2007) have very recently coined the term “labyrinth” that takes the place of the glass ceiling. Women have taken tremendous strides in gaining access in leadership role and “the glass ceiling metaphor convey a rigid, impenetrable barrier, but barriers to women’s advancement are not more permeable” (p. 1). The labyrinth, on the other hand, offers a new image of women confronting different challenges as they travel upward, often on indirect paths, to leadership (Eagly and Carli, 2007). Eagly and Carli (2007) coined the term labyrinth because they felt that the barriers that are defined within the glass ceiling are no longer the solid, impenetrable glass that it once was. They give seven reasons in which the glass ceiling metaphor is now misleading:

1. It erroneously implies that women have equal access to entry-level positions.
2. It erroneously assumes that the presence of an absolute barrier at a specific high level in organizations.
3. It erroneously suggests that all barriers to women are difficult to detect and therefore unseen.

4. It erroneously assumes that there exists a single, homogeneous barrier and thereby ignores the complexity and variety of obstacles that women leaders can face.
5. It fails to recognize the diverse strategies that women devise to become leaders.
6. It precludes the possibility that women can overcome barriers and become leaders.
7. It fails to suggest that thoughtful problem solving can facilitate women's paths to leadership (p.7).

There is still a prejudice against women in upper leadership positions, but those obstacles create labyrinth type pathways in which women maneuver through. The barriers and obstacles are still there, but women create pathways to leadership positions. Eagly and Carli (2007) suggest two skills that will help women work through the labyrinth (p. 161): (1) women should demonstrate that they are both proactive and communal and (2) they should create social capital. Women can use their leadership skills that they have as leaders to be direct and decisive while still building relationships with others by listening and being supportive. One struggle that women continue to have as a blocker of leadership is the social capital. "Joining and participating in networks create social capital. Networks can provide emotional support, contacts with clients, leads about job prospects, inside information, advice on work-related problems, and information about a wide range of job-related issues" (Eagly and Carli, 2007, p. 173). In the past, there has been a lack of networks for women to be a part of; women need to formulate those networks to build upon their leadership skills.

Barriers and roadblocks still exist for women moving towards leadership positions, but in current times, this does not deter women from moving upward on a

labyrinth pathway towards leadership. Eagly and Carli (2007) state it best when they say, “The women who find their way are the path breakers of social change, and they usually have figured out how to negotiate the labyrinth more or less on their own. We have written this book to ease the task of such women. Their successes, in turn, will help chart paths for those women who come after them” (p. 199).

Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

This study explored the career paths of three female superintendents and their perceptions of their experiences as they navigated to the superintendency. A better understanding of this phenomenon may assist future female superintendents in becoming aware of key aspects of the journey to the superintendent position. The following research questions were examined:

1. What are the career pathways that participants took to the superintendency?
2. How do female superintendents conceptualize their career pathways and performance?
 - a. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do the female superintendents perceive as influential/critical to their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - b. What factors impeded their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - c. How do female superintendents perceive their preparation and performance?

Research Design

“We conduct qualitative research when we want to empower individuals to share their stories, hear their voices, and minimize the power relationships that often exist between researchers and the participants in a study” (Creswell, 2007, p. 40). Qualitative

research is about the social or human interactions that people have with each other and the world. “Qualitative researchers are intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 2). In the same point, Bloomberg et al. (2008), state that, “Qualitative research is suited to promoting a deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (p.8). This research study is looking at providing an in-depth view of female superintendents and their career pathways from their standpoint. In the end, it is to learn from these perspectives.

Within the qualitative research paradigm is phenomenology. Phenomenology “describes the meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon” (Creswell, 2007, pg 57). This study looked at three female superintendents and the “lived experiences” of their career pathways to the superintendency. The research took these experiences and reduced them to themes that may be applicable for other female superintendents. A phenomenological approach considers, “how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others” (Marshall, 2007, p. 19). This study involved talking with three female superintendents and identifying the emerging themes within and between the interviews and lived experiences of these women. The research questions examined fit well with both qualitative research and phenomenology because of the desire to understand lived experiences that the female superintendents had, the stories they told, and the importance of pulling out the woman’s perspective in today’s society.

This phenomenological study focused on three female superintendents. In seeking to understand the career pathways of these three superintendents and their perspectives on their experiences, the researcher used thirteen research questions to gather data through a series of in-depth interviews. Standpoint theory framed the phenomenon and guided the development of this study. Standpoint theory justifies the focus on the experiences of women through these categories: (a) a women's social position is different from a man's, (b) a woman's pathway is invisible to outsiders and by looking at the patterns and behaviors one can give the marginalized groups recognition and voice, (c) the viewpoints of women help acquire knowledge, and (d) the necessity to look at the individualities of some women as necessary and critical for all women (Crasnow, 2008). Standpoint theory related to the research study and in the female superintendency in the following ways:

- Female superintendents career pathways and the phenomenon they experience.
- Recognizing the pathways that female women superintendents knew they were taking and/or didn't know they were taking.
- Listening to the individual stories from female superintendents and using the stories as knowledge for future female superintendents.
- Recognizing the unique career pathways of the participants and acknowledging the importance of their stories for others to hear.

Standpoint approaches have been used during the last 30 years and have provided a promising theory in which to look at feminist research (Crasnow, 2008). Standpoint theory makes the argument that people are socially positions. In standpoint theory, it is proposed that a woman's social position is different for a man's (Landau, 2007). Researchers guide their feminist research through standpoint theory and the theory

provides a way to look at the struggles of women (Katz, 2010). Feminist standpoint theory spotlights women as outsiders in society. It allows researchers to see patterns and behaviors that women live in daily, which would normally be invisible to “natives,” namely White men, according to Allen (1998). As a critical theory, it investigates the connections between the production of knowledge and practices of power. Giving these groups recognition and voice can be an important source of critical insight (Harding, 2004). Feminist standpoint theorists claim that there are important things to learn from taking seriously the perspectives of all marginalized groups. Standpoint theory has two major presumptions: (1) the viewpoints of women and their knowledge are a privilege and (2) the differentiation amongst women is not acknowledged and treats the individualities of some women as necessary and critical for all women (Crasnow, 2008). “Views of the social world generated from the perspective of dominant interests are not false, but partial. The marginalized have contact with different aspects of social reality- aspects that are more revealing of the ways the status quo is unjust” (Hartsock cited in Anderson, 2007, para 20).

Women represent 75 to 80 percent of the teachers across the U.S. (Glass, 1992) and the percentage of female superintendents does not come close in matching that percentage. Teaching is considered a starting point on the traditional pathway to the position of superintendent. In spite of this, women in the superintendency are considered marginalized group in the K-12 Educational field (Katz, 2010). The journeys of women achieving superintendent positions face both internal and external barriers (Brunner, 1998a and 1998b, Shakeshaft, 1989; Wesson & Grady, 1994; Katz, 2004). The researcher

believed that talking with women that are in the superintendency would provide greater insight into how to support and promote women in the superintendency pathways.

Trustworthiness and credibility

Creswell (2007) states that we need to be, “sensitive to the potential of our research to disturb the site and potentially (and often unintentionally) exploit the vulnerable populations we study” (p. 44). Throughout the research, several qualitative methods have been used to ascertain trustworthiness of the study and limit threats to validity. The study’s purpose was to give voice to female superintendents and their career pathways, but because of the individual nature of career pathways, the external validity is low. Yet, based upon similarities of the qualities throughout the career pathways, the data can be adapted to other women and their career pathways to the superintendency.

The use of different educational experiences, age, and ethnicity amongst the superintendents allowed a triangulation of data to help build rationalization of themes. Only one researcher was used throughout all of the interviews, which provided consistency in the interviews, data analysis, and the interpretation of the data.

Transcribed interviews were member checked with the participants in a timely manner. It helped verify that the information being presented was what they had anticipated and provided a chance to make any changes they deemed necessary. In addition, the confidential environment created by the researcher added to the validity of the outcomes of the research. The researcher, at all times, reassured participants that their information would remain confidential and that their stories would be used to enhance the research around career pathways.

Participant Selection

For this study, the researcher identified three female superintendents to be representative of female public school superintendents in one Southwestern state. To provide a range of views for the phenomenology, the researcher sought individuals from a variety of school districts. First, department of education data regarding which school districts had female superintendents in the researcher's state was obtained. Of the 179 school districts in the state, 126 superintendents were males and 53 were females. Of the 53 females that were identified as female superintendents in the state, 14 were in a selected region, and surveyed to narrow down the selection of superintendents to three. The region was selected purely because of convenience. Demographic surveys (Appendix A) were sent out to all female superintendents in the selected region. The 14 potential research candidates were contacted by email and sent an informational email stating the purpose and process of the study. In the email, they were sent the demographic survey electronically (Appendix A). The informational email included information about interactions with human subjects and confidentiality agreements (Appendix B and C). The participants that chose to respond to the email with interest in participating were then asked to complete a short demographic survey (Appendix A). From the seven responses that were received, three superintendents were identified to participate in the research study based upon criteria to increase diversity. If they were selected to participate in the interview portion of the study they received the "Yes" Letter (Appendix E). If they were not selected to participate, they received a "No, thank you" Letter (Appendix F). After all the participants signed the informed consent, interviews were scheduled.

Demographic Data

The researcher gathered a list of female superintendents from a Metropolitan area of a Southwestern state, which totaled fourteen superintendents. The fourteen female superintendents were emailed a demographic survey. From the fourteen demographic surveys that were sent out, eight were returned. The researcher then looked at the eight surveys that were returned and chose three participants based upon length of educational experience, age, and ethnicity. Table 1 represents the information gathered from the demographic survey.

Table 1

Demographic Survey Results

Respondent	Age	Ethnicity	Level of Education	Number of Years in Teaching	Number of Years in Administration
Respondent 1	51-60	Caucasian	PhD or EdD	0-5 years	21-30 years
Respondent 2	51-60	Caucasian	PhD or EdD	11-20 years	11-20 years
Respondent 3	51-60	Caucasian	PhD or EdD	11-20 years	21-30 years
Respondent 4	51-60	Caucasian	Master's Degree Plus	6-10 years	11-20 years
Respondent 5	41-50	Caucasian	Master's Degree Plus	21-30 years	11-20 years
Respondent 6	31-40	Caucasian	PhD or EdD	0-5 years	11-20 years
Respondent 7	51-60	American Indian/ Alaskan Native	PhD or EdD	6-10 years	21-30 years

The age was important to disaggregate between the different superintendents and then was used as one of the categories to select a participant. Of the demographic surveys that were returned, all were within one category except for one. Ethnicity was the next category on the survey and it showed similar information in that all participants in the

survey were of one ethnicity while there was the one outlier that was then selected to participate in the interviews. All returned surveys showed the same level of education: PhD which is deemed a necessary qualification in most superintendency positions. The number of years in teaching varied a bit, but it was conclusive that the participants in the survey taught for a relatively short amount of time and then moved into administration for the vast majority of their careers. The number of years in administration also varied, but one participant was selected to participate in interviews based upon her immense experience in the administrative level.

There were differences in the demographic survey among the participants in age, ethnicity, time in the superintendency, time taken along the career pathway to the superintendency, and general educational experience. In order to achieve a greater range of views, selection of the three superintendents was based in part on differences found in the demographic survey responses. One superintendent chosen had a different age category than the other respondents, the second had a different ethnicity than the other respondents, and the third had a greater amount of experience compared with the other respondents. All three superintendents interviewed were in suburban districts.

Researcher Bias

Although the researcher does not have experience as a superintendent, she has experience in some of the pathways that are similar to the superintendents interviewed. The experiences of the researcher forced the researcher to take precautions in the interpretation of the data in order not to make assumptions because of being “too close”

to the data and the experiences. Researcher bias was controlled by careful use of the interview process.

Procedures

Individual Interview Process

Individual interviews were scheduled with each of the participants. Each participant was interviewed three times for 60 minutes each time, held a week apart. The interviews took place at each participant's office to be a more comfortable setting for the interviewee. The interviews were scheduled at convenient times for the interviewees and were rescheduled if necessary by the participant. Interviews were scheduled during February 2011 and early March 2011 to respect the participants' time. Pseudonyms are used for each participant and their school district. Interviews were guided by the researcher's interview questions (Appendix D).

During the first interview, all participants were asked to sign the voluntary consent form (Appendix C) and agree to the use of a voice recorder for all interviews. During all of the interviews the setting, time, date, and any other relevant information was recorded to distinguish any additional influences to the data collection. All audio recordings were transcribed immediately following the interviews.

The first interview focused on participants' past experiences in their career pathways. It was important to expose the superintendents to the term of pathway and also have them reflect upon their past. The superintendents' voices to their past set the stage for the second two interviews. The second interview, completed a week later, focused on the participant's current experience with the superintendency. The superintendents had

the experience of talking about their pathways during the first interview and related the pathways to their current experience. The third interview asked participants to look at their overall experience and how their career pathways influenced their superintendency positions. The third interview gave a culmination to the conversations they had with the researcher and again allowed them to define themselves and their pathways through their voice.

Since each participant participated in three interviews, the transcriptions were brought to the following interview for a member check. The participants completed a member check by reading the previous interview and checking for accuracy. Once the recordings were transcribed and member-checked, the data was stored in a secure manner. All transcriptions were also kept on a single computer in which on the researcher had password access.

Data Analysis

The use of phenomenological interviewing is grounded in the study of understanding the experience of others and how we understand those experiences to develop a worldview (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Using this method of data collection is important when bridging the theoretical framework of standpoint theory and the narration of the shared experiences of female superintendents.

Telling stories is an essential part of human nature and people are able to make meaning from processing stories (Seidman, 2006). “The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to test hypotheses, and not to “evaluate” as the terms is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in

understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience” (Seidman, 2006, p. 9). In this research study, it was important to process the stories that the participants told and to make meaning of their stories.

After concluding the interview sessions, the researcher analyzed the data for common themes using descriptive coding. The first round of data was coded for themes to understand the phenomenon within the data. It also identified key sections that seemed to capture the “heart” of the phenomenology and the participants’ voices. The first round of data pinpointed individual themes of the individual superintendents. The second round of data coding took the themes from each superintendent and looked at them together. The themes from the second round of coding gave a broader picture of female superintendents. Themes emerged from all three of them and guided the findings of the research.

The transcriptions were coded and analyzed by listening to the recordings of the interviews and also reading through the transcribed versions of the interviews. The researcher first coded and analyzed Superintendent A, then moved on to Superintendent B, and finally listened and read Superintendent C’s recordings and transcriptions. The formal process of data analysis began by coding sentences or words during the first cycle of coding (Saldana, 2009). During this first cycle of coding, the research analyzed for themes amongst the data. By identifying themes in the data, coding functioned, “as a way to categorize a set of data into an implicit topic that organizes a group of repeating ideas” (Saldana, 2009, p. 139). Developing overarching themes provides a deeper understanding of the experiences of the three female superintendents.

A second cycle of the data was completed in which were, “advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through first cycle methods” (Saldana, 2009, p. 149). The researcher looked to fit categories within one another to develop synthesis of the information. It narrowed the many codes that were outlines in the first cycle down to fewer, more succinct codes. The second cycle involved theoretical coding. “In Theoretical Coding, all categories and subcategories now become systematically linked with the central/core category, the one that appears to have the greatest explanatory relevance for the phenomenon” (Saldana, 2009, p. 163). From the second cycle, a synthesis of the interview data was developed that was used as the findings of the research.

Limitations/Ethical Considerations

This phenomenological research study was a study of three female superintendents and looked at their career pathways to the superintendency. It told the story of their experiences and gave voice to female superintendents. This study was restricted to three participants and the three interviews done with each at their place of work. Insights and themes presented in Chapter Four cannot be generalized to all female superintendents or career pathways. They were self-illustrations of the perceptions and interpretations provided by the participants in the study. The researcher generated the codes for the themes based upon her own perceptions of the data. Finally, the interviews were bounded by the research questions. The conclusions drawn can be open to other conclusions and examination.

Summary

The qualitative, phenomenological approach used for this study allowed for a greater understanding of female superintendents and their experiences in their career pathways. The individual interviews provided a significant amount of data. Themes and standpoints identified from the analysis of the data are presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

Interviews with female superintendents working in the school system provided insights to the career pathways that have been taken by women, shed light on the struggles and successes of each, and gained perspectives on advice and next steps for future female superintendents. The purpose of this study was to highlight the career pathways of female superintendents and from there, to build awareness to the educational audience of the importance of female superintendents. A qualitative, phenomenological focus was used to extrapolate the data and stories from the three superintendents. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What are the career pathways that participants took to the superintendency?
2. How do female superintendents conceptualize their career pathways and performance?
 - a. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do the female superintendents perceive as influential/critical to their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - b. What factors impeded their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - c. How do female superintendents perceive their preparation and performance?

The following chapter represents the findings based upon the analysis of interview data and reveals themes and experiences from the participants' stories. The findings are organized by the stories, themes and advice of the individual participants.

Superintendent A

Past. Superintendent A lived and went to school and graduated from the district that employed her. From the start of college, she had planned to be an educator, but had no plans for administration. She graduated during a teacher surplus in the 1970's and there were no jobs. She called upon her network of relationships to get a foot in the door. With a connection made with her homeroom teacher from high school, he went down to Human Resources and pulled her file and got her an interview. Superintendent A received an interview at an elementary school and was hired as a 1st grade teacher. During this first position, she was at a small elementary school called a cottage school. There were only eight teachers at that site: two kindergartens, two first grades, two second grades, and two third grades. The teachers at the cottage school took Superintendent A under their wing and taught her how to be a teacher. As Superintendent A stated of her teammate at this first school, "...they just really took me under their wing and nurtured me and taught me how to teach and to this day I owe so much to my teammate because she made me a good teacher." At the end of her first year of teaching, Superintendent A transferred to a new school in the northern end of the district. There was not a formal interview; the principal came over to visit Superintendent A in her classroom and hired her. This principal was the first person who saw the potential in Superintendent A. "That turned out to be a good turn in my life because I came to work for him and he was the

first person who sort of looked at me after a few years of working for him and said, “You know, you ought to be more involved in things, you’re smart.” During her time at this school, Superintendent A was able to grow with the school and build upon experiences and opportunities with growth, curriculum, and people. After awhile, the principal left and a new principal came in to lead the building. This principal was very different and Superintendent A felt that he did not see her as a strong educator as the first principal had. Superintendent A, “...kind of got this thing that I can run this school better than he is running this school Sort of like I can do better than this, I just know I could.”

As a result, she applied for a leave of absence and went back to school to get her administrative license. While Superintendent A was in school to get her administrative license, she still didn’t picture herself as a principal. It wasn’t the factor that was driving her; she still liked teaching. However, a couple things happened to Superintendent A while she was in school: 1) one of her professors said she had a gift for research and statistics and asked her to change her major and 2) while completing her administrative license; she started and finished her PhD. After she finished school and her leave of absence was over, Superintendent A went back to the classroom and started teaching again. Shortly after she came back to teaching, one of the resource teachers left and people around her encouraged Superintendent A to apply. She was hired and then the superintendent said that she couldn’t have the job. She reflected on this event,

The reason I was unhired was he [superintendent] hadn’t been involved in the beginning and he got involved and he said that I didn’t have a degree in English, so I couldn’t have the job. I was really upset and they sent down the Executive Director of Curriculum and the Executive Director of Elementary Education and they came and met with me and tried to make me feel better and I was just furious. I was ready to leave the district. But, you know, I was teaching third

grade and the time and I was like, “OK, fine.” So, I’m giving a spelling test and I’m doing the test and my friend from the staff walks in and says you have a phone call from Cate Hatcher and I said ok and figured it was somebody’s mother. She said, “Do you know who Cate Hatcher is?” and I said, “No, I have no idea.” She said, “Well, she’s the Superintendent’s Executive Assistant and she wants you to call her.” So, I said, “OK, I’m giving a test, I will do it when I am done.” My friend said, “Let me give the spelling test. Go call her.”

From that phone call, Superintendent A met with the current superintendent of the district and it gave a new direction to Superintendent A’s path. During the meeting with the superintendent, Superintendent A was given the job that she had been hired and then released from.

After that, Superintendent A did central office work including literacy in-services. However, she didn’t feel useful in her position. She applied for a series of assistant principal and early childhood coordinator positions. There were a series of these positions that she didn’t get. When an assistant principal job came open, in which she knew the principal she applied and obtained that position. Subsequently, Superintendent A was placed as an interim Principal for a couple of months. She loved the school she was placed at and wanted to stay, but the area Superintendent called up and placed her as principal in another school.

So, I became a principal and I was a principal of three different schools: two elementary schools, opened one of them so I can appreciate how fun it is to open a school. I was given an older school, then opened a new school, then moved to a middle school, so over nine years as a principal.

Through connections that Superintendent A had made throughout her principalships, she had a special assignment on pay for performance. Then, she became a community superintendent. She supervised three areas of the district. There was also a shift in leadership during this time, which allowed for Superintendent A to assume leadership

positions with more authority and responsibilities. During this time, Superintendent A moved into an assistant superintendent of instruction. It was her dream job. It was something she had wanted her whole life and she held this job for two years. The deputy of the district was going to retire and he stated to Superintendent A, "If you want the job, you need to say you want the job or I am going to advocate for other people." Superintendent A decided to apply for the job and got it. The deputy superintendent was a job that Superintendent A did very effectively. She was able to support the current superintendent, but Superintendent A strongly felt that she knew the system and could support the system and culture of the school district. Subsequently, the current superintendent announced she was leaving in May. The School Board did not want to complete a superintendent search late in the school year and asked Superintendent A if she would take the job. Superintendent A's reaction was,

There was one job I never wanted to be. Ever. Once I hit central office, I saw what the superintendents don't get to do. They don't get to do any of the fun stuff. Mostly what you do is work with five elected officials and takes care of the Board and it just didn't look like all that much fun to me.

Superintendent A responded to the board that she would take the superintendency, but only for a year and not on an interim basis. She wanted a one year contract and after that year, if it wasn't working, she would walk away. She took the position and is still in that same position currently nine years later. Superintendent A reinforced that she never strived to get to the superintendency.

I think what happened to me is that each time I made a change; I saw that decision-making made more of a difference. You had more influence. You had more ability to bring people together. You had more ability to set the focus. You had more ability to set the direction. So, I think with each level, I just wanted more.

Superintendent A also credited the relationships and connections she made with people along the way to help her get to where she is currently at. Throughout her twists and turns in education, she had the support of others and also made connections with people that helped her moved forward in her career. Some people she intentionally sought to build relationships with, but other connections and relationships just happened. Superintendent A had the support of fellow female principals during her principalships. Yet, the most positive and helpful connections for Superintendent A were with male colleagues. “There were women that tried to squash me. There were a couple of women who truly wanted to kill me. They did not want the challenge as I began to come up through jobs.”

Present. “I really can honestly say it has been absolutely the highlight of my career and a big part of my life. I am very proud of the work we have done.”

Superintendent A reiterated the joy that she has had throughout her time as superintendent. Superintendent A had constant challenges, interactions with people, and problem solving. “The experiences range from positive, exciting, wonderful things...to some pretty devastating things.” She thought back to a school shooting that happened about a year ago and how horrific that experience was, but how much goodness came from that event, from staff, students, and community. And in the end, she stated that it comes down to kids: the safety of kids, the learning of kids, and the happiness of kids.

Superintendent A touched on the fact that to be a superintendent one has to love what she does. She indicated that a superintendent will never get paid enough to the job a superintendent is asked to do. It is about enjoying all the challenges and joy that comes every day and every day is something new. “You just have both ends of that spectrum

and again, no two days are alike and every time you think you have all the skills you need, you just say, “Oh, please.” There is always something new to learn or do around the corner. She stated that she was a better person for every experience and pathway she went through.

Superintendent A felt that her career pathway has come full circle. The relationships she built and the different jobs that she has held have allowed her to call herself a “successful superintendent.” She expressed empathy for teachers and the job they do. Superintendent A remembers what it is like to be a teacher; she remembers that, “emotional tug on your soul that you just want to do the best for all kids.” She was able to recognize how intellectually, emotionally, and physically draining it is to be a teacher. Superintendent A was also able to draw back on her experience as a principal. She related to the strain and toil that principals go through daily. She took that learning and used it daily as superintendent.

I think that has given me the ability to have empathy for the work that other people are doing in the system and I think it has been a really important quality that I have brought to this job over nine years.

Along with the empathy that she has with people of her district, Superintendent A used her “forward thinking to push the district forward.”

Superintendent A remembered what it was like to be a student, teacher, and principal in her district, but that doesn’t mean she stays stagnant with where the district is going. She had high expectations for the district and knew that to move forward it is about acknowledging and recognizing the past, but also embracing change and forward thinking. She showed appreciation to her career pathway and the environment that she

worked in that helped her become an innovator. Throughout the change that she promoted, Superintendent A also goes back to the relationships that she has built that have helped her along her career pathway.

“I think that one of the things superintendents have to do that I’m not sure anybody else in the organization has to do to the extent is that you have to build strong community relationships.” Throughout her career pathway, Superintendent A felt she built intentional, positive relationships with those around her from the Board of Education, to staunch community supporters, to teachers and parents. She said she was able to relate to so many different groups of people. Superintendent A has been able to come through the organization and have so many different interactions in different parts of the school district, all of which has helped her along her career pathway. With all the strengths that Superintendent A talked about, she also touched upon some weaknesses in her superintendency.

Superintendent A has a good awareness of her own strengths, but she also was cognizant of her weaknesses. One of her huge weaknesses was impatience. “I get very impatient and there are days that I just go, “Why do I bother with other people? I can do this better all by myself if I just go do it.”, but you can’t do that as a superintendent because you don’t have time and if you think you are going to do it yourself, you are going to crash and burn and the forget what you are doing.” She knew that it was important to learn and change and people learn and change at different speeds and sometimes that speed is not as fast as she would like. Another weakness of Superintendent A was that she gets bored. She was really good at starting initiatives and

creating change, but once the implementation is handed off to her team, she gets bored with the process. To offset her weaknesses, Superintendent A was able to get the right people in the room to call her out on her behaviors and move the change forward.

Emotionality was also a weakness that Superintendent A encompasses. “You want people to like you and a lot of people aren’t going to like you and it can be really hard because you take it personally.” She used the example of snow days that she had recently called for the district. It took her and her team three hours to make that decision. She received emails that stated they didn’t agree with the decision. She did not mind receiving emails in disagreement, but she finds it hard that, “...people will write you emails that will attack you as a human being, that you should be fired, and how can you be so stupid, you superintendents just cover each other.” Superintendent A went home some nights sad and thinking that people don’t really like her; she thought about what she could have done differently. Although she used to have more of these thoughts, Superintendent A now knows that people are not always going to like her and she can’t make her decisions based upon people liking her or not; she makes her decisions based on what is best for kids. Superintendent A was aware of the strengths and weaknesses that other female superintendents bring to the job.

Superintendent A felt that women bring such an instructional strength to the superintendency. She believed that women have far more instructional knowledge and, “...are able to convey that affectively so that other people understand and believe we have it and that comes a lot from our career paths.” She also stated that, “Women tend to have long time getting there. We spend more time in the classroom, and I didn’t have

this, but so many of my colleagues did, you have children and then your job and you have all this kind of conflicts.” The strengths that Superintendent A thought she brought to the superintendency were instruction, relationships, empathy, and caring. She also felt that those strengths stretch across to many women in the superintendency. “I think that women have an advantage in that we do have more interest in collaboration and we do have more interest in pulling people in. We are better listeners. Our experiences are generally deeper and help us with the instructional aspects of the job.”

Women also have some weaknesses as it relates to the superintendency. Superintendent A felt that especially of women that started their leadership paths in the 1970’s and 1980’s, they don’t have as much experiences in team sports as women do now. She felt this has been a detriment to the team philosophy of the educational realm. Male counterparts of her same generation have much experience in team sports and can bring that same mentality to administration. Another weakness that Superintendent A perceived was that “women don’t have as much knowledge about the ‘the good old boys’ club”. She watched the men in administration and it is like they have a club. She thought that a lot of women want to visit this club, but women don’t know the rules for the club. “And so you spend all this time like, “how do I get into that club?” and then suddenly when you get in you go, “Why did I want in to the club?” Superintendent A felt that this ‘good old boys’ club is generational and that with a new generation of female leaders coming up the ranks, it will change.

Synthesis. Thinking about her career pathway, Superintendent A believed that she did not have an awareness of the pathway as she moved through it. She never saw herself

as a superintendent until the role fell into her lap. Superintendent A stated that she wouldn't have changed her pathway, even in retrospect, because, "if I had come to this job earlier, I may not have had the wisdom, fortitude, and self-confidence to do it." She did wish, though, she would have learned earlier that the superintendency is what she would end up doing, but if she had moved any quicker or differently through her pathway, Superintendent A is not sure she would be able to do the job. She felt very strongly that both women and men should go through the educational pathway to the superintendency, not come from the military or business arenas. Superintendent A believed that if she had been more aware of her pathways, she may have been more driven and have moved faster through the pathway, but she felt she always found her own way and an awareness of her pathway may have pushed her to resist the pathway. She thought,

that one of the problems for women is that they haven't had that clear pathway and so you debate is it better that someone lay out a pathway and your follow it or is it better to do the career pathway like the women of my generation where we were here and then there, so you bring the varied experiences to the job.

Superintendent A believed that she created her own pathway and moved through the pathway successfully, yet she felt there were challenges and hindrances to other women moving through the pathway.

She believed that family brings about a responsibility that challenges many women. She has observed women and the struggles that they have with their children pulling them away from their careers. Along with children in the family, Superintendent A also felt that husbands bring about a unique challenge. She has been fortunate to have a

retired husband who supports her 70+ work-weeks. On top of families, Superintendent A sees,

...other challenges are the balancing of femininity with assertiveness, being the decision maker, having men work for you...all of those things are challenges in the pathways and I think you have to be comfortable with it. Other women also bring challenges to female superintendents. I personally had women who were very supportive, but I told you early on, other women would have just as soon shoot out my kneecaps as support me.

She also felt that women need the time to process with people who are doing the job.

Women need the chance to talk about why they are doing what they are doing and have they thought about this or that. Superintendent A felt that women need the opportunity to talk and think together in order to process. They also need the chance to be, “affirmed in their work as they move along.” In the end, Superintendent A believed that regardless of the hindrances that a women experiences on the career pathway to the superintendency, “you have to love being a teacher, you have to love being a principal, you have to love the next level, and supervising instruction and schools and learn from the people you are working with or for.”

Themes. Superintendent A surfaced many different themes in the three interviews about superintendency and the career pathway. Three major themes emerged from the overall analysis of the interviews of Superintendent A. These themes included 1) relationships built with others to improve connections, 2) innovation in her own thinking and throughout the organization, and 3) the ability to inspire people to do what is best for students. These three components appeared to intertwine readily through all three interviews and grew as themes that had apparent influence in Superintendent A’s leadership and career pathway.

Throughout the career pathway of Superintendent A, she used connections to build relationships and to enhance her betterment in the organization. Whether it is her own troop of teachers supporting her and making her a better teacher to the intentional relationships she sought out to be her mentors, Superintendent A knows that she used the relationships and connections that she made with staff, students, parents, and community members to move forward. She understood that she cannot do the job alone and the relationships Superintendent A built guides her work every day.

At the end of the day, you have to look at your staff and say these people really know what they are doing. They are experts and we work together as a team. I guess really, at the end of the day, don't think you can do it alone, because you can't. You need really good people to support you.

Another theme that emerged from the analysis of the interviews was Superintendent A's definition of innovation in her leadership. When she talked about innovation, it was about doing the right work. "I always had a strong sense of self. A strong sense of being right, being able to do things." She used this strength to know what is right for the district and push the district forward with innovative ideas and changes. Superintendent A thought she has the ability to pull the right people in the room to challenge herself, but also to move forward with the change. Superintendent A knew that in order to serve students, she must be able to be a forward thinker and to be able to meet their every-changing needs.

"I think that in all of my jobs, that has been a theme that I have always had to deal with, partially because that is who I am and partially because that is the environment we work in. Partially because if you are really going to be good at your job, you really better be open to change and all of that."

The last theme that emerged was the ability to inspire and motivate. Hand in hand with her strong relationships, pulling the right people in the room, and motivating them to move forward, Superintendent A noted her ability to motivate others. Using music, images, and the right stories, Superintendent A inspired people to work for and with her in the common interest of students and doing what is right for students. She believed she has a creative outlet that sets expectations and moves people forward.

Superintendent B

Past. Superintendent B knew from as early as fourth grade that she was going to be a teacher. She would play school with the neighborhood kids and would always play the teacher. Ironically, as her story played out, it was always a multi-age group of students that she taught. While growing up, Superintendent B attended twelve different schools before graduation high school with three of the schools being high schools in three different states. At one of her final high schools, Superintendent B had a Spanish teacher that solidified her desire to become a teacher. Superintendent B wanted a life like the Spanish teacher: being a teacher, living with other women, being in a big city. Off to college, Superintendent B went and finished her degree in the typical four years and lived in a small town that is isolated. Because of the isolation and jobs already taken by experienced teachers, Superintendent B went to teach in a small parochial school. She had 12 students in her class and learned a lot from the sisters in the building. During her second year of teaching a position opened up due to a maternity leave and Superintendent B took that position and got her foot in the door. She taught in that small community for nine years. During that time, Superintendent B went back and received her Master's

Degree in Educational Administration. She did not necessarily want to go into administration, but felt that a degree in administration would present a more secure background for her and her family. While she was in school she was typically one of the few females in her classes. She would, “sit around the room and do an assessment of who was in the room with me and I was gassed, to be honest. I thought if these guys can do that job, I can certainly do that job.” After completing her degree, Superintendent B wanted to try her hand at running a program, so she ran the summer program for two years in her district and absolutely loved it. Superintendent B said that this experience, “started opening doors and drifting my eyes to different practices of my colleagues.” Superintendent B started questioning how her fellow teachers’ practices were and how she thought there were different and better ways of teaching. Then, she found herself starting to question her administrator and coupled with her training and success with summer school, Superintendent B felt she was ready for the principalship.

I wanted to extend my influence because I recognized quickly that I didn’t have too much influence with the teacher across the hall. I didn’t have the authority to make the changes needed, so I needed something more in the arsenal other than a professional conversation.

Superintendent B was hired in a larger school district as an assistant principal. She made a real connection with teachers in the building because she was so fresh out of the classroom. Superintendent B was able to support the teachers and have a good understanding of what they were going through each day in their classrooms. After four years in the assistant principal position, Superintendent B found herself questioning the principal’s practices. “Again, I needed to be in charge of my own destiny. I applied for a principalship. Even though I could talk with my principal, I didn’t have an influence

because I was not his peer. We weren't on the same level." Superintendent B was hired in the same school district as a principal and found herself have collegial conversations with principals and she could direct staff in exploring different methodologies. Superintendent B remained a principal for four years. At this point, Superintendent B really felt as if she had influence with her staff, but the influence wasn't there with her fellow principals. "I could talk and have good conversations, but I had no authority to have them change." Consequently, she applied for and received an assistant superintendent position in the district. She held on to this position for five years. During those five years, "I had the authority to help influence the principals that I was supervising to be more open to other methodologies and be more aware of advanced learners."

Again, after time in the assistant superintendent position, Superintendent B started questioning her superintendent and knew she didn't have influence to make the change that she felt was needed. Superintendent B applied for many positions in the same Southwest state she is currently in and at that time,

I quickly discovered, from my perspective at least, I felt that there was a glass ceiling in the state for female leadership at the superintendency level. Not only was there a glass ceiling, I felt it was bullet proof. So, I thought, "Well, I could stick around and take the crumbs." or I could leave.

As a result, Superintendent B sought superintendency positions outside of the state in the Midwest.

Superintendent B received a position as a superintendent in the Midwest of the country. In the state, they had elementary school districts and secondary school districts. Superintendent B was hired as a superintendent of an elementary school district. Superintendent B was hired as an educator with a fresh set of eyes and a collaborative

person. The state and the district had for years struggled to pass referendums to build new building, but Superintendent B knew that she had the “art of compromise and conversation and influence to move a decision forward.” Superintendent B was able to secure the referendum and gained the respect and advice from the state. She really felt it was about having one conversation at a time. During her time as the superintendent of this elementary district, Superintendent B pushed the district forward, but also made a lot of changes. “So, then, what happens when you rock too many people’s worlds, those people’s critics come out of the woodwork and they get onto the board of education because that’s where the superintendent is disrupting my children’s opportunity. That’s how they saw it.” She met with her Board of Education president and mentor one night for dinner. He stated to her, “You need to know when to hold ‘em and when to fold ‘em.” Superintendent B saw the writing on the wall. She knew it was her time to leave and move forward in her career.

Superintendent B had always thought that the Elementary School District was a bit different way to do it. She felt that she had influences on students in kindergarten through eighth grade, but then her influence stopped there. She applied for a K-12 school district superintendent position outside of a different metropolitan city in the Midwest and received it. Superintendent B stayed in that position for five years. Once more, Superintendent B was able to direct change in the district that would help increase equity amongst African American families throughout the school district. She was able to successful build a new elementary school in an African American community and moved the school district closer desegregation of education. After five years, Superintendent B

knew that she wanted to move back to the state in the Southwest. Her children and her sisters lived in the state and she had 19 years of pension built-up in Southwest.

Superintendent B ended up obtaining the superintendency position she currently holds. “I was hired because this district wanted to build new schools and I had the experience.” The school district had low academic performance, needed to close old schools and open new schools, and stop the “academic flight” of students leaving the district. Superintendent B was successful in passing a referendum to build a new high school, closing schools without too much community out lash, and implement a standards-based education. She was also instrumental in increasing both staff and administrator salary in the district. Superintendent B was able to do all this while maintaining collaboration with her administrative team and district staff. With over 83% staff support and a 9.6 (on a scale of 10) ranked by parents and their feeling of support, Superintendent B was able to move forward with re-haul of education and move towards a standards-based educational district.

Superintendent B had a strong definition of a standards-based education. Her district had monthly visitors to view and learn from their district. She believed, though, that most districts are not truly standards-based, they are standards-referenced. She struggled with not being able to have influence with the other districts. She stated, “my next stop is maybe the commissioner.” However, after five years in the district saw that there are, “wrinkles in the board leadership and with my leadership.”

Superintendent B felt that part of her success is that she has walked a mile in others’ shoes. “I have been the teacher, the assistant principal, the curriculum direct. I

have done the café duty.” She also had positive experiences with male mentors. They took her under their wing and supported her along her pathway to the superintendency. “I have had those males in my life that have been very helpful to me, but not so much for female.” Nevertheless, her successes and drive have all stemmed from influence. “It’s about throwing a pebble into the lake and seeing the ripple effect.” Her goal in any of the positions she has held was about allowing people the opportunity to “pause, reflect, and possibly modify actions or behavior.” That was how she is defined being influential. With all her successes, Superintendent B felt that there have been some hindrances in her career pathway.

Superintendent B was of the opinion that there was a gender issue along the career pathway, for her and for others. “I truly felt that a lot of people don’t want to have a female boss and I truly believe that most females are not female supporters.” She had experienced and encountered many females that put down other females trying to move through the career pathway. Because of these experiences, Superintendent B really tried to support females as much as possible. “I have really taken on females and helped them. From my secretary going to college or a tech aide back in another district. I just make sure that I am a role model for other females.” She doesn’t understand why women try to bring other women down, but she believes that the gender issue is a barrier and is alive and well in education.

Present. Superintendent B stated that she has had a “positive, validating, and invigorating” experience as a superintendent. She felt that she has made a difference in all the districts she has been a superintendent in. As a superintendent, she felt that she is

an innovator, but with that innovation comes some struggles with districts and communities. Superintendent B stated, “An innovator will always experience some rough waters because you are displacing other people’s comfort zone.” She experienced the rough waters at all three school districts she has been a superintendent. Regardless of the struggles she has gone through, Superintendent B felt that her experiences are relatively positive and a good experience.

Superintendent B believed that her career pathway got her to the position she is currently in. She has been an assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent, and superintendent. “My career pathway in the eyes of educators is really solid.” She is aware that her pathway is very typical of a lot of superintendents, both male and female. Superintendent B sensed that school boards are starting to look for an atypical pathway for superintendent positions, though. School boards are undergoing a change in which they are looking for politicians, business leaders, and military heads. She asserted that, “our politicians and leaders in our business community have convinced people that perhaps we should be looking at it through a different model” for superintendent positions. Along with her career pathway, Superintendent C acknowledged her many strengths that have helped her along the way.

A strength that Superintendent B pronounced is her strong will. Once she had lighted on a mission she will follow through on the mission “come hell or high water.” With that as a strength, Superintendent B also knew that she has improved and grown in slowing down and listening to others when she is on a mission. She knew how important it is to have people on board and able to move forward with her. Along with following

through, Superintendent B knew that people commended her for doing what she said she was going to do. Another strength that Superintendent B felt that she has is a being a good listener, a good read of people, and the ability to tap into people's strengths.

Superintendent B took the time to listen to other people and their opinions. The ability to read people and tap into their strengths is evident when she creates a team as she stated,

I like that diversity in thinking and working with people that know that they have a role to play and they take their job seriously. If they heard that this falls into that realm of the scope of their job, then they take that and run. I really like that.

Superintendent B knew that she also used humor in her role of superintendent. She said she is able to bring people down from a serious situation with her humor.

Superintendent B also asserted that her weakness in the superintendent position was the lack of tolerance for people that "have poor or bad attitudes or for people who for whatever reason want to stop the process or not be part of a process of moving forward." She was very aware of this weakness and tries to overcome it by listening and recognizing opinions of others, but still moving forward with her expectations.

Along with her own strengths, Superintendent B believed that women bring strengths, in general, to the superintendency. She thought that women are more intuitive and compassionate. On the flip side, Superintendent B felt that women want to make everyone feel good and "sometimes women have a difficult time putting their foot down and making decisions that are in the best interest of ultimately kids in the classroom and the organization." Balance also comes into play when looking at female superintendents. Superintendent B sensed the struggle the women in the superintendency go through as they are trying to balance personal life, family, and husbands. Superintendent B felt that

another area that is lacking is the fact that women are not women supporters. “I am embarrassed for my own gender because I do believe that women put other women down so that they are elevated in someone else’s perspective.” She believed that men support women leaders far more than women do. Also, Superintendent B also felt that Boards of Education are still in the mindset to hire male superintendents over female superintendents.

While staying in the present-time and connecting it to the Board of Education and the struggles that she has had with a Board of Education, Superintendent B shared a very personal story about herself and her Board of Education. She had a five member board that hired her and has a great working relationship with three of the five. One of the Board members had a history of not supporting and challenging leadership. She was a retired librarian with forty-two years of teaching experience. The particular board member was very supportive of Superintendent B when first hired. But, after five or six months, the Board member wanted Superintendent B to support a decision and the Superintendent didn’t reciprocate that opinion. From that point on, the relationship with that Board member and the Superintendent declined significantly. The particular individual had a strong relationship with the local newspaper and controls what is published and said in the newspaper. Superintendent B did some research on this Board member and found out that the Board member “has a history of bullying and a history of success in that with every administrator including superintendents of bowing down and caving in.” Superintendent B knew that she, herself, is a very strong person and that type of bullying did not scare her.

The Board member was able to purchase the votes for another Board member to successfully be elected to the Board. They did this by advertising slanderous ads in the newspapers, having glossy prints sent out, and colorful signs made and distributed. This presented a challenge, as the board is now 3-2 in favor of the Superintendent. The two members of the Board went as far as to ask for Superintendent B's resignation and buyouts. With a challenge looming in November, Superintendent B felt that she needed to really weigh her options for herself and for the district. Superintendent B knew that the good work of standards-based education has just begun in her district. She understood that if the district got a new superintendent, there will be a change of direction and all the momentum that she has started will stop. Yet, she also knew that if she chose to stay in her current position, her presence would cause tension and strife in the district that could cause just as much halting to the organization as anything else. With this situation presently on her mind, Superintendent B believed that changes needed to happen to Boards of Education nationwide.

Superintendent B considered Boards of Education and their present form is a very outdated way of managing school systems. "I think it's an archaic system of people that have single agendas. To be able to get on a board of education and to execute those agendas...it does not help reform. It does not benefit kids. They are personal agendas." She did not know what a better structure would look like, but she believed that there must be something better out there than what currently exists.

Synthesis. Even though Superintendent B went through some struggles with her Board of Education, she stated that she would not change her personal career pathway to

the superintendency. She deemed her career pathway as appropriate and fitting as she relates to teachers, students, and educational leaders. The one part that Superintendent B thought she might have changed is having more of a business background in the private industry of running organizations. She acknowledged that School Boards are looking for more of a business background and she thought that this type of experience may have helped her along her pathway, although she reflected that she was quite content with her pathway and knew that it has served her well.

Superintendent B would not have changed her pathway and knew that her pathway has helped her along the way to the superintendency. “I feel like my place in the world is in public education because I am that voice that doesn’t shy away from doing hard things.” She is not satisfied with the status quo and will continue to push her influence in order to make the educational system better for students. Superintendent B thought that women need to be competitive with men on their own pathway. Women tend to take longer in teaching positions than men; they tend to raise families, and try to balance it all. Her advice to women on the superintendent pathway was for them to not aspire to leadership positions as quickly as men. She thought that women should take their time because they will gain a wise sense of experiences and be a better leader. The superintendent position is very unique and tells other women:

The higher up the ladder you go, the more people can look up your skirt. So, make sure that every step you take, you are doing it right because there are a lot of critics out there and they are watching for us to fail.

Superintendent B knew that some characteristics between women and the superintendency just don't match with what Boards of Education have in mind. She believed that women will continue to struggle with this perception.

Themes. Superintendent B conveyed three distinctive themes throughout the three interviews about superintendency and the career pathway. Three major themes materialized from the overall breakdown of the interviews of Superintendent B. These themes included 1) the desire to have influence with others throughout her leadership, 2) credibility built from her career pathway and used to her benefit, and 3) innovation with progressive thinking and a push forward attitude. These three elements appeared to flow throughout all three interviews and grew as themes that had apparent impact in Superintendent B's career pathway to the superintendency.

Superintendent B talked a lot about influence in the sense of her being in roles of teacher or principal and not being able to have the influence to change her peers. She knew that when she got to a point of questioning others and not being able to change them, it was time to move forward in her career. Superintendent B had a strong awareness of what is right and wrong in education and she continually used her power and authority to see her vision followed through upon. For example, with her influence, she was able to pass referendums in different school districts that provided new schools for students. She used her influence and vision for what it takes for a good education and communicated that to community members in an effort to get it passed. Superintendent B knew that she is getting to a point in her career when she is looking at fellow superintendents and starting to question their practices. "So, my next stop is maybe the

commissioner. It's almost like where do I stop next?" Alongside influence, Superintendent B thought she also brings a strong attentiveness to credibility.

Superintendent B reiterated that she always uses her past experiences as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal to build relationships and credibility with others. She brought those experiences to the table and was able to use them to build relationships and move the organization forward. She thought her career pathway is validated because of the different skills Superintendent B has in the educational realm. The integrity Superintendent B was able to bring to her leadership has been validated by the connections she has made with others and the actions that she has been able to do. With the ability to built credibility with others, innovation was also intertwined in that.

Superintendent B believed that innovation has been an important part of her career. Superintendent B was also able to build new schools in all of the districts where she was a superintendent. In her opinion, building schools, allowed her to better meet student needs, community needs, and district needs and is a form of innovation. She had also changed her current school district from a school district with grade levels of the old system to a district that is a standards-based system that meets student needs at their level, regardless of their age. She stated that whether she was changing the system and using her skills to push forward, she was displacing people from their comfort zone, which caused some pushback from her community and Board of Education. Superintendent B said she wouldn't change her actions, though because she believed in herself and her knowledge of what was right for students.

Superintendent C

Past. Superintendent C grew up around education and was determined not to become an educator, so she went to college to become a doctor. She had some experiences, though, that directed her out of medicine. She realized that there was such a detachment that doctors formed from patients and she didn't agree with it. When she saw someone's head split open for the first time, she almost passed out, yet, Superintendent C still enjoyed the science courses, so continued taking them. During her time as a student, one of her professors had an emergency and couldn't keep up with all his teaching duties. He asked Superintendent C to help with the labs. It paid well, so she took on the challenge of teaching the labs for her professor and she loved every minute of it. "So, I sort of waived the white flag of surrender and told my parents that I was going to go into education, despite fighting it for years." As a result, Superintendent C became a high school science teacher. She taught for three years. During her student teaching stint, though, she also applied for a principal's cohort and was accepted. She started all of her principal's work while starting her first year of teaching. Superintendent C felt that the coursework that she was taking to become a principal really made her a better teacher. While teaching, the principal who hired Superintendent C left and the assistant principal became the principal. "When you have a change in leadership, you have a change in philosophy and it can be a challenge." As a result of the change in leadership, Superintendent C felt that there was much more of a top-down approach being implemented at the school and she didn't like it. She struggled through her third year of teaching and decided to apply for a principal position herself.

Superintendent C was hired for that principal position. It was in a very small school district. Because she had only taught for three years and the requirement for a principal position was to have taught for five years, the school district gave her a different title and she taught one period a day at the school. Superintendent C remained in that district for a year and was subsequently accepted into a doctoral program at nearby university, which was far away from the district she was currently in. In order to get closer to the university, Superintendent C applied for a 7-12 principal position in a poor, rural part of a Midwest state. She was there for a year. After a year, Superintendent C was accepted as the principal of a larger school. She was in this position for two years. Following those two years, Superintendent C felt that she wanted to be closer to her father and mother whom lived in a Southwest state. She interviewed at several high schools in that state, but all of the schools were concerned with her lack of “big school” experience. She “went to West Spring Town and was the associate principal, not the assistant principal.” It was a huge school in a Midwest state at 2,000 students of tenth through twelfth grade. Superintendent C was at this school for three years. She enjoyed it and learned the differences between big and small. “It was interesting because a lot of people thought that my small school experience was a deterrent, but it wasn’t. When I went to West Spring Town, a lot of people had only been in big schools and when you are in a big school; your experience is very compartmentalized. You know a lot about this one this, but when you are a principal in a small school, you are everything. You know how to build the master schedule. You can fix the boiler because there is no one else.” During her time at this school, Superintendent C had a great mentor in her superintendent

and did a lot of learning. But, Spring Town, an even bigger urban district had an opening for an Executive Director of high schools.

Even though she was eight months pregnant at the time, Superintendent C applied for the position and got it. She started on July 1st and had her baby on July 19th. She had another great superintendent that she enjoyed learning from, but shortly after a new, different superintendent came in and reorganized everything. For that reason, Superintendent C applied for an associate superintendent position and obtained that position. She had a K-12 region of Spring Town, which was a good experience for her because it allowed her to expand her knowledge of secondary education. She remained in that position for a few years and then with the superintendent started to go in a direction that Superintendent C didn't agree with.

So if you don't feel like you can stand in front of your principals and teachers and say this is the best idea I have very head, then it gets to be a question about maybe this is the right fit anymore.

Superintendent C started looking for superintendent positions at this point. There were many posted across the country, but Superintendent C was very selective about the ones she applied for. She was offered two positions: one in a small school district and other one was in a large school district in the Southwest part of the United States. The district was very large, has 56,000 students, and had some significant poverty. Both of her parents were retired in that Southwest state, so Superintendent C thought that this would be a good opportunity to be closer to her family. She took the position. With a small child and a newly acquired position, Superintendent C's husband stayed home with this child and made this new position possible.

During her time in the large school district, Superintendent C cut millions of dollars first from central administration. She then eliminated curriculum, professional development, and communications. She believed that she poised the district to be as bare bones as they could without affecting students. During her second year as superintendent, Superintendent C went to the American Association of School Administrator's conference and met up with a superintendent of a school district in the state where the research took place. After talking with him, he persuaded her to apply for the position he was leaving. Superintendent C still had a year left on her contract and the board was working on drafting a new contract for three more years. At that point, Superintendent C had a daughter that was going to go into kindergarten and she was 7-8 months pregnant again. The truth that Superintendent C saw was that the Southwest state that she was in was a retirement state and the money went in to the retirement areas accordingly. The state did not put a significant amount of money in to education whereas the district that she was looking at did. With her young family at the forefront of her mind, Superintendent C applied for the position in the other state. It seemed as if it was the worst time to leave her current district, but it was the best time to move to another district. When Superintendent C announced to her board that she was applying for another superintendent's position, it was as if she had dropped a bomb on the board. "The bottom line is the trust is damaged and forever more, the board looks at you and thought you don't want to be here. You don't like us anymore." Even though she had to risk the potential fall-out from the board, Superintendent C applied for the position. Her husband had to drive her 14 hours to the interview because she was 9 months pregnant. After the

interview, they drove back to the district where she was superintendent. She had a regular's doctor's appointment to check in on the baby. At that moment, the doctor said that they had to induce the pregnancy because of complications. As Superintendent C was getting prepped for surgery, the school district was announcing their next superintendent, which was her. As she was having her baby, the press was calling; she recalled it being a huge mess. She happily accepted the new position. Superintendent C was currently in her first year as superintendent in her current district.

All the while on her career pathway, Superintendent C was not aware of the path she was taking. She really loved teaching. However, she became, "really frustrated with a certain sort of leadership, so I thought to myself, wouldn't it be nice to go on and provide good leadership and really provide that atmosphere in a school?" She did not feel that her young age made a difference on her career pathway. It was about showing others how well she could do the job and follow through on that. "It was sort of stumbling along scenarios. I am always happy where I am blooming. But, when something catches my eye or I happen to learn about something I think I might really like or that might fit me. Then, I pursue it, but I don't have this sort of planned progression."

Along that pathway, Superintendent C really felt that she has not encountered any hindrances. She got a lot of questions about her age, but she felt that her age is only on paper and it doesn't affect the job that she does. She was able to connect with people and show them that age was not an issue. Superintendent C had also had many positive experiences with superintendents that have been good mentors. She felt that people really need to get to know you and "that is when opportunities are more available."

Superintendent C looked for a saturation of themes as she guides herself through her career pathway. “There has to be a sort of saturation of themes. Then, I act on it and I am very methodical that way. I don’t like to just jump on stuff.” Although Superintendent C stumbled along her pathway, she was also very purposeful and systematic in the pathway she took.

Present. Superintendent C spent two years in a large school district in a Southwest state as superintendent and she was currently in her first year as superintendent in her present district in a different Southwest state. She believed that her pathway was, “very helpful to achieving that role, I think that everything I learned as a teacher, principal, and parent came together to help me be the superintendent.”

Superintendent C considered her experience as a teacher and as a principal important. She has walked in their shoes. If she was with a group of teachers, she can teach; if she was with a group of principals, she can lead. Superintendent C also knew that she can’t do it all in a school district. She relied heavily upon the strengths of others in her district. She related that to her Chief Financial Officer. Superintendent C knows that she could not do a job like that. She was alright with that as she was able to support the Chief Financial Officer in strategy and the Chief Financial Officer could support Superintendent C with data and finance. Superintendent C was alright with this because, “the core mission of our organization is learning and, of course fiscal management is there, but it’s just not the same.” Superintendent C believed that her pathway has greatly helped her to the position she was in now and did not perceive any hindrances with that pathway.

From her first teaching position, Superintendent C, “felt like when I was the right person and they were the right organization that everything worked as it should and went well.” Her age and gender did not act as barriers throughout her educational experience. Even though she felt that she didn’t have any barriers, Superintendent C understands that she still had to earn credibility by working hard and earning trust. Superintendent C realized people did not always believe she should have the salary that she has because of her age, but in her opinion, “it’s a job and you either perform a job at a certain level and you earn the compensation for that job or you don’t. There is almost no other place where people are judged for that.” She related it to Facebook and how there are people making billions of dollars regardless of their age. It is based upon, “what they can do and not if they have their check boxes done.” With no identifiable barriers, Superintendent C defined several strengths that have facilitated a successful superintendency.

Superintendent C stated that she utilized her open mindedness and out-of-the-box thinking to, “employ the most innovative approaches I can possibly dream up.” She lived in a place in which she is not defined by the old paradigms. Along with innovation, Superintendent C was able to build strong, unified teams. She took the strong teams and set high expectations for herself and the teams. She did not settle for OK or good.

Good is not good enough, so I think that is a strength, but it also can be a challenge because education is a very relationship organization and people need to feel the warm fuzzy side of it and sometimes we have a hard time telling people the truth because we want to keep that warm fuzzy piece. We sacrifice sometimes customer service or a student’s education and I am not willing to do that. I am willing to do the hard thing. Part of encourage is courage.

Superintendent C also used humor as part of her leadership. Communication was also a strength of hers. She has received feedback from hundreds of staff members about her

skillful communication and how they appreciated it. The feedback she had gotten from her former board was, “You are an amazing communicator. We feel like we know what we need to know and you know what is going on and you share the information back with people and explain it in a way we understand.” Along with her strengths, Superintendent C established key weakness in her leadership.

Superintendent C defined her weakness as impatience, but more clearly defined as not lowering her expectations. Even with cuts in the central office, Superintendent C knew how important it was to make sure that the students of her district were still getting the same amount of services. When the quality of work would start to lower, she had to revamp programs and structures to continue to meet student needs. “I watched the quality of our work start to shake and you can’t do the same with half as much of a team or half of much of a resource support mechanism.” Superintendent C was not willing to lessen her expectations.

Throughout her own superintendency, Superintendent C believed that a woman’s strength as a superintendent was that women superintendents appear to be some of the most innovative. Female superintendents, “really push the envelope and want that next level of education for their students and they have amazing leadership qualities.” Superintendent C considered male superintendents as traditional. In conjunction with the strengths, Superintendent C observed weaknesses that women bring to the superintendency as well. She thought that female superintendents struggle with balance. “Women feel like they have to do everything for everyone and male superintendents seems to have more balance. Superintendent C theorized that structures at home might be

different for women than for men. Overall, Superintendent C believed that women bring compelling strengths to the superintendency.

Synthesis. Superintendent C would not have changed her pathway for the world. She did not sit down and chart her path, but knew that her “mosaic of experiences” allowed her to learn different things in different places. She said that all these experiences made her the person she is today. She struggled through many events along her pathway, but “they still taught me a lot of things and I think the only struggle is making sure you never forget.” Superintendent C stated that she wants to make sure did not forget what it is like being a teacher, a principal, or a parent. Those experiences are what led her to where she is at and she is better for it. She believed that remembering all those experiences allowed her to “bring everybody’s voice to the table.” During her interactions with others, “I always try to argue for various people.” She recalled back on her experiences as a teacher and a principal and acknowledges how she felt and brings those experiences to the table.

It is really important to have all of those perspectives at the table, not just the administrator perspective. So, I would definitely not change y pathway. I think it makes me who I am and it lends credibility to my decisions when I share my thinking.

Superintendent C knew that she was able to built trust and integrity with her constituents with her career pathway. She knew that she went down the right path.

The one thing that Superintendent C said that she wished she could have changed along her pathway was that she would have paid more attention to the superintendents that she worked for. She would have soaked up all experiences from them, the good and the bad. She saw superintendents struggling or having great success, but at that time, she

had no desire to become a superintendent herself, so did not pay attention to the perceptions that others had for the superintendents. That knowledge, Superintendent C believed, was an important piece of information that others should pay attention to. That knowledge would have helped her along her pathway, but she thought that it could also help other female superintendents along their pathway.

Superintendent C believed that a lot of women never perceive themselves as principals or superintendents. “It is our own barriers that are in the way more than anything else.” She likened the experience to when she was eight months pregnant and interviewing in Spring Town for a leadership position. She did not see it as a barrier, but understood how other women might. “If ever my womanhood was on display, there it was.” She was able to tell the committee who she was, what she wanted to do. She earned that position for who she was as a leader, not for barriers that she put upon herself.

Themes. Superintendent C had three different themes emerge from her interviews about superintendency and the career pathway. Three major ideas materialized from the overall breakdown of the interviews of Superintendent C. These themes included 1) connections and relationships with others, 2) always doing what is right and good for students, and 3) the important role her family has played throughout her career pathway to the superintendency. These three pieces appeared to connect without difficulty throughout the three interviews and grew as themes that had evident effect in Superintendent C’s leadership and career pathway.

From very early on when she heard doctors talk about the detachment from patients that they must have, Superintendent C knew that she was in the wrong career

field. She saw she had to do something that allowed her to make connections with others. Conversely, the minute that Superintendent C taught a lab, she said she loved every minute of it and she knew that she had to make those connections with other students. Along with the connections that she made with students, Superintendent C stated that she also connected with superintendents that supported her and her career pathway. Even knowing about the superintendency position that she currently was in came from a connection that she made with another superintendent at a conference. The other superintendent had told her about the job and encouraged her to apply. Along with her strong connections, Superintendent C also had high expectations for students, how they are learning, and how the organization functions for them.

Superintendent C had a sense of what is right for students and held high expectations for herself in getting them there. Even when the district she worked for in a Southwest state made drastic cuts, Superintendent C believed that she kept the cuts away from students and anything that could impact them. They went, “as bare bones as we could because our kids were going to suffer and as a result of that, everyone took on more and we were all just working all the time.” Superintendent C said she makes decisions based upon what is right for students. When she talked about students, she also focused in on her family because her oldest daughter is of school age.

From very early on in the interviews, Superintendent C talked about her family: her parents, her husband, and her children. Superintendent C felt that she didn’t use pregnancy and family as a barrier. She used it as a guiding tool in her career pathway. With both of her parents retired in a Southwest state she sought out a position in that state

so she could be closer to her family. When Superintendent C took the position in that state, her husband took some time off to raise their young daughter. This allowed her to get her first superintendency underway without too many distractions. When presented with a possible superintendent position in a different state, Superintendent C weighed her options based upon what was best for her oldest, kindergarten-age daughter. The state she was in did not fund education as well as the prospective state and Superintendent C knew that she had to give her daughter the best possible education. Even though it was difficult to move away from her parents, Superintendent C stated that she was doing what was right for her own family. Overall, Superintendent C felt that she has designed her pathway around her family, but she has not lowered her expectations of herself and what she is capable of doing.

Findings

From the themes that were extracted from each individual superintendent, the synthesis of all of the themes together revealed:

- The female superintendents actually had similar career pathways to historically common male superintendent pathways. The three superintendents typically went from teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, executive director, to superintendent.
- The female superintendents had male mentors that guided them through their pathway. The superintendents gained their connections and relationships through male mentors. Female colleagues generally were not seen as mentors, but were seen as detrimental because female colleagues and relationships tried to actually abash the female superintendents.
- None of the female superintendents saw themselves taking a pathway to the superintendency until they actually got there. The superintendents went into education to make a difference and to help change the future of education. They didn't intend to go into administration until it fell into their laps.

- Innovation was a key concept to all three superintendent's stories. They all believed they were being innovative by opening schools, pushing the envelope to how schools were organized, or introduced major changes to the educational system. They believed they were innovative by being themselves.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

Introduction

Research has shown that there is a lack of female superintendents nationwide. Grogan (1999, p. 527) states that, “except in the elementary principalship, there are still few women in the top spots.” This study brought a voice to understanding female superintendents and their career pathways. “Researchers, mostly women, have begun, relatively recently to study women administrators on their own terms” (Grogan, 1999, p. 523). Through a qualitative, phenomenological focus, this study sought to understand the pathways of three female superintendents and the barriers they encountered on those pathways. The purpose was to elicit the superintendent’s pathways, understand their experiences, and display their stories for a larger audience. The researcher desired a greater understanding of the career pathways and if the female superintendents followed a more typical superintendent pathway or one that varied greatly and how that impacted the success of the superintendents. The conclusions from this study may be helpful, in particular, to women who are aspiring to the superintendency or those looking at female leadership and the impact it has in organizations. Other researchers may gain information on the path and experiences that women navigate towards the superintendency. It also may give insight to what supports are needed to increase the number of female superintendents in the United States. The following research questions were used to guide the research study:

1. What are the career pathways that participants took to the superintendency?
2. How do female superintendents conceptualize their career pathways and performance?
 - a. What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do the female superintendents perceive as influential/critical to their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - b. What factors impeded their career pathways toward the superintendency?
 - c. How do female superintendents perceive their preparation and performance?

This chapter summarizes the main findings found in the interviews with the three female superintendents. The findings and discoveries will be shared, as well as inferences extracted from the researcher. The researcher will distinguish recommendations for future female superintendents. Further recommendations will be shared regarding additional research that may be beneficial to increase knowledge of this subject area.

Significance

What career pathways did participants take to the superintendency? All three superintendents did not plan to be superintendents when they first entered the educational field. Superintendent A and B knew they wanted to go in to teaching right away, whereas Superintendent C was skeptical, but eventually found her way into teaching. Superintendent A even said, “I loved teaching and I wasn’t tired of it.” A theme that emerged from the interviews was, while teaching, the three superintendents saw opportunities for leadership positions arise. They watched others in administrative roles and knew that they could do that as well. They saw potential and had confidence in their

own leadership abilities. Superintendent B got to a point where she wanted to be able to influence her colleagues and couldn't when she was equal to them. "Then it started opening doors and drifting my eyes to different practices of my colleagues. And then I started questioning my colleagues" (Superintendent B). Superintendent C really saw a lack of connection between what the administrators she was working for believed and what she felt was best for students. She, too, wanted to influence the educational system in ways that she felt right. Superintendent C stated,

His approach was much more top down and he thought he had all the answers and we were more being told what to do and that was really bothersome to me. I felt like I knew my students the best and I know the right things for them.

With their administrative career started, all three superintendents moved through their career pathway concisely and similar to a general male superintendent's pathway.

They all moved from teacher to assistant principal to principal to central administration to superintendent. Superintendent A had a slight fluctuation when she took a leave of absence and Superintendent C also had a slight alteration when she went from principal of a small school district to associate principal of a larger school district. None of the superintendents stayed in teaching for an extreme amount of time. Superintendent A stayed in teaching for the longest with 11-20 years of teaching experience, but she also had the most administrative experience with 21-30 years. Superintendent B stayed in teaching for 6-10 years and has been in administration for 21-30 years. Superintendent C was in teaching for 0-5 years and has been in administration for 11-20 years. While Superintendents A and B had the most experience in teaching, they all had significant amounts of time in administration.

Research has shown that a lot of women take career pathways that resemble a labyrinth or a zigzag pathway through education to the superintendency. Carli and Eagly (2007) wrote, “The labyrinth contains numerous barriers, some subtle and others quite obvious” (p. 6). This study showed that these three particular women did not. They moved up the ladder in a clear-cut manner. They kept moving up in positional power until they reached the superintendency. In the researcher’s opinion, the three superintendents were quite successful and it would seem as if the direct route of the pathway had served them well. All three superintendents had moved through their pathways in a straight pathway. They also took the time to reflect on their career pathways and what theoretical impacts it had on them.

How do female superintendents conceptualize their career pathways and performance? The three female superintendents saw their career pathways as helping them along their way to a successful superintendency. They generally did not feel any barriers on the pathway and wouldn’t change their pathway if they had the chance. Regardless of the time spent at each position, they felt as if they learned something that helped them along their way. Superintendent A even stated, “So, over nine years as a principal, I was in three different schools. Which, I think was probably moving a little too fast from school to school. I don’t think it was a good thing, but I learned a lot.” Superintendent B felt as if her career pathway was validated along the way. She conceptualized her career pathway as influence. Each step that she took, she was able to have the influence with staff and students in an effort to make a difference. She was able to build new schools and set into place new educational systems. The validation came for

her whenever she saw her vision being played out daily in the schools and classrooms. The conceptualization that Superintendent C used for her career pathway was a “saturation of themes.” She looked at pieces of information and experiences in her positions and when it got to a point where there was a saturation of information pushing her in a particular direction, she went that way. She was very methodical in this manner. She commented, “I don’t like to just jump on stuff because I think that is when you look back and go, “Wow, downside risk.” Along with their conceptualization of their career pathways, there were also key learnings that they gathered along the way.

What knowledge, skills, and attitudes do the female superintendents perceive as influential/critical to their career pathways toward the superintendency? All three superintendents had a similar attitude about education in that they ‘pushed the envelope’; they innovated within their schools and districts. They believed that a lot of male superintendents were in the old-school way of doing things and they were going to do it differently. Superintendents A went as far as to say of her female colleagues, “We made our own rules” and were successful in the ideas we implemented. Superintendent C stated, “The male superintendents I know, it’s not that they don’t do that [innovate], but they seem to be a bit more traditional as a group.” Whether it was new schools, new ideas, or new educational systems, the three superintendents believed that they had the ability to push forward and innovate according to standards that they set for themselves.

Balance was also a key aspect to the interviews of the three female superintendents. Superintendent B stated that it was important for women to balance their professional and personal lives. She stated that she was always seeking to weigh, “my

personal life with my life of service and where do you strike a balance?” Superintendent C felt that women in superintendent roles felt as if they have to, “do everything for everyone and the men superintendents seem to have more balance.” Along with balance, came what the researcher felt was the most important aspect of the three superintendents pathway.

All three superintendents loved their jobs. As stated previously, none of them would change their career pathways, but more importantly, they all enjoyed what they do. The female superintendents felt as if they make a difference on a district level. They were able to make strong, positive educational impacts in their organizations. A strong piece of advice that Superintendent A gave was, “my advice is be very sure you want to do the job and make sure you love it and if you don’t, get out of it because it’s very hard and you have to love it to do it.” Superintendent C solidified her love for her job by saying:

I love it and I don’t know what I would be doing if I was just sitting around. I love the fact that I am constantly opening doors for kids to have a bit more success or a whole different kind of success and opening doors for teachers to reinvent something. I love all that stuff. There are days where I am tired, but I know that I wouldn’t want it any other way.

There was an enjoyment that was observed of all three superintendents when talking about their jobs. A lot of people cannot say they make the difference that these three people do and enjoy their jobs in the same respect.

What factors impeded their career pathways toward the superintendency?

There were some hindrances that the three superintendents experienced in their career pathways toward the superintendency. Superintendent A felt that being born in the era she was and starting teaching in the 1970’s hindered her in some ways. She felt some of

the sexism from male teachers and administrators. “And I won’t say sexual harassment, but sexual comments. I mean they are totally inappropriate now. It was just the way things were done then (Superintendent A).” She does feel that going through those experiences made her stronger and a better administrator. Superintendent B also experienced gender as an issue in her career pathway. She really saw a lot of educators and Boards of Education not want a female boss. She stated, “The gender issue is always a barrier, it’s alive and well, from my perspective.” Superintendent C, on the other hand did not feel as if gender had necessarily been an issue in her career pathway, but she stated that she had to, “earn my credibility the hard way and I was more than willing to do so.”

The most significant and surprising hindrance identified by the participants was other women. Women were not supportive of these three female superintendents. All three had male mentors and colleagues that helped them along their way. “There were women that tried to squash me. There were a couple of women who truly wanted to kill me and did not want the challenge as I began to come up through jobs” (Superintendent A). Superintendent B also felt that this is a huge concern for women and leadership positions. She tried to break the cycle and support women leaders as much as possible. “What I want to do is role model for other females.” All three superintendents talked about having only male mentors. To help achieve more female mentors, Superintendent A believed the career pathway needed to be “populated with people who will process with women.” What’s unfortunate, though, according to Superintendent C was,

I think that a lot of the women that I have known in education just never perceive themselves as the principals or as the superintendent, so sometimes it’s our own

barriers that are in the way more than anything else. Some talented teachers I know could have been phenomenal principals or superintendents, but they never tried to do that.

Whether it is other people or other women, there were still barriers in play in the female superintendent's career pathway.

How do female superintendents perceive their preparation and performance? They relied on previous experiences to help them build connections with other people. Superintendent A knew that she needed all the experiences that she had in order to do her job well. She did not think she would have wanted to come into the position any earlier than she did, either. "If I had come to this job earlier, I may not have had the wisdom, fortitude, and self-confidence to do it" (Superintendent A).

Superintendent B also felt very comfortable in her career pathway and her preparation. "I feel like my place in the world is in public education because I am that voice that doesn't shy away from doing hard things" (Superintendent B). Superintendent C knew that she had experienced different places and people, but she was thankful for all those experiences because they make her who she is today and "looking back, would I change my pathway? Absolutely not." She knew that she was in the right place at the right time and doing the right work. All three superintendents felt prepared for their current positions.

This strong sense of preparation was interesting due to the fact that none of the female superintendents saw themselves taking a pathway to the superintendency until they actually got there. The superintendents went into education to make a difference and

to help change the future of education. They didn't intend to go into administration until it fell into their laps.

Recommendations for Future Female Superintendents

Finally, all three female superintendents provided some advice for women thinking about going into the superintendency. Superintendent A advised women to

...go back to having a variety of kinds of experiences, great faith in yourself, know your core values, and trust that you can team with people and work with people and make decisions. Learn about boards because I think most superintendents will tell you there are too things that will drive you out of the works: one is unions and one is boards. Know that not everyone is going to love you, but if you have a few people that love you, it is worth it.

Superintendent B's stated,

...always think of it as a chess game and you are above the board and you are watching the game being played. When somebody makes a move, you have to thoroughly evaluate what your next move is going to be. Don't personalize it. Make it a game.

Superintendent C shared,

...the piece of advice that I would give anyone, not just women, is its funny when you sit in the other chairs. There is sort of an aura around the position, like how do they do that, but I have learned sometimes you are most successful doing it your way and not trying to be somebody else. Not trying to think people want that person, but instead just really being yourself.

In the end, the advice of the superintendents was about believing in yourself, enjoying what you do, and moving the organization forward. The interviews, insights, and personal stories were meant to help female superintendents, both future and present. The voices that were heard throughout this research study brought about themes that gave great guidance into next steps in supporting female superintendents and their career pathways.

The lived experiences of three superintendents give voice to many, and it is the researcher's hope that those voices will continue to live in the hearts and minds of others.

Recommendations for Future Research

After looking at the major themes that emerged from this research, some recommendations for future research materialize. First, there must be further research in the career pathways of female superintendents. Do the pathways of a larger group of female superintendents mimic the three superintendents in this research?

Second, how do we support female superintendents? All three superintendents had male mentors, and the fact that they got the superintendency reveals that the male mentors were sufficient in guiding their mentees along the way. What would the impact be if there were women to support aspiring female leaders? How do we provide female mentors to women moving through the pathway? This leads into the final recommendation for research, we need to examine how we prepare female superintendents and provide mentorship. The male mentors that mentored the female superintendent were the most qualified people to mentor the participants, and their paths into the superintendency were random. Superintendent preparation could more systematically address the needs and supports for successful and competent female superintendents.

Also, it was not touched on during the research process, but another area of further research would be to look at Boards of Education, the support they have or do not have for female superintendents, and why they hire female superintendents. Do Boards of Education believe that hiring a female superintendent will promote more innovation

within the organization? Or is gender not a consideration as Boards of Education make their hiring decisions?

Conclusion

To conclude the work on female superintendents would be a mistake. The conclusion of this work is actually just beginning. We need to begin to support women and their career pathways, but more importantly, we must educate society about equity in superintendent positions, look at hiring practices of school boards, and encourage women to seek the superintendency.

The findings of the research bring about some questions and prompt the researcher to seek out more information. The research showed the three female superintendents had similar career pathways to historically common male superintendent pathways. The three superintendents typically went from teacher, assistant principal, principal, director, executive director, to superintendent. The superintendents are to be commended for achieving a straight pathway. Do all women experience this straight pathway to the superintendency? It is the right pathway for women or for the individual? What about the labyrinth theory that women move through their pathway in a very zigzag type experience? How can we mitigate barriers such as male-dominated leadership traits and expectations, lack of mentorship, and gender bias? Let us remove the barriers that cause the labyrinth and show that women can and do move up the leadership pathway in a more succinct pattern.

The female superintendents also had male mentors that guided them through their pathway. The superintendents gained their connections and relationships through male

mentors. Female colleagues generally were not seen as mentors, but were seen as detrimental because female colleagues and relationships tried to actually sabotage the female superintendents. The researcher found this surprising, but it is probably not surprising to the readers. It is surprising to the researcher because of her belief that women must seek out female mentors. In her experience as an educational leader, she had made it a point to seek out women to build relationships with. Men were readily available to the superintendents to mentor because they held the majority of leadership positions in the educational field, though.

Lastly, innovation was a key concept to all three superintendent's stories. All three superintendents believed that they were being innovated in their ideas, their organizations, and in their self. What is innovation? Are they innovative just because they are women in a male dominated position? Maybe. Were they hired because they were women and the school board had a perception that hiring a woman would be innovative?

Standpoint theory provided a framework to listen to the voices of the female superintendents and apply those voices to themes. The three voices are the voices of all women in the superintendency. The research gave women a voice; it put the spotlight on female superintendents; it gave them recognition. It recognized the female superintendents for all the hard work they had to go through to break through the barriers and the labyrinth. The three superintendents gave a voice to other women who are superintendents and they gave hope to the thousands of women who aspire to the superintendency. It gave voice to an underrepresented and marginalized group in society. Superintendents A, B, and C provided validation for those that do not have a voice yet.

It is time for more women to break through the barriers and to reach high levels of educational leadership: the superintendency. This is a beginning. It is a beginning of women breaking through the glass, wiping away the jagged edges, breaking through the labyrinth, and moving upwards and onwards to the superintendency and equity. Begin now.

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Appendix A

Career Pathways of K-12 Female Superintendents: What Pathways are They Taking?

Construct: What pathways have current female superintendents taken?

Introduction: In an effort to support women in educational administration, I believe that it is important to look at the career pathways that women take throughout their administrative career. The questions in the interview will look at the different career pathways that three female superintendents are taking.

Instruction: Please fill out the survey below on your career pathway that you have gone through thus far in your administrative career.

Demographics: Please answer the demographic questions below. Check the box that fits you best.

1. Age: 22-30 31-40 41-50
 51-60 61-70 70 +

2. Ethnicity: African American American Indian/Alaskan Native
 Asian American Caucasian
 Hispanic/Latina Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

3. Level of Education: Undergraduate Degree Master's Degree
 Master's Degree Plus PhD or EdD

4. Number of Years in Teaching
 0-5 years
 6-10
 11-20
 21-30
 31-40

41 +

5. Numbers of Years in Administration (Asst. Principal, Principal, Director, Executive Director, Assistant Superintendent, etc.):

0-5 years

6-10

11-20

21-30

31-40

41 +

Appendix B

PROJECT INFORMATION SHEET

CAREER PATHWAYS OF A SOUTHWEST STATE K-12 FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS: WHAT PATHWAYS ARE THEY TAKING?

You are invited to participate in a study that will look at the career pathways in which women in the superintendency take towards the superintendency. In addition, this study is being conducted to fulfill the requirements of a class entitled ADMN 5995: Dissertation Research. The study is conducted by Liann M. Hanson. Results will be used to complete a Doctor of Philosophy and to receive a grade in the course. Liann M. Hanson can be reached at 720-982-8543 or liann.hanson@du.edu. This project is supervised by the course instructor, Dr. Susan Korach, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303-871-2212 or skorach@du.edu.

Participation in this study should take about 60 minutes of your time in 3 different interview sessions. Participation will involve responding to 12 questions about the pathway you took towards your current superintendency position. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue your participation at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Your responses will be anonymous. That means that no one will be able to connect your identity with the information you give. Please do not write your name anywhere on the questionnaire. Your return of the questionnaire will signify your consent to participate in this project.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

You may keep this page for your records.

Appendix C

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

ATTACHMENT B

CAREER PATHWAYS OF K-12 FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS

You are invited to participate in a study that will look at the career pathways of female superintendents. The study is conducted by Liann M. Hanson. . Liann M. Hanson can be reached at 720-982-8543 or liann.hanson@du.edu. Results will be used to complete a Doctor of Philosophy degree. This project is supervised by the course instructor, Dr. Susan Korach, Morgridge College of Education, University of Denver, Denver, CO 80208, 303-871-2212 or skorach@du.edu.

Participation in this study should take about 180 minutes of your time for 3 sessions of one hour long interviews. Participation will involve responding to 12 questions about your journey to the superintendency. Participation in this project is strictly voluntary. The risks associated with this project are minimal. If, however, you experience discomfort you may discontinue the interview at any time. We respect your right to choose not to answer any questions that may make you feel uncomfortable. Refusal to participate or withdrawal from participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you are chosen to participate in this study, your responses will be identified by code number only and will be kept separate from information that could identify you. This is done to protect the confidentiality of your responses. A pseudonym will be used to protect your identity. Only the researcher will have access to your individual data and any reports generated as a result of this study will use only group averages and paraphrased wording. However, should any information contained in this study be the subject of a court order or lawful subpoena, the University of Denver might not be able to avoid compliance with the order or subpoena. Although no questions in this interview address it, we are required by law to tell you that if information is revealed concerning suicide, homicide, or child abuse and neglect, it is required by law that this be reported to the proper authorities.

The interviews will be recorded and the results transcribed. The participants will receive the interview transcripts and be asked to check for accuracy.

If you have any concerns or complaints about how you were treated during the interview, please contact Susan Sadler, Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Protection of

Human Subjects, at 303-871-3454, or Sylk Sotto-Santiago, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs at 303-871-4052 or write to either at the University of Denver, Office of Research and Sponsored Programs, 2199 S. University Blvd., Denver, CO 80208-2121.

Thank you for filling out the demographic survey and agreeing to participate in the interview portion of the research. Please sign the next page if you understand and agree to the above. If you do not understand any part of the above statement, please ask the researcher any questions you have.

You may keep this page for your records.

I have read and understood the foregoing descriptions of the study called CAREER PATHWAYS OF K-12 FEMALE SUPERINTENDENTS. I have asked for and received a satisfactory explanation of any language that I did not fully understand. I agree to participate in this study, and I understand that I may withdraw my consent at any time. I have retained a copy of this consent form.

Signature _____ Date _____

_____ I agree to have the interviews audio taped.

_____ I do not agree to have the interviews audio taped.

_____ I would like a summary of the results of this study to be mailed to me at the following postal or e-mail address:

Appendix D

Interview Questions

Interview 1—Past

1. What was your past experience in the educational field?
2. Were you aware of the career pathway you were taking?
3. What hindrances did you encounter on your career pathway? What positive experiences did you encounter on your career pathway?
4. When did you want to become a superintendent? Was there a particular point on your career pathway in which you felt this?

Interview 2—Present

1. Tell me about your experience as a superintendent.
2. Did your career pathway help you get to the superintendency? Did it hinder it?
3. What are your strengths in the superintendency? What are your weaknesses in the superintendency?
4. What do you see as a woman's strengths in the superintendency? What areas do women seem to lack in the superintendency?

Interview 3—Synthesis

1. Thinking about the role of superintendency that you are currently in; would you change any of your career pathways?
2. How would the awareness of a career pathway have helped or hindered you in your pursuit of the superintendency?
3. What career pathways would help support women in gaining superintendencies? What challenges do you see in particular career pathways for women?
4. What advice do you have for women moving towards the superintendency?

Appendix E

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to fill out the demographic survey and the willingness to participate in the research study. The data you have provided gave me information that helped me determine the limited number of participants that is needed for the research study. I selected three Superintendents that have diverse backgrounds, experience, and ethnicity. **Congratulations, you have been selected to participate in the interview portion of the research study!**

I will set up three interviews with you at the location of your choice. The three interviews will take about 60 minutes apiece for a total of 180 minutes. The first interview will focus on your past experiences with career pathways. The second interview will focus on your current experiences in the superintendency. The final interview will synthesize the first two interviews and look at your overall experience and how your career pathway influenced your current position. The interviews will be recorded. After each interview, the interview will be transcribed and brought to the next interview for you to check over for accuracy. After the final interview, the fully transcribed document will be sent to you for your review. At any time you wish to discontinue with the interview, you have the right to do so.

Thank you for allotting the time to answer my questions in spite of your busy schedule. As we have previously agreed upon, I guarantee that all personal details will not be disclosed in the final research report. If you have questions about my research work or wish to add other details, please do not hesitate to contact me at liann.hanson@du.edu or by cell phone at 720-982-8543.

Thank you for being a participant in this research study. I believe it will bring about great knowledge for current and future female superintendents!

Yours Sincerely,

Liann M. Hanson

University of Denver

Candidate for PhD

Appendix F

Dear Participant,

I would like to thank you for taking the time to fill out the demographic survey and the willingness to participate in the research study. The data you have provided gave me information that helped me determine the limited number of participants that is needed for the research study. I selected three Superintendents that have diverse backgrounds, experience, and ethnicity. Unfortunately, you were not selected to participate in the interview portion of the research study.

Thank you for allotting the time to answer my questions in spite of your busy schedule. As we have previously agreed upon, I guarantee that all personal details will not be disclosed in the final research report. If you have questions about my research work or wish to add other details, please do not hesitate to contact me at liann.hanson@du.edu or by cell phone at 720-982-8543.

Once again, thank you very much for your time and honesty. Hopefully, this will not be the last time we will be working together! Have a fantastic school year!

Yours Sincerely,

Liann M. Hanson
University of Denver
Candidate for PhD