

ABSTRACT

WOMEN OBTAINING THE SUPERINTENDENCY: AN EXAMINATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS THAT INFLUENCE A WOMAN'S CAREER TRAJECTORY

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The role of public school superintendent is one of the most gendered executive positions in the United States, with men twenty times more likely than women to advance from teacher to superintendent. Although the majority of teachers and central office administrators in schools are women, the majority of superintendents are men. Women have made gains, yet underrepresentation continues to exist.

As women break through the barriers, it is important to understand their experiences in administrative leadership as they navigate their careers. How do women in administration think and feel about working toward a male-dominated occupation? What barriers or opportunities have shaped their career choices?

The review of the literature begins with a historical journey, studying the number of women superintendents from 1910 to 2017. The research dives deeper into external and internal barriers commonly found in the workplace. The literature on external barriers centers on structural barriers, discrimination, pay gaps and stereotypes. Internal barrier research examines voice and power, fear of backlash, ability to negotiate, and fear of success.

A qualitative approach was used to study the experiences of six women working as public school administrators. The women all hold the proper superintendent certification, but they are not currently employed as a superintendent. Two interviews gathered the qualitative data, which was analyzed using feminist theory. Patriarchy, equality and discrimination made up the specific components of this theoretical framework.

There are several conclusions derived from this study. First, women continue to face gendered stereotypes within the work environment. Second, mentors play a key role in propelling women toward administration early on in their careers. Career navigation and the concept of time were vital in these women's ability to reach the superintendent position during the course of their careers. Finally, self-confidence impacted their thoughts and feelings about various aspects of administration, including the desire to be a superintendent.

This study provides insight to better prepare women administrators by providing an awareness of the barriers faced and suggestions on navigating these experiences. Rather than waiting for obstacles to occur, women can understand what might occur during the course of their careers in administration. Having prior knowledge allows women a better chance to navigate barriers rather than allowing those barriers to impact their careers and career choices. When these barriers are better understood, it may enable more women to mitigate the challenges of attaining a superintendent position.

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BY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	vi
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	vii
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
Problem Statement.....	3
Purpose.....	5
Barriers.....	5
Research Questions	6
Theoretical Framework	7
Research Approach	10
Delimitations.....	11
Limitations	11
Significance of Study.....	12
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	15
Historical Perspective	16
External Barriers	20
Internal Barriers	31
Theory	50
3. METHODOLOGY.....	55
Research Process/Design	56
Selection of Participants	58

Chapter	Page
Researcher Role	59
Generation of Data	59
Analysis of the Data	61
Validity	63
4. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS	65
Data Collection and Analysis	66
Participants	67
Description of Participants	67
Findings	71
Summary	84
5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	86
Interpretations	87
Findings	89
Limitations	105
Implications	105
Suggestions for Further Research	109
Concluding Remarks	110
REFERENCES	113
APPENDICES	121

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1. Description of Participants.....	68

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix	Page
A. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL	121
B. INFORMED CONSENT.....	124
C. INTERVIEW OVERVIEW	126
D. FORMAL EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS.....	128
E: RECRUITMENT EMAIL.....	130
F: DEBRIEFING SCRIPT.....	132
G. COUNSELING SUPPORTS AND RESOURCE LIST	134

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sheryl Sandberg is the chief executive officer of Facebook and has been described as an activist for women. In 2013, Sheryl Sandberg published a book, *Lean In*. In her book, she openly discusses changes in the workforce, with women on the rise in top positions. She notes an increase of more women in these positions; however, the gains have been slow and inconsistent (Sandberg, 2013; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). She notes that men still run the world, with only 17 of the 195 independent countries in the world led by women (Sandberg, 2013). Women are moving ahead of men in terms of graduation rates from college and attainment of advanced degrees, but even so, women in top corporate positions in America have made few gains over the past ten years. Twenty-one percent of the Fortune 500 companies are led by women and only 18% of elected officials are women (Sandberg, 2013). Furthermore, women make up 25% of executive and senior-level management positions but only 6% of CEO positions (Warner & Corley, 2017).

Sandberg (2013) attributes these gaps to a number of external factors created by society, and she also says, “Women are hindered by barriers that exist within us. We hold ourselves back in ways both big and small, by lacking self-confidence, by not raising our hands, and by pulling back when we should be leaning in” (p. 67). School districts in America are seemingly no different. Historically, women have been recruited into teaching positions and men into

leadership positions, making top spots in education predominantly male, similar to the business and political worlds (Tallerico & Blount, 2004; Warner & Corley, 2017). We see an overall increase of women in the public school superintendency over the past one hundred years; unfortunately, the growth has been slow and inconsistent over time. In the most recent 2017 survey, 29.6% of school superintendents in the United States were women (Finnan & McCord, 2018). The school superintendent position has been categorized as being the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States, with men four times more likely to serve in the most powerful position in education (Björk, 2000; Robinson et al., 2017).

The growth of the number of women in the superintendent position has been inconsistent and unpredictable over the past two centuries. With women on the rise in other executive positions in the United States, researchers still question why the superintendent position continues to be dominated by men, while women constitute 76% of all K-12 educators, 52% of public school principals and 78% of district-level assistant superintendents and coordinators (Finnan & McCord, 2017). The research in this study sought to identify barriers, both internal and external, acknowledged by women in current administrative positions who have completed coursework to become a school superintendent but do not currently hold that position. Once those barriers were identified, the study sought to gain a deeper understanding of how women navigate these barriers during their career and what, if any, impact those barriers have had on their careers and career choices.

Sandberg (2013) discusses internal barriers as a contributing factor in women's lack of advancement. These barriers are rarely discussed, researched, or understood. Growing up, I rarely heard anything about the ways I might hold myself back. When seeking advanced degrees

in educational leadership and school supervision, barriers were never discussed. In fact, most of my professors were men who held school superintendent positions and would not have had the experience or the knowledge to educate us on experiences and barriers of women leaders.

Sandberg argues that understanding and breaking down internal barriers are critical to gaining power. Ultimately, she claims this will help to increase the number of women in power, which is a step towards true equality (Sandberg, 2013).

Problem Statement

Under-representation of women among the ranks of public school superintendents continues despite women outnumbering men in teaching and administration, with 78% of women serving as central office administrators (Finnan & McCord, 2017). In fact, there are more women assistant superintendents and district-level coordinators than men (Robinson et al., 2017). Given these statistics of women in the field of education, we would expect the number of women superintendents to be greater. Grogan and Brunner's (2005) study of women administrators found that 40% articulated a desire to pursue the position of superintendent. Research identifies external barriers, such as discrimination, and societal barriers as those that have precluded women from reaching the top spot. Even with those barriers broken down somewhat over time, women still do not opt for the position of superintendent. There are many women in positions that lead to the superintendency, yet there continues to be very few women superintendents.

To develop a deeper understanding as to why the superintendency is a gendered position warrants further exploration into the reasons why men are more likely to hold a superintendent

position and what women identify as obstacles. To better understand this phenomenon, the thoughts and feelings of women administrators need to be investigated and documented. Researchers do not fully understand the impact of various barriers on a woman's career. Nor do they understand how women administrators have navigated barriers during their careers and what, if any, impact these have had on their decision to pursue the position of superintendent (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Tallerico, 2000). Currently, we do not fully understand why women continue to be passive in a career field for which they are certainly qualified and could succeed in when given an opportunity. Looking at the current body of research, it is a struggle to find clear answers. In a recent content analysis of all United States dissertations on women superintendents written from 2014-2016, results were largely conflicting. Rather than identifying clear outcomes, most findings showed gaps and areas to further research (Sampson & Gresham, 2017).

With the ongoing focus on equity, quality education, student growth and social-emotional learning, schools and children deserve the best, most qualified individuals to lead. Gender and ethnic diversity bring about improvements in leadership and learning (Robinson et al., 2017). If competent, successful women continue to hold back on the pursuit of the superintendency, schools are not hiring the best of the best, as this position has the most potential for facilitating the growth of a district (Superville, 2016).

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of the thoughts and feelings of women who currently serve in administrative roles in education and hold proper certification to be a school superintendent in Illinois. Specifically, I examined the course of their administrative careers, including their career choices, influences and whether or not they aspire to the position of school superintendent. We discussed barriers or opportunities that arose during the course of their careers and the impact those have had on their careers and career choices. This study could provide insight to better prepare future women administrators, provide an awareness of the barriers women face, and offer suggestions on how to navigate these experiences. Rather than waiting for these obstacles to occur, women can understand what may be likely to occur during the course of their careers in administration. Having prior knowledge allows women a better chance to navigate or work around the barriers, rather than allow them to impact their careers and career choices. When these barriers are better understood, it may enable more women to mitigate the process of attaining a superintendent position.

Barriers

Discussing and surfacing inner feelings may help women better understand their own reasons for wanting to or not wanting to move up the job ladder. Past research suggests that women question their own ability to do the job of superintendent (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). The current study provides insight to women's thoughts and feelings that are not as well

explored, through an internal lens, looking at internal barriers. Sandberg (2013) refers to this as a chicken and an egg situation. She believes that external barriers will be removed once women attain more leadership positions; however, those same barriers also prevent women from attaining those roles in the first place. Therefore the question remains as to which one comes first.

External barriers are defined as elements within the environment or society that prevent women from reaching their goals, or in this case, the superintendent position. Perhaps it is not every woman's goal to be superintendent; however, the reasons for that decision should be discussed and explored. External barriers, such as structural barriers, pay gaps, job ladders, stereotypes and family commitments, to name a few, will be explored in much greater detail within this dissertation, supported by research. These barriers create stressors for women and make attainment of the position of superintendent difficult or not desired (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Research Questions

This research attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Why do qualified women administrators choose not to pursue the superintendent position?
2. How does a specific small group of women think and talk about the reasons for not pursuing a superintendent position?

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory forms the theoretical framework for this study. Feminist theory is the foundation of much of the research surrounding the limited number of women superintendents (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). Most, if not all, feminist theorists encourage the acknowledgement of differences across individuals and bringing to light those that negate or ignore the less powerful marginalized individuals (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011). By studying gender, we hope to gain an understanding of historical and current gender arrangements or relationships. This understanding allows people to re-evaluate and alter the existing arrangements that have been in existence (Baires & Koch, 2020; Flax, 1987).

A primary goal of feminist theory is to analyze gender relations and issues that have been consistently neglected where there is an underlying situation of women and the analysis of domination by men (Flax, 1987; Sampson & Gresham, 2017). Common areas of study include how relationships develop, how different relationships interact, and different viewpoints of those relationships, most commonly between men and women. Rosemarie Tong (1989) sums up her thoughts through a feminist lens as description, explanation and prescription of an issue. Feminisms are not only the belief in women's rights and women's movements, but comprehensive efforts of analysis, education and activism for larger social change (Dentith & Peterlin, 2011). Some would say that another major focus of feminist theory is to "denaturalize" gender, so that men and women are looked at equally (Flax, 1987).

The feminist framework will be utilized as a broad understanding, utilizing the basic definitions and understandings mentioned above. The underlying problem in this study is certainly based on gender differences, making it important to analyze relationships between men and women, the history of the superintendent position, and the gaps that have existed with men and women. This study is also based on research suggesting that men dominate the superintendent position and therefore hold a supervisory role to any woman administrator under them. This theory sets out to provide an overall, big-picture understanding of the nature and history of gender inequality in the role of men and women public school superintendents.

Additionally, it will also be used to make sense of how people and groups interact within a social system, or in this case, the school system. These systems create concepts or mental representations of each other's actions, roles, and behaviors. Over time, these concepts acclimate into roles played by the actors within the system and eventually become institutionalized or embedded. Knowledge and people's conceptions (and beliefs) of what reality is become embedded in the institutional fabric of society. It is important to think about this in relation to this study so that, in addition to gender differences, one also understands how different groups of people within the system of education interact. Each player brings their own view to the table and could potentially hold a vital role in women obtaining a superintendent position. Some of those people include school boards, search firms, existing superintendents and women themselves. Perceptions and beliefs held by these key players contribute to actions within the system, especially the way women view themselves and their roles within that system (Flax, 1987).

Gilligan (2016) states that women often define themselves in a context of human relationships and their ability to care for others. Society traditionally constructs women as the caregivers of the family and critiques women on the ability to be a good mother, with priorities expected to be home and family (Rowe & Crafford, 2003). Most women do not, and cannot, realize their true potential, which limits their ability to fulfill this potential. (Gilligan, 2016). Within the system of education, school districts have traditionally hired men as superintendents; therefore, historically, society has constructed the superintendency as a position dominated by men, making it more difficult for many women to see themselves as a superintendent (Falk & Grizard, 2005). One must understand relationships and differences and the impact this has had historically in education so that one may truly understand how these events have triggered society into viewing women as a certain way of being.

Feminist theory was utilized to examine perceived barriers that exist within school systems and society, such as promotional opportunities, salary schedules, stereotypes, pay gaps, career paths and adequate preparatory programs, to name a few. It was also used as a window to examine and understand the various events of each woman's career path and her views on obtaining a superintendent position. Further, this theory was used to analyze the experiences of these women, including any barriers and opportunities that occurred and how these events shaped their career choices and trajectories. This theory ultimately shaped the answers to my research questions through various viewpoints as the data unfolded.

Research Approach

A qualitative study approach was chosen to obtain data for this study and all participants were interviewed twice. Qualitative research design using the feminist theory provides an understanding from different perspectives and offers the greatest chance of making a difference in other's lives (Merriam, 2009). The focus for this study was to examine the perceptions and experiences of six administrators. The participants included six women who have completed the proper graduate-level coursework and are eligible to obtain the superintendent endorsement for this position. All of the women currently work or have worked in the suburbs of Chicago. I sought to uncover their career paths through administration, how they obtained each position, as well as their thoughts and feelings as they moved through their careers. Additionally, I wanted to discover what opportunities or barriers they have encountered at each step of their careers, starting with their first administrative position.

I initially thought that once the topic of barriers was discussed openly it might have been difficult for individuals to open up and share any internal barriers about themselves that have held them back or impacted their career choices. Therefore, I planned to hold two interview sessions to build upon the comfort of our relationship and maximize the depth of the conversations so that potential struggles and the development of those struggles could be shared comfortably.

Delimitations

I have identified several delimitations that affect this particular study. The nature of this study was to focus on women's experiences, thoughts and feelings; therefore, only women in current administrative positions were studied. Additionally, women who worked in public school sectors were chosen to provide a somewhat similar background in career path. Private school sectors may possess a different set of requirements with regard to certification and degrees. The small number of women selected were from similar suburban areas outside of Chicago, Illinois.

Limitations

In addition to the delimitations, the study may also hold limitations that may not be prevented. As mentioned, a sample of six women were interviewed for this study, making it a small sample size. My status as a woman in administration may have also been a limitation as I analyzed interviews and interpreted findings during this study. It is important that as a researcher I understand my own biases and not make assumptions based off of my own experiences.

Another potential limitation of this study could be the scope of the study itself. I made a conscious decision to focus this study on barriers and opportunities in current job roles, making this more career focused. However, expanding the scope of the study to explore and uncover the complexities of life could uncover women who intentionally choose to forego the role of superintendent.

Significance of Study

Of all doctoral dissertations completed during the years of 2014-2016, .002% studied women superintendents (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). A need exists to determine why women leaders do not pursue the superintendency at the same rate as men, given that women hold the majority of positions in education. The majority of research on the superintendency in the past has been based on a man's perspective, theories and interpretations (Shakeshaft, 1989). According to Grogan (1996), more studies need to be conducted from a perspective that focuses on the leadership experiences of the women involved. Additionally, there is very little research on the political nature of the superintendent position and how that might affect a woman's desire to pursue that role (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). In 1992 Glass indicated that a majority of the nation's 15,000 school districts would need to hire new superintendents within the next several years. This was a time of opportunity for women to obtain this position; however, those gains did not happen. More research also needs to be done on the organization of school systems to determine the best context to support women in search of superintendent positions (Sampson & Gresham, 2017).

For educational research to be useful and inclusive, documented experiences at all levels of administration need to be taken into account, including women (Brunner, 1999). Education requires the benefit of the diverse perspectives and experiences that different kinds of educators bring to executive leadership (Brunner, 2002). Understanding why women leave the superintendency is also very important and studied by only a handful of researchers, but it is beyond the scope of this study (Robinson, 2015).

This study contributes to addressing the gap in our knowledge of women administrators, the barriers they face, and the ability to recognize these barriers and engage in strategies to overcome them. This study supports and clarifies these feelings in hopes of encouraging rather than discouraging women from pursuing the position of superintendent.

In the past, many studies have sought to identify mostly external barriers commonly experienced by women school leaders. The data gathered in this study expands the current knowledge base of women educators and administrators and provides a profile of typical or common internal barriers that develop over time to give insight to women aspiring to the superintendent position. The significance of this study is to enhance the body of research on women pursuing superintendent positions and to examine the barriers they face when they are “struggling to break into a traditionally male-dominated profession” (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

The information found in this study could prove helpful in graduate-level administrative preparation programs to educate women on potential and common career barriers. Recently, the School Superintendents Association, (AASA), began a program to match women leaders with mentors specifically to help them prepare for a position as a superintendent. This program focuses on barriers that women face and efforts to overcome those obstacles. Other state-level organizations are also launching different efforts to prepare women for this role and increase numbers (Superville, 2016). Perhaps career counseling could assist women as they navigate through the educational system. Research indicates that the majority of students seeking administrative certifications are women (Pounder, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1987). If women know how to recognize these barriers, they may be able to navigate them more successfully. In

addition, my hope is that information in this study will support and encourage more women to aspire to the superintendency.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, the literature review begins with a historical journey of the public school superintendent with specific focus on the number of men and women in this position over time. This journey provides a potential explanation for the continued low numbers of women superintendents over the course of the past one hundred years.

Following this historical perspective, the review examines the research behind common barriers that women experience during the course of their careers. These barriers are presented as motives or reasons for holding back on the pursuit of the superintendent position and as a potential rationale for low numbers of women in this position. Structural and societal barriers tend to be external in nature, in that women have little to no direct control over them. These barriers exist in an organization or society and have for some time. There are also internal barriers that may prevent someone from meeting goals and aspirations. These barriers are those for which women *have* direct control, as they are found within their own thoughts, feelings and behaviors, such as fear of negotiating or not recognizing accomplishments.

The barriers have been grouped into two main sections, external and internal. Each section will review and discuss the components of each, how they exist in education, and how they affect women in their quest to obtain the position of superintendent. The chapter will conclude with a review of the literature on feminist theory as it relates to this topic.

Historical Perspective

Historically speaking, over the late 19th to early 20th centuries, the United States workforce transformed, resulting in women holding more positions exclusively held by men (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Despite these transformations, women remain under-represented in the role of public school superintendent in the United States (Sampson & Gresham, 2017). Women make up 76% of teachers, 52% of principals, and 78% of district-level administrators, yet they account for less than a quarter of all superintendents (Robinson et al., 2017). Over time, the number of women in superintendent positions have increased, yet these gains have been slow and inconsistent (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Robinson et al., 2017).

Tallerico and Blount (2004) examined the superintendency during the 20th century to determine if the representation of women changed over time. The authors employed a longitudinal methodology to determine if patterns existed and, if so, how the patterns could be understood from historical and sex segregation perspectives. Data were collected from local, county and state-level superintendent positions. The researchers encountered some difficulties associated with accurate data collection such as the lack of consistency in job titles, types of school districts, lack of identification of gender status on documents, and school districts that did not employ a “superintendent” as titled (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Overall, they found that from 1910-2000, the school superintendent at the local, county and state levels remained a leadership profession primarily dominated by men. The percentage of men superintendents ranged from 91% in 1910 to 85% in 1998 with the highest percentage, 96%, occurring during the 1970s. Looking at only local numbers, the percentages are even

lower, with less than one percent of women occupying superintendent positions in the 1970s (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). These low numbers are attributed to the manner in which men and women were recruited during that time period. Specifically with regard to the field of education, these authors note that women were generally recruited into teaching positions and men into leadership positions (Tallerico & Blount, 2004).

Examining the time period from 1910-2017 more closely, the overall percentage of women superintendents increased from 9% to 11% from 1910 until 1930. Blount and Tallerico (2004) suggested this initial rise was due in part to the women's suffrage movement during the 1920s and the fact that the superintendent position was an elected position during this time period. Looking at women in Illinois specifically, the percentage of superintendents was at its highest at four percent in 1930 (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Various groups, including women teachers, strongly advocated for an increase in the number of women candidates for these jobs since the superintendency was one of the few executive positions available to women (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Hanson and Tyack (1981) referred to this time period as a golden age of women administrators.

However, from 1930-1970 the number of women superintendents declined dramatically, from 11% to 3% (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). By the 1930s, most states began to require specialized degrees and programming for individuals pursuing administrative positions. At the same time, the number of women admitted to higher education programs was restricted (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, otherwise known as the G.I. Bill, encouraged a predominantly male population of veterans to attend college, which led to a growth in educational administration enrollments (McCarthy & Kuh, 1997). During the

1950s, school districts began to consolidate and many states eliminated the county superintendent position, which displaced a number of women who held these positions.

During 1970-1998, the number of women superintendents at the state, local, and national levels rose again, from 3% to 11%. This change corresponded with the emergence of a second feminist movement, which focused specifically on the under-representation of women in leadership. In 1972, Title IX's enactment led to the termination of low quotas on the number of women who were allowed to enroll in colleges and universities. Additionally, the Women's Educational Equity Act of 1974, developed to protect women from discrimination in education, was enforced nationally (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). The increase in women superintendents accelerated slightly during the late 1990s, rising to 12%.

In a 2000 study of the American school superintendency, 2,262 superintendents responded to a survey, which was the largest sampling the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) had ever obtained in any of their ten-year studies. Of that number, only 297, or 12%, were women (Glass et al., 2002). By 2004, AASA reported that 18% of superintendents were women as well as 80% of central office staff (Silverman, 2004).

In 2006, 22% of all school district superintendent respondents were women, with more than half of these women leading schools with fewer than 3,000 students and a quarter of the superintendents serving in school districts with fewer than 900 students (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). It was also found that women were more likely to be employed as superintendents in rural and small-town school districts. The superintendent position in smaller school districts is sometimes more challenging because the central office staff is smaller, thereby requiring the superintendent to assume a variety of leadership roles (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). This requires a

well-rounded individual to hold the top position, well versed in both curriculum and finance. In AASA's 2010 Decennial Study, 24% of superintendent respondents were women (Kowalski et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2017). This number rose slightly by the 2015 survey to 26.9% of women participating in the mid-decade update (Robinson et al., 2017).

The next few publications from AASA were solely focused on salary and benefits in 2017 and 2018, when AASA published the results of their 5th and 6th edition surveys of school superintendents. The survey historically covered demographic, salary, benefit and other job-related information; however, for this survey, newer questions were added that focused on experience relevant to gender (Finnan & McCord, 2017). In that study, 26.8% of the superintendents during the 2016-2017 school year were women and 29.6% during the 2017-2018 school year. This number was up slightly from the mid-decade study conducted in 2015 (Finnan & McCord, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017). One criticism with the 2016-2017 percentages is the number of actual respondents to the survey. While the number was deemed enough for reliable statistical analysis, the response rate was low, with a mere 845 responses out of 9,000 who took the survey (Robinson et al., 2017). The following year, those numbers rose to 1,172 (Finnan & McCord, 2018).

The recent and ongoing focus on instruction, past legislative efforts of No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Act, have led researchers to conclude that local school boards should look for educational leaders well versed in instructional pedagogy rather than organizational, managerial or disciplinarian management (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). In district level administration, women tend to find themselves in leadership positions associated with curriculum and instruction, thereby making them more attractive to school boards for

employment as superintendents (Falk & Grizard, 2005). Current women superintendents agree, with over 50% reporting they believe they were hired for their curriculum and instruction experience (Finnan & McCord, 2017, 2018; Robinson et al., 2017). In spite of potentially being more desirable candidates, the increase of women superintendents has not followed pace with this trend (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

With 52% of public school elementary principals and 78% of central office administrators being women, administrators are most often found serving as elementary school principals and curriculum and instruction coordinators (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Superville, 2016). The scarcity of women superintendents becomes more anomalous given the fact that 40% of women administrators aspire to become superintendents (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

As we move through the 21st century, researchers are working to gather additional information and longitudinal data in preparation for the next 20-year interval (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). Extensive literature exists on barriers that women must navigate to obtain the superintendent position. Even though there have been gains and breakthroughs in some of these barriers, they continue to exist and prevent women from reaching the top spot in education.

External Barriers

Glass Ceiling

Magazine editor Gay Bryant first coined the term “glass ceiling” in 1984. In the *Adweek* article, Bryant discusses her reasons for changing jobs and describes the “glass ceiling” as the

point where women get stuck at the top of middle management. She goes on to describe it as an invisible barrier that women keep reaching as they do not move up the career ladder (Falk & Grizard, 2005). Despite existing laws and regulations, many K-12 school systems still possess a glass ceiling. Creating more equitable opportunities requires a comprehensive shift in existing procedures, mindsets and attitudes (Maranto et al., 2018). Wallin (1999) believes that structural barriers result in the lack of opportunities for women in educational administration. She refers to those barriers that embed themselves within the existing structure of an organization. Examples of a structural barrier might include men interacting with other executives informally more often than women do or having lunch with other managers more often than women (Institute of Leadership and Management, 2014).

In 1991, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act was amended and passed, creating several changes. One such change was the development of a 21-member Federal Glass Ceiling Commission. This group studied and analyzed glass ceiling barriers in the corporate world, then issued a report on their findings and conclusions. They made recommendations on how to disassemble the glass ceiling and provided specific suggestions for companies to increase opportunities and development experiences for women and minorities in order to foster advancement to management and decision-making positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; U. S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). The findings revealed that prejudice against minorities and White women were the single greatest barrier to their advancement, as well as other structural barriers. Other portions of this research support similar structural barriers, including stereotypes, lack of recruitment and opportunities, and inconsistent, dead-end job ladders women find themselves on, that continue to hold women back (Falk & Grizard, 2005).

With the lack of consistent monitoring and enforcement of managerial-level data, governmental barriers contribute to obstacles due to the inadequate reporting of information related to matters of the glass ceiling. Within the government itself, there is a debate about whether or not a glass ceiling even exists in the workplace, as demonstrated by the ongoing debates in Congress (U. S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). In a study conducted by the Institute of Leadership and Management (2014), the divide is evident with 73% of women at the managerial level believing a glass ceiling prevented them from advancement, while only 38% of men believe a glass ceiling exists.

In 1999, more attention was drawn to the term “glass ceiling” when Hewlett Packard hired Cara Carleton “Carly” Fiorina as the newest, and first woman, chief executive officer of the Fortune 500 Company (Cotter et al., 2001). At the same time, a research company issued a report on corporate women that again highlighted the persistence of the glass ceiling. The report cited four key conditions that exist in a workplace with a glass ceiling:

- Condition #1: The difference in male versus female position ranks cannot be explained by other job-related characteristics the employees possess, such as education or experience.
- Condition #2: There must be a greater gender difference at higher levels within the industry.
- Condition #3: Chances for advancement differ for men and women. Advancement is defined as the opportunity for a promotion to a higher level, including monetary raises.

- Condition #4: One must observe these inequalities increase over the course of one's career (Falk & Grizard, 2005).

Career Path

Women's lack of success in maneuvering and climbing the job ladder was also discussed. In the business world, women are finding themselves in jobs and positions that do not directly lead to top positions, such as public relations, human resources and investor relations (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). While these are reputable positions, they traditionally do not lead to chief executive officer. Similar to women in education aspiring to the superintendent position, sometimes women find themselves in positions that traditionally do not lead to the superintendent position. Candidates for the superintendent position usually follow a common path that includes five or six years teaching, assistant principal, principal, assistant superintendent and superintendent. Sometimes there are different leadership positions within principal and assistant superintendent; however, often it is a five-step process (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Fifty percent of women report following the traditional path to the superintendency, from teacher to principal to central office. More men bypassed central office before the superintendent's office, whereas more women bypass the role of principal and move from teacher to central office (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). AASA's 2017 survey indicated a similar path to the superintendency, with men typically occupying the role of high school principal before superintendent and women as elementary principals prior to district office, followed by superintendent (Finnan & McCord, 2017).

To have access to the public school superintendency, a candidate generally needs to have worked in the central office as an instructional, human resources, or financial leader; otherwise, mi- to large-sized school districts will not often consider the appointment of an otherwise qualified woman to superintendent (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Lack of adequate experience or missing required competencies is typically the rationale. Therefore, many women begin their superintendent experience in small, rural school districts where there are few or no other central office staff to lead the district. Typically, these districts have few applicants (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). In 2016, 57% of all reporting women superintendents worked in rural districts (Finnan & McCord, 2017).

Another structural barrier that many women experience is that promotion from within an organization happens less frequently for women than men, meaning women may have to relocate for a top position. Eighty-eight percent of women report that relocation is a major barrier and deciding factor when looking for opportunities (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Women typically will choose to keep family and marriage intact rather than have a commuter marriage. Men, on the other hand, may not experience these same feelings. It is rare for a man to decline a better paying job due to relocation (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). In more recent studies, women are more likely to be hired as the superintendent in the district they work in (Robinson et al., 2017).

Discrimination

Discrimination is present and continues to be a factor in job security and the quest for equal wages. In Margaret Grogan's (1996) study, 27 women from the northwestern United States

were studied and all participants aspired to the superintendent position. The qualitative study used a feminist framework to research why women believe they were or were not qualified to be superintendent. Interviews were used to gather data from the women, including observations and other field notes.

Through the study, Grogan (1996) found gender to be a predominant factor in the women's preparation for the school superintendent position, in addition to a variety of other factors. Those factors include the formalized training and experience, but also the day-to-day events of supervising personnel, experience with developing programs at the district level, and budget management, to name a few. Women provided many examples of a gendered environment within educational administration, which influenced administrative styles and behaviors of the women. They note different treatment by community members, peers, superiors and subordinates. The women conclude that they are seen first as women, second as administrators (Grogan, 1996). What researchers continue to find is that regardless of the district, structure, location, or discipline, the common barrier is gender (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Sampson and Gresham (2017) conducted a content analysis review of 43 dissertations relating to women superintendents in the United States during 2014-2016. Ironically, after 25 years, findings were similar to Grogan's study conducted in 1996. Of all dissertations written, gender inequity was the second major theme identified. In short, gender continues to be a difficult barrier to navigate for women in the superintendent role and, in general, women are still treated differently and unfairly when compared to men (Sampson & Gresham, 2017).

Search firms assist school boards in securing superintendent candidates; however, some believe these firms have access to the top jobs and use women in final rounds as token candidates (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). It has been said that search firms and school boards may block women from the process because they may not view women as strong business or finance managers and therefore not good candidates to lead districts (Munoz et al., 2014). Oftentimes it is unknown what exactly the hiring criteria are for a school district. Hiring practices by school boards and search firms have also shown discrepancies, which hinder women from applying or weed out women altogether (Munoz et al., 2014; Robinson et al., 2017). On the other hand, some research firms benefit women, placing 23% of women in superintendent positions versus 17% of men (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Typically when a district hires a search firm, it usually means the board is looking outside of the school district. It is also important to note that search firms are also traditionally made up of men, which can lead to bias in the search and hiring practices (Robinson et al., 2017).

These groups of men, sometimes referred to as “buddy systems” or “good ole boy networks,” are many times the number one barrier women identify to career advancement. These groups of men behave in a discriminatory manner toward women as they watch out for one another, provide preferential treatment to one another, and operate on a favor system that excludes women (Campbell & Campbell-Whatley, 2020).

Gender Pay Gap

Even if women break the glass ceiling in terms of advancement, they may still face other external barriers. Women continue to battle the gender pay gap and fight for equal wages with men, despite the enactment of government laws and standards over the years, starting with the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, which first equalized minimum wage without regard to sex. Later, President John F. Kennedy developed the Committee on Equal Employment, requiring projects financed with federal monies to ensure employment practices are free of racial bias. In 1963, the Equal Pay Act was passed, promising equal wages for the same work, regardless of sex of the worker (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Finally, the development of the Civil Rights Act in 1964 prohibited discrimination in the workforce (Vagins & Usova, 2011).

Although a substantial increase in women's earnings occurred during the late 1970s compared to earlier years, it slowed again in the 1990s. When wage and salary were reviewed in 2003, women still earned 21 cents on the dollar less than men (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Women continue to close the gap during times of wage inequality increases; however, it is possible that narrowing the gap will not continue (Blau & Kahn, 2007). Looking at the school superintendent position specifically, the findings from the latest salary and benefit studies in 2016 and 2017 show men at a significantly higher maximum salary in both the smallest and largest school district categories reported (Finnan & McCord, 2017). The maximum salary in school districts with less than 300 students for men was \$242,000 and for women was \$133,000 and in districts with more than 25,000 students, \$405,000 and \$316,000 respectively (Finnan & McCord, 2018).

The U. S. Department of Labor cites six contributing factors for the gender wage gap, one of which is the difference in occupation selection between men and women. Many say the wage differential results from the types of positions held by men and women. For example, men gravitate toward higher paying positions, such as engineering and business fields, while women gravitate to lower paying jobs, such as teaching and social service positions (Blau & Kahn, 2007; U. S. Glass Ceiling Commission, 1995). Researchers find that depending on the industry, these differences can account for up to 22% of the gender wage gap (Blau & Kahn, 2007). More studies show that when all factors are the same (education, experience, and marital status), men get paid significantly more (Blau & Kahn, 2007).

Career interruptions also contribute to lower wages for women. These interruptions result in lower earnings when childbirth or raising children forces time off. The timing and frequency of these interruptions play a significant role as well. Research notes that women are subject to a 7% reduction in wages due to having children. It's not surprising that 37.3% of women superintendents do not have any children compared to only 9.8% of men (Robinson et al., 2017).

Michelle Budig and Paula England (2001) examined past research and report five explanations for the associations between motherhood and lower wages. Mothers with one child earn about 6% less than single women and those with two children earn 13% less. Prior year's events help explain approximately one third of that percentage, such as time off during maternity leave. However, two thirds of that percentage remains unexplained, to which Budig and England cite possible other reasons for the gap in pay, including discrimination. Past studies do not provide clear evidence regarding exactly what causes the child penalty, with variance in the

definition of the term “experience.” Budig and England also report that mothers lose job experience while on maternity leave as one reason and also new mothers may be less productive at work due to the other responsibilities in the home. Another reason cited is that some mothers may choose lower wages for more “mother-friendly” jobs or perks that appeal to mothers, such as flexible hours, fewer demands for travel, or on-site daycare, for example. Another explanation of the wage penalty for mothers is employer discrimination. Finally, Budig and England believe that perhaps the relation between factors that are difficult to measure may contribute to the wage penalty. The correlation of those individuals who choose not to have children to increased earnings was difficult to measure.

A study conducted by Blau and Khan (2007) sought to explain earning gains for women over the past 40 years and to understand why women continue to earn less than men. They note that evidence supports the decline in discrimination against women in the labor market, yet discrimination continues to exist. In the study, Blau and Khan looked at the wages of women who worked full time from the years 1955 to 2003. In the early years, women in the workforce moved in and out of employment depending on family considerations, especially during times of war. Earnings remained consistent at approximately 60% for women compared to men until the late ‘70s and early ‘80s. During the 1980s to 1990s, women’s earnings consistently and evenly increased to 74%, followed by a pause, then peaked in 2002 at 77% as compared to men’s earnings (Blau & Khan, 2007). Additionally, a large change in the numbers of working mothers exists over the past 20-30 years, which may contribute to the decline in this wage gap percentage (Blau & Khan, 2007). Overall, since women have less work experience than men in general, this is quantitatively important in explaining the gender pay gap (Blau & Khan, 2007).

To better answer their questions, Blau and Kahn (2007) looked at economists' (Juhn et al., 1993) explanations for the gender pay gap, which examine gender-specific qualities such as educational attainment, labor force experience, race, occupational category, industry category, union status, and a category of unexplained. The economists write that even after accounting for all these areas, including education, experience, race, industry, and occupation, women still bring home about 10% less than men.

These categories combine to explain approximately 53% of the wage gap. The largest single category was *Unexplained*, at 41%. The report leans toward discrimination in this category and used a number of studies to support this, such as Wood et al. (1993), Neumark (1999) and Becker (1996). They utilize the experimental approach, Becker's discrimination model, and several court cases to support their reasoning, for example, a case from 1994 involving Lucky Stores, and another in 2000 involving the U.S. Information Agency, and another in 1990 with a case against Price Waterhouse (Blau & Khan, 2007). The study sums up with the notion that gender discrimination still exists.

The difficult part for women is that they really are often not even aware they are being paid less. Take Lilly Ledbetter, for example, who reported having a "feeling" that she was being underpaid compared to her male counterparts but could not substantiate the feeling until an anonymous note was left in her mailbox. Even then, she did not win the claim in court because she did not file within the allotted 180-day mark. In 2009, President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Act, which eliminated the 180-day timeline and made clear that discrimination occurs whenever an employee earns a discriminatory paycheck. Many times, employers are able to cite

some type of reason, other than wage discrimination, as to why someone is paid less; therefore, discrimination is difficult to prove (Coy & Dwoskin, 2012).

Internal Barriers

In addition to the external barriers that prevent women from obtaining superintendent positions are the less explored internal barriers that women battle. While there are several reasons for these internal barriers, above all else, societal structures and biases greatly reduce the possibility that women can lead successful careers and also balance a family. Society constructs women as the caregivers of the family and judge women on their ability to be good mothers and caregivers, with priorities expected to be the home and family (Rowe & Crafford, 2003). According to Buescher (1987), 65% of girls hide their true talents and many others doubt that they really have abilities to succeed. As a result, many women change plans from ambitious careers and goals to more traditional roles in the working world. This is more commonly referred to as the Fear of Success Syndrome or the Horner Effect. This term outlines the fear of success and the notion of rejection by peers and members of the opposite sex for being too successful (Reis, 2002).

Voice and Power

Several feminist researchers have examined the concept of power that comes with the role of superintendent and how power impacts a woman's ability to have voice. The overall

concept of power is one that is not traditionally feminine in nature and therefore is not natural to think and talk about power the same way as a man (Brunner, 2000).

Cryss Brunner, a woman, feminist researcher, educational administrator and current university professor, wrote an article on the silence of women in powerful masculine positions through a qualitative examination of talk. She refers to her research methods as post-positivist, since she clearly communicates her own position within the research to expose her biases. She further explains that post-positivist research is important because it supports women who are in positions traditionally held by men. She quotes from a book written by Dunlap and Schmuck (1995), “The silence of women has been the metaphor for women ignored, not listened to and women not speaking” (p. 2). Brunner (2000) wondered how this metaphor of silence applied to women in positions of power, such as the superintendency. Data was gathered through interviews with 13 women superintendents and two additional individuals who had close working relationships with those 13 superintendents. The superintendents were selected by way of networking with individuals in major national educational associations who had personal knowledge of successful women. There were 58 interviews total, including two with each superintendent and one additional with each of the associates. The superintendent interviews started with three major questions, followed by free-flowing dialogue. Following the interviews, the information gathered was transcribed, analyzed and then given to each superintendent for review and further discussion. The women commented on the findings and provided greater depth to the analysis.

The results were divided into five themes or topics:

1) Power Talk

- 2) Silent Talk
- 3) Style Talk
- 4) People Talk
- 5) Responsible Talk

Furthermore, each topic of talk then falls into one of two categories: “settled” or “unsettled.”

Settled discussion refers to those topics and discussions that are a traditional part of American culture, topics that are relaxed, easy, and secure among professionals. Unsettled talk is exactly as described – uncomfortable and unsettled. There is a fear among the speakers with this type of talk because of fear of perception (Brunner, 2000).

Power Talk was classified as a “major” topic; the other four categories were referred to as minor topics of talk (Brunner, 2000). The first major question presented to the superintendents was to define *power*. Most women had a difficult time with this, were unsettled, and struggled to provide a definition that they were comfortable with. They did not want to be associated with the word and felt that it had a negative connotation for women. Being powerful is not looked upon as a positive characteristic for a woman. Past research supports that women regard power very hesitantly and that it should be avoided, unless there is a sense of safety to assert their strengths and success (Brunner, 2000). One woman’s response to that same question was that she would prefer to talk about leadership style than power. When probed further, she indicated, “It’s okay for me to talk about leadership. It’s not always okay for me to talk about power” (p. 8).

The flip side of this question focused on the settled talk, or on a more traditional “feminine” approach to work, and similar views emerged when defining power from their

perspective. Responses include varying statements of their approach to leadership vs. power. Power was then defined as the ability to get things done, bringing people together, developing people into leaders, servant leadership, helping others and the ability to bring people to consensus (Brunner, 2000). When the colleagues of the superintendents were interviewed, they were asked how their superintendents made decisions and approached varying tasks. All 13 women in the study were described as standing in the background while working with others collaboratively (Brunner, 2000).

Brunner's study set out to look closely at a feminist's view of women in power not having a voice. Silencing, or holding back their voice, in the study occurred in a variety of ways. Several women discussed body language; in particular from their own school board, including eye rolling, closed arms, interruptions, or board members simply not listening when they presented information. Other women talked about meetings with men who left them out of conversations, interrupted, or talked over them. They noted that men talk more and much more loudly than women and as a result women find themselves sitting back more because the men do not really listen anyway. The women also felt they needed to hold back emotions when having discussions with individuals and felt that people disengaged when too much emotion was expressed. Even with all those feelings of being silenced, most women did admit the position alone came with privilege and that people, in general, usually listen to superintendents. It was understood that they may not be heard in the same way as a man or that their views may be marginalized from time to time (Brunner, 2000).

People Talk was the final topic that surfaced. This was an unsettling topic to discuss, as the women knew from time to time that certain people would not listen to them simply because

they were a woman. This topic went on to discuss how the women used key people, men in this instance, to get their opinions and thoughts heard by a larger group. One example used from the study described a negative interaction with a local mayor. Another woman discussed being a part of a superintendent's roundtable discussion as one of two women in a group of 50 men. The men would rarely take any of the women's ideas unless another man noted it. Even so, women were quite comfortable when talking about providing equal voice for all (Brunner, 2000).

The findings from Brunner's study note that in all areas of talk there was indeed an unnatural silence that occurred. Furthermore, in all areas explored, women felt comfortable with settled talk that was all nestled within the traditional roles of women. If and when women broke those traditional rules, they faced negative consequences (Brunner, 2000). Unfortunately, this sense of power is looked at by women as something to be avoided and may be downplayed at times. This has the potential for one to be looked at as less valuable. When a woman downplays her own authority, she is modeling that for others, which could potentially encourage others to behave in a similar manner (Brunner, 2000).

Similar findings were noted in a 2000 study conducted by Skrla et al. with women superintendents about the silence of discrimination they faced during their careers. Three successful women superintendents were interviewed shortly after they had exited the superintendency. During the course of their careers, they continuously felt like they were second-guessing themselves as a result of others questioning their competence. Many times this was from the school board in areas that would be described as masculine: finance, operations or construction projects. Typically, when women are not usually seen in positions of power, school boards do not consider putting women into positions that have been traditionally filled by men

(Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). The women also collectively felt that they were treated as less powerful and easy to direct because they were women. One felt like she was perceived as weak because she was not “loud” (Skrla et al., 2000).

Power

It is said that there are particular approaches to power that only women use that allow them to be successful in their work. Some of those approaches are collaboration, inclusion, and consensus building. Women in Brunner’s study (2000) indicated they see power as something someone gives to you. They prefer to work in the background with others in collaboration to accomplish tasks. When you work collaboratively with others it takes a good amount of listening. Direct style of talk or power is not acceptable, and they refer to themselves as possessing a softer style. Educational administration is shifting from top down to support more of a shared leadership, which supports this softer side of power (Brunner, 2000).

All people have a psychological need for power to some degree, and women are just as likely as men to be motivated by power (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). As a school superintendent, men and women also need to develop some degree of power in effectively leading and running the organization. Oftentimes women must walk a tightrope of conflicting expectations when it comes to power, more so than men. For example, leaders are expected to have power and use it, but women should not be powerful. Leaders are expected to be authoritarians, but women are expected to be nurturers. Leaders are expected to act aggressively to move forward on interests

that improve the education of children, but women are criticized if they are aggressive in their interest (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Women are known to struggle in organizations where the expectation is to have power “over” others, rather than empowering others. Society views women as nurturers, thus it tends to be more natural to use and develop power “with” others. They achieve this power “with” others through meaningful engagement of others in decision-making processes, sharing ideas, turn-taking in speech and listening (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Men, on the other hand, are socialized to develop power through a communication style of asserting ideas, interrupting and having the floor (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Bolman and Deal (2003) note that establishing relationships, alliances and networks provides essential support for a leader to gain and maintain power. If the men within an organization support this type of behavior, developing this type of power is where women can be successful.

In both studies conducted by Brunner (2000) and Skrla et al. (2000), it is clearly noted that consideration for redesigning administrative preparatory programs that have a specific focus on understanding and navigating power and voice, especially for women who aspire to the superintendent position, is greatly needed (Brunner, 2000). When asked, women indicate that the differences in experiences between men and women were never discussed or addressed in their programs. Having a discussion and learning about the role of gender in the superintendency would be beneficial while still in administrative programs so that women could practice confronting some of the potential barriers they may face one day (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Skrla et al., 2000).

Backlash

Self-promotion is defined as having the ability to “point with pride to one’s accomplishments, speaking directly about one’s strengths and making internal rather than external attributions for achievements” (Rudman, 1998, p. 631). Self-promotion differs from negotiation in that negotiations typically take place early on, during the hiring process. Self-promotion should occur more frequently throughout the duration of one’s career (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). In order to self-promote, women must behave in a manner inconsistent with norms typically associated with feminine behavior. Many women fear to act in this manner because it violates the typical gender stereotypes that have been constructed over the years (Rudman, 1998). This fear is known as backlash, or the backlash effect, which is detrimental to the ability to self-promote within the workplace. When working in a position, employees must be able to emphasize their strengths and aggressively pursue goals to move up the ranks of the organization (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Lacking the ability to sell oneself may result in a lag behind others in the workforce.

Women anticipate that assertiveness or acting in an aggressive manner will induce negative reactions or backlash from others; therefore, women will hold back on their behavior (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). Oftentimes the fear of backlash forces a woman to choose between respect and likeability, a characteristic that challenges the ladder to status and power (Catalyst, 2010). Backlash results when a woman engages in gender-inconsistent behaviors such as self-promotion, competitiveness, and authoritative leadership (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012). The predicament women consistently face is that women who want to move ahead in the workforce

put other women at risk for not wanting to move ahead if they choose to sit back. Few studies show that women are perceived as both capable at their jobs and warmhearted at the same time (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012). Therefore, backlash emerges when women are determined and competent but less likeable and hireable compared to men (Rudman et al., 2012).

In 2010, Moss-Racusin and Rudman conducted two studies to test the backlash avoidance model with undergraduate students. In the first study, a simulated job interview was used to investigate women's fear of backlash for self-promotion and to test the backlash avoidance model. One hundred ninety-two participants of mixed racial composition and mixed gender were used in the simulated job interview. During the interview, participants were videotaped and asked six questions. After the interview, participants were administered four questionnaires via computer program. Several areas were assessed, including fear of backlash, perceived self-promotion success, regulatory mode, and measured endorsement of the gender stereotype. Results were consistent with predictions, in that men would self-promote at higher levels than women. There was not, however, relative gender evidence to support more fear of backlash for women than men. This may be due to the women's lack of knowledge and awareness of backlash. The current research did not measure the awareness of backlash, which must be present in order to forward it (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010).

The second study looked at the rate of women's promotion success when advocating for a peer rather than oneself. A written essay was used rather than an interview in this study and only included women. Half of the participants were to write a letter recommending a peer for graduate work and the other half wrote a personal statement promoting oneself. In the analysis of both studies, the results indicated that self-promoting women who feared backlash showed little

success in the promotion of themselves, while the peer promoting group fared as more successful (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010).

Negotiation

Fortunately for those in education, salary schedules are a matter of public record and can be found on every school district website in Illinois. Administrative salaries in Illinois are individually contracted and have many more variables; it is difficult to know exactly how wages are broken down. In Florida, however, administrators have a salary schedule similar to teachers, used to help provide consistency among districts and candidates. Every new salary begins with a successful negotiation, which, unfortunately, many women are historically neither strong nor savvy in (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). In 2008, a panel of superintendents were asked to identify and rank order the most significant incentives for considering a career as a superintendent. Number three on that list was salary and compensation, with 41% of school administrators indicating so (Kelsey et al., 2014).

Gender negotiation research was examined more in the 1970s and 1980s. At that time, no major revelations were exposed regarding a woman's ability to successfully negotiate, as much of the findings were contradictory and inconsistent. These inconsistencies were motivation to continue research in this area and prompted the next generation of studies to take place, focusing on gender and social behavior (Bowles et al., 2005). Bowles et al.'s research suggests that most women tend to present themselves more modestly than men, which leads to the belief that modesty equals less competent. Society has constructed particular behaviors

associated with successful negotiators, such as strength, assertiveness, and competitiveness (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012). As a result, negotiation may not come naturally to women, especially when it involves salary. Negotiating may be seen as a potentially conflictual conversation, so many women leave the decision of their monetary worth up to their employer (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Unsuccessful negotiators are more likely to be weak, submissive, and accommodating. These same stereotyped behaviors align to characteristics more associated with women (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012). Of course, stereotyping does not define the actual person. A woman's failure to negotiate can affect them profoundly over a lifetime. This is a critical moment for women in terms of gender equity and this type of behavior has contributed to the disparity of earnings between men and women over time. As mentioned, starting salaries have the ability to impact lifetime earnings for everyone (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). On the other hand, if women attempt to overcome this behavior by behaving in a more aggressive, more masculine manner, they may be perceived as perhaps skilled, but lacking in a socially acceptable manner (Rudman, 1998).

Amanatullah and Morris's (2010) research points to two specific personality traits claimed to influence the outcomes of negotiations, which are entitlement and self-construal, or how one defines oneself. Amanatullah and Morris conducted the study in 2010 of both men (53%) and women (47%) placed in a negotiation setting. Fifty-nine participants utilized computerized negotiation format, developed by Van Kleef et al. (2006). Participants were led to believe they were negotiating with another person; however, they were communicating with the computer program. The methods used to create a real negotiation were so lifelike that only three of the 59 participants reported any suspicion. Participants were paired up and were given the

role of either the recruit or the agent. The computer played the role of hiring manager. The participants worked through five rounds of negotiation, starting with a low offer from the hiring manager. If the participant accepted the first offer, then the negotiation was over. If not, it continued. At the end, participants were asked to complete a post-negotiation questionnaire (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010).

Prior to the process starting, to gather information on anticipated backlash, participants were asked two questions: “How much do you think you can reasonably ask for without the hiring manager’s perceiving you to be a pushy person?” and “How much do you think you can reasonably ask for without causing the manager to punish you for being too demanding?” (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010, p. 260). The results of these pre-negotiation questions indicate that self-advocating women did anticipate backlash for behaving assertively, as shown in the pre-negotiation salary requests. Self-advocating women felt they could reasonably ask for approximately \$43,000, while self-advocating men reported a salary of approximately \$51,000, a difference of nearly \$8,000. On the other hand, when advocating for someone else, the threshold was smaller, and in fact higher, than men, with women asking for \$48,500 and men \$47,300 (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010). This also supports the earlier research that women tend to negotiate better when advocating for someone else.

Further results supported the same pattern as the pre-negotiation, with self-advocating women negotiating significantly smaller salaries in the opening round of negotiations. The opening salary was not provided in the study; however, in Round 1 of negotiations, self-advocating women counter-offered with a salary of \$42,000, while self-advocating men countered with a salary of \$48,441. The first round of men and women acting as agents for

others was very comparable, at \$49,821 and \$49,107 respectively. Further rounds were not revealed in this study, but it is noted that subsequent offers followed the same patterns set forth by the first offer (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010).

Supporting their claims on the backlash theory, Amanatullah and Morris (2010) specifically set up a study to eliminate stereotypes and biases by creating a situation without interaction and by computer. They argue that self-advocating women's responses to negotiation support the fear of backlash, as women set their goals and aspirations as high as men but quickly back down when the potential for backlash becomes real. This is supported in both the pre-negotiation and in the first rounds of negotiation. Furthermore, there were small differences in the men's pre-negotiation amounts, Round 1 offers, and those offers when acting as an agent. All three salary amounts were within approximately \$1,000.00. Women in this case were consistently 20% lower than men as negotiators, just in the first round. Only when advocating for someone else did we see equalization in salary amounts. Amanatullah and Morris continue to argue that because of backlash, women are less likely to make large and quick compromises in negotiations.

Wade (2001) uses two words to compare the negotiation tactics of men and women: advocacy and assertion. In the United States, men have traditionally functioned in roles of assertion, both in the household and in the workplace, while women have served as advocates. Traditionally, advocates support someone else or a group of people, whereas assertion implies advocating for oneself. These two qualities are uniquely different and when compared with typical gender norms, both are linked to women's likability, which is ultimately tied to women's influence (Wade, 2001). Women are not likely to start the negotiation process due to the social

factors of non-self-advocacy. On the other hand, women fare better when negotiating on behalf of someone else. Some believe that women behave differently when serving as self-advocate versus an advocate for another (Wade, 2001).

Women report greater anxiety than men about negotiating and are less likely than men to perceive situations as negotiable. Therefore, women are less likely to even initiate the discussion. A study of graduates revealed that only seven percent of women even attempted to negotiate their initial salary, compared to 57% of men (Babcock & Laschever, 2003).

On the other hand, if women do successfully negotiate, the results are not always beneficial. In one analysis conducted by Kulik and Olekalns (2012), both economic and social outcomes were explored, as well as competitive behaviors which are more associated with economic outcomes. Accommodating behaviors are more aligned with social outcomes. In many cases, a successful negotiator strives to successfully maximize both economic and social outcomes; however, a women's behavior is more aligned to accommodating behavior, such as asking for less, accepting early offers, and making more offers to the other side (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012).

Knowing this on the other side, negotiators will commonly make lower opening offers to women (Glick & Croson, 2001). During the negotiation process, it is common for women to also negotiate social approval by putting more emphasis on the social outcomes and favor strategies that will protect these outcomes, even if it is at the expense of economic results. It is noted that if women utilize a more competitive approach and improve the economic outcomes, then they end up damaging social relationships in the process, thus leaving the negotiations feeling less satisfied (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012).

If these social relationships become impaired and women are perceived as distant, these perceptions may be damaging economically. Likeability is an area consistent in performance ratings. Therefore, a competent yet unlikeable woman is less likely to be rehired (Rudman, 1998). Therefore, those women who choose to successfully negotiate and benefit economically may put women at risk in their jobs (Kulik & Olekalns, 2012).

Women are struggling in the negotiation process, bargaining more for social approval rather than compensation. This leaves women with less room to claim value, which pushes them below the value. This is a significant understanding from a woman's perspective, as the term "value" is defined both as monetary and self-worth. We already know that the wage gap exists and has effects over time (Blau & Kahn, 2007). In terms of value and self-worth, Dana and Bourisaw (2006) associate value comparing superintendents to wine. When an individual looks at a wine list, what do they believe is the better wine? They may choose the higher priced wine over the more moderate priced wine because they are socially conditioned to believe that the more expensive wine has a better flavor and quality. A similar value is perceived with salaries. A school superintendent making \$275,000 per year is viewed as more talented, capable, and valuable than one who is making \$150,000 per year, thus having more appeal as a candidate for other school district superintendencies.

Stereotypes

Stereotypes also impair one's ability to interview and negotiate well and the mere knowledge these stereotypes exist damages performance (Kray et al., 2002). This has been

defined by Claude Steele (1997) as “stereotype threat”: “The existence of such a stereotype means that anything one does or any of one’s features that conform make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps in one’s own eyes” (p. 797). These stereotypes negatively influence a number of job-related tasks, including interactive negotiation tasks (Kray et al., 2002). In Kray’s research, it was found that by simply tagging the negotiation as an indicator of ability, it improved men’s ability to negotiate and obstructed women’s performance when bargaining. These similar findings were discussed in a number of other studies involving men and women outside of negotiations, such as buying a car, tests of mathematics, and athletics (Kray et al., 2002).

Society creates barriers upon women within the administrative profession and specifically the position of superintendent. School districts have traditionally hired men as superintendents; therefore, society is used to seeing men in this position and has stereotyped the superintendent as a man (Falk & Grizard, 2005; Skrla et al., 2000). Society has viewed and constructed women’s role in leadership and top positions within organizations over the years. The most common stereotype is that women cannot handle the role of the superintendent, when in fact research shows that in most all facets, women may be better leaders than men, outperforming them in many key managerial skill areas, meeting deadlines, and staying on top of their work (Falk & Grizard, 2005).

As a follow-up to his work on the 2000 AASA superintendent report, Glass wrote a short article titled, “Where Are All the Women Superintendents?” that was published in the AASA journal, *The School Administrator*. In the article, Glass was clear that the asserted “insights” (his term) were his opinions based on his study and experiences over time. Brunner and Kim (2010)

reviewed and examined this article confirming that “his asserted insights were his opinions based on his study and experiences of the superintendency over time rather than on any specific factual data” (p. 279). Therefore, they set out to dispute whether or not women are prepared to be school superintendents.

They looked at Glass’s suggested areas of preparation, entitled formal, experiential and personal. Formal preparedness relates to the training and education women have received through programs and coursework. Experimental research is actual experience, positions held, mentors or any other experiences directly related to the pursuit of the superintendency. Finally, personal preparedness is characterized by one's personal beliefs and attitudes toward obtaining a superintendent position (Brunner & Kim, 2010).

Glass’s position throughout the article and again in the conclusion is that women are not prepared for the superintendency. He makes several claims and generalizations throughout the article, such that women are not interested in finance as much as men or women are more “accustomed to child-centered teaching in elementary classrooms” (Brunner & Kim, 2010, p. 296). He also provides that only ten percent of women who are seeking a doctorate are also interested in obtaining the superintendent endorsement. He makes this claim without evidence of research or documenting where this statistic came from.

Brunner and Kim (2010) set out to contradict this stereotypical article and conclude that Glass's beliefs are simply myths and misunderstandings. In their own research, Brunner and Kim found that women are indeed prepared to become superintendents but may choose not to for other reasons. They concluded that women as central office administrators who are either aspiring to become a superintendent or currently holding that position meet and even exceed all

preparedness requirements. They further believe that the differences in career paths may be a benefit to women, as to make them better prepared for the position versus men.

Most importantly, negative perceptions in articles such as these surrounding the reason why there are so few women in the superintendency are created by gender bias. Brunner and Kim (2010) suggest that these types of gendered stereotypes and bias are actually the barriers that exist for women seeking to reach the superintendent position.

Imposter Syndrome

The Fear of Success Syndrome can also be referred to as the Imposter Syndrome, defined as attribution of success to factors other than women's own efforts (Reis, 2002). Women see accomplishments and successes as accidental and undeserved and, as a result, will change plans from ambitious careers and goals to more traditional roles in the working world (Buescher, 1987). The attribution theory, or how and why people explain events as they do, is contradictory for men and women. Women explain reasons for success and attribute those reasons to external factors, such as luck, possessing the right mentor, or even that they fooled people. Men, on the other hand, will say they succeeded because of their internal factors: intelligence, skills, and decisions made. In regard to failures, women quickly point to internal faults or lack of abilities as explanation for these faults. Men, conversely, will cite external factors as reasons for their failures. These attributions have a significant impact on one's emotions and self-esteem and influence behaviors when climbing the workplace ladder (Reis, 2002). Consequently, the Imposter Syndrome may be detrimental to a woman's career path, desires, and motivation

toward a successful and challenging career. It is also noted that women in general do not flaunt their successes or make a big deal about doing well, which may go unnoticed in a competitive work environment (Rowe & Crafford, 2003). This could perhaps be damaging to women superintendents or women administrators in general, as it may portray a false sense of accomplishments.

A 2000-2001 study supports these internal imposter feelings, indicating that women who held the role of superintendent found it difficult and were reluctant to speak about power in their current role. Of nine current women superintendents interviewed, three had a difficult time providing a definition for power; however, when rephrased, as to how they influence others, the question was easier to answer. The role of the superintendent is the most powerful role within a school district and yet the women continued to have difficulty conceptualizing the idea of power (Goldin & Katz, 2002).

For these reasons, there has been somewhat of a shift in the top barriers, moving from institutional, stereotyping, and sex discrimination in 1993 to self-imposed internal barriers in 2007, which had once ranked at the bottom of the list but had made a change over the years, according to a 2007 comparison study (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). The study was first conducted in 1993 and then replicated in 2007 to compare differences in these perceived barriers. Researchers found that internal barriers were not exclusive to those only in the study. Studies across the country in several other states, dissertations, and abstracts reported similar results. Even though the percentage of women superintendents had risen from 12% in the 1990s to 22% in 2007, there were still definite barriers in securing this position. The greatest conflict for women was the balance between personal lives and careers (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009).

Theory

Feminist Theory

Feminist research values women's lives and voices and aims to validate those experiences (Gardiner, Enomoto, & Grogan, 2000). While there are many theories and frameworks related to women's experiences and career paths. This particular qualitative study was constructed within feminist theory. Specifically, liberal feminism best supports this study, as it focuses on the power of the individual woman to use her own abilities to eliminate barriers to equity in the public school superintendent's office. According to Hesse-Biber (2007), to engage in research that is grounded in feminist theory, one must challenge the knowledge that oppressed groups have, in this case, women in the role of public school superintendent. The grounds of liberal feminism focuses on systemic change and the structure of society to reform institutions (Wallin, 1999).

Much of the existing research within this literature review uses feminist theory and continues to be used by many researchers to comprehend the experiences of women in educational leadership (Grogan, 2000). This theory provides a lens through which to analyze women's experiences and offers a framework for studying gender within educational administration and looking at the imbalance of men and women superintendents and the path to the superintendency (Wallin, 1999). This theory supports the wonderment of why both historically and currently the superintendent position continues to be dominated by men. One key concept is that the feminist theory supports the notion of social equality between men and

women, the end of women's oppression, and is defined as validating multiple and diverse perspectives.

Liberal feminists argue society holds the perception that women are less capable than men and this disposition results in discrimination (Wallin, 1999). The goal of liberal feminists is gender equality in the public sector: equal access to education, equal pay, better working conditions, all of which has been researched in this chapter in terms of the women superintendent. According to Sommers (1994), one way to change this inequity is for women to alter society's perceptions by "increasing awareness of and take action against sexism" (p.4). Another way to challenge these opinions is to gain equality through women's choices, actions and preferences. Liberal feminists urge society to either amend or abandon laws and reform institutions that infringe upon equal rights for women (Wallin, 1999).

Feminists maintain the notion that particular barriers exist only for women (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). Even though women's rights continue to evolve, many barriers complicate the advancement of women in the workforce. Barriers and internal factors play a role for women seeking to obtain status in the business world and in educational administrative positions, such as the superintendency (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). Dawn Wallin (1999) and other feminist theorists support the notion that gender gaps are caused by a variety of factors, including structural barriers. Wallin's study utilized a liberal feminist framework to present issues and conclusions, finding that the inequality of women is structural; it is embedded within the system.

Feminist theory also offers insights into the social construction of gender, in particular the relationship between gender, leadership and power (Hesse-Biber, 2007). This theory supports that women are positioned within a gender order in ways that exclude them from reaching top

positions in society, meaning that society is constructed, maintained, regulated and shaped by those in dominant positions, such as the school superintendent (Connell, 2010). Therefore, women continue to play a secondary role.

Alfred Schutz, an Austrian social scientist, is commonly recognized as the leading founder and researcher on social construction. He bridged sociology and phenomenology to form the term “social phenomenology”. The central concept of this theory is that people and groups of people interact within a social system. Over time, these systems create concepts or mental representations of each other’s actions, roles, and behaviors. Over time, these concepts acclimate into roles played by the actors within the system and are said to be institutionalized or embedded in society. Knowledge and people’s conceptions (and beliefs) of what reality is become embedded in the institutional fabric of society. Reality is therefore said to be socially constructed (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

Social constructivists propose that different views of gender do not exist naturally in the world; rather, these are constructions of society. For example, traits and behaviors that are thought to be either masculine or feminine have developed over time because society teaches people a “script” according to the gender to which they have been assigned (White & Argo, 2009). It is suggested that these same social constructs of the world also limit women from pursuing the role of superintendent.

Looking specifically at the superintendent position, Linda Skrla (2000) conducted a qualitative study to examine the social construction of gender in the superintendency. She used a three-stage interview design to interview three former women superintendents who recently exited the position. Each woman was interviewed three times, twice individually and once in a

focus group. She focused on three main questions for the study, which included social construction of the female gender, social construction of the superintendent, and interactions between these two ideas.

Skrla (2000) indicates that the array of norms associated with public school superintendents in the United States is constructed from the belief that people assume men will occupy this role because men have traditionally held it. One woman felt the traditional role of superintendent in her community was for a “White, middle-aged, conservative, married man.” All women talked about the different rules women have in U.S. society that are rarely discussed but present in their work as a superintendent. These rules refer to feminine behaviors and actions that society expects from women, and when these rules are not followed, it creates concerns. The women acknowledged that they could not behave in a manner similar to a man. One woman talked about constantly being judged on every comment, decision and action. They agreed that the superintendency is based on a masculine model that simply was not compatible with women’s characteristics of leadership styles (Skrla, 2000).

The author noted a few revelations from the study, including how these specific women both embrace and reject social constructions of womanliness to be successful at their role. Additionally, Skrla (2000) noted that a newer, more informed construction is the awareness the women had of the discriminatory nature of the social construction of the superintendency and how each of the women dealt with this as part of their daily routine.

Feminist theory seeks to ask new questions and challenge previous understandings to unveil new meanings. Using feminist theory will provide the lens in how to think about and analyze the data collected. By focusing on the lives and career experiences of women, this

perspective will serve to bring attention to how and why women move through their administrative careers to the superintendent position. In order to better understand women's thoughts about themselves and their careers in administrative leadership, this lens will provide the ground in which to view the information. This information will also challenge the traditional social assumptions and stereotypes that society is used to, such as a man serving in the position of school superintendent. By employing a feminist lens in this study, my hope is that the research will be able to challenge and uncover new knowledge from the participants' experiences.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to surface and understand several career paths of women in administration, their experiences over time and the impact these experiences have had on their career choices. These women are all certified and eligible to hold a public school superintendent position; therefore, exploration on whether or not their career plans include a desire to become a superintendent will be discussed. This study has been chosen to better understand why so few women occupy the position of school superintendent, especially when they have taken the necessary coursework and certification tests to do so. Using a feminist lens, this study will take a look at various barriers and experiences over the course of a woman's career and work to make sense of those experiences. We will discuss opportunities, responses and how women have worked through any barriers with the hopes of identifying successful navigation techniques so that more women may obtain the position of superintendent.

In this chapter, I will explain the methodology I used in this study and will outline the rationale for adopting this methodology while connecting to the theory that grounds my study and interpretation of the data that I collected. I will explain why and how my participants were chosen for this study and finally a summary of my role as data collector, data analysis, procedures, interpretation and results. The following research questions were addressed:

1. Why do qualified women administrators choose not to pursue the superintendent position?
2. How does a specific small group of women think and talk about the reasons for not pursuing a superintendent position?

Research Process/Design

For this research study, I utilized a qualitative research approach. A qualitative research design using feminist theory provided an understanding from different perspectives and offered the greatest chance of making a difference in others' lives (Merriam, 2009). I chose this design primarily because I analyzed the career paths of several women, identified and surfaced any barriers or opportunities each have faced during their careers, and how they have responded to those. Through interviews, we discussed in depth how these barriers or opportunities impacted different stages of their careers. I asked the women to interpret their experiences and to explain the meaning they attribute to these experiences (Merriam, 2009). It has been debated that methodology is gendered, with qualitative methods connected more with feminist research and quantitative methods associated with a more scientific, masculine approach. Feminist theory supports this study in that knowledge is subjective, with an equal relationship between the researcher and researched (Westmarland, 2001).

The type of qualitative research approach applied to this study was a narrative inquiry approach, which worked to uncover phenomena and meaning (Merriam, 2009). This approach is best for gathering life experiences and detailed stories about a small group of individuals, a collaboration of sorts between researcher and participants (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000;

Creswell, 2007). Narrative inquiry is about capturing experiences and taking an even deeper look at those experiences in what is called four directions of inquiry. The four directions look inward, outward, backward and forward. Backward and forward refer to time, past and future, related to this topic. It is essential to understand the historical journey of the public school superintendent so that the issues of the future can be addressed. An inward direction takes a look at internal conditions, such as thoughts, hopes and feelings toward an issue, and external are those that exist in the world around us (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Additionally, I combined the approach with critical research, as my end goal for this was not merely to inform but to critique, transform, empower and challenge the status quo. In this type of research, questions were formed in terms of power-- who has it and what structures in society reinforce it (Merriam, 2009). This type of research also draws primarily on feminist theory and portions of social construction theory, as it looks at what structures in society reinforce the levels of power (Merriam, 2009). The combination of these two research approaches guided and support my study.

Using a narrative inquiry approach, multiple interviews were utilized for this study in order to adequately capture the stories and experiences that make up people's lives. The first interview was about getting to know one another and establishing our research partnership (Weiss, 1994). Once the initial round of interviews was complete, I examined the data to develop further questions based on that initial data, as I expected to explore different topics as the research progressed (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Weiss (1994) notes that second and third interviews are likely to produce quality information, while a fourth or fifth interview is not as

likely. When the information you obtain begins to get redundant, it is likely time to halt the interview process. With that, I planned to begin with two interviews per participant.

Selection of Participants

Criterion-based sampling, or purposeful sampling, allows the researcher to focus on specific attributes that are essential to the study (Merriam, 2009; Weiss, 1994). Maxwell (2013) refers to this as purposeful selection, in that particular settings, persons, or activities are selected to provide information that will be particularly relevant to the study and goals of the research. As a result, participants for this study possessed characteristics, such as being a woman, currently working in a public school system as an administrator, and holding or completed coursework to obtain the superintendent endorsement. Additionally, the sample group included those who are not currently working as a superintendent. The group of women also consisted of individuals who enabled me to establish the most productive relationships to answer the research questions (Maxwell, 2013). All participants were from the Chicago suburbs, resulting in similar experiences and opportunities in terms of district structures and positions. Six women from the Chicagoland area were selected. These women all hold degrees in educational administration and are eligible to hold a superintendent endorsement.

Samples for qualitative studies are typically much smaller than quantitative studies, as frequencies are not as important. It is important that the sample is large enough to assure most or all perceptions are uncovered, since more data does not necessarily mean new information (Mason, 2010). There are several factors that lower sample sizes, including expertise in a

particular area and interviewing multiple times. Additionally, qualitative researchers typically do not suggest an adequate sample size like quantitative researchers do. Depending on the type of research approach, the suggested sample size varies greatly, from one to three on the low end to 80-90 on the high end. Sample size has been said to be irrelevant, as the quality of the data is most important, which is a result of a positive interaction between the interviewer and participant (Mason, 2010).

Researcher Role

At the time of conducting this study, I was employed as a middle school principal, having recently completed advanced administrative coursework and secured a superintendent's endorsement credential. As the researcher, I must be aware of my own personal and political background, which may shape how the stories are retold.

Generation of Data

In qualitative studies, the most common form of data collection is done through interviewing and was used as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis for this study (Merriam, 2009). Generating data in this method is recommended when the data desired is what's in and on someone else's mind. How each interviewee observes and understands the world around her is typically unobservable (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). This may prove to be challenging, as interview data is not as concrete and measurable as survey data. Feelings

conveyed through interviews are often invisible and difficult to measure. It is then left up to the interest and perspective of the researcher to determine which pieces of information become data (Merriam, 2009). With this structure, data collection is about asking, watching and reviewing. The way an interviewer acts, responds and frames questions shapes the overall experience. Additionally, the location, time of day and other conditions can have an effect on the outcome of an interview (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

A semi-structured approach was used to include a mix of more and less structured interview questions. This allowed the conversation to flow naturally and allowed me to ask questions at the best time during the interview, which may have been in any order. This less structured format allowed respondents to define the world related to their experiences in their own and unique way (Merriam, 2009). This was chosen over an unstructured interview because the data sought is more than just exploratory in nature.

Interviews were recorded and I took notes and recorded comments, actions and happenings during the interview. Narrative inquiry is about stories and making sure one's stories are correct; therefore, the use of a recorder is important (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interviews were conducted at a time and place that was convenient to the participant and allowed for a comfortable atmosphere. The first set of interviews primarily focused on building our interview relationship and specifically talking about background information, experiences and identifying barriers that were present during the course of their careers. I prepared a set of interview questions for the second meeting; however, following the first interview and analysis, questions could have been adjusted based on the data collected. At the conclusion of each

interview, I wrote additional memos to immediately record initial thoughts, feelings, and reflections.

The second interview dug deeper into the participant's own thoughts, feelings and personal reflections on her past and future career aspirations. This portion of the interview was more personal in nature and allowed each participant to tell her own story, through her own lens and how she made sense of these experiences. It is important to pilot the interview guide with people similar to those selected as interviewees to determine ahead of time if the questions will work as intended. Additionally, it is equally important for the researcher to anticipate how people will understand the questions and how they are likely to respond (Maxwell, 2013).

Creswell (2007) states that narrative research can be a challenging approach, as he suggests the researcher should collect extensive information about each participant and form an active collaboration with each participant.

Analysis of the Data

Interviews were transcribed after each meeting session and the data then analyzed. In the meantime, I listened to the interview tapes to write notes on what was heard, adding to the existing visual notes from the interview. I then read the interview transcripts, observational notes, and deconstructed each story to organize the information into a framework. This framework will allowed me to identify key elements or themes (Creswell, 2007). Particular keywords, themes and ideas were identified with each participant and also as a whole group or segments within the group to begin to identify categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2013). A

chronology of unfolding events was examined to identify any possible turning points in each participant's life. A coding system needed to be identified early on so that I would be able to retrieve data easily and keep information organized. These codes translated into categories and subcategories. The best approach for this particular study was an axial coding approach. Axial coding goes beyond open coding in that once categories are established, the researcher puts data pieces back together in new ways, so that connections can be found. In axial coding, the focus is on the phenomenon, what are the conditions surrounding it, and in what context it is found (Strauss & Corbin, 1997).

Qualitative research is not a step-by-step process. Data collection and analysis begin with the first interview, the first meeting, and the first observation, where thoughts, insights and hypothesis direct next steps (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, any clarifications or confusion on the researcher's part will also be addressed during the second interview. It is important to note that both parties will discuss the meanings of the stories, which adds a validation check to the analysis (Creswell, 2007). Active collaboration with each participant is also suggested (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Creswell, 2007).

Creswell (2007) also recommends several options for narrative analysis, such as plot or three-dimensional space; however, it is noted that the researcher will not know what approach will be best until it is time to analyze the data.

Validity

There are many different perspectives regarding the importance of valid results in qualitative research (Creswell, 2007). Depending on the researcher, there are different views, definitions and procedures for establishing a valid and reliable study. Qualitative research involves conducting an investigation in an ethical manner (Merriam, 2009). The primary reason for conducting qualitative research is to understand.

Similarly, Creswell (2007) suggests eight validation strategies frequently used by qualitative researchers to support valid and reliable results and recommends qualitative researchers engage in at least two of them in any given study. Validity tests are recommended to be used and put into action within a study (Maxwell, 2013). I used the following strategies:

- Building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation that stems from distortion introduced by the researcher or informants are essential.
- Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of the study is important so that the reader understands the researcher's position and any biases or assumptions that impact the inquiry. In this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach to the study.
- Member checking solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations, considered by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to be the most critical technique for establishing credibility.

- Rich, thick description allows the reader to make decisions regarding transferability because the writer describes in detail the participants or setting under study. With such detailed description, the researcher enables readers to transfer information to other settings and to determine whether the findings can be transferred “because of shared characteristics.”

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This chapter presents an analysis of the data gathered from interviews conducted for this study to understand how women in administration with a superintendent's endorsement think and feel about possibly pursuing the position of school superintendent someday. The data describes each woman's career path, opportunities and challenges and how these have influenced their careers thus far. The findings of this study are grouped into four themes. All of the findings contribute to answering the following research questions:

1. Why do qualified women administrators choose not to pursue the superintendent position?
2. How does a specific small group of women think and talk about the reasons for not pursuing a superintendent position?

In this study, I interviewed six women individually on two different occasions. Each interview ranged from 30 minutes to one hour in length. During the first interview, participants answered questions prepared in advance to provide an overview of background, experiences, barriers and successes (see Appendix A). The interviews were semi-structured and open ended. Each interview was transcribed and coded prior to the second interview. The purpose of review prior to the second interview was to discover any trends or unanswered questions, so that any necessary follow-up questions could be asked and explored. The second interview expanded on the first and included some additional questions (see Appendix B).

Feminist theory established the frame in which to analyze the data. This perspective provided a lens through which to understand how the women navigated their careers, including any barriers, opportunities, influences and surprises. It was important to conduct a qualitative research study to examine the thoughts and experiences of women in administration who could share their stories with other women in leadership who may be uncertain about the path to the superintendency.

This chapter will include background information on each participant as well as a summary of the data gleaned from the interview transcripts. This data is presented and arranged by theme.

Data Collection and Analysis

Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed. The audio recordings were reviewed several times to ensure the transcription was accurate. From there, the transcriptions were used to analyze the text by hand at first to identify potential codes and themes. John Creswell (2007), author of qualitative research methods, recommends this framework to allow the researcher to identify key elements or themes. Each transcript was reviewed, highlighted and color coded to identify these themes. Particular keywords and ideas were identified with each participant and also as a whole group to begin to identify categories and relationships (Maxwell, 2013). A potential list was created and reviewed several times for commonalities. After the initial themes were drafted, the transcript was reread again, highlighting words, quotes and portions of the text that aligned with each theme. These were then cut, sorted and tagged on index cards to better

manipulate. These cards were organized and sorted into similar quotes to discover additional themes and potential subthemes. Once categorized, themes were solidified and some items fell into more than one code category.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of six women, ranging in age from 38 to 55 years old, who completed their graduate coursework in educational leadership and hold an endorsement of public school superintendent but are not currently employed as superintendents. All women work in public school systems in the Chicagoland suburbs. The women represent districts of varying sizes and demographics. The specific names and schools will not be shared in this study in order to maintain the confidentiality of the interview participants. All of the women currently hold district-level positions of varying types.

The following section of this chapter will provide a description of the participants, their career moves, and backgrounds to gain familiarity with the participants of this study. All names of participants and schools have been changed for privacy purposes (see Table 1).

Table 1

Description of Participants

Pseudonym	Type of District	Student Enrollment	Number of Years in Current Position	Age	Current Role
Lisa	Unit, PK-12	9,000	14	43	Director
Brenda	Elementary, PK-8	5,500	1	45	Assistant Superintendent
Pauline	Unit, PK-12	12,500	8	52	Director
Mary	Elementary, PK-8	Less than 2,000	12	55	Assistant Superintendent
Judy	Elementary, PK-8	Less than 2,000	1	42	Assistant Superintendent
Kathy	Elementary, PK-8	6,500	4	38	Assistant Superintendent

Description of Participants

Lisa

Lisa is a 43-year-old married mother of three who currently works in a larger size unit school district. She began her teaching career as a special education teacher and has worked her way up to the position of Director of Student Services after seven years in the classroom. She has been in her current position in the same district for 14 years; however, Lisa's title and job responsibilities have changed somewhat over time.

Brenda

Brenda is a 45-year-old assistant superintendent who recently experienced a promotion within her own district from an elementary principal position. She has been in her current elementary district for eight years. Brenda began her career as a school counselor then was promoted to assistant principal in the same building before moving on to a new district for her principalship. Brenda is married and has two children in high school. Her mother is a former teacher and has been a big influence in Brenda's career.

Pauline

Pauline works in a large unit district as a district-level director. She has been in education for almost 35 years and in her current district for eight years in several different positions. She is married with three grown children. Pauline began her career as a school psychologist and worked in various roles within a cooperative and public school system for about 20 years before pursuing her administrative endorsement. She was then offered a "special assignment" as a site administrator to oversee buildings when the principals were out for construction meetings. A year later there was a principal opening and the superintendent appointed her to that position. She worked as a principal for six years before moving to a different district as an elementary principal, where she worked for another six years. She was asked to take on a district-level position two years ago overseeing multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) and special services. Pauline is near retirement with two years left in her career.

Mary

Mary is in her last year as an assistant superintendent on her way to retirement. She began her career as a special education teacher and worked in several districts as an assistant principal and principal until working in her current district for the past 12 years as an assistant superintendent. She works in a smaller elementary district with a small district office staff. Mary is married with three grown children and has not pursued a superintendent position during the course of her career.

Judy

Judy is a former special education teacher who has worked in several different districts. She has moved from teacher to assistant principal, principal, and most recently, assistant superintendent. Her current district is a small elementary district. She has worked in larger unit districts as well as a larger elementary district. This is her first experience in a small district. She is married with three children, two of whom are still at home.

Kathy

Kathy is an assistant superintendent in a large elementary district. She has only been in the district for three years and experienced a promotion during her time from an executive director to assistant superintendent due to a title change and the incorporation of additional

duties. Prior to this position, she served as a special education teacher, assistant principal, associate principal and principal. She began pursuing her master's degree early on, within the first three years of teaching. Kathy is married with two children. She is the youngest of the interview subjects at 38 years old.

Findings

Four major themes emerged from the coding process. The interviews began with each woman talking through her administrative career, beginning with her first administrative experience, how she secured that position and the nuances of moving from one position to the next. During our conversations, a number of barriers, opportunities and lessons learned were uncovered. The organization of these themes begin with exterior barriers, followed by interior barriers and opportunities. Each theme is explored in depth with supporting evidence from the voices of the participants. Quotes add further evidence for the questions. The arrangement of the findings conclude with the research questions for this study.

- Cultivation: Get Out of the Box
- Leadership Experiences: Playing the Game
- Woman Self: Find Your Why
- Mentors: Words That Influence

Theme 1. Cultivation: Get Out of the Box

Cultivation, or intentionally developing quality leaders over time, emerged as an important theme from the interviews. This theme is best defined as an external structural barrier in that specific practices are embedded within districts themselves. These structures are rarely challenged and they are difficult to change. Each woman talked about cultivation at several different points during the interviews. It arose during different questions, depending on the path those questions took.

Research supports the belief that structural barriers hold women back from advancement. It is noted specifically that promotion from within happens more frequently for men than women and structural norms result in a lack of opportunities for women in particular (Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Wallin, 1999).

Depending on the superintendent and the board, districts approach recruitment, hiring processes and the filling of administrative vacancies in a variety of ways. The structure of some districts is to run a full interview process, while others appoint. The culture and past practice of the district and the vision of the superintendent does not always support internal leadership growth and cultivation.

Brenda, Kathy and Pauline were all provided opportunities though selection or appointment, while Judy, Lisa and Mary did not have that opportunity. Brenda was “selected to be a middle school counselor and then was asked to be an assistant principal.” Kathy “was an associate principal and I went right into the principalship of that alternative program.” Pauline’s “superintendent appointed me to principal.”

Even several of the women were appointed to leadership positions, many of the same women spoke of very specific instances of not cultivating leaders from within. In some instances it was a person, a supervisor perhaps, and in other examples it was the culture of the district. Brenda, Lisa, Judy, Pauline and Mary described stories of districts and individuals within those districts not supporting them in their leadership careers. They had been deceiving and intimidating, trying to lead women into a different direction because they feared for their own position or that they may lose out on a promotion. Pauline talked about how a fellow counterpart, who happened to be a man, told her that “he didn’t think I should be a principal, that I would be better suited as a special ed. director.” She was later told that this man told her this to steer her away from his job.

Kathy had a principal early on in her career that was “not helpful or in favor of supporting an internship within her building, supporting me getting my administrative degree.” This prompted her to find a teaching position within a building that would be supportive of her growing administratively.

Brenda’s thoughts about her former principal were that “I’m not sure he truly was invested in cultivating. I just don’t know that it was a high priority for him.” In Brenda’s case, the district had no intention or desire to grow leaders from within, especially women leaders, and in one district the culture was that you have to prove yourself outside of the district before being given an opportunity to come back. Brenda recalls:

It was a little disappointing because obviously also at the time they weren’t necessarily, I felt like cultivating leadership from within. It was highly valued to have principals that were coming from other places, like you had to do your time elsewhere.

Judy had a similar experience in her first administrative position in a district that did not grow leaders from within. At the time, she thought:

If I put the time in, they would see that I could do the job. I assumed they were happy with my work and that I could continue to grow in that district. Unfortunately, that was not the case. I was great at being an assistant principal, but they never considered me, viewed me, or grew me toward being a principal. I did not get the principalship in my own building where I worked as an assistant principal for seven years. I did, however, get to do all the work the following year for the new principal, who was a former PE teacher and knew little about curriculum and instruction. I left the following year for a principalship.

Judy continued to talk about making a tough decision to leave that type of district culture so that she could continue to grow and gain experiences if she wanted to meet her professional goals. “It was scary because I started to doubt myself and think that maybe I couldn’t do the job, especially if my own district doesn’t think so.”

Brenda also talked about how she ultimately had to leave a district that she had called home for ten years in order to get that next opportunity. Brenda was good enough to fill an elementary principal’s maternity leave but was passed up for several full-time principal openings.

It is important for women to be able to identify structural barriers and the potential for advancement within a particular district. This title of this theme is “Cultivation: Get Out of the Box” because it is so important for women to be able to step outside of the box and see these barriers so they can make decisions about their careers, as Judy needed to do.

Theme 2. Leadership Experiences: Playing the Game

The second theme to surface from the interviews was the idea of how the participants learned to “play the game” once they obtained their first leadership role. Each interviewee talked about having to figure “it” out, as graduate schools did not prepare them for how to manage this delicate balance of fitting in. In this section, we will look at some of those unforeseen barriers that arose and each woman’s thoughts and feelings about them. Interestingly, the barriers themselves are best described as external structural barriers; however, the women’s responses to these barriers fell into more of an internal struggle. Therefore, the theme of needing to “play the game” was categorized as an internal barrier for the women.

One example Brenda and Lisa spoke of was navigating the nuances of communication and speaking up. Brenda remembers:

I think I figured it out pretty quickly. At an assistant principal level there’s an element of playing the game and learning, sort of the nuances of people and systems and figuring out sort of where your input is appreciated, where it is not and how to speak when spoken to.

Lisa responded similarly during her interview: “I did not speak up at all and really it took several years for me to find my voice in those meetings where there were an awful lot of men sitting around the table.” She also noted that one of the biggest challenges she had experienced over the years was, “particularly when I started but even so now, at times being taken seriously.”

As time went on, the participants began to realize the importance of having a voice in those meetings and recognized the need to speak up to be taken seriously. Lisa resolved this by “not caring as much anymore...I have something to say and I’m not as concerned about meeting that norm of sitting quietly and looking pretty. I’ve grown up I guess.”

This idea of having a voice is more than just being able to speak up in meetings; it's also about the ability to strategize your communication approach when you've got something to say.

Brenda learned

how to have influence and still move forward with things and not compromise your values, but still play the game and I guess I came to the realization that in some cases I had to, with the idea of what's best for kids, sometimes I had to play the game to get things done, and sometimes that doesn't feel too good because you wish that people would be more on the same page.

For Kathy, one of her challenges, in terms of communication, was her age. In order to counter this, she utilized a different strategy while principal. Her approach was the manner in which she communicated:

[Often] I used people to help support and get around that [concept of age]. I worked with a male associate principal and so sometimes we would go together to certain groups or with certain ideas and he'd take a portion and I'd take a portion so that we didn't run into that limitation of anyone who had trouble with a female presenting it or younger person presenting.

In a different discussion about playing the game, Brenda worked on finding her voice to advocate for herself:

I'm not sure at the time the district-level administration necessarily saw a female in the role of lead building administrator at a middle school. Like fine for elementary, but not at the secondary level. So, maybe I had to advocate for myself a little bit more than maybe other people to get opportunities.

Sandberg (2013) agrees that internal barriers are a contributing factor in women's lack of advancement and argues that understanding and breaking down internal barriers are critical to gaining power. Studies focusing on voice and power reveal an unnatural silence that occurs in women. Women typically feel more comfortable with conversation nestled within the traditional roles of women. If and when women broke those traditional rules, they faced negative

consequences (Brunner, 2000). Lisa mentioned this during her interview when she talked about the perception of “not contributing” during administrative meetings.

Good Ole Boys’ Club

Another notion of playing the game is to understand the existence of and working with a “good ole boys’ club,” which surfaced in all six interviews. The consensus among the women is that it is still alive and well in many suburban districts. From the research, we know that establishing relationships, alliances and networks provides essential support for a leader to gain and maintain power (Bolman & Deal, 2003). We also know that men are socialized to develop power through a communication style of asserting ideas, interrupting, and having the floor, which is not the most comfortable behavior for a woman (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). This concept of power and behavior continues to draw men together while excluding women. Again, this can best be described as an exterior barrier, yet navigating this barrier shifts to an internal struggle for the women.

Judy, Pauline and Mary discussed this in the sense of seeing “incompetent men leaders” given opportunities for positions they ultimately couldn’t do. Pauline referred to their leadership as “smoke and mirrors” and felt they were hired for their “personality and not necessarily their leadership abilities.” She also added, “They have their little group and they work and work and work until they find jobs for that group, then they go back and find jobs for another group. That’s why I ended up leaving.” Even in her new district, she is frustrated by the fact that “all the

directors are women and the executive directors are men.” Judy talked about a former assistant principal that she hired:

He was an administrator for one year before being recruited by a male friend-of-a-friend superintendent for a principal position. He called me for a reference and I told him he was not ready. He ended up getting the job and they released him two years later. Now he’s back in the classroom.

On a positive note, during the interviews, the women talked about lessons learned from each experience and how many times one experience opened the door to another, sometimes within the same district and other times it had to be a move to another district. The women talked about how these barriers and lessons helped shape how they approach other barriers now in their jobs. Brenda said she “was grateful for the experience,” reflecting on navigating these struggles.

All in all, each interviewee learned to play the game at some point in her career. For some women, it was a realization that took a little longer. Ultimately, many of these barriers came as a surprise to the women, in that no one prepared them for these challenges in administration. When the women were asked about what they wished they knew prior to entering into administration, Lisa said, “Honestly, that the good old boys’ club is alive and well. You think that it is long gone. It is very, very, very, very much alive.” Judy wished she

would have known there is a culture that exists in some districts that look at men and women differently. I learned a lot, but that is one area that took me by surprise the most. Learning how to work through that was a challenge I wish someone would have said something about.

After discussion, the women ultimately realized they had to figure these challenges out if they wanted to continue to be successful in their careers. These challenges were internal barriers

they struggled with professionally and personally. They can look back now and talk confidently about those challenges and feel good about the lessons learned from each experience.

Theme 3. Self: Find Your Why

The fourth theme, entitled “Self,” takes a deeper look inside each woman’s experiences and the idea that some of their struggles may have come from within themselves. Each woman has to look within herself to find her “why” in order to do the work she truly wants to do. Setbacks and obstacles may have gotten in the way, but through reflection and thought, these women figured out how to navigate these internal barriers during their careers.

When the women were asked about lessons learned over the years, the importance of self-awareness emerged. Kathy said:

I think one of the tougher lessons that I have learned is to be really clear about who you are before you start [a new leadership position] so that you can operate with integrity and not waver, because unfortunately, I think of any administrative position, people are looking for you to be ineffective. They are looking for things that you are doing wrong. [After reflecting] When people questioned things, I would have taken things less personally. So I think that anytime that you are afforded opportunities if you can do some self-discovery and self- searching before, about what you will give a little bit on or what you want, what are your own non-negotiables and how you will operate or what you believe about education and kids, that helps you overcome a lot of obstacles from the get-go.

Similarly, Lisa talked about the importance of reflecting on her own behavior. She recognized that certain behaviors were difficult, such as speaking up, but acknowledged that

it’s what you need to do. It’s uncomfortable at first but you need to do it. You could just sit through a meeting and if you’re not really reflecting on how you behaved you could really just end up sitting through every meeting and then you run the risk of, you know, ‘she’s not really contributing.’

Brenda talked about how perhaps it was “a little bit my own self” that has been a barrier during her career:

In terms of making sure that...I don't know...having the confidence to make the move. I mean it's really easy for me to now say to people, 'You're waiting to be totally ready to be a principal. It's never going to happen.' We spent more time making sure we had accumulated all the experiences before jumping in.

She felt a sense of needing to be prepared, knowing now that level of preparedness only comes when you actually make the move. Similarly, Pauline felt that a barrier to her success was her “ability to sell myself,” worrying about applying for that next job and not getting it. At one point, she realized that this is something that needs to change. Judy had a similar feeling of “waiting to feel prepared for a principalship. Looking back, I'm not really sure what that would have been because I was probably prepared all along.”

When asked about how they handled some of these thoughts and feelings during their careers, many of the women talked about internal characteristics they developed over time. For instance, Brenda talked about how she “needed to advocate for myself a little bit more than other people to get opportunities.” She talked about choosing whether or not to sit back and “admire the problem” or go out and do something about it. She also added, “I wouldn't change it for anything.”

The research on internal barriers supports these ladies' reflections. Once they figured out how to self-promote, they became more comfortable with themselves and how to better navigate their careers. It is noted that self-promotion should occur more frequently throughout the duration of one's career; however, in order to self-promote, women must behave in a manner inconsistent with norms typically associated with feminine behavior (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). Many women fear to act in this manner because it violates the typical gender stereotypes

that have been constructed over the years (Rudman, 1998). In order to move up the ranks of the organization, these women needed to be able to emphasize their strengths and aggressively pursue goals (Babcock & Laschever, 2003). Once they figured out how to comfortably behave in this manner, they became clearer on their “why.”

Brenda, Lisa, Pauline and Mary also recognized that during their careers, some of their decisions also involved the balance of family and work. Pauline “noticed across my 35 years...that a woman’s trajectory is slower than men because they had to be a little bit more thoughtful and consider the amount of time they have away from their family.” Brenda talked about how she

prioritized my family in a certain way that maybe prompted me to make some different decisions about things. I don’t know that I would go back, but I do think it carved a slightly different path than maybe some other people would have gone.

Lisa “likes having most of my evenings and being able to spend time with my own kids.” During the course of Mary’s career, she “stayed home for a while and then decided that I was going to substitute teach, so I did that for a while.”

Theme 4. Mentors: Words that Influence

The fourth and final theme to surface fell into a very different category altogether. Moving away from barriers for a moment, an opportunistic theme emerged from the interviews: the importance of mentors in all of the women's lives, specifically, mentors who helped forge a path to leadership for women who had “never considered” it. Many of the women talked about

someone who encouraged them to consider leadership or take the first step in that direction. For many, it was early on in their careers and administration was not on their radar.

All interviewees talked about specific mentors who took time to encourage, train and coach them toward leadership. These were individuals who took time to see their strengths, abilities, and talked them through the initial idea of leadership to their first administrative job. Interestingly, all of these supportive mentors were women.

Research talks specifically about how mentors are essential in this line of work, and a lack of mentors limits female entry into administration and advancement into the superintendency (Shakeshaft et al., 2007). The nuances of this theme support the notion that these women excelled when nudged to do so and perhaps struggled with an internal barrier of self-promotion. Self-promotion should occur more frequently throughout the duration of one's career so that strengths are emphasized and upward movement can occur (Moss-Racusin & Rudman, 2010). In order to self-promote, a woman must behave in a manner inconsistent with norms typically associated with feminine behavior. Many women fear to act in this manner because it violates the typical gender stereotypes that have been constructed over the years (Rudman, 1998).

Many of the mentors were in a position to appoint or promote women to certain leadership roles or very specifically asked and encouraged them to apply for leadership positions, having firsthand knowledge of the selection process. Lisa, Brenda, Pauline and Kathy had someone who put them on a path to administration and pointed them in the right direction by providing connections to very specific jobs.

Lisa: "At the time, the current director came to me and asked if I would be interested in making the jump to an assistant director."

Brenda: “She strongly encouraged me to go in the direction of administration and really I think even redesigned my role to give me a lot of opportunities.”

Pauline: “She pointed me in the right direction.” “You should really be a building administrator.”

Kathy: “The principal asked me to apply for the assistant principal position.”

Through our discussions it was apparent that the women all had trusting relationships with these mentors, in that they made them feel confident in their abilities and trust they could take on a leadership position, even when completely uncertain. Pauline said, “They saw something in me that I didn’t see myself.” Kathy thought she would be a “teacher for life.” Lisa said she “never considered” leadership, and Pauline was told, “You are the right person to do this work.” These are powerful and motivating statements that gave these women enough confidence to work toward administration.

These relationships continued over the years and they provided ongoing support to the women as they moved through their careers. Kathy remembers:

I can specifically recall incidents where she would say, you know, come into my office. I’m about to make this phone call to this parent. It’s going to be difficult. I want you to hear how I navigate it and then afterwards we would debrief. We would talk about teacher evaluations and why certain things were written the way they were and then debrief after the post-conference so she could use them as teaching tools for me.

The mentors coached them through a number of leadership situations until they were ready for their first administrative positions. Even after these women obtained administrative roles, the mentor relationships continued and remained a strong and valuable resource. Mary recalls:

Even when I became a principal, I looked to her for mentorship. I mean, she would be the one who would coach me through some of those difficult times with staff where she would say I need to have a thick skin and you need to let this roll off and you should not take it personally.

Summary

During the interviews, all six women were asked whether or not they wanted to be a superintendent someday. Of those interviewees, only two women could give a confident, quick answer. Lisa was the only definite “no” when she responded to the question: “God no! Not enough money in the world. Wouldn’t touch it with a ten-foot pole.” Kathy, on the other hand, was the only clear “yes” when asked if she saw herself as a superintendent someday: “I do. Yeah. I’m crazy; people describe me as overly optimistic.”

The other four interviewees talked around the subject for a minute, wavering their answers and not providing a clear yes or no. Brenda’s response was, “You know, I don’t know. I mean, I look forward to getting a closer look at the role in this assistant superintendent role. I figure maybe in a year or two I might know more about that.” Judy had a similar response: “Honestly, I don’t know. I feel like I am in the right position to get there someday, but really need a closer look and some key people to help support me.” Pauline began the conversation by saying that “I never ever wanted to be a superintendent.” She later said that “maybe an interim, but I don’t know how much further removed [from the buildings] I want to be.” My follow-up question asked whether or not she may have a different opinion if she had a mentor who encouraged her and helped guide her. She did say “yeah” to that. Mary, who is in her last year before retirement said that at one point she saw herself as a superintendent:

I wanted to be at the top of whatever game I was playing. I was about five years in and I was asked if I was interested in pursuing the superintendency. I thought about it, but at the end of the day, I don’t do politics well. I didn’t want to be the person who got to decide whether or not someone had a personal day or not. The politics of working with a school board. I mean, everyone has a dysfunctional school board member or two and quite honestly, if I was in that position, I probably would have been fired for my mouth.

Initially, three of the six women openly said they were interested in pursuing the superintendent position when asked point blank. After further discussion, Pauline initially said no, but with support and guidance felt it could be attainable, resulting in 66% of the participants having an interest in the superintendent position. This number is slightly higher than what past research indicates, at approximately 40% of women articulating a desire to pursue the position of superintendent (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). The role of the superintendent is the most powerful role within a school district, and yet the women continued to have difficulty conceptualizing the idea of power (Goldin & Katz, 2002).

The majority of barriers that women experience are internal in nature. Once ranking at the bottom of the list, self-imposed internal barriers have made a shift over the years (Derrington & Sharratt, 2009). Women in these interviews provided reasons for success and attributed those reasons to external factors, such as possessing the right mentor in Theme 4. In regard to struggles, these women quickly pointed to internal faults or lack of abilities as explanation for these faults, which was noted in Theme 3. These attributions have a significant impact on one's emotions and self-esteem and influence behaviors when climbing the workplace ladder (Reis, 2002). Consequently, the Imposter Syndrome may be detrimental to a woman's career path, desires, and motivation toward a successful and challenging career.

After collecting the data and realizing that many women do, in fact, aspire to the position of superintendent, I knew that my research questions needed to be revisited and perhaps revised somewhat, as the data was now offering a slightly different story.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of women administrators' experiences in leadership and the influence these experiences have had on their careers and career choices to better understand why women do not aspire to the superintendent position, even when properly certified to do so. After examining the data, I was surprised to see that many women do, in fact, aspire to reach the superintendent's office, causing me to rethink my initial research questions as the stories were told. The data is telling a new and slightly different story, which is common in qualitative research involving interviews. Robert Weiss (1994) notes that in the initial phase of report writing, it is worth re-examining the initial questions that prompted the study and if those questions accurately capture the data that has been collected. I realized that by answering the study's initial questions, I would only use a small portion of the data that had been gathered, and after everything that I have learned, the data is telling a much deeper and interesting story. The process of qualitative design is emergent and not linear. The process is not finished when the data has been collected; in fact, the purpose typically changes as the research progresses (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Merriam, 2009). I have found that to be the case with this study.

I have come to realize that most of my interviewees are open to the idea of someday pursuing the role of superintendent. Even with this desire, that may not happen due to obstacles

or barriers that they have encountered during the course of their careers or could potentially encounter in the future. Therefore, as I present my conclusions, they are based on the answers to new research questions.

- Revised Research Question 1: What barriers and opportunities do women administrators experience during the course of their careers that influence their decisions to work toward a superintendent position?
- Revised Research Question 2: How does a specific small group of women think and talk about the reasons, and what commonalities and differences exist among them?

The findings indicate there are a number of barriers women experience during an administrative career while maneuvering the job ladder to the superintendent position. Additionally, the findings also indicate that these barriers are possible to overcome with the proper knowledge and support. It is my hope that this knowledge will help women better navigate the challenges of maneuvering the administrative job ladder and moving toward attaining the position of school superintendent. While women have made gains in obtaining the role of school superintendent, there continue to be very few women in that role. This study examined the careers, thoughts and perspectives of six women all working in administrative positions who hold the proper certification to be a superintendent in the state of Illinois.

Interpretations

The path to the superintendency is an intersection of gender, social norms, and leadership development that plays a crucial role in the development of a woman's career (Alston, 2005).

Throughout this research process and during all interviews, each woman described her administrative experiences and career path. We talked about the opportunities and challenges along the way and lessons learned from those events. Understanding the experiences of women administrators that may or may not choose to pursue the path to the superintendent position is necessary for improving leadership development in women who aspire to this goal. Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) note that many leadership and change theories are based on the studies of men, resulting in findings that may not be of great use to women. As more women move into administration, they argue that more studies that include only women should be researched.

The interpretation and findings are analyzed from a liberal feminist perspective and framed by common themes that emerged from the study. Liberal feminism generally takes on more than one form; however, for the purposes of this study, the premises of liberal feminism focus on living the life of one's own choosing in a society in which all individuals have the opportunity to realize their potential (Tong, 1989; Wallin, 1999). The specific concepts used from the feminist theory center on equality, discrimination and patriarchy in our society, which will be used as angles to analyze the data collected. I will also think about and analyze different relationships, how they developed, interactions, and different viewpoints of those relationships, most commonly between men and women, which is a common frame of feminist analysis (Tong, 1989).

Re-examining the same themes and data presented in Chapter 4, I will look at them in more depth as specific barriers and reasons why women struggle or hesitate to pursue the superintendent position and as answers to my revised research questions. It is important to

examine these themes through a feminist lens to help us develop a deeper meaning and ground the data in this perspective to better understand how women think and talk about these reasons.

It is also significant to understand the role of the public school superintendent from a feminist perspective so that women can better understand how to navigate their career paths and what challenges might occur during the course of their administrative careers. The current system has made the position more accessible to men, so how can women work to navigate the current system? Research has been clear that school boards and society as a whole expect the superintendent's position to be filled by a man, and more specifically, a married man (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). It is important to understand the barriers and perceptions that women have in order to create real change for women in the future. Moreover, it is apparent that the problems women face in attaining the superintendency have remained rather consistent over time. For this reason, there must be a different approach to ensure that women have greater access to the superintendent position.

Findings

Barrier 1: Gendered Stereotypes

The most difficult and most prevalent barrier for women is navigating the unspoken political network of men in school district administration. In the 1990s the superintendency was reported to be one of the most male-dominated executive positions in the United States, with little change since then (Glass et al., 2002). Developing relationships through networking is a

vital and specific career competency for furthering one's career (Forret & Dougherty, 2004).

Women in this study quickly learned who belonged to this network, who had connections, and who used their power to give and get favors from others, particularly men, in the organization.

This was not only used as a means to get what they wanted, but it was also to help other men get ahead or make their jobs easier.

This form of overt gender discrimination exists in both administration and the superintendency partly due to this informal network of men whose sole purpose is to help one another. Research shows that supportive relationships in the workplace have been more beneficial for the career progression of men than women (Forret & Dougherty, 2004). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) believe there is a traditional profile to the American school superintendent:

They are white males in their fifties. They always have been. Most of them are successful in their roles and as Americans, we like to replicate success. So we hire more of the same-- much more of the same. (p. 105)

This revelation coincides perfectly with studies spanning 25 years. In a 1996 study by Margaret Grogan, gender was found to be a predominant factor in women's preparation for the school superintendent position, in addition to a variety of other factors. Women provided many examples of a gendered environment within educational administration, which influenced administrative styles and behaviors of the women. In 2008, a similar study considered the perceptions of over 400 existing superintendents, who overwhelmingly recognized gender bias and the negative effect it had on women (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). Liberal feminism strives to remove these types of oppressive gender roles and patriarchy from society, which is exactly what women need to have an equal opportunity in reaching the superintendent position (Tong, 1989).

Additionally, society typically prefers the status quo, which is seeing the role of public school superintendent occupied by a man.

Playing this game is perhaps the most difficult for women to navigate, partially due to the fact that the rules of the game were designed by men, for men, with women watching from the outside. Each and every woman who was interviewed talked about the good ole boys' network and how difficult this was to navigate and break through. Dana and Bourisaw (2006) note that it is "unwise" for women to "associate" with a good ole boys' network, especially if that network of individuals has the potential to damage your dignity or credibility. According to the women interviewed, once the rules of the game were figured out, they ultimately needed to decide if they wanted to play the game or move on to a different opportunity.

This type of gender discrimination has also been the area of most surprise for all of the women interviewed. Partly because this was never taught in any class or coursework, nor was it ever a topic of conversation once employed by a district. Each woman had to figure this out on her own then learn to navigate the politics in order to be successful. They constantly looked for ways to be viewed as equals and receive the same support and treatment as the men in administrative roles in the district. There may be a perception out there that this network no longer exists; however, women in administration know that it is very much alive. In 2000, over 50% of sitting superintendents reported that a strong ole boys' network continues to exist (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). In another study, women superintendents identified the existence of a buddy system and exclusion from this system as the number one barrier to career advancement (Campbell & Cambell-Whatley, 2020).

The strong network of men created many inequalities that surfaced for the women in many aspects of the administrative world. It was apparent during meetings and controlled who could speak and who would be listened to. It was apparent during lunch outings with the men invited and the women waiting until asked. It showed during interview processes, who earned promotions and who was provided opportunities. In one instance, the opportunity for advancement was on the table for one woman. In the midst of an interview process, another man was added late. He missed the deadline for application, missed the screening interviews but in the end was ultimately chosen as the next principal. It was later found out that his friendship with another man, who was a member of the interview team, allowed his late entry into the process.

Reasons such as this were the number one reason why women left successful administrative roles. They were not asked to leave, but rather had to make the difficult decision on their own. This was a very challenging position for the women interviewed. On one hand, they knew their input was not appreciated and, ultimately, there would be no future in that district. On the other hand, many of them were in these roles for a number of years, they were comfortable, they knew their job and worked successfully with colleagues. They developed relationships with many people, watched co-workers get married, have children and start families. For them it was a bittersweet decision, but one that had to be decided. A longtime school board member, professor and author once said:

Today, as in past years, when he [Robert Maranto] asks female education leaders about their career paths, they often mention that they left a previous job to escape local norms that barred them from promotion beyond a certain level--but not a single male education leader has ever said the same. (Maranto et al., 2018 p. 12)

Structural Barriers and District Culture

Finding oneself in a position to navigate gender discrimination, inequalities, and other underlying struggles of the good ole boys' network can stall or derail a woman's administrative career path to the superintendency. For a newly hired woman administrator, this can be very difficult to manage. Some feminists say these barriers are structural in nature, in that when women are finally hired in administrative roles they need to navigate these structural barriers for continued success. This is mainly due to the fact that the role of school superintendent is not looked at through a woman's perspective. Specific supports that would increase the likelihood of a woman's success in this role go unnoticed (Wallin, 1999).

I would agree that a district's culture is a result of the creation and existence of structural barriers that have been in place for years. They have lived for so long, creating persistent patterns of discrimination resulting from role definition, socialization practices and a wide-range of societal values that it goes unnoticed by those working there (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). It is the hope of liberal feminists to break down these structures and other barriers that lead to equality for women in the workplace and specifically in educational administration (Wallin, 1999).

Structural barriers exist at all levels of a school system, beginning with hiring practices. Wallin (1999) says that one of the biggest arguments for the under-representation of women in educational administration is due to discrimination in recruitment and promotion. From the screening and selection for interviews to other hiring practices, discriminatory operations preclude women's advancement from the very beginning. Munoz et al. (2014) agree that a barrier for women is the manner in which the school board selects their search criteria. Often

times they are critical of a woman's finance ability and believe they are not good candidates to lead districts. We saw these same discriminatory practices with Brenda's experience of working toward a principal position and coming to the realization of working in a district that provides different opportunities for men than it does for women. This could absolutely be a deadend street for women seeking a superintendent position. Brenda's explained:

I'm not sure at the time that district-level administration necessarily saw a female in the role of lead building administrator at a middle school.

Brenda went on to explain that because of this knowledge she only interviewed for elementary principal positions in that district. Sadly, she also talked about the district culture of proving yourself outside of the district before being given an opportunity to come back. These hiring barriers prevented her from continuing to work in that district, so she left.

Beyond hiring practices, once a position is obtained, there are additional discriminatory barriers for women to manage in the workplace. Take the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, which is one of the most respected institutions in the country. Men are noted to have a specific name for the women. They refer to them as "DUBS-- dumb ugly bitches" (Kay & Shipman, 2014). This is something that has been ingrained into the culture of that institution and most men probably don't think twice about the term. However, how difficult would this be for women to try to rise to the top in an environment that constantly demeans women (Kay & Shipman, 2014). In the world of educational administration, it is not typical for this type of degrading behavior to be as overt in nature, yet it does still exist in more discrete ways.

When asked at the end of her interview if Pauline had anything additional to share or revisit, she pondered for a minute as if something was weighing on her mind and said:

We need better and more women. I think the perspective is just different and it's necessary. I'm frustrated in my setting. I'm a director and we have executive directors. Okay, all the directors are women and the executive directors are men. Why is that? At a time, I believed that the superintendent gave the title because it came with more money. So, who does the majority of the work?

This type of discriminatory culture within a district can be a stalling factor in a woman's career. It is demeaning and shameful to be given a lower status and title just because you are a woman. Additionally, by providing executive director positions to men, it allows for easier advancement for men to move ahead; while it may be more difficult for Pauline to move to assistant superintendent or superintendent from a director position but potentially more likely from an executive director position. Depending on how many years it takes to figure out whether or not promotion from within is hopeful, one could spend quite a bit of time hoping for advancement. Without making key advancements, the opportunity to obtain the superintendent position can become dismal. Katty Kay and Claire Shipman (2014) said it best:

Faced with these realities, sometimes women give up altogether, deciding we don't fit in this world and can't be bothered to put up with it when the toll on our psyches and our families is so high. Too often when we stay, doing so drains our energy. Every morning we have to drag on our office armor, trying to win a game we don't really understand or like. (p. 95)

Two of the women interviewed spent ten years and seven years in positions they hoped would lead to promotion but ultimately led to departure from the districts. If not careful, these years can quickly add up and keep a woman in one place for quite a while, waiting, hoping for that chance. A specific feminist analysis on these types of school districts could further explore the reasons why some people are provided opportunities and open doors and others are not (Wallin, 1999). A deeper analysis could ultimately lead to answers that would help women navigate and break down structural barriers in these types of districts.

Barrier 2: Mentors

For those headed into administration for the first time, a trusting relationship with an encouraging mentor certainly helped the women see their potential. Having a mentor is shown to improve the chances of moving along in administration. In a study of 142 aspiring women principals, 42% became principals before the end of ten years when they had a solid mentor (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Mentorship comes up in almost all research on women seeking the superintendency and the lack of mentors is frequently noted as a major barrier in the pursuit of the superintendent position (Bjork, 2000; Campbell & Campbell-Whatley, 2020). This surfaced as an important component in the interviewees' lives and continues to be of importance as they navigate their careers through administration and also in search of a superintendent position.

It is important to also note that when thinking about mentor relationships, gender becomes an important theme in which to think about these relationships. I saw it firsthand with these interviews. When the women were asked about any opportunities they were afforded during the course of their careers, many first talked about "someone" that encouraged them to go into administration. Ironically, only when asked specifically if that "someone" was a mentor did they refer to them as that key person. These were not formal mentors identified by their school districts; rather, they were positive working relationships that established over time. This is common for women in that many of their mentors do not come from a formal mentoring program, yet they credit their mentors for their successes (Connell, Cobia & Hodge, 2015). Of all the mentors identified in the interviews, all happened to be women. I believe these woman-to-woman relationships did not happen by chance. In the absence of formal gendered policies

and the existence of bias in the educational system, the only real support to aspiring women administrators is other women administrators, which we uncovered during these interviews.

A woman needs an encouraging female mentor and network of individuals to look out for one another. As individuals, the number is few in educational administration and women need to be encouraged and supported as they move through their careers, aspiring to higher level leadership positions, which can be better achieved with a larger network of women (Sandberg, 2013). “When a man, imagining his future career, looks in the mirror, he sees a senator staring back. A woman would never be so presumptuous. She needs a push to see that image” (Kay & Shipman, 2014, p. 206).

One important piece of data to note is that most of these women did not pursue an administrative position until someone else *suggested* it. The key to these mentor relationships was the support, trust and encouragement that developed between the women and ultimately led them to apply for their first administrative position. If the goal for these women is to one day have a role as a superintendent, then having a solid group of mentor superintendents will likely be needed. If this pattern follows suit, they will certainly benefit from someone suggesting a particular district or being able to coach them along the way. Women need “places where we can, among family and friends, shed our public persona and be our ‘real’ selves” (Tong, 1989).

The likelihood of someone suggesting and encouraging them to apply for a superintendent position may depend on the network of mentors they grow for themselves during their administrative careers. If there is a lack of women superintendents to support other women aspiring to this position, the odds of a woman-to-woman mentor become increasingly high. The

mentors spoken of earlier on in their careers are long retired or may not be in a position to help them reach the superintendent position.

In one research study, it was found that women who have positive, professional connections with White men superintendents provided the potential for women to become integrated into the power structures and support network; however, this may prove to be risky, in that women may then tend to distance themselves from other women. Women must remember that they are entering a male-dominated profession and that available mentoring may be conducted by men (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). This should not be a deterrent for women as we strive to move school systems toward equality and demolish barriers that exist so that differences are appreciated and respected rather than feared (Wallin, 1999).

Therefore, a barrier for women to reach the superintendent position may be a lack of mentors willing to push and encourage them to obtain that position later in their careers. Two women near retirement talked about mentors early on in their careers but did not have those supports later. These same ladies felt as if there were more people feeling threatened by them, rather than supporting them, during the last five to seven years of their careers. When asked if a mentor later in their careers may have changed the course of things, they both felt that it absolutely would have.

Barrier 3: Self-Confidence

Throughout the interview process it was noted that the women themselves can be their own barrier during the course of their careers. This barrier arose as an internal conflict when

deciding when the right time was to look for a promotion. Understandably, having to navigate possible gender discrimination, patriarchy, and inequality over the course of several years will certainly do that to someone. Women are looking for and seeking equality and opportunity in their career journeys, so they, too, can perceive themselves as people who can thrive equally as well as men (Tong, 1989).

Katty Kay and Claire Shipman (2014) conducted an in-depth study on confidence in women. In particular, they looked at this from both a scientific and artistic angle, interviewing and meeting with many powerful women and research scientists. Throughout their journeys, men were used as a comparison in regards to the difference and the impact of confidence in men versus women. In their research, they found many fascinating discoveries related to confidence that support the nature of some of the comments recorded during the interviews. Overall, in their research they found that “success correlates more closely with confidence than it does with competence and the data confirms that women report less confidence than men at any given age” (Kay & Shipman, 2014, p. xiii). This is significant information for women trying to break through into an administrative world dominated by men.

Without the confidence to work toward that next move, or even taking a risk on an application, women could end up in job positions that do not typically lead to the superintendency. In the case of Pauline, she did not specifically identify self-confidence but expressed that she

would have loved to have been able to sell myself to another district. For them to see that I would be a good assistant superintendent for elementary or curriculum and instruction. The only thing that I look back on in my long career that maybe I wished would have happened.

One of the differences between men and women in this case is that a lack of confidence in women can produce ruminating thoughts and immobility, whereas men view it as a charge for action. Confidence turns thoughts into action (Kay & Shipman, 2014). With a few years left in her career, this goal for Pauline is absolutely reachable; however, it does not sound like she is willing to take the risk.

Brenda spoke directly to this point, indicating herself as her own barrier “in terms of making sure that I have the confidence to make the move. It’s really easy for me to now say to people, ‘You’re waiting to be totally ready to be a principal. It’s never going to happen.’” Women are wired to want to get everything right and we are scared of getting something wrong. It seems that Brenda has recognized that making mistakes and taking risks is a behavior that women typically avoid, but these actions are critical for building confidence (Kay & Shipman, 2014).

Lisa talked about her biggest barrier being able to “sell herself, “to feel like it’s okay to go for a new job because it will be just fine.” Kay and Shipman (2014) say that “it isn’t that women don’t have the ability to succeed; it’s that we don’t seem to believe that we *can* succeed, and that stops us from even trying.” Upon reflection, Lisa has been in her position the longest, with no desire to pursue the superintendency. I wonder how much her confidence plays a part in that. If women don’t take risks, they will never reach the next level (Kay & Shipman, 2014).

In an ideal world, I would love to see women have the confidence to continue to work toward equality through their own actions. Often women are trying to climb higher on the patriarchal ladder in a society that supports the dragging down of others in order to get to the top, which affects their self-confidence along the way.

Barrier #4: Time

Although this was not explicitly discussed or asked in any of the interviews, the idea of time in career emerged as an important concept and potential barrier to the superintendency when analyzing the interview data. This concept of time aligns with gender-specific stereotypes in society and experiences unique only to women.

One such experience is the path to the superintendency and the time it takes to move along that path. Without a deliberate plan for career advancement, an absence of planning can be a definite barrier for women (Hoff & Mitchell, 2008). There are several possible paths, but one of the typical steppingstones include high school principal to superintendent or assistant superintendent to superintendent. Since none of my interviewees were currently working at the high school level, they need to find themselves in a particular path that is likely to lead to a superintendent position. For some, this may be a series of several moves before even getting to an assistant superintendent.

For instance, if a woman starts her career as a teacher, moves to assistant principal to principal to assistant superintendent and stays in those positions for only five years each, she already has twenty years in. This would be a pretty aggressive timeline, knowing that most women stay in the classroom longer before moving to administration. On average, women administrators spend seven to ten years in the classroom while men only spend five to six years in the classroom, nor do they plan to enter school administration after graduation from college (Connell, Cobia & Hodge, 2015; Glass, 2000). It may even be likely that someone may have to move to a director or executive director position before getting to assistant superintendent. The

route toward the superintendency takes longer for women from point of entry and includes more detours than it does for men on the same path (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Looking at the interviewees' titles and age ranges, you see that four of the six were current assistant superintendents, which could be a direct line to the superintendent spot.

The length of time spent in administrative positions is also an important factor when pursuing the superintendent role. During a dialogue about challenges, Pauline's observation is one that might sound like regret, when she talks about wanting to be "an assistant superintendent for elementary curriculum and instruction. When I look back on my long career that maybe I wish would have happened." She has two more years before retirement and will remain in her current position, although her ideal position would be an assistant superintendent for curriculum. Unfortunately, she will not pursue the superintendent position due to time left in her career. If she had about five to ten more years and a mentor, perhaps things would be different. It was hard not to feel bad for Pauline in her current position and where she would like to be; however, she feels it's best to stay where she is. I think most women would feel this way if working in an assistant superintendent role just a few years before retirement. It might be too risky to make that move and take on that challenge right before retirement.

Time could also be a factor with school boards and may influence their decision making. They could look at a potential candidate who happens to be a 50-something woman nearing retirement and feel she is past the appropriate age to be entering into a superintendent role, which places them at a disadvantage before their first interview (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

On the other end, those who began administration on the younger side and only taught for three to five years may have a better chance of reaching the superintendency, as three of them are

in an assistant superintendent position now, with over ten years of their career left. Even though being a young administrator presented its own challenges, it was something the women needed to work through to continue to move along the path.

In order to keep this timeline moving, women find themselves having to take more risks than what one might be comfortable with. In fact, risk taking is a characteristic more often associated with men than women. Revisiting the concept of backlash, when women engage in gender-inconsistent behaviors, such as self-promotion, competitiveness and risk taking, they run the risk of prompting negative reactions from others. Sometimes those risks are too uncomfortable to take, so rather, women tend to hold back (Amanatullah & Morris, 2010; Kulik & Olekalns, 2012). These stereotypes in our structured society continue to reinforce the concept of backlash, affecting the behavior and action of women. This could certainly be another potential reason why gender inequities exist in the position of school superintendent.

In a related but different concept of time, the women talked about how much time a superintendent role would occupy, and at this point in their careers they are happy to have a nice work balance with family. Brenda, Lisa, Kathy and Judy discussed this, as they all have children who are still at home and will be for several years. Therefore, these women did not want to be in a position that takes them away from their families more than the jobs they are currently in. Perhaps when their children go off to college they would be willing to forfeit the extra time. However, when that happens, they may only have a few years left, and if not in the right position to make that final move, again, it may never happen.

This is a common belief of women in early stages of administration and it is thought that the discriminatory nature of gendered structures contribute to this way of thinking, resulting in

stunted career tracks. Women know that in order to be successful as a superintendent, the job demands time: a physical presence at meetings and a large number of other events that extend beyond the typical work day. This pressure of time also affects men; however, since the role of superintendent is gendered for a married man, they have the support of someone who can attend to the home and family responsibilities. Research has consistently noted that school boards as well as society expect the superintendent position to be filled by a married man (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

Unless women backwards map their career starting from the superintendent position, it may be very difficult to maneuver the job ladder successfully to obtain that position. Rather than working through positions, not sure of the next step, women really need to think about whether or not the superintendency is a consideration so they can deliberately map out their careers. None of the woman interviewed had leadership on their radar until someone encouraged them to move in that direction. That factor alone could really make an impact on time, depending on at what point in your career you begin in administration.

In all my research that was done, this was one area that I did not expect to emerge as a barrier. For women, time is of the essence. Unless one starts in administration on the younger side, it may be difficult to navigate through a long job ladder on the path to the superintendency. One woman interviewed did not get to where she would have liked before retirement, perhaps because she was in the classroom for 20 years.

This could definitely be a reason why women do not opt for the superintendent position. Perhaps they are near the end of their careers, perhaps they spent too long in the classroom as a

teacher in the beginning of their careers, or perhaps they are not quite in a position to reach that spot because they took too many lateral moves.

Limitations

This study provides useful information about the leadership experiences of six women administrators; however, this study had some limitations simply due to the nature of the study. The methodology alone could be viewed as a limitation, as with qualitative research there is a desire to obtain similar characteristics within the study. For this study in particular, participants were carefully chosen as individuals who have similar experiences to forge a common understanding (Creswell, 2007). They were all women and all worked at a district office level within Chicago suburban public school districts. Additionally, this study did not focus on diversity; therefore, all women interviewed were of Caucasian descent.

One might suggest that the number and structure of the interviews were also a limitation, with only six participants whose time was spent over two sessions at 30-60 minutes per person. Additionally, preserving the confidentiality and anonymity of each interviewee is also somewhat a limitation, as to not provide too much background or specific information.

Implications

Several implications can be drawn from the research gained in this study. Most significant is implications to current practice in both public school systems and university

preparation programs. The women interviewed all agree that their administrative course of study did not prepare them for the gender barriers they encountered in administration. They all agreed that these were unspoken topics. Generally speaking, the absence of women in high-ranking positions, such as the superintendent position, often mean that a woman's influence and perspective on policy changes, decisions and practice in the field are limited and certainly needed to create real change in these areas (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

In terms of university preparation programs, there could be several key changes to the course of study. We continue to see very few women in the role of superintendent, with research showing similar barriers to the ones identified in this study, yet the typical course of study does nothing to bring light to this information. A course or unit of study, for both men and women that highlight the low number of women superintendents and the research on barriers that exist for both men and women may help aspiring leaders prepare for these barriers. Further, many of the leadership program professors are former superintendents, who happen to be men. Providing a better balance of gender will offer students a more diverse perspective of the superintendent position.

Additionally, a deliberate focus on mentorship, connecting prospective administrators with networking groups, possible mentors, or even specific strategies that students should take once they've obtained their first administrative position could be a great starting point for young administrators. One such strategy is how to negotiate the informal networking structures within a system. The development of mentor programs through the university could be one strategy for recent graduates, which could include reflective activities that come from feminist thought in order to deconstruct current practices and create potential change for the future. This information

could be valuable to university professors to continue to be relevant to the current struggles that young administrators experience and hence develop courses to create change.

Public school systems could focus their efforts on creating processes and procedures that focus on specific practices, strategies and policies that enable gender equity to develop within administration and within the system. Policies that support more voice for women, including the celebration of differences and diversity.

Principal pipeline programs should be developed within districts to provide the opportunity for teachers to think about administration early on in their careers. School systems should then take a deliberate approach to support and recruit women to these programs, as well as identify struggles early on, with clear support in order to strengthen the capacity of young women administrators. These programs offer a safety net by providing leadership experiences in a district they are already working in and have developed a support system in.

Current superintendents and their memberships in state organizations could also provide support by helping to change the mindset of current school board members. If more of the association groups in the state of Illinois worked together to challenge the status quo at key events and encouraged more women to be seen and heard, such as presenting at conferences or being part of a panel discussion, these small actions will make them visible to board members, hopefully dispelling the image of the White man as superintendent and promoting greater gender equality.

Many superintendents also have greater access to legislators and policy makers in the state. Current superintendents, both men and women, can use their current positions to lobby for greater gender equity and the adoption of policies that remove barriers for women.

The implications and benefits to the field of education that were gained from this study include further exploration of thoughts and perceptions of women administrators regarding their journeys through educational administration. Further, how have their journeys impacted their decisions to one day pursue a position as a school superintendent. The study determined barriers that women have experienced during the course of their careers that have influenced their career paths. This benefits the field of educational administration by adding to the research and raising awareness of the barriers that women experience during the course of their careers and how these barriers have impacted their ability to reach the superintendent position.

The participants also had an opportunity to think and reflect upon their careers, perceived barriers, and successes in administration. It directed their thoughts toward a role in the superintendent position and a deeper discussion on why or why not they wanted to pursue this role. I gave them permission to discuss the struggles and barriers that only they have experienced solely because of gender.

A feminist analysis of the various perceived barriers during the course of a career in administration may lead to a more comprehensive determination of the reasons for the underrepresentation of women in the superintendent positions, as well as lead to possible solutions for the gender inequities that exist in this area (Wallin, 1999). The feminist perspective helps explain gender differences and provides guidance on the barriers that were uncovered.

More research is needed from the women's perspectives about their experiences, thoughts and perceptions on why they chose to obtain this endorsement but may or may not want to hold that position. The more that can be learned about women in administrative roles, how they

reached the superintendency, or why they lacked aspirations for the superintendency, the better chance there is that the number of women superintendents in the state of Illinois can increase.

Suggestions for Further Research

Based on the findings of this study, along with a review of the current literature, suggestions for further research include:

- There is a lack of literature in the field about female administrative behavior for women who currently hold the superintendent endorsement but have not yet secured the position of superintendent. Since the population size of this study was relatively small, one recommendation is to expand the study to look at a larger sample of women participants who have the superintendent endorsement.
- Expansion of the current topic of study to include men in administrative roles to compare the findings with this study. This larger and expanded sample size would lead to additional information to support all aspiring superintendents and examine whether or not the barriers in administration are different for men than women.
- Expand the scope of the study to include more of a life focus, rather than career focus, by taking a deeper look at the complexities of life as possible reasons why women choose to forgo the position of superintendent. This may help researchers distinguish the difference between women who consciously choose not to seek the superintendency versus women struggling to obtain the superintendency. Including a comparison to men's lives could take this study one step further.

- A study that looks at successful mentor relationships in women administrators and superintendents, including a look at the gender makeup of those relationships to see whether or not the gender of the mentor has any benefit to the administrator.
- A deeper study on school board bias is needed to determine whether board members are aware of and are able to recognize their biases towards women superintendents. This should also include the analysis of gender makeup of these school boards, including their recruiting, selecting, and hiring practices.
- A similar examination of professional search firms should be done, including the gender makeup and their recruiting, selecting, and hiring practices. Search firms are a popular resource for school boards in the Chicagoland area, with several controlling most of the hiring market.
- A study of superintendent preparation programs at universities in Illinois to assess coursework topics, requirements and gender makeup of professors would provide details on the scope and level of diversity of each program. Research indicates that more women are enrolling in superintendent programs, so a deeper look at preparation specific to women would be pertinent.

Concluding Remarks

The role of superintendent is a politically, financially and administratively complex position that requires a significant amount of time and dedication. The sheer nature of this role can make it desirable for some, yet not at all for others. Upon embarking on this journey, I

thought that the women in my study did not have the desire to pursue the role of superintendent, even when holding the proper certification to do so. However, through the collection of stories from six women and their administrative career paths, this study revealed what they perceived to be barriers during the course of their administrative careers. To my surprise, there are many women who aspire to this role. This study demonstrated potential reasons why some of these women do not want or will not obtain the position due to barriers they have encountered during the course of their careers. The major barriers identified through the course of this study centered on equality, discrimination and patriarchy experienced during the course of the women's careers. Additionally, it was found that several key factors were essential for these women's successes. The importance of having a mentor emerged as well as the importance of possessing self-confidence and risk taking.

This study revealed that it is possible that perceived barriers exist for women who are aspiring superintendents that may contribute to the lack of women in the position. The gender imbalance may at first seem small and insignificant, but it is a crucial issue, and one in which all must acknowledge the small parts they play. It is only through the shared efforts of many that the attainment of gender equality in the superintendency will be achieved and we will finally see the leadership gap close. The social construction and mindset of the superintendent being a man needs to change. Removing barriers will create a society where women have more opportunities for pursuing passions, creating change and positively impacting society. Much is still to be done to release the arrow from the bow. Women have been pulled back in adversity, just waiting for their time to release. Once that happens, women will discover their strength, propelling them

forward to become future superintendents. There is no better time than now as women are stronger and more ready to lead and change the educational landscape than ever before.

“To get something you never had, you have to do something you never did.” - Unknown

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APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions, Interview #1

Introductions:

1. Tell me about your career in education, beginning with your first position in the field of education.
2. Describe the factors or opportunities that you experience during the course of your career that perhaps influenced your path.
 - a. Mentors?
 - b. Connections?
 - c. Biggest influences in administration?
3. What are some of the challenges that you have encountered along the way?
 - a. How did you approach them? What was your response?
 - b. Were any that were too difficult to overcome?
 - c. Did you learn to adapt or accept?
4. What have you learned as a result of these challenges and successes?
 - a. What do you wish you would have known prior to administration?
 - b. Did any of your coursework or classes prepare you for this?
 - c. What has been your biggest surprise?
 - d. What has been your biggest barrier?
5. Superintendency
 - a. Why did you pursue coursework in this area?
 - b. Do you ever see yourself as a superintendent?

- c. Do you have the superintendent endorsement?

Interview Questions, Interview #2

Depth:

1. Revisit any barriers identified
 - a. Influence on career decisions?
 - b. What has surprised you most during your career?
2. Have you worked in a district that actively supported your growth as an administrator?
(Connect to first interview)
 - a. What did you do with/without this support?
 - b. How did you advocate for yourself?
3. Have you ever felt out of place at work?
 - a. Do you feel like you have an equal voice in your job?
 - b. Have you ever felt not listened to?

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT

NORTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP, EDUCATION PSYCHOLOGY AND FOUNDATIONS

Participant's Name: _____

Consent is hereby given to participate in the research project entitled:

Study Title: WOMAN OBTAINING THE SUPERINTENDENCY: AN EXAMINATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS THAT INFLUENCE A WOMEN'S CAREER TRAJECTORIES

Jodi Megerle explained all the procedures and or investigations to be followed and their purpose. Information was given about all benefits, risks, inconveniences, or discomforts that might be expected.

The opportunity to ask questions regarding the research and procedures was given. Participation in the project is completely voluntary, and participants may withdraw at any time without penalty, prejudice, or loss of benefits. All personal information is strictly confidential and no names will be disclosed. Any new information that develops during the project will be provided, if that information may affect the willingness to continue participation in the project. Questions concerning the research at any time during or after the project should be directed to Jodi Megerle, at 847-702-2830. This project and this consent have been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations.

A copy of this form will be given to the participant.

Signature of participant	Date
--------------------------	------

Signature of person explaining the study	Date
--	------

I give consent to be audio recorded for this interview

Signature of participant	Date
--------------------------	------

APPENDIX C
INTERVIEW OVERVIEW

Principal Investigator: Jodi J. Megerle

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the perception of commonly experienced external and internal barriers during the course of a woman's career in the education field. Specifically, I will examine: what women identify as barriers during the course of their career and the impact these barriers have had on their career and career choices. This study could provide insight to better preparation of future female administrators, provide an awareness of the barriers women face and suggestions on how to navigate these experiences. Rather than waiting for these obstacles to occur, women can understand what may be likely to occur during the course of their career in education. Having prior knowledge allows women a better chance to navigate or work around the barriers, rather than allow them to impact their career and career choices. When these barriers are better understood, it may enable more women to mitigate the process of attaining a superintendent position.

Description of Study: The research will interview each participant in the study twice. The interviews will last 45-60 minutes and will be audio recorded. The recording will be transcribed and coded to determine themes.

Risks: There are minimal risks associated with participation in this study. Anticipated risks may be associated with past experiences that may be uncomfortable. Participation is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to answer specific questions.

Benefits: The information found in this study could prove helpful in graduate level administrative preparation programs, to educate women on potential and common career barriers. Recently AASA began a program to match female leaders with mentors specifically to help them prepare to obtain a position as a superintendent. This program focuses on barriers that women face and efforts to overcome those obstacles. Other state level organizations are also launching different efforts to prepare women for this role and increase numbers (Superville, 2016). Perhaps career counseling could assist women as they navigate through the educational system. Research indicates that the majority of students seeking administration certifications are female (Pounder, 1994; Shakeshaft, 1987). If women know how to recognize these barriers, they may be able to navigate them more successfully. In addition, my hope is that information in this study will support and encourage more female leaders to aspire to the superintendency.

Data Collection: Audio recording will be kept for a period of three years. After that period, they will be destroyed. Any transcripts will be coded using a pseudonym and all identifying information will be removed from transcripts. These will be kept for a period of three years.

APPENDIX D

FORMAL EMAIL TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Dear Potential Research Participant/Administrator,

My name is Jodi Megerle, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Northern Illinois University. I am writing this email to invite you to participate in a series of two interviews for a research project entitled, “Women Obtaining the Superintendency: An Examination of Internal and External Barriers that Influence a Woman’s Career Trajectories”. The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the phenomenon of the small numbers of women currently serving as superintendents. This study will seek to understand perceived barriers facing women who are currently working in the field of education, possess the proper credentials for the superintendent position, but are not currently working as a superintendent. Your input will enhance our knowledge of leadership and career decisions of women.

Interviews for this study will be conducted during February and March of 2019. In order to respect your time, the interviews for this study will be no longer than one hour in length and will be scheduled at the time and location of your choice. If it is impossible to conduct the interview in a face-to-face meeting, we can set up a phone conference or FaceTime session.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Northern Illinois University’s Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. I have attached the informed consent for this study, which will provide you with a more detailed description of this study and information pertaining to the measures that will be used to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity. If you have any questions or concerns, you may reach me at (847) 702-2830 or jodimegerle@aim.com.

If you are interested in participating in this interview study, please respond to this email with the most convenient contact information so that we may schedule a time for an interview. I will ask for you to complete the informed consent at our first meeting. I am looking forward to working with a group of dynamic women leaders and hope that you will be able to participate.

With Warm Regards,

Jodi J. Megerle

APPENDIX E
RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Dear Potential Research Participant/Administrator,

My name is Jodi Megerle, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at Northern Illinois University. _____ suggested that you may be willing to serve as a participant in a series of two interviews for a research project entitled, “Women Obtaining the Superintendency: An Examination of Internal and External Barriers that Influence a Woman’s Career Trajectories”. The primary purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the phenomenon of the small numbers of women currently serving as superintendents. This study will seek to understand perceived barriers facing women who are currently working in the field of education, possess the proper credentials for the superintendent position, but are not currently working as a superintendent. Your input will enhance our knowledge of leadership and career decisions of women.

Interviews for this study will be conducted during February and March of 2019. In order to respect your time, the interviews for this study will be no longer than one hour in length and will be scheduled at the time and location of your choice. If it is impossible to conduct the interview in a face-to-face meeting, we can set up a phone conference or FaceTime session.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Northern Illinois University’s Institutional Review Board, which ensures that research projects involving human subjects follow federal regulations. I have attached the informed consent for this study which will provide you with a more detailed description of this study and information pertaining to the measures that will be used to ensure your confidentiality and anonymity. If you have any questions or concerns, you may reach me at (847) 702-2830 or jodimegerle@aim.com.

If you are interested in participating in this interview study, please respond to this email with the most convenient contact information so that we may schedule a time for an interview. I will ask for you to complete the informed consent at our first meeting. I am looking forward to working with a group of dynamic women leaders and hope that you will be able to participate.

With Warm Regards,

Jodi J. Megerle

APPENDIX F
DEBRIEFING SCRIPT

Study Title: WOMEN OBTAINING THE SUPERINTENDENCY: AN EXAMINATION OF INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL BARRIERS THAT INFLUENCE A WOMAN'S CAREER TRAJECTORIES.

Thank you for participating in my study and interviewing with me today. The general purpose of this study was to examine barriers that women have experienced during the course of their career and how these have influenced your career decisions. I always don't tell people everything at the beginning of a study because I do not want to influence your responses. If I tell people what the purpose of the study is and what I predict, then your answers may not be a good indication of how you truly feel.

I invited only women who have completed upper level administration leadership coursework, who are eligible to obtain or already possess the superintendent endorsement. In this study you were asked several questions related to your background, experiences, opportunities and challenges you've experienced during your career. The results from this study will hopefully help women navigate barriers to the superintendent position, as well as help inform university preparation programs to better prepare women for administrative positions.

If you feel especially concerned about being recorded or that in sharing your personal stories, this has surfaced any feelings of uneasiness or sadness, please contact Jodi Megerle at 847-702-2830 for options for counseling resources. Additionally, if you would like to withdraw your interview responses at this time, you may do so.

Thank you again for participation in this study. If you have further questions about the study, contact Jodi Megerle at 847-702-2830 or at jodijean227@aol.com.

APPENDIX G

COUNSELING SUPPORTS AND RESOURCE LIST

Harper College – Women’s Program
1200 W Algonquin Rd. Palatine, IL
847-925-6558

Star Net Region II
2626 S. Clearbrook Dr. Arlington Heights, IL
224-366-8579

Between Friends (Chicago)
2121 Euclid Ave., Rm. 045, Rolling Meadows, IL
847-818-8900

Elgin Community Crisis Center
Elgin, IL
847-697-2380

Northwest Center Against Sexual Assault (CASA)
415 W. Golf Rd. Ste. 47, Arlington Heights, IL
847-806-6526

CEDA- Community & Economic Development Association of Cook County Inc.
2010 Dewey Ave. Room 308 Evanston, IL 60201
847-328-5166

Hanul Family Alliance
1166 S. Elmhurst Rd. Mt. Prospect, IL 60056
847-439-5195

Pillars
333 North La Grange Road Ste. 1 La Grange Park, IL 60526
708-995-3512

Heather’s House at Aid for Women
1150 N. River Rd. Des Plaines, IL 60016
(847) 795-3700

Alcoholics Anonymous
312-346-1475

Narcotics Anonymous
(708) 848-4884

Safe From the Start

1535 Burgundy Parkway, Streamwood, IL 60107
(630) 540-0549

Preservation of Human Dignity (PHD)
37 North Plum Grove Rd, Palatine, IL 60067
(847) 359-4919

Northwest Community Healthcare
3060 Salt Creek Lane, Arlington Heights, IL 60005
(847) 618-5570

Lake Health Center
1515 E. Lake Street, Suite 202 Hanover Park, IL 60133
(224) 856-4583

Kindred Life Ministries
300 Schoenbeck Road Wheeling, IL 60090
(224) 280-8286

Firman Community Services, Inc.
1855 Rohlwing Road Rolling Meadows, IL 60008
(847) 632-1510 OR (847) 222-1200

Greater Elgin Family Care Center (Various Locations)
Various Locations
847-608-1344

The Rita and John Canning Women's Program at Harper College
1200 W Algonquin Rd. Bldg A Room A349 Palatine, IL 60067
847-458-7234

Clearbrook Child and Family Connections #6
1835 W Central Arlington Heights, IL 60005
847-385-5325

Access to Care
2225 Enterprise Drive, Ste 2507 Westchester, IL 60154
708-531-0680

ACCESS/Genesis Center for Health & Empowerment
No Boundaries
(847) 298-3150

LAF (Legal Assistance Foundation)
120 S. LaSalle Street, Suite 900, Chicago, IL 60603
312-341-1070 800-447-4278 (Child Support)

Northwest Compass Inc.
1300 W Northwest Highway, Mt. Prospect, IL 60068
847-392-2344

Family Behavioral Health Clinic
1455 Golf Road Suite 105 Des Plaines, IL
847-390-3004

The Salvation Army of Des Plaines
609 W. Dempster, Des Plaines, IL
847-981-9111

Wings Program Inc
1355 Remington Rd, Schaumburg, IL 60173
847-221-5680

Faith Lutheran Church
431 S Arlington Heights Rd., Arlington Heights, IL 60005
847-253-4839

Community Connections Center
1711 W Algonquin Rd, Mt Prospect, IL 60056
847-506-4930

WIC (Women, Infants & Children)
1300 W. Northwest Highway Mt. prospect, IL 60056
Des Plaines: 847-294-1802; Mt. Prospect: 847-392-0325

Elk Grove Township Community Services
901 Wellington Avenue, Elk Grove Village, IL 60007
(847) 357-4120

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