

Female Superintendent Perceptions of Challenges in Seeking and Serving in the Position of
Superintendent of Schools

By

Michelle Mortensen

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Advisor: Dr. Kay Worner, Ph.D.

Dr. John Eller, Ph.D.

Dr. James Johnson, Ed.D.

Dr. Frances Kayona, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of the mixed method study was to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents report they experienced in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perception regarding school-board superintendent relations. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods: the researcher designed the research questions based upon the underrepresentation of females in the superintendency and the literature review. Data collection included two phases: 1) a multiple-choice survey distributed to survey respondents through electronic mail; and 2) open-ended interviews conducted with four volunteer interviewees. The multiple-choice survey provided quantitative information while the open-ended response questions presented qualitative data that allowed for clarifying responses and deeper understanding of the information obtained from the multiple choice survey. Some of the survey questionnaire and interview questions were replicated in a modified version from the survey used in Catherine A. Wyland's dissertation titled *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota*.

In general, there is a perception that insufficient qualified female superintendent candidates exist. Even with increasing numbers of females obtaining the licensure for superintendency, both exterior and interior barriers have limited females' access to the top leadership position in public schools. In spite of the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office for Federal Contract Compliance Programs enforcing federal laws, such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act, making it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; retrieved from <https://www1.eeoc.gov>). The Federal laws listed above provided an underlying framework for the study; however, stereotypes and societal norms also played a significant role in the selection of the topic of the study.

Study results indicated that 51 female superintendents in Minnesota identified several barriers to seeking and obtaining the superintendent positions and that superintendent-school board relationships are generally positive but often depending on specific issues or situations.

Acknowledgement

The greatest acknowledgment goes to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. He allowed me to see inside myself and provide me with the strength and knowledge to complete my dissertation. Even though this dissertation was the hardest project I have ever completed, His grace and mercy inspired me to continue working through self-doubt and inadequacies. I am His forever.

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To my dear friends Marcia, Sarah, and Jill, I don't know how I would have completed this without your unending support. The daily texts of inspiration made me laugh, made me cry, but mostly, it gave me the strength to go on. For that, I will be forever in your debt.

To my staff, colleagues, and school board at Renville County West school board, I thank you for allowing me to work beside some of the best educators within the state of Minnesota. It is always a pleasure and honor.

A special thank you to the female superintendents who took my survey and conducted interviews in order to help us progress in adding more females to leadership positions. Your insight is amazing.

To my best friends, Mandy, Julia, Julie, and Shelly, thank you for standing beside me all these years and never letting me fall.

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To my four children, Conrad, Spencer, Jacklyn, and Brannigan, thank you. I know it wasn't easy for you to give up family time so mom could study. I am so proud to be your mother and you are truly the meaning of life to me.

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Last, but far from least, I want to thank my husband, Kurt. For the past 31 years you have supported and loved me through all our trials and tribulations. You have followed me through all the career moves with little complaint, cooked meals when I was too tired after a day

of work and homework, and was the glue that held our family together. Mostly, you believed in me when nobody else did.

Dedication

I dedicate this study to all female educators who strive for lifelong learning for the purpose of educating and supporting children. May you find rewards on every path your journey may lead you.

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Chapter I: Introduction

“In a five year study of American school superintendents released in 2015 by AASA, the School Superintendents Association, it was revealed that just 27 percent of district superintendents are women” (Kominiak, 2016); Minnesota Association of School Administrators reported 52 of 337 Minnesota superintendents were female (MASA, 2017). Both statistics illustrate there is an underrepresentation of females in the superintendency in Minnesota, as well as across the United States. Wilson (1980) stated, “The most successful superintendent is male, Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, Republican, intelligent, and a good student but not gifted” (p. 20) (Grogan, 2000).

Historically, females were expected to tend to home and family (Keller, 1999). Females were considered subservient to men and role expectations for females did not include gaining greater knowledge through educational means (Blount, 1998). Society treated females as second-class citizens (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). As female`s became more vocal about the desire to teach their own children, training and educational opportunities arose (Blount, 1998).

As early as the 1800’s, Blount (1998) noted that educated and trained females were allowed into teaching positions, but not leadership positions. Blount’s research detailed that, by custom, women could not supervise men. Therefore, as long as one male teacher would be made to be subordinate by a female’s administrative advancement, she was denied promotion to a leadership position (Blount, 1998).

The rapid growth of females in leadership roles and the superintendency did not occur until the beginning of the 20th century, notably with the women’s suffrage movement (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Blount, 1998). Historian Margaret Gribskov wrote:

The rise and fall of the woman school administrator approximates the peaks and valleys of the first American feminist movement of the late 1800s and early 1900, and the feminist movement was a crucial factor in producing the large numbers of women administrators of that period. (as cited in Blount, 1998, p. 81)

Blount (1998) added:

The women's suffrage movement had sparked the emergence of women school administrators for at least two reasons. First, the quest for women's rights had triggered the larger movement of organized women's groups, many of which actively supported the candidacy of women for school offices. Second, suffrage had given women power at the ballot box, which allowed them to affect the political process directly, to become, as some had hoped, a political constituency. (p. 81)

By the end of the 20th century, fewer than 1,000 female superintendents were leading the 15,000 school districts throughout the United States (Glass, 1992; Grogan, 1996; Ortiz, 2001). In fact, research has illustrated that public education lagged behind other professions in the number of females obtaining executive roles (Garn & Brown, 2008). Glass ceilings, concrete walls, and labyrinths were referenced to be barriers in the underrepresentation of females in the superintendency (Wyland, 2014), however, Fels (2004) believed that despite challenges, females now have greater opportunities to reach their goals than any time throughout history.

Conceptual Framework

Even with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and the Office for Federal Contract Compliance Programs enforcing federal laws, such as the Equal Opportunity Employment Act, the Fair Labor Standards Act, the Equal Pay Act, and the Civil Rights Act, making it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of

the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information, the gap of female to male superintendent employment ratio in Minnesota is 1 to 5.48 (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; retrieved from <https://www1.eeoc.gov>). The Federal laws listed above provide an underlying framework for the study; however, stereotypes and societal norms also play a significant role in the selection of the topic of the study.

Feminist Theory Framework

Feminist theory focuses on empowering females to break stereotypes and beliefs of the traditional behavior of females (Mahaney, 2014). Feminist theory is a branch of theory within sociology that grew out of influences of the women's movement in the late 1960's (Mahaney, 2014). Feminist theory focused on social problems, trends, and issues and shifted assumptions and focus away from the viewpoints of males and more toward female viewpoints (Crossman, 2018). Crossman (2018) spoke of feminist theory as being misunderstood and thought to focus entirely on females characteristically promoting the superiority of females over males. However, feminist theory actually encourages the pursuit of equality and justice through identifying the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice in the social world (Crossman, 2018). Feminist theory focused on gender inequality in both personal and professional social situations (Crossman, 2018). Professionally, liberal feminists argued that females have the same capacity for moral reasoning as males, but have historically been denied the opportunity to express and practice this reasoning, particularly within the sexual division of labor (Crossman, 2018).

Throughout the United States, female educators outnumber males in K-12 public school teaching positions and in university educational leadership programs; however, males fill the

majority of public school superintendent positions in the United States (Blount, 1998; Glass et al., 2000; Grogan, 1996; Sharp et al., 2004; Wyland, 2014). Females can see the superintendent's job clearly through what researchers call "the glass ceiling" (Brown, 1999; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Wirth (2001) noted "The Glass ceiling is a term coined in the 1970s in the United States to describe the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organization prejudices, which block women from senior executive positions (p. 1). Garn & Brown (2008) stated that research has shown that public education lags behind other professions in the number of females obtaining executive roles. This is self-evident in the state of Minnesota with only 52 or 15.4% practicing female superintendents in 337 Minnesota public school districts today (MASA, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study was the lack of female representation in the superintendency in the nation's school districts but specifically in Minnesota. For example, Minnesota Association of School Administrators reported 52 of 337 Minnesota superintendents were female (MASA, 2017). Research is needed to explore the reasons females are not entering the superintendency and the challenges they experience when seeking and serving in the role of superintendent of schools. The study is needed to provide information to prospective female superintendent candidates about the challenges they may face when obtaining and serving in the superintendent role; this information may assist them in circumventing some of these challenges in their search for a superintendent position.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the mixed method study was to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents reported they experienced in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perception regarding school-board

superintendent relations. The study used both qualitative and survey methods: female superintendents in Minnesota were asked to participate in a survey and to volunteer to be interviewed regarding their perceptions of the challenges experienced as a female in the role of superintendent of schools.

Assumptions of the Study

1. The female superintendents interviewed responded to the questions honestly and without bias.
2. Gender inequality is prevalent within, and in seeking, the superintendency.
3. The researcher's belief that all the female superintendents have knowledge of their roles and responsibilities.

Delimitations

Delimitations are parameters or limits of the study (Gall and Gall, 1996).

1. Only female superintendents were considered for the study.
2. The study did not include additional perspectives that could be gathered from male superintendents, community members, teachers, or school board members.
3. The study was limited to P-12 public schools throughout the state of Minnesota.
4. The respondents were either full-time superintendents or females that share a principal position along with their superintendent position.
5. The study did not seek demographic information pertaining to religion or ethnicity of participants.
6. The possibility of bias existed since the researcher is a female who has served in a public-school leadership position.

Research Questions

The following research questions were developed to guide the study and fulfill the study purpose:

1. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges they experienced in seeking and serving in their position as superintendent of schools?
2. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive regarding the nature of their school board - superintendent relations?
3. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges in school board-superintendent relationships that exist regardless of gender or due to gender?

Definitions of Terms

1. Barrier – “as institutionalized and evidenced by problematic gender discrimination practices or self-imposed and occurring when women self-select out of the job for reasons of personal lifestyle choices” (Wyland, 2014).
2. Challenges - to arouse or stimulate especially by presenting with difficulties (Gove, P. B., 2002).
3. Gatekeepers - School board members, professional consultant firms, and individuals such as retired, interim or current superintendents, who determine, during the superintendent selection process, who is allowed to proceed through the screening and interviewing process and who is eventually selected for the job (Tallerico, 2000a; Tallerico, 2000b).
4. Gender - Gender refers to “culturally constructed systems of meaning that identify various things - persons, ideas, gods, institutions - according to the binary categories of ‘women/men’ or ‘feminine/masculine’ (Wilson-Jones, 2010, p.8).

5. The Glass Ceiling - “a term coined in the 1970s in the United States to describe the invisible artificial barriers, created by attitudinal and organizational prejudices, which block women from senior executive positions” (Wirth, 2001, p. 1).
6. Good Ole’ Boys Club – an informal system of friendships and connections through which men use their positions of influence by providing favors and information to help other men (Nelson, 2017).
7. Governance – The implementation of legally authorized collective actions, functions, and decision-making powers of the school board (White, 2007. p. 11).
8. Minnesota - A state of the northern United States bordering on Lake Superior and on Manitoba and Ontario, Canada.
9. Power - The ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events; the ability to make something happen (Katz, 2006).
10. School board - a body of elected or appointed members who jointly oversee the activities of a school district (Place, 2014).
11. Superintendency - the office, post, or jurisdiction of a superintendent (Gove, P. B., 2002).
12. Superintendent - A superintendent is a chief executive officer of a school district hired by a school board to administer all aspects of school district operation (Place, 2014).
13. Underrepresentation - as being lower in quantity, quality, or degree than is actually the case (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006).

Summary

The underrepresentation of female superintendents throughout public schools in Minnesota was examined in the study by focusing on the challenges reported by female

superintendents related to obtaining and retaining the top executive position in the education. The study was organized into five chapters, related appendices, tables and graphs, and references.

Chapter one introduces the study detailing the purpose of the study, delimitations, key vocabulary, and focused on four research questions. A literature review in chapter two presents three main themes. The first theme relates to the historical perspectives of females in education leadership. The second theme references challenges and barriers to the superintendency and encompassed four subdivisions. The four subdivisions include: the glass ceiling, hiring practices, barriers to job success, and position power and gender. The third theme focuses on school board governance and consisted of three subdivisions including: the role of the superintendent, the role of the school board, and relationships between school board members and superintendents. The final theme concludes with female leadership and comprised three subdivisions. The three subdivisions include: female superintendents and school boards, stereotypes of leadership and gender, and feminist theory.

Chapter three details the methodology used to collect the data including the participants, research design, instruments used in data collection and analysis, and procedures and timelines of the study. Chapters four and five provide the results of the study, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations for further research and practice. The dissertation concludes with appendices and references.

Chapter II: Literature Review

Throughout the United States, female educators outnumber males in K-12 public school teaching positions and in university educational leadership programs; however, males fill the majority of public school superintendent positions in the United States (Blount, 1998; Glass et al., 2000; Grogan, 1996; Sharp et al., 2004; Wyland, 2014).

The problem of the study is the lack of female representation in the superintendency in the nation's school districts and specifically in Minnesota. For example, Minnesota Association of School Administrators reported 52 of 337 Minnesota superintendents were female (MASA, 2017). Research is needed to explore the reasons females are not entering the superintendency and the challenges they experienced when seeking and serving in the role of superintendent of schools. Further study is needed to encourage females to seek the superintendent position and address the challenges of the position.

The purpose of the mixed method study was to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents report they experienced in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perception regarding school-board superintendent relationships. The study used both qualitative and quantitative methods: female superintendents in Minnesota were asked to participate in a survey and to volunteer to be interviewed regarding their perceptions of the challenges experienced as a female in the role of superintendent.

The literature review in Chapter II presents four main themes. The first theme relates to the historical perspectives of females in education leadership. The second theme references challenges and barriers to the superintendency and encompasses four subdivisions. The four subdivisions include: the glass ceiling, hiring practices, barriers to job success, and position power and gender. The third theme focuses on school district governance and consists of three

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Historical Perspective of Females in Education Leadership

Historically, females were expected to tend to home and family (Keller, 1999). Females were considered subservient to men and role expectations for females did not include gaining greater knowledge through educational means (Blount, 1998). Society treated females as second-class citizens (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). As females became more vocal about the desire to teach their own children, training and educational opportunities arose (Blount, 1998).

As early as the 1800's, Blount (1998) noted that educated and trained females were allowed into teaching positions, but not leadership positions. Blount's research detailed that by custom, women could not supervise men. Therefore, as long as one male teacher would be made to be subordinate by a female's administrative advancement, she was denied promotion to a leadership position (Blount, 1998).

The rapid growth of females in leadership roles and superintendency did not occur until the beginning of the 20th century; notably with the women's suffrage movement (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011; Blount, 1998). Historian Margaret Gribskov wrote:

The rise and fall of the woman school administrator approximates the peaks and valleys of the first American feminist movement of the late 1800s and early 1900, and the feminist movement was a crucial factor in producing the large numbers of women administrators of that period. (Blount, 1998, p. 81)

Blount (1998) added:

The women's suffrage movement had sparked the emergence of women school administrators for at least two reasons. First, the quest for women's rights had triggered the larger movement of organized women's groups, many of which actively supported the candidacy of women for school offices. Second, suffrage had given women power at the ballot box, which allowed them to affect the political process directly, to become, as some had hoped, a political constituency. (p. 81)

By the end of the 20th century, fewer than 1,000 female superintendents were leading the 15,000 school districts throughout the United States (Glass, 1992; Grogan, 1996; Ortiz, 2001). In fact, research has illustrated that public education lagged behind other professions in the number of females obtaining executive roles (Garn & Brown, 2008). Glass ceilings, concrete walls, and labyrinths were referenced to be barriers in the underrepresentation of females in the superintendency (Wyland, 2014), however, Fels (2004) believed that even with challenges, females now have greater opportunities today to reach their goals than any time throughout history.

Challenges and Barriers

The Glass Ceiling

The "glass ceiling" is an appropriate metaphor describing the underrepresentation of females in the upper levels of leadership throughout executive and educational management (Brown, 1999; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Researchers Eagly and Carli (2007) believed that instead of a glass ceiling, the challenges, and obstacles on a female's path to the executive level were more of a labyrinth, or a maze of walls. The labyrinth presented continual twists, turns, detours, dead ends, and unusual paths to ascend to the administrative positions (Barker, 2012; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). The journey within the maze produced challenges with

domestic responsibilities, sexual discrimination, society beliefs, career pathways, and a female's lack of self-confidence to believe in herself (Reilly & Bauer, 2015).

Females could see the superintendent's job clearly through the glass ceiling, since 57 percent of the professionals in central offices (American Educational Research Association, 1999) and 41 percent of principals were female (Keller, 1999), but few have cracked the barrier; as only 18 percent of females hold superintendent positions (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Keller (1999) found that females faced the difficult decision of whether or not to obtain the top position of the school district. Some females did make the decision to take the top position while others chose to stay under the glass, refusing to fall victim to losing their personal lives to the grueling job. Those who remained under the glass ceiling believed that their competence in leading was considered by school boards to be lower than men, therefore to prove themselves on a higher level, they needed doctoral degrees, professional visibility, and greater experience in finance or other areas of business (Keller, 1999). Acker (1990) stated,

The concept of the universal worker, so common in talk about work organizations, excluded and marginalized women who cannot, almost by definition, achieve the qualities of a real worker because to do so is to become like a man. (p. 50)

As a result of the 1991 Civil Rights Act, the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was created and charged with conducting a study and preparing recommendations concerning "1.) identifying artificial barriers blocking the advancement of minorities and women; and 2.) increasing the opportunities and development experiences of women and minorities to foster advancement of women and minorities to management and decision-making positions in business" (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p. 6). The commission found three findings depicting major challenges for females in pursuing top level positions.

The first finding was that the single greatest barrier to advancement in executive ranks was prejudice against minorities and females (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). The Commission (1995) showed the lack of females in executive positions was not limited to the field of education, but also throughout corporations. The research found that 97 percent of senior management in Fortune 100 Industrial and Fortune 500 companies was white and, 97 percent of those positions were male (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Mahitivanichcha and Rorrer (2006) added that men were courted and moved into higher administrative ranks more quickly and more often.

The second finding was that people of diverse backgrounds were often excluded from advancement because of the glass ceiling, therefore struggled to compete successfully for corporations' top leadership positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Typically, men occupied jobs with high status and wages while females occupied jobs with lower status and lower wages (Browne, 1999). In education, the least-paid positions yet the highest proportion of females are teachers found in elementary public schools, not on the direct path to the superintendency (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

Finally, societal barriers, internal, or organizational structural barriers, and governmental barriers were major challenges (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Odum 2010). Cultural attitudes, practices and behaviors have built glass walls and ceilings (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Historically, the top spots in administration were viewed as a private club controlled by the "old boy network" (Moody, 1983, p. 389). Farr (1988) defined "old boy network" as a

White, upper (or upper middle) class men in their productive adult years with established informal networks through which instrumental favors are exchanged and barriers to inclusion are erected. They are unified through chauvinistic, class, and local traditions that afford them "insider" privileges (p. 264).

Females do not have a “private club” and do not socialize in the same manner as men; this negatively affects mentoring opportunities and relationships within male dominated organizations (Guajardo, 2015). Copeland and Calhoun (2014) found a lack of role models and mentors, work family balance, and gender bias all were challenges for females as they advanced to the top leadership role, making the glass ceiling thicker and more profound. Marital status and responsibilities of family and children were qualities that made females less preferred candidates in relation to school board selection of the top level position. School boards feared these responsibilities would be in conflict with the time constraints and demands in the role of superintendent (Glass, et al., 2000; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

Females in education were said to have glass ceilings while men are said to have glass escalators (C. Williams, 1992). Men had shorter job ladders and stunted career tracks to arrive at the superintendency (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) noted that being female increased the difficulty of overcoming barriers and meeting challenges as these individuals struggled to penetrate the glass ceiling and walls surrounding them. The researchers cited the Commission’s report that “discrimination - the Glass Ceiling in particular - remains another deep line of demarcation between those who prosper and those left behind” (p. 4-5) (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Meyerson (2004) added, “It’s not just the ceiling that’s holding women back; it’s the whole structure of the organizations in which we work: the foundation, the beams, the walls, the very air” (as cited in Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p.8).

Hiring Practices of Females in the Superintendency

The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the Office for Federal Contract Compliance Programs are two federal agencies created to enforce discrimination laws and affirmative-action programs for public employers (Reskin, 1993). Even with the U.S. Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) enforcing federal laws making it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information, the gap of female to male superintendent employment ratio in Minnesota is 1 to 6.48. (retrieved from <https://www1.eeoc.gov>).

Barker's (2012) research found that females identified the hiring process for aspiring superintendents to be a barrier. Glass (2000) cited two reasons why females were scarce in the superintendency. First, preparation for the superintendency by females was discouraged, and second, school boards viewed females as incapable of managing public school systems; therefore, school boards would not hire females (Glass, 2000). Females wanted to be hired for their qualifications and for what they could do and not because of their gender (Superville, 2016). Superville (2016) spoke of females facing challenges men did not encounter. Females were encouraged to smile more, had their appearances assessed and critiqued more often, and scolded when they asserted their authority (Superville, 2016). Employment opportunities in districts in financial distress were restricted to male superintendents as school boards felt that females were incapable of fiscal management of the district (Glass, 2000; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

Dana and Bourisaw (2006) found school boards were more comfortable with men, as hiring male superintendents was common practice throughout history. Making the change to females was difficult for some boards, especially if the school board was male dominant (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). School board member demographics can have a negative impact on females in the selection process as member mindsets were often set on what they thought the profile of a

successful superintendent should look like (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Guajardo, 2015). Other traits, such as prior experience, often determined which applicant would advance as a finalist for a superintendent's position (Tallerico, 2000b). Tallerico (2000b) noticed the path, or gates, through which a candidate advanced in the hiring process, were characteristically opened to veteran superintendents, assistant superintendents, and high school principals. These candidates tended to be white, male, and married (Guajardo, 2015). Tallerico (2000b) noted that gates were slightly ajar, but most likely closed, to candidates with elementary principalship or district office experience; usually female or people of color.

Filling a superintendent vacancy in a school district takes times and often a school board has several matters to consider; thus, during the hiring process, school boards may use the professional advice and services of search firms, commonly known as gatekeepers (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Moody, 1983). In education, school board members, professional consultant firms, and individuals such as retired, interim or current superintendents are defined as gatekeepers (Tallerico, 2000a; Tallerico, 2000b). These individuals, or groups of individuals determine, during the superintendent selection process, who is allowed to proceed through the screening and interviewing process and who is eventually selected for the job (Tallerico, 2000a; Tallerico, 2000b).

Services such as prescreening applicants and narrowing the list of candidates to four to six semi-finalists, helped school boards secure the best possible candidate for the superintendency (Moody, 1983). Tallerico (2000b) applied Lewin's (1947) "theory of channels and gatekeepers" by stating, "to access the superintendency meant viewing superintendent selection as a flow process involving the passage of applicants through a variety of 'channels,' most of which are composed of multiple subdivisions or 'sections'" (p. 146) (Tallerico, 2000b,

p.19). At each section, decisions were made whether a candidate was to continue through the corresponding gate to the next level (Tallerico, 2000b).

Moody (1983) suggested that extreme care should be taken when hiring a search firm, or outside agency, to assist in the selection of a superintendent. Selection processes, recruitment, and fulfilling expectations of the district could be discriminatory (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) noted that “because women are not usually observed in the more powerful leadership positions, cultures generally will not consider options of electing or appointing a woman to a position that has always been filled by men” (p. 51). Gatekeepers showed concern about a female in a position of power potentially earning more money than any other public worker in the community (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015).

Researchers Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) offered differing opinions of search firms. They found that females used professional consultants more often than men when searching for a superintendent position (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). Grogan & Brunner (2005) also noted that females had a better chance than men of being hired by a search firm. The research noted a 23 percent female to a 17 percent male comparison (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Dana & Bourisaw (2006) found it imperative that male and female board members and gatekeepers find a gender-neutral approach in hiring a superintendent.

Connell, Cobia, & Hodge (2015) identified two major factors that caused gains in the number of female superintendent applicants aspiring for the superintendency. First, there were increased numbers of vacancies and dwindling applicant pools for school superintendent positions. These vacancies resulted from resignations, retirements, terminations, and technological advancements. Secondly, the deterioration of working conditions or rewards of the job led males to leave the job after losing interest (Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Grissom &

Anderson, 2012). Shakeshaft (1989) referred to this hiring opportunity as the “golden age for women in school administration” (p. 34).

Female superintendents found that retaining a position once hired was just as difficult as obtaining one (Guajardo, 2015). Retention challenges included social isolation, social environment and culture, working conditions, geographic location or isolation, and uncompetitive salaries (Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2012). The most prevalent factor to females leaving their positions revolved around changing boards and conflict with school board members (Glass, Bjork, & Brunner, 2000; Guajardo, 2015). Guajardo (2015) reiterated the importance of good relationships in retention of a superintendent. A longer superintendent tenure is in the best interest of a school district as it has a positive correlation to academic achievement of students (Guajardo, 2015).

Barriers to Job Success of Female Superintendents

Reilly and Bauer (2015) noted that female superintendents encountered barriers in achieving the superintendency and retaining the position. These barriers were categorized in two ways: self-imposed, or internal barriers; and societally imposed, or external barriers, which are based on gender stereotyping (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Place, 2014). Continual personal growth and inner strength of individuals will overcome internal barriers; however, exterior barriers can only be changed by improving or changing the social and instructional context (Reilly & Bauer, 2015).

If we are to ever make progress toward redefining the superintendency to include the presence of women’s representative numbers, we must come to a better understanding of how the social constructions of gender, power, and politics play out in lived experiences and the workplace.” (Skrla, Scott, & Benestante, 2008, p. 116)

Derrington and Sharratt (2008) further supported female superintendents needed to identify and acknowledge a barrier to overcome it.

Internal Barriers

Females seeking the superintendency often face internal or self-imposed barriers. Researchers found self-imposed barriers to include: lack of self-esteem; lack of assertiveness and demands for greater work ethic; job locations; unwillingness to relocate; lack of career planning and career path; responsibilities of families and home; lack of mentors and networks; delayed entry into administrative positions; and internalization of sex roles (Barker, 2012; Connell, Cobia & Hodge, 2015; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Fuller & Harford, 2016; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Barker (2012) indicated that family responsibilities were a primary barrier to females seeking the superintendency. Superintendents spend more than fifty hours a week at work. These long hours, coupled with time and stress of the superintendency, can be punishing on a family; therefore, some females simply do not seek the position (Glass, 2000; Superville, 2016).

Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) found that female superintendents in small, rural areas suffered greatly from severe fatigue. These females experienced turmoil due to stresses of coping with multiple roles as school superintendent, homemaker, wife, and mother (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

Glass (2000) remarked that during their career, most superintendents will have three superintendencies in their 15-17 years as CEO. During that time period, relocation will happen approximately four times. Consequently, this barrier poses challenges for females with families and a working spouse or significant other (Elmuti, Jia & Davis, 2009; Glass, 2000; Wellington, Krogg, & Gerkovich, 2003). In 2005, Grogan and Brunner developed a survey to determine causes in the lack of women superintendents. The researchers found that eighty-eight percent of

the females surveyed mentioned relocation as a reason to not pursue the superintendency.

Another twenty percent of the females in the survey reported that relocation caused them to have commuter marriages within the family structure (Grogan & Brunner, 2005).

As previously referenced, Reilly and Bauer (2015) noted that female superintendents encountered barriers in achieving the superintendency and in retaining the position. They identified five issues female superintendents stated as reasons for lack of tenure in a school district caused by personal barriers that resulted in the departure of the superintendent. The first reason was the family responsibilities and structure. The administrators struggled with being an instructional leader, mother, wife, and caretaker (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Grogan, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Secondly, the relationship with her spouse was noted. Historically, the beliefs of the typical traditional family structure showed that a husband's employment is of higher importance than his wife's and a family should not move for a woman's career (Ezrati, 1983; Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Thirdly, research indicated the need to be a "superwoman" and female superintendents facing pressure to balance time constraints between home, family and work resulted in higher divorce rates (Reilly & Bauer, 2015; Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Next, Reilly and Bauer (2015) found that being a superwoman was not only exhausting, but also had a negative impact on female superintendents' overall health. High levels of stress in the position caused some females to take anxiety medication or seek therapists to help "get over" the stresses of the position. Some female superintendents believed that chronic illnesses that they experienced could be attributed to the superintendency (Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Lastly, because many females do not become superintendents until after their children are grown, the stress of caring for their dependent children was lessened. However, entering the

superintendency at a later age, females often had responsibilities of caring for elderly parents in addition to their job responsibilities (Reilly & Bauer, 2015).

External Barriers

Individuals typically have no control over external barriers. Exterior barriers have been documented as lack of mentorship, the “good ole boy” network, sex-role stereotyping, school board behavior, and the selection process (Odum, 2012; Barker, 2012). Barker (2012) stated that the nature of society's expectations and gender stereotyping; external barriers, which focus on organizational structure, often restricted female’s opportunities for advancement to the top position in schools.

The first external barrier mentioned by Barker (2012) was a lack of mentoring. Mentoring is a major component of building support systems in education (Barker, 2012; Bjork & Kowalski, 2005; Blanchard, 2009; Copeland & Calhoun, 2014) and a major tool for overcoming barriers (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010). Sharratt and Derrington (1993) found that professional support systems such as mentoring were not as readily available to women compared to men. Females lacked the professional ties and informal networks that were opened to men, creating an obstacle for career advancement (Miller, 1993). Scarcity of networking and mentoring opportunities meant female superintendents had to learn strength, find encouragement, and master adaptability from networks outside of the superintendency or educational field. Female superintendents gave mentoring credit to the strong values and beliefs of family members to aid in decision making (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010).

A second barrier facing females was identified as the “good ole boy” fraternity (Barker, 2012; Connell, Cobia, & Hodge, 2015; Konnert & Augustine, 1995). Glass et al. (2000) found that male superintendents, search consultants, and school board members denied female

candidates access to information regarding possible job openings and female superintendents were unable to share strategies needed to increase their visibility to headhunters, school boards, and other superintendents. As some women were not a privileged part of the “good ole boy” fraternity, females lacked professional networking, influential sponsors or mentors, and formal and informal trainings (Barker, 2012; Glass et al., 2000; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). Elmuti et al. (2009) claimed that women needed more encouragement while in the superintendency. Some men were hesitant to mentor females as the perception existed that females were more emotional and, as a mentor, men risked workplace sexual harassment issues (Barker, 2012).

Gender prejudice, also known as sex-role stereotyping, is a third challenge (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Odum, 2010). Stereotyping referred to perceptions of how females were perceived in their competence, assertiveness, and leadership skills (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009). Elmuti et al. (2009) made reference to stereotyping as having visits from ghosts of superintendents’ past. For example, if a female superintendent accepted a position after a male superintendent exited from a district, the female superintendent would be expected to perform at the same level as did the previous superintendent. If unable to do so, the female superintendent would be perceived as weak or incompetent. In contrast, if a female superintendent interviewed for a position following the tenure of an inept or inefficient female superintendent, school boards classified the female candidate in that same category citing that all female superintendents were inept or inefficient (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009). This usually hindered the selection process.

The last major external barrier for women is in the selection process of superintendents (Barker, 2012; Glass, 2000; Tallerico, 2000b). Barker (2015) referenced the 2000 AASA study showing females cited discriminatory practices as roadblocks in the hiring process. Some school

board members remarked that females were poor leaders and managers and unable to manage a budget (Barker, 2012; Blanchard, 2009; Glass and Bjork, 2003; Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Females were identified as being too emotional to be effective school district managers (Barker, 2012; Blanchard, 2009). School board and/or community members may hesitate to hire a female superintendent simply because it would be problematic that the highest paid public worker in the county or city was a female (Lemasters, 2011).

In addition, qualification standards were perceived as higher for females than for men (Davis, 2010). Dysfunctional boards of education created a lack of job security for superintendents, which made the 24/7 nature of the job a discouraging prospect (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) noted that “because women are not usually observed in the more powerful leadership positions, cultures generally will not consider options of electing or appointing a woman to a position that has always been filled by men” (p. 51). Superville (2016) remarked that school board politics could be brutal and public scrutiny was intense.

Reilly and Bauer (2015) stated seven reasons lack of retention of superintendents in school districts were caused by external barriers. The first issue was the pressure of school boards (Beekley, 1999; Brunner and Grogan, 2007; McKay & Grady, 1994; Tallerico et al., 1993; Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Female superintendents in Reilly and Bauer’s study were disappointed when school boards became more interested in micromanagement than in doing what is best for children. Females also stated their frustrations were due to not focusing on instruction, but rather the time spent focused on the “need” and “whims” of their school boards. A second issue was the ever-changing requirements of the job. Other reasons for female superintendents leaving their position were that they wanted to focus more on instruction or they wanted to feel excited about education again. The last three reasons for lack of retention were

related to life trajectories, such as retirement, university teaching and educational consulting, and finally, home, family, and personal life needs (Reilly & Bauer, 2015).

Whether internal or external, the barriers and challenges reported by female superintendents were emotional, exasperating, and yet inspiring. Lane-Washington and Wilson-Jones (2010) cited that the success for female superintendents was different for women than men. They also mentioned that respect and credibility came at a higher cost to females stating that females must work harder to obtain these aspects than men (Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones, 2010). Rhode (2017) believed that second-generation problems of gender inequality must be confronted including unconscious bias, in-group favoritism, and inhospitable work-family structures. Society must be committed to equal opportunity while cognizant not to undervalue half of its talent pool (Rhode, 2017). “If we truly believe in equity and equality when dealing with the education of all children, then women – and especially women of color – need to believe in themselves, invest in themselves, and attain to make it to the top” (Kalbus, 2000, p.556).

Position Power and Gender

Schools are organizations that provide a hierarchical structure where administrators, board members, and teachers are granted power over others (Mountford, 2004). Katz (2006) defined power as the ability to make something happen. There are five bases of power in leadership: referent power, characterized by charisma and personality; expert power, categorized by leader competence and skill level; legitimate power, built on formal organizational or job authority; reward power, described by offering rewards to subordinates; and coercive power, based on the ability to punish subordinates (Katz 2006; Northouse, 2013; Place, 2014). There are two kinds of power within organizations; personal power and position power. The five bases of power are all encompassed within these two kinds of power (Katz, 2006; Northouse, 2013).

Position power, defined as control, authority, and dominance, is most used in United States schools (Brunner, 1995, 1998). A second definition more commonly referenced position power as “power over,” a hierarchical approach to leadership (Katz, 2006; Mountford, 2004; Northouse, 2013). Mountford (2004) continued to explain that power over was “top-down” and used to control or influence others at lower levels of the organization.

Personal power, defined as shared power using collaboration and communication, was used less in organizations, and not as valued by many men (Brunner, 1995, 1998). Personal power, or “power with,” is based on kindness, knowledge of content and expertise of the leader influencing subordinates (Katz, 2006; Northouse, 2013).

Brunner (1998) asked thirty-five superintendents to define power and how each used power. Seventeen superintendents defined power as ‘power over,’ twenty-two superintendents defined power as ‘power with’ and seven superintendents defined power as a mixed method (Brunner, 1998). Male superintendents reported using position power by authority more often than female superintendents (15 of 17) (Brunner, 1997; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Female superintendents used shared power, ‘power with,’ (17 of 22) more often through communication, cooperation, and collaboration when they wanted a more collaborative approach to leadership (Brunner, 1997; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Mountford, 2004). Female superintendents communicated the importance of building relationships and sharing their power to make things happen (Katz, 2006). All types of power; power over, power with, and mixed method, are used by all superintendents (Brunner, 1998).

In 2006, Katz surveyed 210 female superintendents and followed up with nine superintendents through personal interviews. Participants reported a strong connection with personal power, highlighting the importance of expert and referent power in their leadership

practice (Katz, 2006; Place 2014). Some of the participants talked about building connections by sharing power, or sometimes “giving it away” (Katz, 2006). Brunner (1994) found that several females did not have a definition of power, avoided using the term, and rarely perceived themselves as powerful (Lemasters, 2011). Katz determined that power was often threatening to women since society suggests that powerful females are viewed negatively by stakeholders (Guajardo, 2015; Katz, 2006)

Throughout history, societies taught females to take care of relationships, while men were taught to “have all the answers” (Brunner, 1998). Females were to support the ideas of others, especially men (Brunner, 1998). Brunner (2000) referenced Naomi Wolf’s (1994) research on female socialization concerning the concept of power. Wolf identified that “there is a taboo that makes it virtually impossible in ‘women’s language’ to directly claim power or achievement” (p. 250). Females must “speak the language of those in the male circuits of power while remaining feminine” (Brunner, 2000, p. 198; Lemasters, 2011). Miller (1993) claimed that woman’s use of power was transparent next to a male. Females are not regarded or heard in the same way (Miller, 1993). An example provided by Brunner described a female superintendent struggling to make her point to stakeholders. She understood the situation, knew the attitudes, views, and beliefs of the stakeholders, and discovered the only way to get her words heard was to send a male to speak for her (Brunner, 2000). Brunner (2000) stated the requirement to use others as mouthpieces because of gender bias is unnatural; this becomes a difficult, frustrating, and unsettling experience for female superintendents.

A recent study by Pounder (1998) suggested that those who hold positions of power in educational settings should use their power to initiate and facilitate collaborative decision making (Pounder, 1998) and not use power to dominate, control others, or oppress others in

decision making (Brunner & Schumaker, 1998; Grogan, 2000; Mountford, 2004; Petersen & Fusarelli, 2002). Katz (2006) noted that superintendents needed others to subscribe to their vision and to use the abilities and resources of those supporters to help them get to the desired outcome for their district. Katz suggested that women's sense of integrity involved the sense of caring for others through collaboration and relationship building resulting in women equating power with giving and caring (Katz, 2006).

School Board Governance

Role of the Superintendent

A superintendent serves as the chief executive officer and key holder of power and influence hired by school boards in United States public school systems (American Association of School Administrators, 1994; Odum, 2010; Place, 2014). Superintendents are the only personnel in a school system that report directly to the school board (Odum, 2010). The chief executive officer should expect to be responsible for duties which include ensuring an effective teaching and learning process; having oversight of financial, legal, and personnel operations; increasing knowledge of federal and state laws; developing, planning, implementing, and evaluating district goals, objectives, and policies; and being a moral educator (AASA, 1994; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999; Odum, 2010; Place, 2014). Grogan (2000) highlighted the importance of moral duties in the superintendency while describing the position as second only to a minister in representation of the modeling and upholding of the community's values.

Pascopella (2008) noted that today's superintendents have a mean age of 55 years, which is the highest age reported in the history of record-keeping. She stated that in times past, superintendents started their positions around the age of 40; this was after teaching in classrooms for about five years, serving as a building level administrator for five to seven years, and serving

another five years in district administration. Historically, the typical retirement age for superintendents had been 57 or 58, with 17 years in the superintendency (Pascopella, 2008). At present, the increased average age of superintendents may be the result of the reluctance of central office administrators to risk the unknown of moving from a “safe” position to one where relocation to another district or state is prevalent and often the norm (Pascopella, 2008).

The superintendent position is one of the most difficult and most male-dominated chief executive positions of any profession in the United States (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). The researchers noted that to address the complexities in education, challenges in political platforms, economic constraints, stressors of student accountability, and social or community pressures, superintendents must continually expand their skills and capacities (Grissom & Anderson, 2012; Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999). These rising pressures in education have resulted in shortened or tumultuous job tenures in public school systems (Hodgkinson & Montenegro, 1999).

Peterson and Short (2001) stated that the success of the superintendent requires interpersonal skills in shared decision-making that nurture the superintendent’s ability to define, control, recommend, and support decisions facing a district. As the leader, the superintendent must build, motivate, and facilitate collaborative decision-making groups to enable successful management of schools (Peterson & Short, 2001). The role of the superintendent has metamorphosed into more than just sole decision-making, financial, and public relations focus; it now deals with board indecision, multiple agendas, and conflicting expectations (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2001). Mayer (2011) suggested that keeping the decision-making process evidenced-based, fair, and open prevents school board members from imposing terrible personal judgment on affairs of the district.

The role of the superintendent is complex and requires a high level of interaction with their school board members. At times there may be disharmony between the superintendent and school board members (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). Conflict between the two parties usually has a harmful effect on the organization (White, 2007). Instability or superintendent turnover in the superintendent's office disrupts management functions and may have a negative short-term impact on district performance (Grissom & Anderson, 2012). However, Grissom & Anderson's (2012) research concluded that successful systemic school reforms take five or more years of a superintendent's focus. The years needed for reform suggested that turnover of the superintendent negatively impacts a school system and could be felt even longer (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). Thompson (2014) concluded that "a healthy school board-superintendent relationship is more likely to exist when lengthy tenures of superintendents and board members are expected and encouraged" (p. 75).

Superintendents must remain sensitive and be alert to inappropriate behaviors by individual board members (Mayer, 2011) while making all the parts come together in an acceptable whole (Carver, 2006). Challenges arise with all board members receiving equal treatment; yet, the superintendent's only accountability is to the board as a body, not to individual members or committees (Carver, 2006; Eller & Carlson, 2009). Clear accountable safeguards and policies need to be in place for a district to run effectively without school board - superintendent dilemmas (Mayer, 2011).

White (2007) referred to Estes's (1979) work stating the superintendent must possess eight qualities to create a positive relationship with the school board, employees, and community:

1. A sound conceptual and theoretical basis for educational programming.

2. An appreciation of the dynamics of the local communities and the establishment of responsive management practices and structure to address the needs of local constituents.
3. The ability to engage in constructive dialogue with local boards of education and to assist boards in exercising leadership in their respective communities.
4. The political astuteness and ability to interact with the local, state, and federal government structure in a constructive manner.
5. The ability to direct management, including an ability to assemble an effective management team, and to assure productivity and harmony in the school district.
6. The ability to formulate and monitor effective regulatory policies and procedures, which will facilitate efficient school operations.
7. The ability to provide the emotional and spiritual support and leadership for the school district.
8. An awareness of resources and knowledge necessary to do the job of running the public school (p. 3)

Superintendents manage school districts, which often are the largest employer in the community (Lamkin, 2006). Lamkin (2006) pointed out that success and failure in a school district, or community, often falls on the shoulders of the superintendent. Budgetary issues, personnel concerns, and special interest groups all make the superintendency a complex undertaking (Eller & Carlson, 2009). A superintendent must be influential and involved in the instructional practices of the district while remaining updated on federal and state mandates, district policies, and political views (Grogan, 2000). The superintendent, as a manager and a leader, is held accountable for virtually every aspect of the school organization.

Role of the School Board

The National School Boards Association (2017) reported that there are 49 state school board associations throughout the nation to support more than 90,000 local school district school board members. There were 13,809 local school districts serving 50 million children in the public schools nationwide in 2017 (NSBA, 2017). Local school boards are comprised of five to nine board members, with the typical number being six to seven, depending upon the size of the district and community (Eadie, 2006; Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005; Place, 2014; Sell, 2006). Hess (2002) stated that 96 percent of all board members were parents, and about half of them currently had children in school. He stated that large-district school boards have fewer professional or businessmen, and more educators, retirees, and homemakers, than do small-district boards (Hess, 2002).

All local school boards are organizational units within their wider state organizations. They consist of a group of people working collaboratively, through formal structure and process, to achieve a common goal (Eadie, 2006). The job of the school board member includes setting the district course through a strong strategic plan, adopting and revising policies, making major decisions about instructional programming, attaining financial security through the budget process, hiring and evaluating the superintendent, and discussing and approving plans for managing the district as a whole (Mayer, 2011).

Eighty percent of school districts in the United States enroll less than 3,000 students, while larger, urban school districts account for the twenty percent that serve large numbers of students in smaller geographic areas (Sell, 2006). School boards are the direct link between the districts' governance and the constituencies and families that they serve (AASA, 1994; Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005; Sell, 2006). The American Association of School Administrators (1994)

reported that school board members must be sensitive to the special needs of all learners in the district; an active advocate for students and learning; and must practice the same advocacy for the state, and federal government bodies (AASA, 1994). High impact boards not only devote their time to making judgments and decisions, they remain an active staple in the community by establishing and maintaining relationships with the public and key stakeholders within the community (Eadie, 2006).

In 1992, the National School Boards Association identified “a four-fold thrust for leadership by local school boards to ensure excellence and equity in public schools” (AASA, 1994, p. 8). Aside from carrying out governance responsibilities set for by state and federal statutes, the first of the four thrusts included working with the community to develop a vision for the local school district. The second was to establish a structure and environment to help achieve that vision while providing children opportunities to attain their maximum potentials and ensure that all needs of the child are met. The third was that school districts must develop an accountability system to assure students have high performance on standards and assessments showing increasing student growth and achievement. The last thrust was that school boards must engage in advocacy on behalf of students in their schools (AASA, 1994).

Challenges are prevalent in all school systems, but Hess (2002) averred that board members in medium and larger districts had more issues and concerns than board members in smaller school districts. The most notable exceptions would be in school finance and student achievement where alarm is widespread (Hess, 2002). The Iowa Association of School Boards noted “the field has been tilted toward student achievement with pressure and accountability such as we have not seen before in the history of the nation” (Hackett, 2015, p. 25). An initiative high on the list of challenges was No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Eadie, 2006). Eadie (2006)

explained that there was a growing concern for student achievement but also noted an expansion of federal involvement in public education at the local level, with boards struggling to maintain local control of curriculum and instruction. The implementation of ESSA, Every Student Succeeds Act, (NSBA, 2017) embraced the need for increased student achievement while allowing local school districts and state departments of education to gain more local control of their governing capabilities.

Other concerns among local school systems are the progressively increasing numbers of single parents and exploding growth of families in two-career marriages. These factors have created a decline in the parental involvement in children's lives (Eadie, 2006). Hess's research showed that board members had "significant" or "moderate" concerns relating to special education, technology, and teacher quality. Further research indicated that school boards had less concern relating to student discipline, teacher shortages, and school overcrowding (Hess, 2002). Hess continued to state that approximately one in five board members would like to receive training in student achievement issues, planning and budget/resource allocation, community collaborations/partnerships, and community engagement (Hess, 2002).

The roles and responsibilities of school board members are easy to define but somewhat difficult to articulate, navigate, and understand (Castallo, 2003). The most serious roles of the governing board are to assure that student achievement and growth is happening in local school districts and to maintain two-way lines of communication with community members (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005; Place 2014).

School Board and Superintendent Relationships

As close collaborators, the school board and superintendents must make sure that both have a meaningful role in the governing process. This can be achieved by charting the details of

the school boards governing structure, as well as the steps needed to complete the work of a school board (Eadie, 2006). Student learning increases when there is a district wide focus on improvement, a clear and stated definition of success, deliberate policy development, and the enactment of a leadership continuum (Hackett, 2015).

The work of the superintendent and school board members is based on human relations: working as a team, with clear roles, toward a common goal (Mayer, 2011). Lasting educational reform will not take place without the strong support of the school board, no matter how capable the superintendent is in terms of the technical knowledge and skills required to do the job (Hackett, 2015).

Many factors determine a district's effectiveness in carrying out its educational mission, but none is more important than a school board realizing its full potential and making a real difference in district affairs (Eadie, 2006). School board colleagues work with the superintendent to make the judgments and decisions promoting student success while keeping the district on a sound footing financially, administratively, and politically (Eadie, 2006). The effective board relationship with an executive is one that recognizes that the jobs of boards and executives are truly separate (Carver, 2006). Specifically, the school board enacts policies while the superintendent is responsible for implementing board-approved policies (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005). Although the roles of the superintendent and school boards are clearly defined, the lines of authority are not always that clear, especially when board members and the superintendent compete to further agendas that may or may not be aligned district goals (Peterson & Short, 2001). The board must give the professional school administrator authority to carry out designated responsibilities, and the administrator must give the board assurances that the duties assigned to the job are being carried out (AASA, 1994).

In 1993, the American Association of School Administrators published a report on the professional standards for the superintendency. This report stated that superintendents should develop procedures for working with the board of education that define mutual expectations, working relationships, and strategies for formulating district policy for external and internal programs; adjust local policy to state and federal requirements and constitutional professions, standards, and regulatory applications; and recognize and apply standards involving civil and criminal liabilities. (AASA, 1994, p. 9)

It is foreseeable that board members and superintendent may have questions or concerns about their roles and responsibilities (AASA, 1994). Three distinct concerns are noted: perceptions in the increase of single-issue board members focusing attention on limited and narrow objectives rather than on helping the entire system move forward; short term tenures of school superintendents while facing a diminishing pool of qualified applicants; and, “micromanagement” or the attempt by one or more board members to assume administrative matters that are rightfully the administrative responsibility. (p.8)

Conflict is an unavoidable factor in school board member and superintendent relationships (Castallo, 2003; Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005; Place, 2014; White, 2007). “Understanding the tie between communities and schools as well as how political power structures influence superintendent-board roles and relationships can provide a framework for analyzing sources of conflict” (Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005, p.9). White (2007) conducted a qualitative multiple case study dissertation on conflict in schools. Three school districts in Texas were chosen, with the study sample comprised of a superintendent and two school board members, with a purpose of understanding how role uncertainty caused conflict. The researcher found that conflict in school districts arose if there was a failure to obtain and retain a positive

relationship between the superintendent and the board members, which greatly affected the ability of those districts to achieve its stated goals (White, 2007). Honesty, respect, trust, straightforwardness, performance, and open communication were critical elements that had to be in place to mitigate the dynamic of conflict among school boards and superintendents (White, 2007; Carver 2006).

Communication is essential in order to create and maintain a successful working relationship between the school board and superintendent. Perceptive school boards and superintendents realize that maintaining public relations could mean the difference between success and failure (AASA, 1994). Harmonious and productive relationships will abound if two-way communication is established and maintained (AASA, 1994). Those relationships can have either a negative or positive outcome on what happens in the classroom (AASA, 1994).

Randall Collins from Waterford (Conn.) Public School, a 27-year superintendent, verified the need for good board-superintendent relationships by stating, “At times, individual members have created sleepless nights in terms of an agenda, or an ax to grind, and in terms of different philosophies, and that can be disruptive to the board-superintendent relationship” (Pascopella, 2008, p. 4). Research suggests that superintendents who achieve results still lose their jobs if they do not build effective superintendent-school board relationships (Hackett, 2015). These departures can be attributed to a tenuous relationship between superintendent and their boards (pg. 18). In fact, about sixty percent of superintendents’ turnover in school districts was voluntary. Hackett (2015) asserted, whether voluntary or involuntary, superintendent turnover negatively impacts a school system. Hackett (2015) further acknowledged that the loss of a superintendent may adversely affect staff morale and employee job satisfaction. The effect may

cause an increase in principal and teacher turnover and a decline of job performance with the real tragedy how it negatively impacts the school system and the children (Hackett, 2015).

Turnover on the school board also affected the relationship of the superintendent and governing school board (Natale, 2010; Place, 2014). School board turnover can be defined as a defeat in an election, a decision to not seek a re-election, or a resignation sometime during the term being served (Natale, 2010). Natale (2010), a former New York superintendent, interviewed superintendents throughout the state of New York about their ability to meet district goals relating to student achievement following a school board member turnover. School board turnover increased micromanagement and an altered school board agenda; female superintendents reported being more adversely affected by school board turnover than males (Natale, 2010; Place, 2014).

Three major factors influence relationships between school board and superintendents: policy development and administration, influence of external factors on school governance, and the discretionary authority given to chief administrators (AASA, 1994). The success of a school district requires special appreciation of shared decision making and teamwork among board members and the superintendent (Mayer, 2011). Thomas Gentzel, the executive director and CEO of the National School Boards Association, “You’re not dysfunctional if you disagree. You’re dysfunctional if you can’t make a decision.” “Disagreement can be healthy if it’s done in the right environment” (Vara-Orta, 2017, para. 23). Ultimately, effective communication is the key to understanding, and understanding is our ongoing quest to ensure the best possible education for students (AASA, 1994).

Female Leadership

Female Superintendents and School Boards

The presence of female superintendents has remained sparse in the United States since the Chicago Public School system named Ella Flagg Young as the first female superintendent in 1909 (Odum, 2010). Shakeshaft (1989) noted that since 1905, white male dominance had been the societal norm in all educational positions except in the early days of elementary school principalship (Alston, 2000). Employment of teachers in public school systems throughout the United States has remained predominantly female (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006), but the American public school superintendency has been unchanged for the past 100 years (Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000).

Females were 40 times less likely to advance from teaching to the superintendency than men (Skrla, Reyes & Scheurich, 2000). Most females entered the teaching profession as elementary school teachers; a position that did not lead down the path to the superintendency (Glass, 2000). Glass (2000) added nearly all superintendents were previous principals, assistant principals, or high school department chairs. Elementary schools did not have assistant principals or department chairs; therefore, female educators had fewer opportunities to become superintendents (Glass, 2000; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

Females bring unique experiences and attributes to educational leadership (Gardiner, Howard, Tenuto, & Muzaliwa, 2013). However, researchers Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) pointed out that females must meet a higher standard than men to attain leadership roles. Additionally, they stated that females must maintain better performance than men to retain these roles (Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001). Rhode (2017) added that females are also more likely than men to be punished for mistakes, discouraging females from taking risks in demonstrating leadership abilities. Grogan (2000) referred to Shakeshaft's (1989) research of

educational administration showing females were viewed as women first and administrators second.

Once females obtained a superintendent position, the development of a productive relationship with the hiring school board was still challenging (Place, 2014). Eagly and Karau (2002) stated that females had to meet a higher standard than men to be judged as very competent and possessing leadership ability. Female superintendents were viewed by school boards to be strong managers or able to handle district finances (Barker, 2012; Logan, 2000; Glass, 2000; Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004). Skrla et al. (2000) further stated that it did not matter how successful she was with student performance, balanced budgets, or bond passages, school boards questioned the abilities and competence of the superintendent based on her female gender.

Cecchi-Dimeglio (2017) reported the more decisive, assertive, or direct a female superintendent became, the less constructively critical feedback school boards provided. The researcher added the objective of constructive feedback is to allow the employee to focus on positives while making way for growth (Cecchi-Dimeglio, 2017). Cecchi-Dimeglio's findings showed females were 1.4 times more likely to receive critical subjective feedback, as opposed to positive or critical objective feedback. She stated further that annual evaluations were most often subjective, creating gender and confirmation bias (Cecchi-Dimeglio, 2017). Subjective feedback created negative feelings for female superintendents which led to females constantly second-guessing their decision-making skills and roles (Skrla, Reves, & Scheurich, 2000). Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) found that female superintendents exited school districts due to strained relationships between the school board and superintendent caused by role confusion between a

board's policy making responsibility, administrative responsibility, gender bias and trust in female's ability to serve in the manner in which they were trained.

Females continued to be at a disadvantage and underrepresented in the ranks of American public school superintendents (Alston, 2000; Skrla, Reves, & Scheurich, 2000). Additionally, females paid a higher price for success, including frequent relocations, difficult marriages and high divorce rates, and remaining childless (Fuller & Harford, 2016). Celia Charles, a superintendent from a rural district of 1250 students stated,

I believe that it was, many of the things, were due to the fact that I'm a woman. Because I think you have less credibility in the eyes of men, and you have to always be proving yourself. You have to almost be a workaholic and excellent to keep that image in front of other people. It's real hard you know (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996, p. 654).

Tallerico (1999) presented five reasons to involve female superintendents in conversations regarding imbalances:

First, education deserves the benefit of diverse perspective and experiences that different kinds of educators can bring to school administration. Put simply, it's the smart thing to do. Second, we are currently underutilizing the diversity of talent and potential among our teaching ranks. Thus, it's the practical thing to do. Third, equal opportunity in employment is guaranteed by Title VII of the 1965 Civil Rights Act and the 1963 Equal Pay Act (Bank, 1997). It's the legal thing to do. Fourth, all children, no matter where they live, should see both genders and all colors in leadership roles in every occupation and institution including education. It's the socially responsible thing to do. Fifth, it is morally objectionable to ignore inequities in the attainments of men, women, and people of color. It's the right thing to do (p. 148) (as cited in Wyland, 2014, p. 1).

Females are in a majority of well-educated Americans and, more females than males participate in administrator preparation programs at higher education institutions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). State certification agencies reported that most licensed superintendents were female (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Rhode, 2017). However, Guajardo's (2015) research illustrated the disconnection between Dana & Bourisaw's report and the actual number of female superintendents serving as CEO in public school systems.

The absence of women at senior levels of administration, particularly the superintendency, in K-12 education means that women's influence on policy changes, decisions and practice in the field is limited (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006, p. 486). Despite all legislative and statutory developments, the representation of women at the CEO level in school districts continues to be slight (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Researchers Connell, Cobia and Hodge (2015) predicted that based on current rates of change in the United States, it will take three or more decades for female superintendents to attain equity with male superintendents.

Stereotypes of Leadership and Gender

Gail Evans (2000) stated, "From early childhood on, boys and girls play with different sets of rules" (p. 41).

Leaders are expected to build power and use it, but women should not be powerful. Men are expected to be authoritarians; women are expected to nurture others. Leaders are expected to aggressively pursue interests that improve the education of children, but women are criticized if they are aggressive in their pursuit (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006. p. 18).

The researchers continued,

Women are considered to be primarily emotional. Men are considered to be rational.

Women are considered to be “soft” leaders; men are considered to be “strong” leaders.

Women gossip; men talk. Women suggest; men direct. Women nurture; men conquer.

Women who exercise their authority are seen as micromanagers; men are seen as strong leaders (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p. 27).

Bornstein (1979) specified that the “four personal characteristics most important of managerial jobs are emotional stability, aggressiveness, leadership ability and self-reliance; characteristics that are nurtured in men...however, when women display the same characteristics, they are considered pushy, brash, aggressive, abrasive and masculine” (as cited in Garn & Brown, 2008, p. 332).

Sharp et al. (2004) indicated that prejudices were found to be societal barriers that prevented females from gaining respect from male superintendents, school board members, and community members. The researchers assumed that larger school districts were headed by male superintendents for reasons including age-old prejudices such as “a woman cannot be as good a manager as a man, a woman is more emotional than a man, or that a woman is more prone to cry” (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004, p. 26). Sharp et al. (2004) discovered this was not the case. The researchers found that female superintendents led larger school districts, 25,000 or more students, and small rural districts, 300 or less students, more often than men. Male superintendents tended to relocate to school districts containing 3,000 to 24,999 students more than female superintendents. Job placement tended to be influenced by location and size of the school district (Sharp, Malone, Walter, & Supley, 2004).

Gammill and Vaughn (2011) reported that nearly 33 percent of twenty-first century schools were in rural areas where proportionately more female superintendents began their

experience as CEO's (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). According to Budge (2006) and Gammill & Vaughn (2011), rural communities share the following characteristics: low population, school and community interdependence, migration of young people, oppression, and a sense of attraction to place (Place, 2014).

Blount (1998) referred to the 1971 AASA study saying,

The superintendency is a man's world...Previous studies revealed that of the few female superintendents in the United States, most were in rural areas...Perhaps the significant reduction in the number of rural school superintendencies and the replacement of county superintendencies with the revitalized intermediate unit of school administration may help to explain the continuing decline in the percentage of public school superintendents who are women (p. 123).

The hierarchy of districts is organized by wealth, location, and reputation. Women and people of color predominantly occupy superintendency in the districts lowest in the hierarchy and the most challenges (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Bell, 1988; Ortiz and Marshall, 1988).

Blount (1998) noted that women tended to be paid less than large city school districts, making the position unattractive to male superintendents and causing white males to vacate these districts (as cited in Yeakey et al., 1986). The push for consolidation in small rural schools created a major issue for female superintendents as many tended to lose their jobs (Blount, 1998).

Dana and Bourisaw (2006) reported that smaller districts had the fewest central office administrators, more stress on the job, declining enrollment, less job satisfaction, were targets of public scrutiny and criticism, offered very little privacy, and endured greater school board conflict. Glass (1992) reasoned that superintendents in smaller districts "perform many tasks

they believe are inappropriate to their positions, and they have little or no support in doing them”
(p. 51)

Feminist Theory

Feminist theory is one theory that provides an explanation of the challenges women faced in leadership. This particular theory focuses on empowering females to break stereotypes and beliefs of the traditional behavior of females (Mahaney, 2014). Feminist theory is a branch of theory within sociology that grew out of influences of the women’s movement in the late 1960’s (Mahaney, 2014). This particular theory focused on social problems, trends, and issues and shifted assumptions and focus away from the viewpoints of males and more toward female viewpoints (Crossman, 2018). Crossman (2018) spoke of feminist theory as being misunderstood and thought to focus entirely on females characteristically promoting the superiority of females over males. However, feminist theory actually encourages the pursuit of equality and justice through identifying the forces that create and support inequality, oppression, and injustice in the social world (Crossman, 2018).

Mahaney (2014) noted socialist, radical, cultural, and liberal feminists as the four main philosophies of feminism. The first philosophy emphasized institutional and social relationships as needs for change by socialist feminists. Second, radical feminists concentrated on the change in gender relations and societal institutions. Third, cultural feminists recognized the detriment and implications of devalued females in society, and finally, liberal feminists focused on strengthening females in self-awareness, self-respect, self-esteem, assertiveness, and equality (Mahaney, 2014). Mahaney (2014) maintained that these four philosophies often overlapped and all focused on gender equality.

Feminist theory focused on gender inequality in both personal and professional social situations (Crossman, 2018). Professionally, liberal feminists argued that females have the same capacity for moral reasoning as males, but have historically been denied the opportunity to express and practice this reasoning, particularly within the sexual division of labor (Crossman, 2018). Eagly and Johannesen-Schmidt (2001) found that gender role expectations of the leader in an organization are based on how society categorizes them as male and female. In private spheres, liberal feminists pointed out the sexual division of labor in a marriage needs to be changed in order to achieve equity (Crossman, 2018). Crossman (2018) stated that feminist theorists claimed married women have higher levels of stress than unmarried women, or married men.

Females hold the natural gift of nurturing and caring. Unfortunately, societal norms do not value these characteristics and viewed these traits as weaknesses preventing females from feeling a sense of power, strength, and pride (Mahaney, 2014). Family dynamics have changed as more families have become dual income households working to support family responsibilities (Mahaney, 2014). Mahaney (2014) noted another shift in family dynamics; more males had become stay at home parents (Mahaney, 2014). Males who stayed home struggled with the same societal prejudice and bias as females taking the responsibility of caring for children (Mahaney, 2014). Males also dealt with social and gender role constraints with demand of strength, autonomy, and competition, and should not express vulnerability, empathy, or sensitivity (Mahaney, 2014).

Mahaney (2014) indicated media played a crucial role in supplying gender biased messages to young children. Media was portraying males as independent, dominant, self sufficient, and successful, while females were portrayed as sweet, passive, over emotional, and

attractive. Unfortunately, a major conflicting problem arose as these appropriate behaviors in young females were considered negative and inappropriate in adulthood (Mahaney, 2014).

Feminist theorists' main goal is changing the perceptions and beliefs of not only individuals, but society as a whole (Mahaney, 2014). "The development and implementation of policy and governance related to constitutional rights does not assure equitable freedoms, rights, and responsibilities for women. Social justice does not exist for women" (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p.1).

Conclusion

This literature review provided an overview of the struggles, challenges, and barriers that females experienced while aspiring to the superintendency. The underrepresentation of female superintendents in public schools in the United States has prevailed throughout history. Only within the last 20 years has research and attentiveness been directed to the topic of females in the superintendency (Kowalski & Brunner, 2011).

Chapter III, Methodology, provides information relating to the research design, detailed information regarding participants, research design, instrument, data collection and analysis, and procedures and timelines.

Chapter III: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of the mixed method study was to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents reported they experienced in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perception regarding school-board superintendent relations.

The researcher found limited research on females holding the school district position of superintendent. Barker (2012) stated that most studies on females in the superintendency were conducted by females currently experiencing the challenges of entering the profession, or currently serving in the position. Research on female superintendents have primarily been written using feminist theories and approaches (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Skrla, 2000; Tallerico, 2000a; Tallerico, 2000b; Barker, 2012). Feminist theory placed gender at the center of the issue being studied.

Kowalski and Stouder (1999) recommended the undertaking of additional research relating to factors inhibiting female advancement in the superintendency with attention focused on barriers related to such factors. The professional literature surrounding school administration also ignored the vanishing female administrators (Blount, 1998).

Educational administration is a profession in which the concerns of women superintendents about discriminatory treatment and sexism were not addressed nor even heard. From state legislature and state education agencies to professional organizations for boards and administrators, the institutions of the profession were seen as places where women's issues were ignored (Skrla, Reves, & Scheurich, 2000, p. 64).

Furthermore, sexism and gender were barriers for females seeking the superintendency (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Dana & Bourisaw (2006) added that sexism was recognizable in the

attitudes and behaviors of male superintendents and school board members developed from sex-role expectations for men and women in different cultures and subcultures.

Chapter III details the methodology of the study and includes research questions, participants, Human Subjects Approval, research design, instruments for data collection and analysis, treatment of data, and procedures and timelines.

Research Questions

The three questions which guided the mixed method study were:

1. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges they experienced in seeking and serving in their position as superintendent of schools?
2. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive regarding the nature of their school board - superintendent relations?
3. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges in school board-superintendent relationships that exist regardless of gender or due to gender?

Participants

The researcher sought information from 51 of a possible 52 females serving as public school superintendents in the state of Minnesota in the 2017-2018 school year. The researcher was also a female superintendent in the state of Minnesota and was not a participant in the study. All participants were active members of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA). MASA is a private nonprofit member service organization representing over 900 educational administrators (MASA, 2017). MASA estimated that all but two of the 337 Minnesota school district superintendents were members of their organization (MASA, 2017).

Each participant understood the purpose of the study and participated on a voluntary basis. Eligible participants must have met the following criteria:

- Possess a current Minnesota Superintendent Licensure
- Is a member of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators
- Serves as a practicing female superintendent in the State of Minnesota

The researcher requested a list of practicing superintendents and contact information, including phone numbers and school emails, from the office of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators in August 2018. There were 51 female superintendents identified as possible study respondents and asked to participate in the study survey. An email, letter of consent, and a link to the study were distributed from September 28, 2018 to October 31, 2018. Participants were asked to: 1.) Read through the cover letter, and, if they chose to continue by completing the survey, consent would be assumed; 2.) Complete the survey; and, 3.) Voluntarily provide contact information if interested in participating in a follow-up interview. (Appendix IV) An email reminder was sent to 51 female superintendents on October 16, 2018 reminding them of the survey. (Appendix V) Of the possible 51 respondents, 27 surveys were completed and used for the purpose of the study. On October 31, 2018, six Minnesota female superintendents, who self-identified as willing to participate in an interview, were drawn from a hat. Of the 20 who volunteered to be interviewed, two participants representing rural school districts (300-2,999 student enrollment), and two females representing suburban school districts (3,000-24,999 student enrollment) were selected as interviewees. No study participants were from urban school districts of 25,000 or more students' enrolled completed the survey or interview process. The participants were called on October 31, 2018 and subsequent interviews were scheduled in November, 2018 (Appendix VI).

Human Subject Approval - Instructional Review Board (IRB)

The researcher completed the Internal Review Board (IRB) training by Saint Cloud State

University through CITI Training Solution on November 19, 2017 (IRB Record ID #25117726), all appropriate application materials were submitted before the researcher started the collection of data. (Appendix I)

The researcher passed the Internal Review Board (IRB) review on September 13, 2018.

All participants were asked to sign an informed consent form prior to being interviewed. (Appendix IV) The informed consent form provided the following information:

- Participant understands the basic procedure of the study as written and explained on the consent form.
- Participant understands that participation is voluntary and may be discontinued at any time.
- Participant affirms that she is at least 18 years of age.
- Participant understands that refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which she is entitled.

Research Design

The researcher conducted a mixed-methods study combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. “Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth. Combining *what* with *why* adds power and richness to your explanation of data” (Roberts, 2010, p. 145).

The researcher designed the research questions based upon the conceptual framework of underrepresentation of females in the superintendency and from the literature review. Data collection included two phases: 1) a multiple-choice survey distributed to survey respondents through electronic mail; and 2) open-ended interviews conducted with four volunteer interviewees. The multiple-choice survey provided quantitative information while the open-

ended response questions presented qualitative data that allowed for clarifying responses and deeper understanding of the information obtained from the multiple choice survey. Some of the survey questionnaire and interview questions were replicated in a modified version from the survey used in Catherine A. Wyland's dissertation titled *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota*.

Instruments for Data Collection and Analysis

The first part of the research design is quantitative which included data collection from a total of 27 Minnesota female superintendents using a sixteen-item survey. The questionnaire was replicated in a modified form from the survey used in Catherine A. Wyland's dissertation titled *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota*. Seven survey questions were replicated from the Wyland survey asking about perceived barriers or challenges facing female superintendents in seeking and obtaining their positions and three asking demographic questions. Nine survey questions were developed by the researcher from a review of the related literature. Of the sixteen survey questions, seven were aligned with Research Question One and asked participants to identify perceived barriers commonly existed for them upon seeking the position of the superintendent. Four survey questions aligned with Research Question Two and asked participants to characterize their relationship with their school board, identify to what degree they felt supported by their school boards, to identify the greatest impact on superintendent-school board relationships, and relate what major challenge they encountered while seeking a superintendent position. One survey question aligned with Research Question Three and asked participants to identify if their perceived challenges in school board and superintendent relationships existed regardless of gender or because of gender.

Seven additional questions were developed by the researcher for the purpose of interviewing four volunteer survey respondents. Of the seven interview questions, one was aligned with Research Question One and asked the interviewee to provide additional information on their perceived barriers in seeking a superintendent position. Four interview questions aligned with Research Question Two and asked interviewees to expand on survey questions related to superintendent-school board relationships. No interview questions related to Research Question Three. Two interview questions were developed by the researcher to ask interviewees their perceptions of what is needed to encourage more females to seek a superintendent position in Minnesota.

The survey was piloted by a cohort of ten doctoral students and reviewed by the dissertation committee. Their feedback resulted in survey improvements in navigation, clarity of instructions, and quality of questions. The survey created utilized the online survey tool, SurveyMonkey, for distribution to survey respondents through electronic mail. Completion of the online survey was determined to be less than 15 minutes. Survey results were collected by SurveyMonkey.

The survey instrument consisted of 16 questions (Appendix III). Demographic information was collected asking participants four questions: what positions they held prior to obtaining a superintendent position, the number of superintendent positions applied before obtaining a position, number of years in present position, and their school districts' enrollment. There were three questions specific to superintendent and school board relationship, eight questions asking participants to rate the extent to which a selected item was a barrier in seeking a superintendent position (not a barrier, somewhat of a barrier, definitely a barrier), and one question asking participants to identify, from a list of options, whether the superintendent-school

board relationship issue existed regardless of gender or because of gender. Results with frequencies and percentages noted were recorded using a word processing program secure and apart from public access (Wyland, 2014). The same procedure was used for superintendent-school board relationship questions using a mixture of descriptive scales and short open-ended questions.

The qualitative component of the study used an interview model to gain further understanding of survey responses. White (2007) stated that qualitative research involves fieldwork; as a result, interviews were held in the participant's office or district's central office. Face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher with four volunteer Minnesota female superintendents allowing the researcher to "simply seek to discover and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives and worldviews of the people involved" (Merriam, 2001, p. 11). The 20 study participants who volunteered for interviews were categorized by rural, suburban, and urban school districts with two names chosen out of a hat from each category. However, since there were no study participants from the category of urban, two volunteer participants were drawn from a hat for each the suburban and rural categories. These individuals were contacted using information they provided in the survey when they volunteered to be interviewed. Each chosen interviewee was called on the phone and a meeting was scheduled with each interviewee. Three of the four interviews were conducted in the offices of the interviewees. Due to scheduling conflict, one interview was conducted over the phone. Interviews allowed the researcher to gain the interviewee's perspective through a series of in-depth questions focused on nine classifications examined by Guajardo (2015). The classifications focused on marriage and family, leadership, career path, mentors and role models, school board, board tenure, discrimination, defining successes, and preparation for the superintendency.

Each of the four participant's interview lasted forty-five minutes to an hour. The researcher received permission by each respondent to record all interview comments. Immediately following each interview, the recording was transcribed by the researcher into a word processing software program creating a transcript of each respondent's interview. Given the nature of the participants' positions, it was important to maintain confidentiality by assigning pseudonyms to the participants, their school districts, and any other identifying information. Disclosure of the identity of the participants, or their school districts, could result in negative ramifications because of the political ramifications that underlie the relationships of rural female superintendents and their respective school boards (Place, 2014).

Treatment of Data

After the survey was conducted, responses were analyzed with the assistance of the Center for Statistical consulting and Research at Saint Cloud State University. Following the interviews, recorded responses of participants were transcribed and coded by the researcher using a word processing software program. No names were used in transcribing from the audio files and all identifying characteristics were altered to ensure respondent confidentiality. An electronic copy of the transcription was sent to each participant in the interview process for their verification. Stouder (1998) stated, "Member checks involved re-statement of the comments made by respondents to make sure that there was correct identification and interpretation of the comments. "Verification of the data and its interpretation by the respondent ensured an accurate representation of the participant's position" (p. 39). All research and data were stored on a password protected computer in a locked home office.

Procedures and Timelines

- A survey was generated in November, 2017, by the researcher (based on the Wyland study and from review of the literature), using the online survey tool, Survey Monkey. (Appendix III)
- The survey and interview instruments were field tested by a group of doctoral cohort students from Saint Cloud State University on April 21, 2018.
- The survey was administered electronically from September 28, 2018 to October 31, 2018.
- An email reminder will be sent to 51 female superintendents on October 16, 2018 reminding them of the survey participate by October 31, 2018. (Appendix V)
- On October 31, 2018, six Minnesota female superintendents were selected for interviews from those who self-identified as willing to be interviewed.
- The participants were called on October 31, 2018 and interviews were scheduled in November, 2018 (Appendix VI).
- The data from the survey responses and from the interviews were analyzed and organized for reporting November 2018 to December 2018.
- The final defense of the dissertation was scheduled for Friday, February 22nd, 2019.

Summary

In conclusion, Chapter III provided an overview of the methodology included for the study of female superintendents and the challenges they reported related to seeking and obtaining superintendent positions and with their school boards. The study involved mixed methods using qualitative and quantitative approaches. The chapter described the participants, human subject approval, research design, instruments used for data collection and analysis, treatment of data, and procedures and timelines. The results of the study are included in Chapter IV. Chapter V

provides conclusions, discussion, limitations, and recommendations for further research and practice related to female superintendents and the challenges they face.

Chapter IV: Results

“In a five year study of American school superintendents released in 2015 by AASA, the School Superintendents Association, it was revealed that just 27 percent of district superintendents are women” (Kominiak, 2016); Minnesota Association of School Administrators reported 52 of 337 Minnesota superintendents were female (MASA, 2017). Both statistics illustrate there is an underrepresentation of females in the superintendency in Minnesota, as well as across the United States. Wilson (1980) stated, “The most successful superintendent is male, Anglo-Saxon, middle-aged, Republican, intelligent, and a good student but not gifted” (p. 20) (Grogan, 2000).

Throughout the United States, female educators outnumber males in K-12 public school teaching positions and in university educational leadership programs; however, males fill the majority of public school superintendent positions in the United States (Blount, 1998; Glass et al., 2000; Grogan, 1996; Sharp et al., 2004; Wyland, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents reported they experienced in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perceptions regarding school board - superintendent relationships. The findings of the study may be useful to higher education professionals, education professional organizations, public school boards of education, and school district administrators in Minnesota by providing insights into how gender may affect the minimal number of females in the position of superintendent of schools and the impact of superintendent-school board relationships may have on females both seeking and serving as superintendent of schools.

Findings presented in Chapter IV are organized into the following sections: research design, research questions, sample description, data analysis and a summary of the findings for each research question.

Research Design

The study utilized a mixed-methods research design combining both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. “Qualitative and quantitative approaches in a single study complement each other by providing results with greater breadth and depth. Combining what with why adds power and richness to your explanation of data” (Roberts, 2010, p. 145).

Data collection included two phases: 1) a multiple-choice sixteen item survey distributed to survey respondents through electronic mail; and 2) open-ended interviews conducted with four volunteer interviewees. The multiple-choice survey provided quantitative information while the open-ended response interview questions presented qualitative data that allowed for clarifying survey responses and providing deeper understanding of the survey topics. The questionnaire and interview questions were replicated in part from the survey used in Catherine A. Wyland’s dissertation titled *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota*. The data were analyzed and findings were organized according to each research question. The qualitative data gained from interviews are summarized after the quantitative data are discussed.

Research Questions

1. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges they experienced in seeking and serving in their position as superintendent of schools?
2. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive regarding the nature of their school board - superintendent relations?

3. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges in school board-superintendent relationships that exist regardless of gender or due to gender?

Description of the Sample

A total of 52 females serving as public school superintendents in the state of Minnesota in 2017-2018 were identified as potential survey respondents; there were 51 potential respondents to the survey. Of that number, 27 respondents completed partial or all of a survey developed by the researcher for the quantitative phase of the study.

Each participant understood the purpose of the study and participated on a voluntary basis. Eligible participants met the following criteria:

- Possess a current Minnesota Superintendent Licensure
- Active member of the Minnesota Association of School Administrators
- Serve as a practicing female superintendent in the State of Minnesota

The second phase of the study was qualitative using an interview model (White, 2007). Of the 20 study participants who volunteered for the interview portion of the study, two names were selected from the rural and two from suburban student enrollment categories.

Demographic Information of Study Sample

Demographic information was collected asking participants what positions they held prior to obtaining a superintendent position, the number of applications to superintendent positions before obtaining a position, number of years in present position, and their school district enrollment (Wyland, 2014, p. 32). Demographic information is represented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1*Professional Demographics*

Profile Variables	2018 Minnesota Results
Administrative Positions Before Superintendency	1.9 positions
Superintendency Positions Applied Before Acquisition of First Superintendency	1.5 positions
Number of Years in Present Position	4.6 years
School District Enrollment	
Rural (Fewer than 300-2,999 students)	16 (64.0%)
Suburban (3,000-24,999 students)	9 (36.0%)
Urban (25,000 or more students)	0.0%

(n=25)

The 25 participants who answered this question reported that the average number of administrative positions held prior to becoming a superintendent was 1.9. The average number of years the participants reported they served in their present positions was 4.6 years.

With regard to district student enrollment, the majority of participants, 64.0%, (n=16), reported they were employed in rural districts with fewer than 2,999 students, and 36.0% (n=9) reported they were employed in suburban districts with enrollments of 3,000 to 24,999 students. At the time of the study, none of the study respondents served as superintendents in urban Minnesota school districts with student enrollment over 25,000 students.

Data Analysis

Research Question One: What did Minnesota female superintendents report as challenges they experienced in seeking and retaining their position as superintendent of schools?

For research question one there were seven barriers listed and for each barrier, respondents could choose from one of three responses: definitely a barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or not a barrier. If a respondent identified that the item was definitely a barrier, she was asked to further indicate the perceived degree of difficulty caused by the barrier by selecting one of three responses: no difficulty, modest degree of difficulty, or severe degree of difficulty.

There were 27 participant responses to this survey question. A follow-up face-to-face interview with four respondents expanded and supported the question findings. Table 4.2 reveals the participants' responses to Research Question One regarding barriers they experienced seeking a superintendent position.

Table 4.2

Perceived Barriers Experienced by Female Superintendents in Minnesota Seeking a Superintendency

Barrier	Definitely a Barrier		Somewhat of a Barrier		Not a Barrier	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of Family Support	0	0	2	7.7	24	92.3
Lack of Employment Opportunity	2	8.0	7	28.0	16	64.0
Gender Discrimination	10	40.0	11	44.0	4	16.0
Lack of Peer/Collegial Support	3	12.0	5	20.0	17	68.0
Family Responsibilities	5	20.0	11	44.0	9	36.0
Lack of Self-confidence	2	8.0	8	32.0	15	60.0
Lack of Tenacity	0	0	1	4.0	24	96.0

Table 4.2 shows that of the 27 participants, 26 responded to the first barrier listed which was the lack of family support and that there were 25 who responded to the remaining six identified barriers listed in Table 4.2. Gender discrimination was identified as definitely a barrier by 40.0% (n=10) of the respondents and, combining categories, 40.0% (n=21) identified gender discrimination as either definitely a barrier or somewhat a barrier. Family responsibilities was identified by 20.0% (n=5) of the respondents as definitely a barrier while 64.0% (n=16) identified family responsibilities as either definitely a barrier or somewhat a barrier. Lack of peer / collegial support was identified by 12.0% (n=3) of the respondents as definitely a barrier; 68.0% (n=17) reported it as not a barrier. Lack of employment opportunity and lack of self-

confidence were identified as definitely a barrier by 8.0% (n=2) of respondents however, when combining those responses with the choice of somewhat a barrier, lack of employment opportunity was reported by 36.0% (n=9) of respondents and lack of self-confidence was reported by 40.0% (n=10) as either definitely or somewhat of a barrier. The vast majority of respondents reported that lack of family support was not a barrier 92.3% (n=24) and lack of tenacity not a barrier for 96.0% (n=24).

The second part of Research Question One identifies the degree of difficulty identified by respondents selected as definitely a barrier by using one of three responses: no difficulty, modest degree of difficulty, or severe degree of difficulty. These data are reported in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Perceived Degree of Difficulty of Barriers Identified by Minnesota Female Superintendents

Barrier	Number Not Responding	Number Responding		
		No Difficulty	Modest Difficulty	Severe Difficulty
Lack of Family Support	27	0	0	0
Lack of Employment Opportunity	25	0	2	0
Gender Discrimination	17	0	7	3
Lack of Peer/Collegial Support	24	0	3	0
Family Responsibilities	22	2	3	0
Lack of Self-confidence	25	1	1	0
Lack of Tenacity	27	0	0	0

Table 4.3 data total number reporting varies by item. The table data reveal that 37.0% (n=10) respondents identified gender discrimination as a modest or severe difficulty in securing a superintendent position in Minnesota and 12.0%, (n=3) identified family responsibilities as modest difficulty. Lack of peer/collegial support as a modest difficulty was reported by 11.1% (n=3). No difficulty was reported by 7.4% (n=3) with the barrier of family responsibilities. Lack of employment opportunity was noted as a barrier of modest difficulty by 7.4% (n=2). Lack of

self-confidence was noted by one respondent as a modest difficulty. No respondents reported lack of family support and lack of tenacity as any level of difficulty.

The findings were confirmed during the interviews. Two common themes that were mentioned by all four interviewees indicated tremendous family support with supportive husbands who were able to relocate to support the career of their spouses. While lack of employment opportunities was not mentioned by any of the interviewees, employment issues were mentioned by all four interviewees. Interviewee A conveyed the need to convince the school board during interviews that she was qualified to perform the duties. Interviewee B stated the same need to convince the school board that she was not only qualified to perform the duties of a superintendent, but had to prove that she was capable of taking charge and that a female could run a school district equal to a male candidate. She went on to explain how selection in job interviewees was different in districts depending upon the make-up of the boards themselves believing that all male boards have a tendency to hire male candidates. There was a perception that females are hired more in districts with a mix of female and male board members. Interviewee C stated the importance of needing to change the mindset of the community as well in order to believe in her leadership. The job is very public and therefore the community belief system is an important component to develop early on. Interviewee D stated, "It takes longer for women to prove their credibility, but it feels like men are granted that credibility until they lose it and women have to work harder to earn that otherwise."

Research Question Two: What did Minnesota female superintendents report regarding the nature of their school board - superintendent relations?

Study participants were asked how they characterized their school board – superintendent relationships. Each participant could choose from three responses: exceptional, could use some

work, or problematic. There were 25 participants who responded to this survey question. A follow-up face-to-face interview with four respondents expanded and supported the study findings. Table 4.4 details the responses to how participants characterized their relationships with their school board members.

Table 4.4

Characterization of Relationships with School Board Members

Relationship Responses	Number of Participants	Percent
Exceptional	17	68.0
Could Use Some Work	7	28.0
Problematic	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

Table 4.4 data reveal that 68.0% (n=17) respondents reported their relationships with their school board as exceptional. Of the 25 participants, 28.0% (n=7) reported their relationships could use some work. Only one respondent reported the relationship with school board member as problematic.

Table 4.5 reveals the data for the survey question that asked to what degree respondents believed they were supported by their school board.

Table 4.5

Perceived Support by School Board Members

Support Responses	Number of Participants	Percent
Fully Supported	18	72.0
Depends on the Situation	6	24.0
Not Supported at all	1	4.0

(n=25)

Table 4.5 data reveal that eighteen respondents or 72.0% reported they felt fully supported by their school boards while six or 24.0%, of participants indicated it was situational depending upon nature of the situation. Only one respondent reported as not supported at all by

the school board. These data were confirmed during the qualitative interviews. Interviewee A stated how the school board and superintendent work like a committee. The decisions are ultimately made by the superintendent, but the board members are not afraid to challenge or question if need to. Interviewee A felt very supported by her board. Interviewee B gave examples of two different schools. In her experience, she found that school board members that grew up in the district they are now members of the school board tend to look at things in a different light. They attended that school district as students; therefore, they know everything there is to know about education in that district. Roles of school board members and superintendents can become conflicted when one has spent a lifetime in the district and the other has not. Districts where the school board members did not grow up in the district possess different qualities as a professional board and therefore work differently. They don't see the district as what it has always been, but what it can be when we work together. Interviewee C stated the importance trust and respect. The superintendent struggles with a particular board member that doesn't respect, trust, or listen to her. "It can make my job very difficult." Interviewee D works with a veteran board. New board members elected to that district have mentorship opportunities with other board members to make sure that roles are understood. "They leave the day to day operations to me."

Table 4.6 shows information on the survey question, what is the one event or factor that has had the greatest impact on your superintendent – school board relationships?

Table 4.6

Perceptions of Greatest Impact on Superintendent-School Board Relationships

Impact Event or Activity	# of Participant Responses	Percent
Community Perceptions	1	5.0
Gender	1	5.0
Trust/Communication	6	30.0

Longevity in the Position	1	5.0
Leadership Experience	1	5.0
Personal Agendas	1	5.0
Relationship with Board Chair	1	5.0
Student Success or Perceived Success	2	10.0
Always Having to Prove Myself	2	10.0
Elections	1	5.0
Evaluations	1	5.0
None	2	10.0

(n=20)

Table 4.6 data show that of the total number of responses, 30.0% (n=6) indicated that the greatest impact on relationships with the school board was trust and communication. Student success or perceived success and always having to prove myself each had 10.0% (n=2) of respondents' who selected those items as greatest impacts; another two respondents, or 10.0%, selected none for this question. Community perceptions, gender, longevity in the position, leadership experience, personal agendas, relationship with the board chair, elections, and evaluations were each reported by one respondent as having the greatest impact on relationships with school board members.

Table 4.7 provides information related to the major challenges facing females seeking a superintendent position. Each of the options also allowed for open-ended comments which are reported after each challenge listed.

Table 4.7

Perceptions of Major Challenges Facing Females Seeking a Superintendent Position

Challenge	# of Participant Responses	Percent
Gender-Biased Interview Process	3	12.5
Balancing Family Life with Superintendency	1	4.2
Changing Paradigm Leadership/Good Old Boy Network	6	25.0
Double Standards for Gender	4	16.6
Gender Discrimination	2	8.3
Perceived Lack of Confidence or Weakness	6	25.0
Mobility	1	4.2
None	1	4.2

(n=24)

Table 4.7 data illustrate that the need to change the paradigm in leadership from a “Good Old Boy” network to gender neutral leadership was presented as a major challenge for 25.0% (n=6) of respondents. The perceived lack of confidence or weaknesses in a female displayed by school board members and male superintendents also presented as a major challenge for 25.0% (n=6) of respondents. Double standards for gender was identified as a major challenge by 16.6% (n=4) of respondents and a gender biased interview process was named a major challenge for 12.5% (n=3) of respondents. Gender discrimination was named as a major challenge by 8.3% (n=2) of respondents. Balancing family life with superintendency expectations and mobility were each mentioned by one respondent.

In the open-ended questions, the respondents their perceptions of the “Good Old Boy” network once they obtained a position. This major challenge was noted not only in the hiring process by school boards and gatekeepers, but also in the difficulties experienced once practicing as a superintendent. Gatekeepers refer to school board members, professional consultant firms, and individuals such as retired, interim or current superintendents, who determine, during the superintendent selection process, who is allowed to proceed through the screening and interviewing process and who is eventually selected for the job (Tallerico, 2000a; Tallerico, 2000b). One interviewee added, “There is a double standard for men and women.” “Having my voice heard and affirmed by the “boys’ club” group. I frequently feel as though my opinions are not valued...I perceive a definite difference between the way new men are gathered into the group versus the way I am.” “The good old boys clubs on some school board and who exist to a degree within the superintendent ranks make it appear that there is no place for women in...big important things like: finance, building a school, maintenance and ground work and law”

In the open-ended responses, female superintendents spoke about how school board members fear hiring females due to the perception that females lack confidence, are unable to make decisions, are emotional, or are weak in finance and personnel management. The female interviewees spoke about how the concept of lack of confidence and weaknesses are interchangeable and prevalent from seeking a position through employment. Female interviewees added, “Females have to earn credibility with the board and the community in different ways than males. It appears that males are granted credibility until they lose it. Females don’t have it, until they’ve earned it.” “Lack of confidence in capability as a superintendent. I do not necessarily feel this with my own board, but rather, some male colleagues / superintendents.” “Men can be seen as confident and assertive, while women are viewed as pushy and emotional even though the two groups might be saying and acting in the same manner.” “The perception that when a female in a leadership position is forceful in stating positions, expectations, etc., she is perceived as being ‘bossy’ or ‘bitchy’, while a male leader doing the exactly same thing would be regarded as ‘taking charge’.”

In the open-ended responses, one interviewee added, “I continue to see superintendent searches that bring forward five men and one woman to the interview table. While I do not know if that represents the ratio of men to women candidates, I worry that it doesn’t.” “Retired, white male leaders (of a previous generation) are running the search firms that lead superintendent searches in Minnesota. They are absolutely part of a “good old boys” network and pretend to be about equity and change, but they are not.”

The data regarding major challenges faced by females seeking a superintendent position were confirmed during the qualitative interviews. Interviewee D talked about what she heard at an AASA conference regarding an “imposter syndrome”. She went on to explain that women

tend to feel like they don't have the skill set or they're not confident in and so they tend not to apply for positions because they feel like they can't do it, so they don't. She added that men might think that they don't know enough but they will apply and learn as they go, but women feel like they need to have the knowledge before they can apply. "We don't give ourselves as much credit on our knowledge or our ability; therefore, we hold ourselves back." Interviewee A, B, and C spoke more about gender discrimination being noticed after obtaining a female superintendent position. They felt that fitting into the "club" and the camaraderie to join the male conversations were major challenges. "We never get to be in the best buddy group as we don't fit into the group." Interviewee A felt that she was missing out on the conversations that the male superintendents were having thus creating a feeling of isolation. Interviewee B stated that people are always mad at the decisions made. Interviewee C concurred by adding that the unrealistic expectations of the job, and the added hours needed to prove herself makes the job more difficult.

Research Question Three: What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges in school board-superintendent relationships that exist regardless of gender or due to gender?

Each respondent was asked to note whether the gender challenge listed was regardless of gender or because of gender. The respondents who did not perceive an item as a major challenge in school board superintendent relationships were asked to leave the boxes blank. All respondents were asked to check all that applied to their perceptions.

Table 4.8 details the data for gender challenges in school board and superintendent relationships.

Table 4.8

Perceived Gender Challenges in School Board and Superintendent Relationships

Challenge		Number Responding			
		Regardless of		Because of	
		Gender	Percent	Gender	Percent
Role Uncertainty	(n=16)	11	68.8	5	31.2
Trust	(n=17)	10	58.8	7	41.2
Work vs. Home	(n=12)	4	33.3	8	66.7
Micromanagement	(n=23)	12	52.2	11	47.8
Respect	(n=14)	4	28.6	10	71.4
Superintendent Performance	(n=14)	8	57.1	6	42.9
Open Communication	(n=12)	11	91.7	1	8.3
“Good Old Boy”	(n=20)	1	5.0	19	95.0
School Board Turnover	(n=11)	11	100.0	0	0
Student Achievement	(n=10)	10	100.0	0	0
Shared Decision Making	(n=12)	7	58.3	5	41.7
Lack of Collaboration	(n=12)	7	58.3	5	41.7

Respondents could select none, one or more of the challenges. The n-value will vary in total.

When analyzing Table 4.8 data, most of the challenges noted were regardless of gender rather than because of gender. The total number of participant responses varied for each item listed in Table 4.8. Micromanagement was reported by 52.2% (n=12) of the respondents as regardless of gender compared to 47.8% (n=11) who identified it as because of gender. Role uncertainty was reported by 68.8% (n=11) as regardless of gender and 31.2% (n=5) who identified it as because of gender. Open communication was identified by 91.7% (n=11) of respondents as regardless of gender and only 8.3% (n=1) because of gender. Both school board turnover and student achievement challenges received 100% of responses as regardless of gender. Trust was reported as a major challenge by 58.8% (n=10) as regardless of gender while seven or 41.2% (n=7) reported it was because of gender. Superintendent performance was noted by 57.1% (n=8) as a challenge was regardless of gender and 42.9% (n=6) who identified it as because of gender. Both shared decision making and lack of collaboration were identified as regardless of gender by 58.3% (n=7) of respondents for that challenge and because of gender for 41.7% (n=5) of respondents.

The “Good Old Boy” network was chosen by 95.0% (n=19) of the respondents as because of gender. Respect was reported as a major gender challenge in school board and superintendent relationships because of gender by 71.4% (n=10) with 28.6% (n=4) reporting it as a challenge regardless of gender. Work versus home was a major gender challenge for eight 66.7% (n=8) because of gender and 33.3% (n=4) reporting it as a challenge regardless of gender. No additional qualitative data was gathered regarding gender challenges in school board and superintendent relationships.

Summary

In summary, Chapter IV presented the study results organized by the three research questions. Interview comments from selected respondents related to barriers in seeking positions and school board-superintendent relationships were also reported. Data gathered from 27 study respondents were analyzed to examine barriers and challenges they perceived they experienced in seeking and obtaining superintendent positions and in creating strong school board – superintendent relationships. Major findings from the study are summarized by research question.

Research Question One data indicate that gender discrimination (84.0%), family responsibilities (64.0%), and lack of self-confidence (40.0%) were identified as either definitely a barrier or somewhat a barrier in seeking a superintendency. The vast majority of respondents identified lack of family support (92.3%) and lack of tenacity (96.0%) as not a barrier.

Research Question Two data indicate that 68.0% identified their relationship with their school board as exceptional; 28.0% reported that the relationship could use some work. Trust and communication were reported by 30.0% as having the greatest impact on relationships with their school boards.

Research Question Three results indicate that most of the challenges reported by study participants with regard to their school boards were regardless of gender rather than because of gender. One exception was in the category “Good Ole Boy” in which 95.0% of respondents said that was because of gender.

Chapter 5 presents the conclusions, discussion, limitations, and recommendations for further study and practice.

Chapter V: Summary, Conclusions, Discussion, Limitations, and Recommendations

Throughout the United States, female educators outnumber males in K-12 public school teaching positions and in university educational leadership programs; however, males fill the majority of public school superintendent positions in the United States (Blount, 1998; Glass et al., 2000; Grogan, 1996; Sharp et al., 2004; Wyland, 2014).

Historically, females were expected to tend to home and family (Keller, 1999). Females were considered subservient to men and role expectations for females did not include gaining greater knowledge through educational means (Blount, 1998). Society treated females as second-class citizens (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). As females became more vocal about the desire to teach their own children, training and educational opportunities arose (Blount, 1998).

In 1991 The Civil Rights Act was enacted and the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission was created. This Commission was charged with conducting a study and preparing recommendations concerning “1.) identifying artificial barriers blocking the advancement of minorities and women; and 2.) increasing the opportunities and development experiences of women and minorities to foster advancement of women and minorities to management and decision-making positions in business” (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006, p. 6). The commission found three findings depicting major challenges for females in pursuing top level positions.

The first finding was that the single greatest barrier to advancement in executive ranks was prejudice against minorities and females (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). The Commission (1995) showed the lack of females in executive positions was not limited to the field of education, but also throughout corporations.

The second finding was that people of diverse backgrounds were often excluded from advancement because of the glass ceiling, therefore struggled to compete successfully for

corporations' top leadership positions (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Typically, men occupied jobs with high status and wages while females occupied jobs with lower status and lower wages (Browne, 1999). In education, the least-paid positions yet the highest proportion of females are teachers found in elementary public schools, not on the direct path to the superintendency (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006).

Finally, societal barriers, internal, or organizational structural barriers, and governmental barriers were major challenges (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Odum 2010). Cultural attitudes, practices and behaviors have built glass walls and ceilings (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Historically, the top spots in administration were viewed as a private club controlled by the “old boy network” (Moody, 1983, p. 389). Farr (1988) defined “old boy network” as a

White, upper (or upper middle) class men in their productive adult years with established informal networks through which instrumental favors are exchanged and barriers to inclusion are erected. They are unified through chauvinistic, class, and local traditions that afford them “insider” privileges. (p. 264)

Chapter V includes conclusions, discussion limitations, and recommendation for further research and professional practice. The researcher reports the findings as they connect to literature and to the research questions. Finally, Chapter V contains recommendations for further research and for professional practice. The chapter concludes with a final summary.

Research Purpose

The purpose of the mixed method study was to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents reported they experienced in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perception regarding school-board superintendent relations. The research was designed to provide beneficial information regarding

the challenges Minnesota female superintendents encountered while seeking or obtaining a position as a superintendent of schools. The findings of the study may be useful to higher education professionals, education professional organizations, public school boards of education, and school district administrators in Minnesota by providing insights into the impact of gender on the number of females serving as superintendents in Minnesota public schools and how school board relationships affect those who serve as school district female superintendents.

Research Questions

The data were analyzed and findings organized according to each of the following research questions:

1. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges they experienced in seeking and serving in their position as superintendent of schools?
2. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive regarding the nature of their school board - superintendent relations?
3. What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges in school board-superintendent relationships that exist regardless of gender or due to gender?

Conclusions

Research Question One

What did Minnesota female superintendents report as challenges they experienced in seeking and retaining their position as superintendent of schools?

The first research question examined what Minnesota female superintendents reported as challenges they experienced in seeking and obtaining their position as superintendent of schools. The question focused on seven identified barriers Wyland's (2014) impacting female superintendents pursuing the top leadership positions in Minnesota. In the study survey,

respondents chose from one of three responses: definitely a barrier, somewhat of a barrier, or not a barrier for each barrier listed. If the item was identified as definitely a barrier, respondents were asked to further indicate the perceived degree of difficulty caused by the barrier as no difficulty, modest degree of difficulty, or severe degree of difficulty.

Study respondents identified gender discrimination as definitely a barrier by ten or 40.0% of the respondents and rated it as a modest to severe barrier in securing a superintendent position in Minnesota. Family responsibilities were identified by five or 20.0% of the survey respondents as definitely a barrier while family responsibilities were reported to be to be of modest difficulty by 11.1% and not a barrier by 7.4% of participants. The four interviewees said that family responsibilities were not a barrier.

Lack of peer / collegial support was identified by three or 12.0% of the respondents as definitely a barrier and lack of employment opportunity and lack of self-confidence were identified as definitely a barrier by another two respondents. While lack of employment opportunities was not mentioned as a barrier by any of respondents in the interview questions, employment issues were mentioned by all four interviewees. Interviewees A and B conveyed the need to convince the school board during interviews that they were not only qualified to perform the duties, but had to prove that they were capable of taking charge and that a female could run a school district equal to a male candidate. Interviewee C stated the importance of needing to change the mindset of the community as well in order to believe in her leadership. Interviewee D stated, "It takes longer for women to prove their credibility, but it feels like men are granted that credibility until they lose it and women have to work harder to earn that otherwise."

The findings in Research Question One compares with the research in Chapter II literature review. Barker's (2012) research found that females identified the hiring process for

aspiring superintendents to be a barrier. Glass (2000) cited two reasons why females were scarce in the superintendency. First, preparation for the superintendency by females was discouraged, and second, school boards viewed females as incapable of managing public school systems; therefore, school boards would not hire females (Glass, 2000). Females wanted to be hired for their qualifications and for what they could do and not because of their gender (Superville, 2016). Superville (2016) spoke of females facing challenges men did not encounter. Females were encouraged to smile more, had their appearances assessed and critiqued more often, and scolded when they asserted their authority (Superville, 2016). Employment opportunities in districts in financial distress were restricted to male superintendents as school boards felt that females were incapable of fiscal management of the district (Glass, 2000; Tallerico & Burnstyn, 1996).

Dana and Bourisaw (2006) found school boards were more comfortable with men, as hiring male superintendents was common practice throughout history. Making the change to females was difficult for some boards, especially if the school board was male dominant (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). School board member demographics can have a negative impact on females in the process as member mindsets were often set on what they thought the profile of a successful superintendent should look like (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Guajardo, 2015). Other traits, such as prior experience, often determined which applicant would advance as a finalist for a superintendent's position (Tallerico, 2000b).

Lemasters (2011) added that school boards and/or community members may hesitate to hire a female superintendent simply because it would be problematic that the highest paid public worker in the county or city was a female (Lemasters, 2011). Dysfunctional boards of education created a lack of job security for superintendents, which made the 24/7 nature of the job a

discouraging prospect (Grogan & Brunner, 2005). Dana and Bourisaw (2006) noted that “because women are not usually observed in the more powerful leadership positions, cultures generally will not consider options of electing or appointing a woman to a position that has always been filled by men” (p. 51). Superville (2016) remarked that school board politics could be brutal and public scrutiny was intense.

Research Question Two

What did Minnesota female superintendents report regarding the nature of their school board - superintendent relations?

Seventeen survey respondents or 68.0% reported their relationships with their school board were exceptional; seven of 25, or 28.0%, reported their relationships could use some work and only one respondent reported the relationship with school board member as problematic. When each respondent was asked to what degree respondents believed they were supported by their school board, eighteen respondents or 72.0% responded they were fully supported by their school boards while six of 25, or 24.0%, of participants indicated it was situational depending upon nature of the situation. Only one respondent (4.0%) reported she was not supported at all by the school board.

These data were confirmed during the qualitative interviews. All four female interviewees felt very supported by her school board as a whole. Interviewee B expanded on her experiences as she found that school board members that grew up in the district they are now members of the school board tend to look at things in a different light. “They attended that school district as students; therefore, they know everything there is to know about education in that district. Roles of school board members and superintendents can become conflicted when one has spent a lifetime in the district and the other has not. Districts where the school board

members did not grow up in the district possess different qualities as a professional board and therefore work differently. They don't see the district as what it has always been, but what it can be when we work together.”

Conflict is an unavoidable factor in school board member and superintendent relationships (Castallo, 2003; Peterson & Fusarelli, 2005; Place, 2014; White, 2007). Although the roles of the superintendent and school boards are clearly defined, the lines of authority are not always that clear, especially when board members and the superintendent compete to further agendas that may or may not be aligned district goals (Peterson & Short, 2001). Interviewee D works with a veteran board. New board members elected to that district have mentorship opportunities with other board members to make sure that roles are understood. “They leave the day to day operations to me.”

The next survey question relating to Research Question Two asked study respondents to name the one event or factor that had the greatest impact on your superintendent – school board relationships. Six or 30.0% of those responding reported that the greatest impact on their relationships with their school board was trust and communication. Honesty, respect, trust, straightforwardness, performance, and open communication were critical elements that had to be in place to mitigate the dynamic of conflict among school boards and superintendents (White, 2007; Carver 2006). Interviewee C reiterated this by stating the importance of trust and respect in the school board-superintendent relationship. The superintendent struggles with a particular board member that doesn't respect, trust, or listen to me. “It can make my job very difficult.” Randall Collins from Waterford (Conn.) Public School, a 27-year superintendent, verified the need for good board-superintendent relationships by stating, “At times, individual members have created sleepless nights in terms of an agenda, or an ax to grind, and in terms of different

philosophies, and that can be disruptive to the board-superintendent relationship” (Pascopella, 2008, p. 4).

The survey choices of student success or perceived success and always having to prove myself each had two or 10.0% respondents’ who identified them as having the greatest impact on superintendent and school board relationships. Community perceptions, gender, longevity in the position, leadership experience, personal agendas, relationship with the board chair, elections, and evaluations were each reported by only one respondent as having the greatest impact in their relationships with school board members.

The final question on the survey regarding school board – superintendent relationships asked respondents to list major challenges they believed to be experienced by females seeking a superintendent position. The need to change the paradigm in leadership from a “Good Old Boy” network to gender neutral leadership was presented as a major challenge for six or 25.0% of respondents. In the open-ended questions, the responses of study participants related to their perceptions of the “Good Old Boy” network once they obtained a position. This challenge to school board-superintendent relationships was noted not only in the hiring process by school boards and gatekeepers, but also in the difficulties experienced once practicing as a superintendent. Female superintendents added, “There is a double standard for men and women.” “Having my voice heard and affirmed by the “boys’ club” group. I frequently feel as though my opinions are not valued...I perceive a definite difference between the way new men are gathered into the group versus the way I am.” “The good old boys clubs on some school board and who exist to a degree within the superintendent ranks make it appear that there is no place for women in...big important things like: finance, building a school, maintenance and ground work and law”

The perceived lack of confidence or weaknesses in a female displayed by school board members and male superintendents also presented as a major challenge for six or 25.0% of respondents. A review of research provided supported findings. Gender prejudice, also known as sex-role stereotyping, is a major challenge (Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Odum, 2010). Stereotyping referred to perceptions of how females were perceived in their competence, assertiveness, and leadership skills (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009). Elmuti et al. (2009) made reference to stereotyping as having visits from ghosts of superintendents' past. For example, if a female superintendent accepted a position after a male superintendent exited from a district, the female superintendent would be expected to perform at the same level as did the previous superintendent. If unable to do so, the female superintendent would be perceived as weak or incompetent. In contrast, if a female superintendent interviewed for a position following the tenure of an inept or inefficient female superintendent, school boards classified the female candidate in that same category citing that all female superintendents were inept or inefficient (Elmuti, Jia, & Davis, 2009). Moody (1983) suggested that extreme care should be taken when hiring a search firm, or outside agency, to assist in the selection of a superintendent. This usually hindered the selection process.

In the open-ended responses, female superintendents spoke about how school board members fear hiring females due to the perception that females lack of confidence, are unable to make decisions, are emotional, or are weak in finance and personnel management. The research by Elmuti et al. (2009) correlated to the responses as all interviewees were the first female superintendents in their districts. The correlation is found not only in the fears of school board upon hiring a female superintendent, but also in the interactions and relationships once hired. The female interviewees spoke about how the concept of lack of confidence and weaknesses are

interchangeable and prevalent from starting a position through employment. Female interviewees added, “Females have to earn credibility with the board and the community in different ways than males. It appears that males are granted credibility until they lose it. Females don’t have it, until they’ve earned it.” “Lack of confidence in capability as a superintendent. I do not necessarily feel this with my own board, but rather, some male colleagues / superintendents.” “Men can be seen as confident and assertive, while women are viewed as pushy and emotional even though the two groups might be saying and acting in the same manner.” “The perception that when a female in a leadership position is forceful in stating positions, expectations, etc., she is perceived as being ‘bossy’ or ‘bitchy’, while a male leader doing the exactly same thing would be regarded as ‘taking charge’.”

Four respondents (16.6%) named double standards for gender as a major challenge facing females in seeking a superintendent position. Gender biased interview process was named a major challenge for three or 12.5% of respondents. In the open-ended responses, female superintendents added, “I continue to see superintendent searches that bring forward five men and one woman to the interview table. While I do not know if that represents the ratio of men to women candidates, I worry that it doesn’t.” “Retired, white male leaders (of a previous generation) are running the search firms that lead superintendent searches in Minnesota. They are absolutely part of a “good old boys” network and pretend to be about equity and change, but they are not.”

The Research Question Two data regarding major challenges faced by females seeking a superintendent position were confirmed during the qualitative interviews. Interviewee D talked about what she heard at an AASA conference regarding an “imposter syndrome”. She went on to explain that women tend to feel like they don’t have the skill set or they’re not confident in and

so they tend not to apply for positions because they feel like they can't do it, so they don't. She added that men might think that they don't know enough but they will apply and learn as they go, but women feel like they need to have the knowledge before they can apply. "We don't give ourselves as much credit on our knowledge or our ability; therefore, we hold ourselves back."

Interviewee A, B, and C spoke more about gender discrimination being noticed after obtaining a female superintendent position. They felt that fitting into the "club" and the camaraderie to join the male conversations were major challenges. "We never get to be in the best buddy group as we don't fit into the group." Interviewee A felt that she was missing out on the conversations that the male superintendents were having thus creating a feeling of isolation. Interviewee B stated that people are always mad at the decisions made. Interviewee C concurred by adding that the unrealistic expectations of the job, and the added hours needed to prove herself makes the job more difficult.

The findings in Research Question Two were confirmed in Chapter II literature review. The "glass ceiling" is an appropriate metaphor describing the underrepresentation of females in the upper levels of leadership throughout executive and educational management (Brown, 1999; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006). Researchers Eagly and Carli (2007) believed that instead of a glass ceiling, the challenges, and obstacles on a female's path to the executive level were more of a labyrinth, or a maze of walls. The labyrinth presented continual twists, turns, detours, dead ends, and unusual paths to ascend to the administrative positions (Barker, 2012; Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). The journey within the maze produced challenges with domestic responsibilities, sexual discrimination, society beliefs, career pathways, and a female's lack of self-confidence to believe in herself (Reilly & Bauer, 2015). Those who remained under the glass ceiling believed that their competence in leading was considered by school boards to be lower than men,

therefore to prove themselves on a higher level, they needed doctoral degrees, professional visibility, and greater experience in finance or other areas of business (Keller, 1999).

Research Question Three

What did Minnesota female superintendents perceive as challenges in school board-superintendent relationships that exist regardless of gender or due to gender?

Each respondent was asked to note whether the gender challenge listed was regardless of gender or because of gender. The respondents who did not perceive an item as a major challenge in school board superintendent relationships were asked to leave the boxes blank. All respondents were asked to check all that applied to their perceptions.

Findings related to Research Question Three noted that most of the challenges were regardless of gender rather than because of gender. Micromanagement was reported by 12 or 52.2% of the respondents as regardless of gender and 11 or 47.8% because of gender. Eleven respondents or 68.8% reported that role uncertainty was regardless of gender and five or 31.2% identified it as because of gender. American Association of School Administrators (1994) reported that it is foreseeable that board members and superintendent may have questions or concerns about their roles and responsibilities (AASA, 1994). Three distinct concerns were noted: perceptions in the increase of single-issue board members focusing attention on limited and narrow objectives rather than on helping the entire system move forward; short term tenures of school superintendents while facing a diminishing pool of qualified applicants; and, “micromanagement” or the attempt by one or more board members to assume administrative matters that are rightfully the administrative responsibility (p.8).

Open communication was also reported by 11 or 91.7% of respondents to that item as a major challenge in school board and superintendent relationships regardless of gender and only

one respondent who identified this as a challenge because of gender. All study participants identified both school board turnover and student achievement as challenges for school board and superintendent relationships regardless of gender. Ten respondents or 58.8% reported trust as a major challenge regardless of gender while seven or 41.2% reported it was because of gender. Superintendent performance was identified as a challenge by eight or 57.1% regardless of gender and six or 42.9% stated it was because of gender. Both shared decision making and lack of collaboration were identified as major challenges in school board-superintendent relationships regardless of gender by seven or 58.3% of participants and five or 41.7% of respondents to that item reported because of gender.

As referenced in Research Question Two, the “Good Old Boy” network was chosen by 19 or 95.0% of the respondents as because of gender and only one or 5.0% noted it was regardless of gender. Ten respondents, or 71.4%, reported on that item that respect was a major gender challenge in school board and superintendent relationships because of gender with four or 28.6% reporting the major challenge was regardless of gender. Work and home balance was a major gender challenge because of gender for eight or 66.7% who reported on that item that it and four or 33.3% reporting as regardless of gender. Females hold the natural gift of nurturing and caring. Unfortunately, societal norms do not value these characteristics and viewed these traits as weaknesses preventing females from feeling a sense of power, strength, and pride (Mahaney, 2014). Family dynamics have changed as more families have become dual income households working to support family responsibilities (Mahaney, 2014).

Minimal findings in Research Question Three compared with the research in Chapter II literature review. When examining what was reported as because of gender rather than because of gender, only three categories were noteworthy: “Good Old Boy” network, work and home

balance, and respect, or lack thereof. As “Good Old Boy” network and respect were reported strongly in question two, work and home balance does play a significant reason for a lack of females in the superintendency in the state of Minnesota, as well as across the nation.

Reilly and Bauer (2015) noted that female superintendents encountered barriers in achieving the superintendency and retaining the position. These barriers were categorized in two ways: self-imposed, or internal barriers; and societally imposed, or external barriers, which are based on gender stereotyping (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Place, 2014).

Barker (2012) indicated that family responsibilities were a primary barrier to females seeking the superintendency. Superintendents spend more than fifty hours a week at work. These long hours, coupled with time and stress of the superintendency, can be punishing on a family; therefore, some females simply do not seek the position (Glass, 2000; Superville, 2016).

Tallerico and Burstyn (1996) found that female superintendents in small, rural areas suffered greatly from severe fatigue. These females experienced turmoil due to stresses of coping with multiple roles as school superintendent, homemaker, wife, and mother (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996).

Research Questions One and Two both illustrated significant reference and correlation to research found in Chapter II. While some of the responses to Research Question Three contained references to the related literature, results of the study showed that Minnesota female superintendents reported most gender issues occurred regardless of gender and not because of gender. No questions were of interviewees related to Research Question Three. The historical review in the related literature served as a posited that women encounter barriers specific to their gender that limit access to the position of superintendent (Odum, 2010).

Discussion

The study results found that Minnesota female superintendents note four major challenges while seeking and serving in the top leadership positions in Minnesota public school districts: gender discrimination, credibility, “Good Old Boy’s network, and positive school board-superintendent relationships. Both survey respondents and interviewees highly valued positive working relationships with respective school boards with respect to conflict resolution and mentoring of potential future candidates. White (2007) stated that to have a positive relationship between school board members and superintendents, there must be mutual respect displayed by both parties. A positive board and superintendent relationship allows for more focus directed to students and decisions impacting student achievement and growth (White, 2007).

The researcher believes that regardless of the challenges presented to the study’s interviewees, these female superintendents defied a gender stereotype and persevered through tough or challenging times. The study participants were clear that there are systematic changes that need to be made Brunner based on their experiences in seeking the superintendent position, but their determination to overcome barriers and challenges provides encouragement to other females interested who also seek the position of superintendent of schools.

The interviewees’ responses led the researcher to conclude that the interviewees are strong individuals that have overcome the specific barrier of gender discrimination by offering words of advice to potential female superintendent candidates. Interviewee A stated, “Make sure that you really believe in who you are and what you’re doing because you will get challenged or ignored. Have confidence in your knowledge and go for it on your own terms.” Interviewee B added, “Have courage to do what’s best for kids. Don’t shift your convictions or beliefs because others will question whether you are able to lead as well as everything about you.” Interviewee C

offered, “Do it! Don’t be afraid to set out and find mentors in your area. Find people that are really going to tell you the real truth, and then set yourself up for success. Don’t be afraid to move within the system you’re in and there’s leadership opportunities for teachers, mentors, and continuous improvement coaches, whatever it is, and get some of those experiences so you feel what it is to impact learning that impacts the students directly.” Finally, Interviewee D concluded, “Don’t underestimate your ability or undersell yourself. Study yourself for who you are. Women tend to be more nurturing and I believe that is what we need more in the superintendency.”

Limitations

In addition to the delimitations identified at the inception of the study, limitations emerged during the administration of the study that were not anticipated. Roberts (2010) defined limitations as “particular features of your study that you know may negatively affect the results of your study or your ability to generalize...areas over which you have no control” (p. 165).

Limitations of the study include:

1. At the time of the study, there were no female superintendents participating in the survey representing the urban districts. Therefore, no urban superintendents were represented in the qualitative interview process.
2. At the time of the study, two practicing female superintendents had left their districts midyear for reasons unknown.
3. Two other studies by other female superintendents working toward doctoral degrees from other institutions were conducted simultaneously with the study. This could have impacted the response rate due to survey exhaustion.

4. If the researcher was to do the survey a second time, question six of the survey would require all participants to answer each question and not check all that apply.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. It is recommended that a qualitative study be conducted for the purpose of interviewing male superintendents, and school board members to ask their perceptions of barriers female superintendents experience in seeking a superintendent position.
2. It is recommended that a study could be conducted with female administrators who failed to attain their goal of becoming a superintendent, but hold a license.
3. It is recommended that a study be conducted to compare hiring trends of rural, suburban, and urban school districts regarding employment of top level administrators by gender over a 10 year time period.
4. It is recommended that a replication of the study be conducted in other states.

Recommendations for Practice

1. It is recommended that the study results be made available to school board and superintendent to promote discussion regarding the importance of developing equitable relationships within school districts, and maintaining fair and equitable hiring standards, assisted by professional organizations such as the Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA) and Minnesota Association of School Administrators (MASA).
2. It is recommended that the School board association policy-makers should explore policies, procedures or practices to promote school board stability.
3. It is recommended that purposeful training on superintendent and school board roles should be required by superintendent professional organizations and school board associations of all new superintendents and school board members.

4. It is recommended that superintendents and school boards establish local coalitions to promote the importance of school board service and mentor quality candidates in the position prior to an election.
5. It is recommended that university leadership be encouraged to expose educational administration graduate students to diverse groups of superintendents, including female superintendents and various levels of experience, to ensure that females are identified, recruited, mentored, and supported from graduate work through job inception.
6. It is recommended that superintendent professional organizations be encouraged to do more mentorship and networking opportunities among all members to effectively eliminate “Good Old Boy” mentalities.

Summary

In general, there is a perception that insufficient qualified female superintendent candidates exist. Even with increasing numbers of females obtaining superintendent licensure, they continue to experience barriers in seeking and obtaining the top leadership position in public school districts. Female administrators are well-prepared with knowledge, skills, and credentials required for the superintendency (Mahitivanichcha & Rorrer, 2006). In the last decade, research studies seek to shed light on the issues females experienced regarding career choices, perceptions, and their aspirations to the position of superintendent. Further research is needed to find solutions to the low and stagnant number of females entering into the superintendency (Fuller & Harford, 2016).

Minnesota female superintendents who participated in the study did not seem to be motivated by the title of superintendent. Their primary foci as superintendents were student achievement and creating opportunities for students; their personal and career challenges did not

diminish their efforts toward these goals. The participants in the study appeared to be resilient in their pursuits for equality while working diligently to be positive role models for other aspiring superintendents and superintendents. Overall, the study participants revealed tenacity and were ‘awe-inspiring’.

Lane-Washington & Wilson-Jones (2010) mentioned that respect and credibility come at a higher cost to females. They must work harder and longer to obtain the same credibility as their male peers. The study participants worked hard to overcome barrier and stressed the need for continued work by leadership in higher education, legislative policies, and in societal perceptions in order to make needed changes within the field of educational administration. “Society must be committed to equal opportunity while cognizant not to undervalue half of its talent pool (Rhode, 2017). “If we truly believe in equity and equality when dealing with the education of all children, then women – and especially women of color – need to believe in themselves, invest in themselves, and attain to make it to the top” (Kalbus, 2000, p.556).

APPENDICES

Appendix I – CITI Program Course Completion



Completion Date 19-Nov-2017
Expiration Date 18-Nov-2022
Record ID 25117726

This is to certify that:

Michelle Mortensen

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

Basic/Refresher Course - Human Subjects Research (Curriculum Group)
IRB Training for Graduate Students (Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic Course (Stage)

Under requirements set by:

St. Cloud State University



Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w0957d14a-97d9-432a-a0d1-b16e7c628986-25117726

Appendix II – Letter of Permission

Michelle Mortensen
 PO Box 465
 Renville, MN 56284
 mmortensen@rcw.k12.mn.us

November 27, 2017

Dr. Catherine Wyland
 1564 E. Shore Dr.
 Saint Paul, MN 55106-1120

Dear Dr. Wyland,

I am completing a doctoral dissertation at St. Cloud State University. I would like your permission to use the *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota survey and interview tools*. I am requesting permission to use the tools to interview female superintendents in Minnesota public schools regarding their challenges and barriers as well as their successes in the superintendency. This will include replication of portions of the studies published under the titles cited below:

- Wyland, C. A. (2014). *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). St. Cloud State University

My dissertation will be produced electronically and made available through the St. Cloud State University Library and its publication partners. I am requesting permission to include the tools in current and future revisions and editions of my dissertation, and to grant others the right to reproduce my entire dissertation, including the tools and data obtained for educational, non-commercial purposes. These rights will in no way limit republication of the material(s) in any other form by you or others authorized by you.

If this meets with your approval, please complete and sign the form below. Please return the form and a copy of the *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota survey and interview tools* to me in the enclosed return envelope or through email at the address listed above.

If you do not hold the copyright for this material, or the right to grant this type of permission, I would greatly appreciate any information you can provide to me regarding the rights holder(s), including any contact information.

Thank you for considering this request and for supporting my research.

Sincerely,



Michelle Mortensen

As copyright holder or representative of the copyright holder(s), I have authority to grant permission for the use of the *Underrepresentation of Females in the Superintendency in Minnesota survey and interview tools* and replication of its use to interview female superintendents in Minnesota and I grant permission for the requested use. I am aware that the author of the research paper will be granting irrevocable non-exclusive licenses to St. Cloud State University and Library, and agrees to the terms of these licenses.

Signature of copyright holder or representative: 

Name: CATHERINE WYLAND

Date (yyyy/mm/dd): 2017/12/01

Address: 1564 E SHORE DR

City: Postal Code: ST PAUL MN 55106

Appendix III - Survey

1. ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the “agree” button indicates:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline by clicking on the “disagree” button.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Clicking on the “agree” button indicates: * you have read the above information * you voluntarily agree to participate * you are at least 18 years of age. If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline by clicking on the “disagree” button.

Agree

Disagree

Perceived Barriers/Challenges

The following is a list of perceived barriers commonly identified by female administrators who have aspired to become superintendents. For each, indicate which option best describes the extent to which the barrier existed for you when seeking the superintendency.

Lack of family support

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Lack of employment opportunity

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Gender discrimination

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Lack of peer / collegial support

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Family Responsibilities

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Lack of self-confidence

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Lack of tenacity

- Definitely a barrier
- Somewhat a barrier
- Not a barrier

Other

When respondents selected “Definitely a barrier for me,” an additional question was asked related to the perceived barrier.

Please indicate the degree of difficulty you had in overcoming this barrier. In some instances, a barrier may present no difficulty (i.e., you were able to bypass the barrier); in other instances, the difficulty could be modest or severe. Please select the appropriate degree of difficulty for each barrier.

- No degree of difficulty
- Modest degree of difficulty
- Severe degree of difficulty

2. How would you characterize your relationship with your school board?

- Exceptional
- Could use some work
- Problematic

3. To what degree do you feel supported by your school board?

- Fully supported
- Depends on the situation
- Not supported at all

4. From your perspective, what is the one event or factor that has had the greatest impact on your superintendent-school board relationship?

5. If you had to name only one, what do you see as the major challenge facing females seeking a superintendent position?

6. What do you perceive as the major challenge(s) in school board and superintendent relationships and it (they) exist regardless of gender or because of gender?

Check all that apply.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Role uncertainty | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Trust | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Work vs. Home | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Micromanagement | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Respect | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Superintendent performance | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Open communication | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> "Good Ole Boy" | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> School board turnover | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Student achievement | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Shared decision making | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |
| <input type="radio"/> Lack of collaboration | <input type="radio"/> regardless of gender | <input type="radio"/> because of gender |

7. School district enrollment

- Rural (fewer than 300-2,999 students)
- Suburban (3,000-24,999 students)
- Urban (25,000 or more students)

8. Administrative positions held prior to your first superintendency

9. Years in present position (Count the present year as a complete year)

10. How many superintendency positions did you apply for before hired as a superintendent?

- 0-2
- 3-5
- 6+

11. A small sample of survey respondents will be randomly selected for a follow-up interview, at

your convenience, in October 2018. Please consider this option.

The interview will be tape-recorded, the recording will be used for recollection purposes only, and will be destroyed at the culmination of the research project. The recorded interview will be heard only by the researcher.

Study codes will be used instead of identifying information and the codes will be kept in a separate location available at all times. All information you provide will be kept confidential and results will be presented in aggregate form. All data will be stored in a protected electronic format. The results will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with St. Cloud State University representatives.

Potential risks, discomforts and inconveniences to participants include loss of time in completing the interview and the potential discomfort of recalling distressing events. These have been minimized by making the telephone interview as brief as possible and providing the option to withdraw at any time. The benefit of participation is adding valued information that will augment existing data.

Please indicate acknowledgement and agreement of confidentiality by marking the

appropriate box. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you 3 may withdraw at any time.

Yes

No

If yes, please list contact information to reach you to set up an interview.

Name _____

District _____

Phone number _____

Thank you!

Thank you for taking time to complete this survey. Your participation is greatly appreciated.

Appendix IV - Survey Consent Form

While the majority of staff in public school systems are female, females are in the minority in the position of superintendent of schools. To better understand this disparity in the numbers of male and female superintendents, you are invited to participate in a study that seeks to identify the barriers, challenges, and supports of the position as reported by Minnesota female superintendents.

The study is conducted by doctoral candidate Michelle Mortensen at St. Cloud State University, to partially fulfill requirements of the Doctorate in Educational Administration. The study is under the direction of Dr. Kay Worner, Professor Emeritus, kworner@stcloudstate.edu; (612) 810-7986.

Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time.

The procedure involves completing an online survey that will take less than 15 minutes. A small sample of survey respondents will be randomly selected for a face to face interview. Your responses will be confidential to all but the researcher at all times. All information you provide will be kept confidential and results will be presented in aggregate form. All data will be stored in a protected electronic format. The results will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with St. Cloud State University representatives.

Potential risks, discomforts and inconveniences to participants include loss of time in completing the survey and the potential discomfort of recalling distressing events. These have been minimized by making the survey as brief as possible and providing the option to withdraw at any time. The benefit of participation is adding valued information that will augment existing data.

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact Michelle Mortensen, mlmortensen@stcloudstate.edu or Dr. Kay Worner at kworner@stcloudstate.edu. For a copy of the study results, please contact Michelle Mortensen, mlmortensen@stcloudstate.edu. This research has been reviewed according to St. Cloud State University IRB procedures for research involving human subjects.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Clicking on the "agree" button below indicates that:

- you have read the above information
- you voluntarily agree to participate
- you are at least 18 years of age

If you do not wish to participate in the research study, please decline participation by clicking on the "disagree" button.

- agree
- disagree

Appendix V – Email Reminder

Dear MASA Colleague,

I would like to take this opportunity to put out this reminder. If you haven't had the opportunity, and would still like to participate, please take note that the survey to gather data on female superintendent perceptions of challenges in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools will be closing soon. Thank you to all that have already taken the survey. I look forward to finishing this study and hope that together we can help advance females in educational leadership positions and support each other in our educational positions.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration. Please remember, your participation is voluntary, confidential, and very much appreciated.

Sincerely,

Michelle Mortensen

St. Cloud State University Doctoral Candidate
Superintendent of Schools, Renville County West
(507) 383-3362

Appendix VI - Interview Consent

The purpose of the study is to identify the perceptions of challenges Minnesota female superintendents report they experience in seeking and serving in the position of superintendent of schools, including their perception regarding school-board superintendent relations. The study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods: female superintendents in Minnesota were asked to participate in a survey and a small sample of survey respondents will be randomly selected for a follow-up face to face interview in November 2018.

The interview will be tape-recorded, the recording will be used for recollection purposes only, and will be destroyed at the culmination of the research project. The recorded interview will be heard only by the researcher.

Study codes will be used instead of identifying information and the codes will be kept in a separate location available only to the researcher. Your responses will be confidential to all but the researcher at all times. All information you provide will be kept confidential and results will be presented in aggregate form. All data will be stored in a protected electronic format. The results will be used for scholarly purposes only and may be shared with St. Cloud State University representatives. Any member wishing to obtain research results or the full dissertation, may contact Michelle Mortensen at PO Box 465, Renville, MN 56284 or call 507-383-3362.

Potential risks, discomforts and inconveniences to participants include loss of time in completing the interview and the potential discomfort of recalling distressing events. These have been minimized by making the telephone interview as brief as possible and providing the option to withdraw at any time. The benefit of participation is adding valued information that will augment existing data.

Please indicate acknowledgement and agreement of confidentiality by providing a signature indicating your consent to participate. You may choose not to participate. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw at any time.

Additionally, please note the most convenient date and time for the interview along with a telephone number. Thank you.

- Yes, I would like to participate.
- No thank you. I am not interested in participating in this study.

Participant Signature

Telephone Number

Times and Dates of Availability

Appendix VII - Interview Instrument with Prompts

Interview Protocol

Name of Interviewer: _____ Date of Interview: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Setting and location of Interview: _____

Other topics discussed: _____

Other documents, etc., obtained during interview:

Introductions: Greetings

- a. Warm up
- b. Establish relationship and build trust

Explain the nature of the research, purpose, and provide consent form for signing.

Thank you once again for your participation in the study. The following questions are probes to more fully understand the responses provided on the questionnaire.

1. (Re-read question one from the questionnaire to the listener). Would you tell me more about your perceived barriers in seeking a superintendent position? Will you share one or two examples of obstacles you have faced?
2. (Re-read question two to the listener). Please tell me more about your relationship with your school board. How do you develop relationships with your school board? Is your school board primarily engaged in a policy-making role? How important is the school board chair position in developing school board superintendent relationships?
3. (Re-read question three to the listener). How well does each school board member understand the limits upon an individual board member's authority as part of a

governance body? How does your school board manage individual board member situations? Does your school board recognize your administrative authority?

4. (Re-read question four to the listener). Would you please tell me a little more about why this factor was the greatest impact? Was this a positive or negative impact?
5. (Summarize answer to question five). Do you believe this major challenge is the reason why so few females are in the superintendency in Minnesota?
6. What would you like to see happen to engage more females to join the superintendency? (Need for more organizations, more networking, and better mentoring opportunities?)
7. Finally, what advice would you give to female administrators who seek a position as superintendent of schools?

Once again, please accept my sincere thanks for your participation. Not only does your cooperation provide assistance in this doctoral study, but it also exhibits your continuing care and concern for female educators in Minnesota and in our nation.

Appendix VIII - IRB



Institutional Review Board (IRB)

720 4th Avenue South AS 210, St. Cloud, MN 56301-4498

Name: Michelle Mortensen
Email: mimortensen@stcloudstate.edu

IRB PROTOCOL DETERMINATION: Expedited Review-1

Project Title: Female Superintendent Perceptions of Challenges in Seeking and Serving in the Position of Superintendent of Schools

Advisor: Kay Worner

The Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol to conduct research involving human subjects. Your project has been: **APPROVED**

Please note the following important information concerning IRB projects:

- The principal investigator assumes the responsibilities for the protection of participants in this project. Any adverse events must be reported to the IRB as soon as possible (ex. research related injuries, harmful outcomes, significant withdrawal of subject population, etc.).

- For expedited or full board review, the principal investigator must submit a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated on this letter to report conclusion of the research or request an extension.

- Exempt review only requires the submission of a Continuing Review/Final Report form in advance of the expiration date indicated in this letter if an extension of time is needed.

- Approved consent forms display the official IRB stamp which documents approval and expiration dates. If a renewal is requested and approved, new consent forms will be officially stamped and reflect the new approval and expiration dates.

- The principal investigator must seek approval for any changes to the study (ex. research design, consent process, survey/interview instruments, funding source, etc.). The IRB reserves the right to review the research at any time.

If we can be of further assistance, feel free to contact the IRB at 320-308-4932 or email ResearchNow@stcloudstate.edu and please reference the SCSU IRB number when corresponding.

IRB Chair:

Dr. Benjamin Witts
 Associate Professor- Applied Behavior Analysis
 Department of Community Psychology, Counseling, and Family Therapy

IRB Institutional Official:

Dr. Latha Ramakrishnan
 Interim Associate Provost for Research
 Dean of Graduate Studies

OFFICE USE ONLY

SCSU IRB# 1835 - 2348	Type: Expedited Review-1	Today's Date: 9/13/2018
1st Year Approval Date: 9/13/2018	2nd Year Approval Date:	3rd Year Approval Date:
1st Year Expiration Date: 9/12/2019	2nd Year Expiration Date:	3rd Year Expiration Date:

Appendix VIX - Letter of Support from MASA



MASA

Minnesota Association
of School Administrators

1884 Como Avenue, Saint Paul, Minnesota 55108
voice/651-645-6272 • toll free/866-444-5251
fax/651-645-7518
email/members@mnasa.org
website/www.mnasa.org

Gary M. Amoroso, Ph.D.,
Executive Director

May 21, 2018

Dear Colleagues:

Michelle Mortensen, one of our members is conducting a study to look at the perceptions of female superintendents regarding the challenges and types of support they experienced in seeking and retaining a superintendent position. Please consider taking part in her survey to help our organization understand how to better support female superintendents in seeking and retaining superintendent positions. The findings will be shared with you at your request.

Gary M. Amoroso, Ph.D.
Executive Director

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