

What Influences Qualified Women Administrators in Virginia to remain in  
Division Level Positions while others Pursue the Position of Superintendent? – A  
Qualitative Study

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**ABSTRACT**

In education, women administrators are underrepresented in leadership positions, especially as superintendent. The study examined the following: characteristics and experiences of women superintendents to those of women administrators who aspire to be superintendent and to those women who have decided not to pursue the superintendency; the factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent; and the impact of identified factors on the decisions made by study participants. This qualitative multiple-subject study with an interview protocol was designed to consider the historical perspective of women in education, characteristics of women administrators, and a feminist poststructuralist framework; it included the identification of internal and external barriers and criteria for enhancing the advancement of women administrators. The study addressed the following research questions:

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of acting women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?
2. What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

The seven findings suggested that 1) educational leaders influenced decisions to become administrators; 2) style of leadership, method of conflict resolution, and decision-making practice is collaborative; 3) interpersonal skills, good communication, and approachability are (p.204-205) skills required for the superintendency; 4) the decision to pursue the superintendency is influenced by a number of factors, including role models, mentors, and the intensity of the position; 5) balancing a career with family responsibilities is potential barriers for women seeking the superintendency; 6) negative perceptions of female leaders were potential barriers for women administrators seeking and obtaining the position of superintendent; 7) individual school boards and communities influence how women and men are viewed as leaders and whether or not women superintendents are perceived differently. This study has identified implications for

future studies and for advancing the careers of women administrators by eliminating barriers, challenges and negative perceptions regarding their pursuit of the position of superintendent.

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**GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT**

Women educators are traditionally underrepresented in leadership positions, especially the position of the superintendent. This study examined the characteristics and experiences of women educators in three categories: those who are superintendents, those who aspire to be superintendents, and those who have decided not to pursue the superintendency. Further, the study examined the factors which influenced the women's decisions and identified their impact upon the decisions. The qualitative study employed an interview protocol to determine the impact of historical factors, personal characteristics, and a feminist perspective to identify internal and external barriers to advancement, as well as criteria enhancing advancement.

Research addressed these questions:

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of acting women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendence and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?
2. What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

Findings included the following:

- 1) Women educators are influenced by their leaders;
- 2) Women's leadership style is usually collaborative;
- 3) Interpersonal and communication skills foster leadership in a superintendent;
- 4) Several factors (role models, mentors, intensity of the work, etc.) influence the decision whether to pursue superintendency;
- 5) Family responsibilities often present barriers to advancement;
- 6) Perceptions of women can be a barrier to advancement;
- 7) Communities and school boards determine women's advancement opportunities.

Implications for future studies and for advancing women educators' careers have been identified in this study.

## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Victor my loving, devoted, and faithful husband of more than thirty-two years. I love him. He has stood with me through every aspect of this challenging journey. Unselfishly, Vic has made sacrifices to enable me to complete this study without ever once complaining. He has always supported, lifted, and encouraged me. I will be forever grateful for his unconditional love and friendship.

Mario is the best son a mom could ever have; I love him so. This dissertation is to inspire him to allow God to guide his steps in pursuit of his goals and aspirations. I thank him for the many sacrifices he has had to make over the years while I have been involved in this study. I am proud of him, and he tells me how proud he is of me. I will forever cherish our years together.

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“She Persisted” --- Senator Elizabeth Warren

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## Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>General Audience Abstract.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction.....</b>	<b>1</b>
Historical Overview .....	2
Purpose of the Study .....	2
Research Questions .....	3
Methodology .....	3
Study Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations.....	3
<i>Assumptions.</i> .....	3
<i>Limitations.</i> .....	4
<i>Delimitations.</i> .....	4
Definitions.....	4
Study Organization.....	7
Study Significance.....	7
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review .....</b>	<b>8</b>
Historical Perspective of Women in Education .....	9
Characteristics of Women Administrators .....	13
Feminist Poststructuralist Framework.....	17
Internal and External Barriers/Obstacles – Women Administrators.....	25
Enhancing the Advancement of Women Administrators.....	29
Literature Review Synthesis/Summary .....	34
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology.....</b>	<b>36</b>
Research Methodology.....	36
<i>Purpose of study.</i> .....	36
<i>Rationale for research design.</i> .....	36
<i>Framework.</i> .....	37
<i>Role of researcher</i> .....	38
<i>Maintaining validity.</i> .....	38
<i>Experience of the researcher.</i> .....	39

Procedures .....	40
<i>Selection of the setting</i> .....	40
<i>Selection of the participants and assurances of confidentiality</i> .....	40
<i>Entry, reciprocity and ethics.</i> .....	40
<i>Interview protocols and procedures.</i> .....	41
<i>Instrument validation</i> .....	41
Data Collection.....	42
<i>Data management</i> .....	43
Data Analysis .....	44
Summary .....	45
<b>Chapter 4 Results</b> .....	<b>46</b>
Introduction .....	46
Research Questions .....	46
Description of Sample Data .....	46
Data Reporting .....	47
Introductions of Study Participants .....	49
Summary .....	76
<b>Chapter 5 Findings</b> .....	<b>77</b>
Introduction .....	77
Research Questions .....	77
Summary of Findings .....	77
Finding One.....	78
Finding Two .....	78
Finding Three .....	78
Finding Four.....	79
Finding Five .....	80
Finding Six .....	81
Finding Seven.....	81
Implications for Practitioners .....	82
Implication One.....	82
Implication Two .....	83
Implication Three .....	83
Implication Four .....	83

Implication Five .....	83
Feminist Poststructuralist Framework – Results Analysis .....	84
Suggestions for Further Research.....	85
Reflections.....	86
Summary .....	87
<b>References .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendix A Certificate of Completion of Training in Human Subjects Protection.....</b>	<b>95</b>
<b>Appendix B Instructional Review Board Application Approval Memorandum .....</b>	<b>96</b>
<b>Appendix C Sample Introduction Letter .....</b>	<b>98</b>
<b>Appendix D Sample Introduction Verbal Script .....</b>	<b>99</b>
<b>Appendix E Formal Letter Following Verbal Consent from Participant .....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Appendix F Informed Consent for Participants .....</b>	<b>101</b>
<b>Appendix G Interview Protocol Guide .....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>Appendix H Research Questions .....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>Appendix I Interview Questions .....</b>	<b>108</b>

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1.</i> Paradoxes of the superintendency.....	23
<i>Figure 2.</i> Study participants.....	41
<i>Figure 3.</i> Alignment of interview question by research question.....	42
<i>Figure 4.</i> Educational background of participants and career paths of study participants. ....	54
<i>Figure 5.</i> Participant response to what influenced your decision to become an educational administrator. ....	56
<i>Figure 6.</i> Participant shares story demonstrating leadership, conflict resolution, and decision-making style. ....	59
<i>Figure 7.</i> Participant perceptions of the elements of a support work environment. ....	61
<i>Figure 8.</i> Participant perceptions of desirable superintendent characteristics.....	64
<i>Figure 9.</i> Participant responses to the skills and traits making them effective in their present positions. ....	67
<i>Figure 10.</i> Participant perceptions of what may be external and/or internal barriers to the superintendency. ....	72

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“Two Roads Diverged in a Yellow Wood”  
---Robert Frost

During the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have witnessed major opportunities, advancements, and accomplishments unfold for women as they continue to chip away at the “glass ceiling.” To have witnessed the first woman in United States history lead the ticket of a major political party in pursuit of the office of president is an indicator of progress in the advancement of women in leadership roles. In education, women currently represent approximately 70 percent of the teaching positions in public schools throughout the United States (Grogan & Shakeshaft, 2011). However, women administrators have continued to be underrepresented compared to men in leadership positions, especially as superintendent. The American Association of School Superintendents (AASA) National Conference reported 73 percent of superintendents in public schools in the United States are men and 27 percent are women (AASA, 2016). In the history of education in America, this represents the highest number of women who have ever held the position.

Miller (2009) viewed the position of power in public education as being influenced by a societal system in which men are afforded the opportunities to become Level 5 leaders where they have been able to develop their executive capabilities as described in Collins’ (2001) bestseller *Good to Great*, and women have been largely excluded from those chances. If women administrators are to continue to make gains in advancing to the superintendency, an examination of the factors influencing their decisions to pursue or not pursue the position is necessary.

Presently, in the field of education, there are more women in educational leadership roles than ever before. However, women administrators have not advanced to levels of representation reflecting the number of women teachers in the workforce (Blount, 1998; Shriver, 2009). The tenet of this research is to examine whether the lack of advancement to the position of superintendent is a result of barriers, obstacles, and/or self-imposed choices made by women administrators. This study proposes to contribute to the discourse by identifying and examining factors which influence women administrators’ educational leadership career paths.

## **Historical Overview**

Beginning with the establishment of the American colonies, women were usually prohibited from formal education. During the late 1700s, laws were passed requiring formal education for both male and female students. Men were the headmasters and responsible for delivering instruction. By the 1800s, teaching opportunities for women gradually emerged with the assistance of advocates and growing communities (Blount, 1998). During this period, men were chosen to be the first superintendents. Teaching, which started as men's work, had transformed into "women's work" (Blount, 1998). In 1909, the first female superintendent was selected (Blount, 1998).

In the early 1900s, concurrent with the Women's Suffrage Movement and passing of the 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment to the United States Constitution granting women the right to vote, a "golden age" for women administrators began (Hansot & Tyack, 1981). Nine percent of school divisions in the United States were being led by women superintendents. However, between 1930 – 1970 the percentage of women superintendents dropped from nine to three percent (Blount, 1998). The Great Depression, unemployed males, and end of World War II were factors that influenced the decline of women superintendents throughout the nation (Blount, 1998). Female superintendents represented 1.2 percent of superintendents during this time period. (Glass, 1992).

Grogan (1999) stated that between 1950 and 1965 there were limited opportunities for women administrators. However, following the Civil Rights Movement, public school education was challenged, along with other societal institutions, regarding leadership opportunities in terms of gender and race. The passing of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, the establishment of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), and the passing of Title IX, a federal law which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded education program or activity, led to greater opportunities for women in education (Grogan, 1999).

## **Purpose of the Study**

This study contributed to the existing research by investigating and fostering an understanding of factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Further, this qualitative study determined the relevance of identified factors on the decisions made by study participants and explained the impact of shared experiences on those decisions. The data were gathered through an interview protocol to capture

perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The interview protocol was designed to analyze the factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. This study was a multiple subject study to analyze the lived experiences of women administrators who are superintendents, aspire to be superintendents, or have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

### **Research Questions**

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?
2. What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

### **Methodology**

The relevance of identified factors influencing the decisions made by the study participants provide how broadly the qualitative study relates to their shared experiences. The data were gathered through an interview protocol to capture perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The collected data were analyzed to identify factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. This study was multiple subject study, as the study analyzed the lived experiences of women administrators who are superintendents, who aspire to be superintendents, or who have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

### **Study Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

Simon (2011) defined assumptions as items in a study that are somewhat out of the researcher's control, but without them the study would become irrelevant. Limitations have been described as potential weaknesses in a study that are out of the researcher's control. Delimitations refer to characteristics that limit the scope and define boundaries of a study and are in the researchers' control (Simon, 2011). Assumptions, limitations and delimitations are described below:

*Assumptions.* The study assumed the following:

1. Participants would answer the interview questions truthfully.

2. The study would assist women administrators in decision making regarding their careers.
3. The study would add to the discourse regarding gender equity in the workplace.

*Limitations.* The study's reliability and validity are based on the willingness of the participants to speak openly and with self-disclosure regarding the factors influencing their career decisions to pursue or not pursue the superintendency. Study participant Julie (NS) had served as a superintendent two years prior to the central office administrative position she held when she was interviewed. Her perspective as a non-aspirant to the position of superintendent was based on her current experiences. An additional limitation is the researcher may interject elements of bias because she shares similar characteristics and experiences with the participants. Lastly, the study was limited to a time period which reflects conditions occurring during this time.

*Delimitations.* The researcher sought to limit the scope of the study by interviewing nine women administrator participants employed or recently retired from Superintendent Regions I, III, IV and V in the Commonwealth of Virginia. Race, age and marital status were not considered in the study. The literature from which the study basis was derived is not overly broad. Therefore, there is an evident dependence on the published findings of select researchers.

## **Definitions**

This section contains definitions of key terms to assist the reader in understanding topics from this study.

AASA – American Association of School Administrators

Accountability – the fact or condition of being accountable; responsibility.

ASCD – Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development

Aspirant – a person who aspires, as one who seeks or desires a career, advancement, and status.

Barrier – inhibitor to female educational leadership: legal, political, or societal.

Black Feminism – a political/social movement growing out of Black women's feelings of discontent with both the civil rights movement and the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

Civil Rights Movement – a struggle by African Americans in the mid-1950s to late 1960s to achieve civil rights equal to those of whites, including equal opportunity in employment, housing, and education, as well as the right to vote, the right of equal access to public facilities and the right to be free of racial discrimination.

Discourse – communication of thought by words; talk; conversation, a formal discussion of a subject in a speech or writing, as a dissertation, treatise, sermon, etc. Any unit of connected speech or writing longer than a sentence.

Educational Leadership – positions other than classroom teaching, including, but not limited to the following: assistant principal, principal, director or other central office instructional position, assistant superintendent, superintendent, and professor.

EEOC – the United States Equal Employment Opportunity Commission enforces Federal laws prohibiting employment discrimination. Laws protect against employment discrimination involving unfair treatment because of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or genetic information.

ESSA – Every Child Student Succeeds Act reauthorizes the 50 year old Elementary and Secondary Act (ESEA).

Essentialism – innate, essential differences between men and women. That is, people are born with certain traits. This is often used to explain why there are so few women in science and technology. May be used as a rationale for pigeonholing, offering limited education, hiring discrimination, etc. Sometimes raised (including by women) under the guise of equal but different.

Feminist Poststructuralists Theory – branch of feminism that emerges with insights from post-structuralist thought. Poststructural feminism emphasizes the social construction of gendered subjectivities. An important contribution of this branch was to establish that there is no universal single category of “woman” or “man” and to identify the intersectionality of sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, nationality.

Gendered Job Queue – The screening process contributing to the sex of the population of hires within an organization. Among high status employment, due to gendering, males are more prevalent than females.

Glass Ceiling – Metaphor for barriers preventing females from reaching leadership positions. “The unseen,” yet unreachable barrier that keeps women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of qualifications or achievements.

Gender – Male or Female. Used interchangeably with sex.

Gender Equity – The process of allocating resources, programs, and decision-making fairly to both males and females without any discrimination on the basis of sex and addressing any imbalances in the benefits available to males and females

“Good Ole Boy” Network – Reference to traditional male leadership within school systems. Controlled by unspoken rules and traditional male-dominated social norms.

19<sup>th</sup> Amendment – The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of sex. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation. The Nineteenth Amendment was enacted in 1920, after a 70-year struggle led by the women's suffrage movement.

PK-12 – Public Schools from kindergarten to graduation from high school.

Poststructuralism Era – A label formulated by American academics to denote the heterogeneous works of a series of 20<sup>th</sup> century French and continental philosophers and critical theorists who came to international prominence in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Reconception – A new or different conception.

Superintendent/Superintendency – refers to the highest administrative position in a school division, and is a position that entails leading a school division and promoting regulations and practices to enhance student achievement and division operations.

Title IX – comprehensive federal law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally-funded education program or activity. No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 – prohibits employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin.

Western Second Wave Feminist Theory – second wave of the history of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women’s rights and interest.

Women's Suffrage Movement – struggle for the right of women to vote and part of the overall women's rights movement.

### **Study Organization**

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the research project. Chapter 2 provides the research basis for the study. The historical perspective of women administrators, characteristics that have influenced their career and professional decisions, the feminist-poststructuralist theory, obstacles and barriers faced by women administrators, and suggestions for enhancing their advancement are discussed in the literature review. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, justification for data collection, and analysis techniques utilized. Chapter 4 provides the results of the study. Chapter 5 presents findings, implications for practice, the summary, and opportunities for future research.

### **Study Significance**

With the passing of the “Every Student Succeeds Act” (ESSA) on January 6, 2015, public school educators across the United States are faced with the renewed opportunity of providing quality education for all students. The challenges include high academic standards, success in college and career readiness skills, high quality preschool programs, and the achievement of higher graduation rates, just to name a few. Superintendents and school administrators are expected to be instructional leaders and exhibit managerial leadership skills. As diverse as the students they serve, the superintendents leading school divisions across the nation are starting to become more reflective of the population they represent. In this study, the researcher identified factors influencing women administrators' decisions regarding their pursuit of the superintendency. Chapter 2 is the literature review.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Literature Review**

This chapter considers the scholarly discourse related to women administrators in public school education who either pursued or did not pursue the position of superintendent. The first section discusses the historical perspective of women in United States education from the early settlement to the present. The second section describes the characteristics that have influenced the career and professional decisions of women administrators over time. The third section explains the basis for the Grogan (1996) study, grounded in feminist-poststructuralist theory, that focuses on women aspirants to the superintendency. The fourth section addresses what researchers have defined as obstacles and barriers faced by women administrators as they pursue more advanced leadership positions in education. The fifth section analyzes criteria for enhancing the advancement of women administrators pursuing the position of superintendent in K-12 public schools in the United States. Section six evaluates key understandings from the literature review.

A concept map and a research identity memo were generated to identify key terms and to design the conceptual framework to focus on the comprehensive search of scholarly research, literature, and other resources related to the role of women administrators, particularly as superintendents, in education. The comprehensive search utilized the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University online library and Resource Center Library at the VA Tech Northern Virginia Center. Search engines included Summon, advanced search and subject specific databases. More than 13,671 books, journal articles, reviews, dissertations, and other resources were identified as potential sources when the keywords “women administrators in education” were entered into the search engine. An effort was made to refine the search by limiting the publication dates for resources to those produced between 2005 and the present, resulting in a decrease in resources to 6,862. With the insertion of the following key terms: “females in educational leadership,” “superintendent,” “gender equity,” “underrepresented,” and “barriers,” the search provided a wide range of sources (ranging from 800 to 200) in each topic. Major studies and prominent scholars in the field of education dominated the literature. A comprehensive filtering and analyzing process continued to narrow the search for relevant, professional resources. Related dissertations and reference pages were also examined for significant information to include in this literature review.

## **Historical Perspective of Women in Education**

This section presents a chronological timeline that addresses the developing roles of women in education and analyzes historical events and leaders that influenced the evolution of women's involvement in the American education system. The discourse focuses on those who advanced legislation creating opportunities for women to serve as leaders in public schools.

Beginning with the establishment of the American colonies by early settlers, women were usually prohibited from formal education. Later, as laws were passed, parents were required to ensure their children received an education. However, White men served as schoolmasters, and women were generally viewed as less intelligent and not permitted to serve as teachers. In fact, women who desired to do work beyond typical housekeeping and caretaking were viewed with suspicion and contempt (Blount, 1998). By the late 1700s and into the 1800s, opportunities for women in education gradually appeared. Advocates including Abigail Adams, Benjamin Rush, Sarah Pierce, Catherine Beecher, Emma Willard, and Horace Mann provided educational opportunities for women as students and/or teachers (Blount, 1998).

As communities grew in New England towns and the mid-Atlantic region, the population of students increased, facilities became larger, and school boards could no longer handle the responsibilities needed to supervise schools: this trend demanded an administrator for the schools (Axtell, 1974). Generally, White men were chosen to be those first school superintendents. Their duties varied but included responsibility for the fiscal affairs, school building construction, and the maintenance of school property. In New England, the legal rights and necessary qualifications to assume the superintendency were available only to White males (Axtell, 1974). However, the South had fewer schools: affluent White children were taught by private tutors, but some middle-class White children actually learned to read from their parents or older siblings. Many middle-class and poor White children and all Black children were unschooled (Knight, 1922).

By the early 1900s single and married women were teaching in schools throughout the country. During this period, what started as "men's work" had a remarkable transformation into "women's work" (Blount, 1998). With this transformation came increased supervision from male administrators. Men regulated the curricular structure, certification requirements, salaries, and schedule, and made most of the decisions for female teachers. Blount (1998) described this period of transition in this way:

I argue that it was not coincidental that teachers' independence and decision making powers were stripped away just as women dominated the profession numerically. The male educators who remained had to assert their masculine qualities somehow, thus many became administrators to control the labors of women just as fathers and husbands long had done in the home. Administrators did not appear in significant numbers until women began filling teaching positions. As administrators assumed more control, male teachers felt less comfortable remaining in the classroom. They either left teaching or found other ways to pursue masculine-appropriate work within the profession. Teaching had become a women's profession – controlled by men. (p.37)

By the 1900s, women constituted the majority of teachers while males pursued leadership professions. However, in 1909, the United States had its first woman superintendent in Ella Flagg Young, who led the Chicago Public Schools and insisted that women were better educational leaders than men. Flagg Young wrote:

Women are destined to rule schools of every city. I look for a large majority of the big cities to follow the lead of Chicago in choosing a woman for superintendent. In the near future we will have more women than men in executive charge of the vast educational system. It is woman's natural field, and she is no longer satisfied to do the greatest part of the work and yet be denied leadership. As the first woman to be placed in control of the schools of a big city, it will be my aim to prove that no mistake has been made and to show cities and friends alike that a woman is better qualified for this work than a man. (Blount, 1998, p.1)

As a result of the Women's Suffrage Movement and the resultant 19<sup>th</sup> Amendment granting women the right to vote, Ella Flagg Young intended to start a trend to populate educational leadership with female administrators; however, the opposite occurred. The administrative position became an appointed position, a move that Blount (1998) insisted would deflate the power of the female vote.

During the early 1900s, the number of female superintendents serving in the United States was carelessly recorded. However, Blount (1998) suggested that thousands of women were successful in serving in school leadership positions as lead teachers, teaching principals, supervisors, midlevel administrators and some superintendents. Hansot and Tyack (1987) referred to this time period as a "golden age" for school administrators. Although women

superintendents led some small and rural county school divisions, only nine percent of superintendencies were held by women.

Between 1930 and 1970, the number of female superintendents actually fell from nine to three percent (Blount, 1998) for a number of reasons. First, the Great Depression beginning in 1929 silenced the women's rights movement (Blount, 1998), and newly unemployed male educators usurped the few women's administrative positions in education. This phenomenon occurred once again at the end of World War II, when men needed employment once they arrived home from the war (Blount, 1998).

Blount (1998) suggested that the end of the war changed the landscape of public schooling and its leadership. Millions of veterans returned from the war in search of employment. In an effort to support them, school districts eagerly recruited, hired, and promoted them. Not only did this give veterans jobs, but it also increased the number of men working in schools. As former servicemen were placed in school administration, they integrated the organizational and psychological theories developed by the military into educational-administration training programs and influenced the structure of school systems. As a result, the historical method of "rising through the ranks" as the predominant means of advancement was replaced with the requirement to have specific credentials from colleges and universities in school administration. The G.I. Bill benefits assisted male veterans. The increased enrollment of male veterans matriculating to obtain these credentials pushed large numbers of women out of their college and university enrollment slots. A gender shift further expanded because many credentialing programs imposed low quotas on the number of women who could be admitted, and immense social pressures forced women who had worked outside the home during the war to return home, give their jobs to veterans, marry, and bear children (Blount, 1998). As a result of these changes, the number of women superintendents declined to the lowest point of the century in the post World War II decades. Few educators discussed this enormous shift in the gender composition of school administrators, though. When the topic was raised, women were blamed for their lack of credentials and career commitment (Blount, 1998).

Between 1950 and 1965, few changes occurred for women administrators. Grogan (1999) noted that following the Civil Rights Movement and during the 1970s, society and public school education were being challenged regarding educational leadership in terms of gender and race. Educational policies and civil right laws assisted women who desired to enter educational

leadership by removing obstacles that kept them from being selected for administrative positions. The federal law, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibited employers from discriminating against employees on the basis of sex, race, color, natural origin and religion. Both the EEOC and the Civil Rights Act Title VII permitted females to sue for gender-based job discrimination. In response to the unfair practices by higher educational institutions that set limited quotas and admitted only a few female applicants, Congress passed Title IX in 1972. Title IX, a statute enforced by the United States Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights, protected people from discrimination based on sex in educational programs or activities that receive Federal financial assistance. These policies led to greater opportunities for women in education (Grogan, 1999).

School reform and accountability became the focus in the late 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. This period has been described as the most scrutinized in modern American education (Glazer, 1991). Marshall (1993) described the late 1970s and 1980s: "The election of President Reagan in 1980 marked the political ascendance of a new conservative consensus...[and] in education, an emphasis on excellence and quality rather than equity." (p.168)

The conservative agenda also dominated the G. H. W. Bush Administration. Glazer (1991) noted an educational summit in Charlottesville, VA, hosted by President Bush, at which no women administrators or teachers were featured as keynote speakers. The summit drafted a blueprint for modern educational reform, but women administrators were not directly involved in the process. Glazer (1991) suggested that school reform adopted top-down male-biased models versus feminist models. This conservative focus on school accountability and reform significantly impacted the progress of gender equity in education (Blount, 1998).

The 1990s continued to be a challenging time for women in administration. The shift in focus from equity to accountability in education lingered, resulting in decreases in the number of female superintendents (Glazer, 1991). Women administrators were gaining leadership positions in the supporting roles, but not in the role of superintendent (Grogan, 1999). Based on 2007-2008 National Center of Educational Statistics (NCES) data on public school superintendents, Grogan and Shakeshaft (2011) predicted women would reach full leadership equality with men in 77 years. The calculation was based on a 0.7 percent annual increase. However, since the 2000 NCES study, the percentage of female superintendents has increased considerably, and the

current representation is 24.1%. This is the highest percentage ever reported and significantly higher than the 13.2% reported in 2000 (AASA, 2010).

Throughout the history of public education in the United States, women have dominated parts of the field. Approximately, 70% percent of the teachers in American classrooms have been women (Gorgan & Shakeshaft, 2011). However, the counter exists among administrative positions, especially in the position of superintendent. In preparation for the 2016 national conference of the American Association of School Superintendents (AASA), the organization reported 73% of the superintendents are men and 27% are women (AASA, 2016). In the history of public school education, this represents the highest number of women superintendents to ever hold the position.

The first section of this discourse chronicles the evolution of the roles of women in supervisory positions in education and elaborates on the leaders, the legislation, and the events that shaped those changes in American educational leadership roles. The next section discusses the characteristics of women administrators.

### **Characteristics of Women Administrators**

This section addresses the characteristics of women administrators in PreK-12 public schools in the United States. This discourse includes an analysis of commonly recognized characteristics of women administrators, both those who aspire to pursue the superintendency and those who do not. The section discusses factors that impact female leadership and compares the preparation of female and male administrators. The section concludes with a comprehensive discussion of the ways in which women administrators are suited for the position of superintendent.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) recognized Jackie M. Blount as the premiere researcher on the history of women educators and the superintendency. In fact, they credited Blount with publishing the only study in existence that contained longitudinal data and applied consistent methodology in order to provide an historical account of the plight of women as teachers and their evolution as administrators. Blount (1998) further suggested that the lack of comprehensive data on women in administrative educational positions was a deliberate attempt to disregard their presence and devalue the role of females in administrative positions. Most studies, articles, and

reports contained limited, fragmented, and inconsistent descriptive information regarding female administrators (Blount, 1995).

Blount (1995) asserted that "...little other data has been collected on the number of women in school administration. Taken collectively, these studies are difficult to interpret since each has employed different research techniques, counted different samples of the superintendent population, and occurred at erratic intervals" (p.3). Blount (1995, 1998) and Tyack (1976) also suggested that the lack of data collected regarding female representation in public school leadership roles may actually be responsible for their underrepresentation.

More recently, Brunner and Grogan (2007), with the assistance of the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), conducted a study of women who led school systems. In their research, they identified the "commonly held characteristics of aspiring and non-aspiring women administrators who were qualified to pursue the position of superintendent" (p.52). The study identified the most common personal demographics of women who served as associate or assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction as follows: The women were generally White, married with one or two children aged 0-15 years, between 51 and 55 years old; they most likely came from small towns or suburbs with an undergraduate degree in education; most of them had been elementary teachers for 6 to 15 years before becoming a principal or director. Their career path was likely teacher to principal to central office, and they were not currently seeking a superintendency.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) also discovered that most female administrators believe that the "old girl/boy network" is part of their work world and that the network helps individuals get central office positions. Listed below are the most common professional development and support practices shared by the female administrators who responded to their survey (p. 54):

- They mentor others aspiring to administration and were mentored themselves.
- They were supported to become central office administrators by male superintendents.
- Their undergraduate major was education, and their advanced degree was likely in educational administration and supervision. Many hold superintendent certificates.
- Their continuing professional development came from ASCD or AASA and reading professional journals.

This study identified the differences among women administrators aspiring to be superintendents and women administrators who did not aspire. Aspiring women administrators were typically younger (under age 45) than those who did not aspire and seated superintendents, suggesting that their aspirations began early in their careers (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). In the area of raising their own children, aspiring female administrators and seated superintendents generally had more children than non-aspiring females. Brunner and Grogan (2007) asserted the following:

This piece of information flies in the face of the notion that women choose between motherhood and the superintendency or that women who aspire put off the superintendency so they can raise their children. Also brought into question is the assumption that women who are career-focused and driven to advance are less interested in having children than are other seemingly less ambitious women. Indeed, it appears that motherhood is a larger part of the lives of both aspirants and seated superintendents than it is for non-aspirants. (pp. 68-69)

In regards to educational experiences, professional development and memberships to professional organizations, women administrators who pursued the superintendency were more willing to invest the time and money to join, connect, and participate in networking opportunities than female administrators who were not interested in pursuing advancement (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Both groups reported that they had male mentors who supported them in the pursuit of administrative jobs. When asked where they saw themselves in five years, 71.9% of the aspirants responded, “as a superintendent,” while only 1.8% of the non-aspirants projected such a placement (Brunner & Grogan, 2007).

The same study suggested that 40.3% of aspiring women administrators believed that the position of superintendent is important and influential. They referenced McClelland Achievement Theory (1961): individuals tend to hold three culturally based needs that determine future behavior – the need for achievement, power, and/or affiliation (Cavalier, 2000).

A synthesis of research suggests that women administrators choose not to pursue the position of superintendent for the following reasons:

- “I am happy with my current position and have no interest in changing jobs”
- “Politics of the job don’t appeal to me”
- “Too much stress”

- “Superintendent’s salary is not high enough for the weight of the job” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, pp. 78-79).

For aspiring women administrators, Young and McLeod (2001) found three main factors that emerged as impacting female leadership: “role models, exposure to leadership styles, and endorsements. All three of these factors must be present for women educators to seek an administrative career. Female educators lacking even one of these had less confidence when deciding to enter administration” (p. 33).

Tallerico and Blount (2004) have elaborated factors contributing to the persistence of male overrepresentation in educational administration:

- ideologies about appropriate sex roles, stereotypes and norms,
- the bureaucratization of schooling that was built on separate spheres for women (teaching) and men (leadership),
- the conceptualization of schooling and its leadership in ways that emphasize competition and authority (stereotypically masculine strengths), rather than collaboration and service,
- administrative employment practices that present higher barriers for women than men, and
- the greater proportion of men than women earning graduate degrees in educational administration up until the mid-1980s. (pp. 641–642)

These factors will be addressed in more detail in section four, “Internal and External Barriers/Obstacles.”

Maienza’s (1986) study identified variables that impact male and female administrators’ career paths. Two hypotheses considered in the study are these: (1) Male and female superintendents have similar educational backgrounds and experiences; and (2) women move into leadership positions at a slower rate.

The research delineated some areas in which men and women administrators differ. Males have pursued administrative positions early in their careers as compared to women. The average age for men administrators is 38, compared to 48 for women. Typically, men held positions as coaches, department heads, assistant principals, and principals in high schools, and this historically has been an almost direct path to the superintendency (Brunner & Yong-Lyun, 2009). In contrast, women who have not held the same positions are more likely to follow the

winding career path of first teacher, then elementary principal, then a central office position, and finally the position of superintendent (Brunner & Yong-Lyun, 2009).

In spite of barriers and obstacles facing women administrators seeking the male-dominated position of superintendent, research from Brunner and Grogan (2007) and Prince (2005) proposed that female administrators are well suited to serve in the position of superintendent for the following reasons:

- Due to the accountability/high stakes testing movement, women are viewed as instructional leaders.
- Women educators' career paths foster the leadership skills needed.
- Skills honed in the classroom have produced females who are savvy in public relations, problem solving, and appealing to the community.
- Female educators are twice as likely as men to hold degrees in education, have spent more time teaching than men, and are more knowledgeable on best practices, educational trends and issues than men.
- Women's winding career paths and their advanced degrees give them a strong perspective on the work force, and they are more sensitive to the views of the teachers they lead.
- Men tend to lead from the top down, while women tend to be collaborative in their leadership roles.

Brunner and Grogan (2007) found other factors that influence the hiring of women administrators for the job of superintendent: the views and composition of the school board; the number of women in the community who are employed in high-power jobs; and vocal advocates who may promote the idea that students should see women in the roles of authority. In Section 2, all of the issues that factor into a woman's aspiration to become a superintendent are identified and discussed in relationship to the experiences of their male counterparts and typical gender roles in American society.

### **Feminist Poststructuralist Framework**

Hemmings' (2005) article, "Telling Feminist Stories," provided the foundation for this section by delineating the historical evolution of Western Second Wave Feminist Theory. Employing a chronological framework, the 1970s ushered in Essentialism, followed by Black

Feminism in the 1980s to the current Poststructuralism Era beginning in the 1990s (Hemmings, 2005). These implications and benefits of the feminist theory framework with regard to research on women administrators are explained further, and the section ends with a description of the feminist theoretical perspective as it relates to the superintendency.

Grogan (1996) used the feminist poststructuralist theory to design her study on women leaders in educational administration, specifically focusing on women aspirants to the superintendency. Intersecting poststructuralism with the feminist theory, Grogan (1996) developed the feminist poststructuralist theory that is different from the components of both. She defined poststructuralism as the use of deconstruction. Deconstruction is the critical practice of analyzing text for meaning and the challenging of absolutes to open up different possibilities for interpretation of data. Concurrently, the new meanings that are derived have been offered as supplementary to existing research findings. However, these new meanings have not replaced other interpretations.

Using gender as a unit of research, “most feminist theories seek to understand why women tolerate social relations which subordinate their interests to those of men” (Weedon, 1987, p.12). Grogan’s (1996) study drew a similarity between the feminist standpoint and feminist poststructuralism in the following way:

They both insist on a deconstruction of the dominant beliefs held by all those in power (Harding, 1991). The argument is that assumptions need to be held up to the light and examined critically for the values inherent in them. A consistent voice in feminist literature calls for exposure of the dominant groups in whose interest societal structures have been perpetuated. Many feminist theories would argue that to do so reveals others who have not been as well served by virtue of their gender or other similarly marginalizing attribute. (p.28)

Grogan (1996) continued to explain that feminist poststructuralism relies on the basic theoretical concepts drawn from French poststructuralist theories:

- *language and discourse*, an all-encompassing notion of the words, symbols, and metaphors used in any field;
- *subjectivity*, an idea that places doubt on the stability of identity;
- *power*, thought of as located in institutions rather than in the individual, and closely connected to knowledge;

- *common sense*, that pervasive so-called wisdom that is, in fact, a product of certain assumptions. (p.28)

Because prior to 1989, there was very little research regarding the low numbers of women administrators in public school leadership positions and reasons for that imbalance, the feminist poststructuralist approach was particularly useful. Grogan (1996) credited Carol Shakeshaft (1989) for her contributions to the discussion of gender equity in educational leadership through her comprehensive studies. Since then, others have added to the research and have concluded that relationships between the sexes have been socially constructed. Grogan also explained that gender has more than one quality and may be both descriptive and signifying. As an example, gender can describe an oppositional relationship.

What is described as feminine is only so in contrast to what is masculine (West & Fenstermaker, 1993). In contemporary American culture, a person's association with either the male or the female gender seems to have a profound impact on his or her life choices. For instance, instead of an individual simply "being" either male or female as a biological characteristic, the idea of "doing" gender was put forward by West and Fenstermaker (1993). They argued that membership in one or other of the genders carries with it the accomplishments of activities of such a one as to be seen as male or female. Consequently, it is not yet possible to conceive of an ungendered superintendent. Either it is a male superintendent, which is synonymous with the idea of "superintendent" in many people's minds, or it is the opposite: it is a woman superintendent. (p. 30)

Scott (1986) claimed that "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (p.1067). She supported her belief that a discussion of power is not simply a discussion of gender, and argued "that gender is an inextricable factor. Historically, images of those in power evoked 'manly' adjectives such as strong, protective, visionary, and fatherly, while those not in power are weak, vulnerable, and needy" (p.1067).

Feminist views on gender inequality have been based within historical, cultural and social constructs. (Butler, 1990; Connell, 1995). This section describes different perspectives from feminist researchers and their theoretical approaches to gender. Connell (1995) claimed that femininities, like masculinities, are not a product of biology or some manifestation of "inner essence"; rather they are socially constructed "configurations of gender practice" (p. 14) created

through historical and social processes, situated in patriarchal relations of power, and intact with other social justice factors such as race, social class, and sexuality.

Butler's (1990) theory classified gender as performative, suggesting that being male or female is not self-evident or natural. Instead, a person's gendered identity only appears natural through repeated, ongoing performances. The performative dimension of gender reproduces and helps create the illusion of an essential gender identity. Butler (1990) and Martino (2008) studied the intersectionality of social class, race, sexuality, ableism, and other social justice factors that challenge the boundaries of other mindsets, which narrowed gender to an outcome of biology, thereby elevating patriarchal relations of power.

Through a theoretical lens, feminist historian Connell (1995) addressed structural inequalities that are reoccurring daily. These inequities demonstrate the premise that women, especially women of color, have been positioned within a gender order (Connell, 1995) in ways that exclude them from the ruling apparatus of society (Connell, 2010): society has been built, maintained, and ruled by those in dominant patriarchal positions, a structure that practically ensures that women play a secondary role.

To address the concern regarding discriminatory practices toward women, Reskin (2002) developed Gendered Job Queue theory, which contends that the most valued jobs are reserved for the men of dominant racial ethnic groups, and that only after these positions lose value or the salaries are lower, dominant men leave the positions, thereby creating opportunities for women or men of underrepresented racial ethnic groups.

Grogan (1999) further posited that there are main insights gained when one analyzes the research on the disproportionate numbers of women in the superintendent positions as compared to men:

- Women administrators experience conflicting discourses.
- Women's ways of leading are considered secondary or subordinate to men's ways.

Because the goal of feminist theory is to give voice to women, it is important to apply feminist theory to determine cause and effect in recognized discrepancies. Gardiner (2002) defined feminist theory as follows:

Feminist theory validates multiple and diverse perspectives, in particular the values of examining these perspectives to clarify one's own beliefs and values, and for the pedagogical

opportunities to help one to consider viewpoints of other individuals. Women learn from other women's voices and experiences. (p.29)

In addition, feminist theory is "connected in principle to feminist struggle" (Sprague & Zimmerman, 1993, p. 266). This research documented the actual experiences of women administrators who are participants in feminist research, and the societal structures and ideologies that oppress females.

Hesse-Biber (2007) explained that feminist theory challenges knowledge that excludes oppressed groups. The theory also allows for new questions to be asked that position women's experiences in the focus of social inquiry, questions which upset traditional practices of knowing in order to create new information. The feminist perspective has served to enlighten and bring focus to the practices by which women administrators in leadership have been victims of discriminatory actions.

Overall, feminist theories challenged patriarchal, sexist, and oppressive behaviors. By integrating a feminist perspective, researchers could address various forms of structural inequities. Research enhanced by feminist theory could promote empowerment, liberation and emancipation for women with regards to gender and leadership. (Brooks & Hesse-Biber, 2007) Such findings provided a groundwork for the re-conception of the superintendency.

Grogan (2000) advocated for a re-conception of the role of the superintendency as a result of perspective drawn from feminist and postmodern literature. She recognized that the expectations for the contemporary superintendent are different from what they were years ago. Grogan (2000) attributed this change to federal and state accountability systems and the information age. Also, due to changing demographics and increased diversity in public schools, superintendents must fine tune their human relation skills, as well as maintain the political astuteness that has been the responsibility of superintendents over the years to include management of the budget and personnel resources of a public school division. Grogan (2000) suggested superintendents should be reformers and curriculum and instruction leaders, instead of continuing their former administrative roles. She advocated for leaders who put the best interest of children in the forefront of all decisions.

Grogan's (2000) foundation for a reconception of the superintendency was rooted in feminist literature from the 1970s to the turn of the century that studied the importance of gender relations in areas of history, philosophy, sociology, and psychology. She asserted, "Feminist

theories arising from this body of literature differ from each other. What links them in a loose fashion is their attention to what has been described as distinctively feminist issues [which are] the situation of women and the analysis of male domination” (Flax, 1990, p 40). Grogan’s (2000) ideas have been influenced by combining both the feminist and postmodern perspectives.

In general terms, the superintendent position has been viewed as a role for men. As Grogan (2000) explains, “Wilson (1980) blandly asserted, ‘The most successful superintendent is male, Anglo-Saxon, middle aged, Republican, intelligent, and good with students but not gifted’” (p.20).

Carol Shakeshaft’s 1989 work described the male-dominated context within which all women administrators work. Prior to Shakeshaft’s work, the research on the position of superintendent reflected the male position because men were the practitioners and the researchers. Grogan (2000) alternatively proposed that “if we accept gender as a useful category of analysis to help us understand the superintendency better, then we need to draw on the experiences of women in the position” (p.126).

Grogan (2000) ended her discussion on the modern superintendent and the feminist postmodern perspective by observing that the “most significant contribution of the feminist theory to the way we consider the superintendency is to adopt its paradigm of social criticism. Feminist scholars advocate for action that results in a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for those who have been marginalized” (p.126). She continued, “...postmodernism provides us with concepts (discourse, subjectivity, power, knowledge, and resistance) that enable us to understand the superintendency in terms different from those that have been used in the past” (p. 127).

To effect this transformation, Grogan (2000) highlighted paradoxes that may occur in the superintendency: (1) Superintendents often envision goals they are not allowed to complete; (2) successful reformers may not realize their reforms; (3) public schools adopt private sector values; and (4) the pressure to decentralize authority leads to increased accountability (p. 131).

The paradox of vision.	To be hired, superintendent candidates often articulate a vision of where the district should be in 5 years before understanding the community. Sometimes the superintendent does not last the 5 years. Sometimes it is a different community in 5 years. Much of the literature reflects the turbulence and the turmoil that increasingly characterize superintendencies.
Successful reformers need not reform.	Superintendents must be seen as engaging in reform. However, those who are highly visible and proactive in their efforts are often recruited elsewhere before the results of reform become apparent. Therefore the superintendency is associated with the reform activity, not with measuring the outcomes of such efforts.
Public schools adopt private sector values.	The private sector is being called upon to rescue public education. Just as the movement toward charter schools and vouchers across the country introduces an element of competition into public schools, the threat of privatization of management hangs over the heads of certain districts as unwieldy; still others blame bloated and expensive central offices for poor student performance. A few large systems are also currently led by superintendents from private sector: lawyers, military men, and fiscal experts, none of whom were hired for their educational expertise.
Decentralized authority and increased accountability.	As superintendents become more accountable for student outcomes they are pressed to decentralize authority and empower others. At the same time, pluralistic communities create competing agendas for improvement that often are irreconcilable with each other. Creating further tension, superintendents spend much time with community members at the expense of meeting with teaching faculties.

*Figure 1.* Paradoxes of the superintendency. Grogan (2000) p.131.

Grogan (2000) insisted these contradictions provide a “foundation for questioning what superintendents might do differently in the future, thus laying the groundwork for a re-

conception of the superintendency” (p.131). Crosby-Hillier (2012) further maintained that the following practices should foster such a re-conception:

- Embrace contradictions. School districts need superintendents who are experienced at dealing with fragmentation, contradiction and a fundamental ease with being pulled in opposite directions. The feminist postmodern theory is alert to the existence of multiple perspectives and sensitive to the particular community context; in a reconceived superintendency, superintendents empower others.
- Commit to listening and learning. Caring allows school leaders to remain focused on local conditions, seeing them for what they are. Remaining aloof tends to dull our senses by making us confident of what we know. A feminist postmodern perspective shakes this confidence by forcing us to question why things are the way they are.
- Appreciate dissent. These principles are rooted in caring about improving the learning opportunities for all children. Superintendents who are focused on the local power mechanisms will be better informed about how to provide those opportunities. Such superintendents will not squelch dissent in the name of consensus. Following Foucault’s (1980) line of thought, these superintendents take into account how differing voices contribute to a better understanding of pluralistic contexts. This does not mean that the superintendent is to be paralyzed by the resulting conflict or swayed by the loudest noise. Guided by a focus on children and cautioned by a critical awareness of how children are being served, the superintendent will find direction in resisting easy solutions.
- Commit to social justice. A feminist postmodern re-conception of the superintendency implies a commitment on the part of the superintendent to ask tough questions, to consider issues from multiple perspectives, and to put himself or herself on the line.
- Adopt an ethic of care. In studying the way women have defined the superintendency, the importance of adopting an ethic of care is revealed (Grogan & Smith, 1998). Dealing with particular individuals as individuals (rather than as representatives of demographic groups) prompts positive working relationships that emphasize high educational standards and a commitment to equity. (Noddings, 1992)

Based upon the discussion of the tenets of feminist poststructuralist theory and the need for its application to 20<sup>th</sup> Century research on the viability of women in the superintendency, Grogan (2000) recommended the re-conception of the superintendency as the means of developing a modern position responsive to the needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century learners and suggests that the re-conception will make the superintendency more attractive to nontraditional aspirants, the majority of whom are women, to pursue the position of superintendent.

### **Internal and External Barriers/Obstacles – Women Administrators**

Studies of women in educational leadership considered the challenges they face as barriers and obstacles. In this section, legal barriers and district practices, both internal and external that obstruct women administrators' ability to advance will be examined. The conflicting discourses of partnering, mothering, and homemaking are discussed in this section, including their impact on the decisions women administrators make with regard to their pursuit of the superintendency. Less quantifiable barriers like these will also be addressed: Women lack mobility, key experience, and mentors; they are seldom recruited and face a "glass ceiling." Women are perceived as weak managers, weak with money, weak politically, and as emotional. This section will conclude with the contemporary view of the issues, phenomena, and implications described as "self-imposed" conditions.

As discussed in the historical perspective section of this chapter, prior to and since the women's suffrage movement, laws have been passed to advance the rights of women in the United States. The resurgence of the women's movement in the 1960s and 1970s assisted with removing what Eagly and Carli (2007) described as the concrete wall. The term refers to the legislative barriers that prevented women from obtaining equal ranks in employment. Barreto, Ryan, and Schmitt (2009) claimed that the full impact of the women's movement of the 70s still remains unclear today. Hymowitz and Schellhardt coined the phrase "glass ceiling" to describe the employment conditions following the women's liberation movement. The "glass ceiling" was viewed as subtler terminology than previous conditional descriptors for women, but equally as damaging because the term refers to salary inequities, corporate cultures, work/life balance, and networking (Hymowitz & Schellhardt, 1986).

Eagly and Carli (2007) opined that the glass ceiling is misleading and impenetrable. Instead, they devised the metaphor of the labyrinth, suggesting women have a maze-like journey

to reach top positions of employment. In another study, Kaye and Giulioni (2012) characterized the career path of women as akin to climbing a rock wall and implied that women rarely follow a traditional career ladder and may have to move down and across before they can ascend to top leadership positions.

In addition to legal barriers, Derrington and Sharratt (2009) conducted two surveys (1993, 2007) that identified school-district barriers that affected women superintendents and among women aspiring for the position. In 1993, the three major barriers included sex role stereotyping, sex discrimination, and the lack of role models/mentors to guide women into the superintendency; in 2007, the three major barriers included a “good ole boys” network unavailable to women, a School Board that is not well informed on the qualifications of female candidates, and self-imposed barriers. The changes in responses from 1993 to 2007 and the self-imposed barriers that emerged in the survey will be discussed in the final section of this topic.

When faced with the decision to pursue or not pursue the superintendency, women administrators may also experience an internal barrier: role conflict. Brunner and Grogan (2007) synthesized the conflict in this way:

When faced with the experience of spoiled identity, women are cast into role conflict (Merton, 1957) in ways that are more profound than a conflict related to making a choice between one role and another. Indeed, just the basic choice between the roles of wife-mother and career woman can create great anxiety given the time that both take. But when faced with the issue of the stigma attached to the role of career, Darley (1976) asserted that women often avoid the career achievement-oriented role and accept the mother-wife role. (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 41)

Researchers also found that though role conflict existed for women educational administrators, they were not hindered by it: “[T]hey were neither less efficient nor less effective than men” (Jones & Montenegro, 1983, p. 231).

In Hennig and Jardim’s 1977 study, the following women administrators’ personal qualities were identified as barriers to pursuit of the superintendency:

- “lack of aggressiveness - waiting to be chosen, discovered, invited, persuaded, or asked to accept a promotion
- reluctance to take risks
- lack of self –confidence” (Brunner & Grogan, 2007, p.42).

External barriers are the societal beliefs, attitudes, structures and systems that impact or impede women who seek to earn the role of superintendent. Brunner and Grogan characterized these as following:

- **Lack of Sponsorship and Role Models.** Sponsorship, mentoring and role models have been addressed by researchers Gardiner, Enomoto, and Grogan, (2000), and Marshall, (1985). Sponsorship is ranked as the most essential professional development and career advancement tool to facilitate the advancement of those serving as school administrators. The sponsor acknowledges, teaches, mentors, and promotes the aspiring mentee. Unfortunately for women administrators, (Marshall, 1985) researchers observed this: “The sponsor-protégé relationship is a close and personal one. Male sponsors are reluctant to invest their effort in women because women are different and because close male/female relationships most often are seen as nonprofessional” (p. 133).
- **Family Responsibilities.** Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that despite the changing roles of husbands and wives in the home, women still maintain the majority of childcare and household chores and responsibilities. Women administrators are well aware of the demands and challenges that superintendents face in their positions. As a result, women administrators have to weigh the position in regard to how they will balance their family and work load responsibilities. Overall, societal norms hinder women administrators as these relate to family responsibilities.
- **Perception of Female Characteristics.** Historically, a male model of leadership has defined the role of the superintendent. “Women administrators, because of their abilities, different jobs and life experiences, special training and interests, may exhibit a leadership style that differs from the expectations for male-normed educational administration positions” (Marshall, 1985, p.133).
- **Stigma and Resentment from Others.** Marshall (1985) discovered that when women administrators were unable to preserve their normal gender identity or administrator status and experienced stigma or spoiled identity, they employed at least one of three techniques to handle it: “(1) denial and retreat; acceptance of cultural and organizational norms related to gender specific behavior; (2) alienation, rebellion; remaining the “marginal man,” and (3) coping with stigma through the use of

impressions and situation management; dis-identifying, covering and passing” (p. 132).

Prince’s (2005) article, “Women in Charge: Female Educators Often Have What It Takes to Be Superintendents, but Hurdles Still Exist,” emphasized obstacles that women administrators face. The obstacles include the “perception that family obligations will limit them; finances are not their strong suit; or that they are somehow less logical than men” (p. 1).

Uniquely, a barrier revealed in Archer’s (2003) research of the topic observed the sport of golf as a barrier to women administrators. The respondents mentioned that informal networking and mentoring occurs on golf courses. While women may play golf, they may not be as skilled as men. Women administrators felt hindered by the lack of exposure to their male colleagues in informal settings.

Grogan’s (1996) research included an extensive study on the competing tensions among partnering, mothering, and homemaking and the decision of women administrators who elect to pursue or not pursue the superintendency. Women administrators communicated tensions felt in the following areas: (1) fear of failing as a mother, (2) responsibility for the maintenance of personal relationships, and (3) coping with household labor. Time to attend to the duties associated the demands of the superintendency presented an ongoing dilemma for women administrators interviewed. Grogan (1996) described the challenges for women administrators in the following way:

The point is that unlike their male counterparts, the participants experience daily contradictions in trying to speak from multiple positions. In terms of the bases of power, it is clear that the discourse of educational administration expects conformity to the male model from women aspiring to the superintendency. It is no wonder then that the women are reluctant to place such pressure on their relationships that they risk losing them, for if they were to do that in order to secure a superintendency, they would be bereft of the very support systems that enable their male counterparts to be positioned differently in the discourses. (p. 134)

The tensions identified in 1996 by Grogan were also paramount in 2010, when McGee surveyed Florida female superintendents who led 21 of the 67 school districts. The purpose of the study was to test McGee’s hypothesis that self-imposed barriers, including family obligations, unwillingness to relocate, and other social norms associated with motherhood influenced women’s decisions to avoid higher-level administrative positions (McGee, 2010).

McGee found that a woman's choice to pursue or not pursue the leadership position likely stemmed from internal or self-imposed barriers, rather than external barriers. Based on survey results, self-imposed barriers revealed in the study were ranked based on the average responses in order of their importance or significance from most to least:

1. Anxiety regarding family
2. Politics- "good ole boy" network
3. Lack of network
4. Lack of confidence
5. Job location
6. Childcare issues
7. Employer's negative gender attitudes
8. Lack of assertiveness
9. Spouse's career conflict
10. Reluctance for risk
11. Desire to start family
12. Lack of peer support
13. Lack of family support
14. Lack of motivation

The review of these sources has led to a consideration of the various kinds of barriers (internal, external, legal, societal, perceived, and self-imposed) that affect a woman's decision to pursue the superintendency. These factors are often systemic and deeply ingrained in practice. However, the identification of such barriers generates a discussion of viable ways to dislodge them or to overcome them, which is addressed in the final chapter.

### **Enhancing the Advancement of Women Administrators**

Throughout the review of literature regarding women in educational leadership, there has been a conscious effort to report not only what has been shared in the previous four sections of this literature review, but also to highlight the progress of female educators in regard to their experiences serving as successful superintendents. The final section will discuss strategies and recommendations for women administrators who are considering whether or not to pursue the superintendency. In Anderson's (2000) article, "Strategies Used by Women Superintendents in

Overcoming Occupational Barriers,” these recommendations were drawn from studies of female superintendents who responded to the following research question: “What do women superintendents view as successful strategies for overcoming the barriers they face?” (p. 21) Literature suggests a variety of approaches to successfully prepare for the superintendency role. Dopp and Sloan’s (1986) study of female superintendents recommended the following strategies to aspiring women administrators:

- Gain broad backgrounds in education, including principalships and central office positions.
- Engage in early career planning.
- Develop personal and professional support systems.
- Perceive themselves as social change agents on behalf of women and society.
- Possess the ability to communicate and work well with people.
- Have positive interpersonal skills, excellent conflict resolution skills, and a high energy level.
- Be willing to be geographically mobile.

Grady and O’Connell (1998) studied dissertations and discovered that even though women administrators had more education, degrees, certificates, and teaching experience prior to becoming administrators, and had better qualifications than the typical male candidate, their credentials did not assure them the opportunity to earn the position of superintendent. They argued that there are other strategies that need to be employed to obtain the role of leading public school districts. The major strategies are presented in the following six categories: family coping skills, school boards, political savvy, selection process, mentorship/sponsorship, and training.

- **Family Coping Skills.** One of the leading barriers facing women administrators is conflict between their families and their careers. To be successful, women administrators should develop coping skills. Blanche (1996) argued, “The roles of men and women must change to accommodate the needs of the family and childrearing if women are to successfully attain superintendency level positions” (pp. 53-54). Women will need to balance their various roles if they aspire to move up in their careers. McDade and Drake (1982) advised that women administrators should “achieve a balance between femininity and leadership – do not give up one for the other” (p. 214).

- **School Boards.** Because individuals tend to hire people like themselves, visibility is an essential strategy used by successful women superintendents. For example, if a school board has a majority of male members, female administrators must market themselves, so that school board members and decision-makers in the community will see them in leadership roles (Marietti & Stout, 1994). Similarly, women school board members can play an important role in advancing female administrators. Marietti and Stout (1994) discovered that female-majority boards were more likely to hire women superintendents than male-majority boards; “as females increase in proportion on school boards (which they have recently) we might anticipate more female superintendents” (p. 383).
- **Political Savvy.** The success of a school superintendent is rooted in the relationship maintained with the school board. Women administrators have to be well versed in the political climate of the school board and the local community. Tallerico, Burstyn and Poole (1994) suggested that women’s political capacity was limited in the following areas: understanding school board policies; vulnerability in the superintendency; understanding the importance of one’s career path to the chief executive role; analyzing external and political influences on shaping, expanding or constraining conflict; awareness of board turnover and knowledge of how to prevent, cope with, and capitalize on it; having ways of dealing with relentless scrutiny on the job; appreciating the predictable mobilization of teacher or administrative union forces, and self-awareness training.
- **Selection Process.** Knowledge is power. Women administrators who are aspiring to become superintendent need to understand how the selection process works. Even though they are hard to detect, discriminatory practices are alive and well. Women superintendents should be interviewed and studied. The findings regarding how they acquired their positions should be shared with women administrators who are interested in following in their footsteps. McDade and Drake (1982) asserted that work toward becoming a superintendent may be too overwhelming for women because of the barriers and obstacles they face. However, McDade and Drake (1982) also added the following on how to overcome these obstacles:

If the career paths of women superintendents could be described in more detail, with the specific problems, or challenges faced by successful women identified according to the specific path taken; and if these same women offered advice to the aspiring – advice that is also tied to specific career paths – perhaps more women would consider the challenge. (p. 210)

- **Mentoring/sponsorship.** Successful women superintendent aspirants have a mentor or a sponsor during pursuit of the superintendency. Marshall (1984) maintained that mentors help female administrators by affording them role models for administrative functions; ways to learn attitudes, behaviors, and norms; support so that women can maintain their confidence and aspirations during difficult times; and information about and recommendations for administrative positions. There are a number of opportunities for aspiring women administrators to network and solicit assistance from both male and female superintendents, including conferences, workshops, and regional meetings. However, mentors and sponsors are not limited to acting superintendents. Retired superintendents, family members, friends, professors, and colleagues should be sought to encourage and support women administrators (Brown 1994).
- **Training.** Necessary preparation, qualifications, and competencies of a successful superintendent are essential for aspiring female administrators. Information compiled by Arons (1980) suggests although women possess as much administrative ability as men, their career paths are not always conducive to becoming administrators. The attention to appropriate career moves will encourage women to enter administrative careers, obtain the adequate preparation for administrative certification, and enter the applicant pools in numbers relatively equal to their male counterparts. (p.8) In Anderson's (2000) questionnaire, respondents (successful superintendents) were asked to rate the strategies they use to overcome perceived barriers. The list below shows that eighteen of the twenty-one strategies are perceived as highly successful strategies. The strategies are in ranked order:
  1. developing a strong self-concept (65.1%)
  2. learning the characteristics of the school district when applying for positions (56.8%)

3. obtaining the support of family (52.8%)
4. developing political “know-how” (48.8%)
5. knowing the job description of position (48.6%)
6. enhancing interviewing skills (43.5%)
7. learning coping skills to deal with conflicting demand of career and family (38.3%)
8. increasing flexibility to relocate (37.6%)
9. obtaining a doctorate (35.7%)
10. formulating and adhering to a plan of action to achieve career goals (34.0%)
11. learning strategies of successful women in other fields (33.8%)
12. preparing an effective resume (32.2%)
13. attending workshops to improve professional skills (31.8%)
14. increasing visibility in professional circles (31.3%)
15. being proactive in seeking administrative internships for top level positions (30.5%)
16. gaining access to community power groups (27.6%)
17. enlisting a mentor (25.7%)
18. learning how to deal with sex discrimination (14.6%) (p. 28)

In addition to Anderson’s survey, Brunner (1998) described seven strategies for successful women superintendents:

- Women superintendents should learn to balance two sets of expectations. The first set is role-related; the second, gender-related. There are numerous approaches to balancing these two.
- Women superintendents should keep their agendas simple in order to focus on their primary purpose: the care of children, including strict attention to their academic achievement.
- Women superintendents should develop the ability to remain “feminine” in the ways they communicate and at the same time be heard in a masculinized culture.
- Women superintendents should disregard the old myth that they must “act like a man” while in a male role. It doesn’t work.
- Women superintendents should remove or let go of anything that blocks their success.

- Women superintendents should remain fearless, courageous, risk-takers, “can do” people. At the same time, they should have a plan for retreat when faced with the impossible.
- Women superintendents should share power and credit. (pp. 5-15)

Hanson (2011) conducted an exploratory study in a western state where the percentage of women superintendents is unusually high at 41%. Based on the results of open-ended interviews, none of the 11 women superintendents communicated that they had experienced any gender-based barriers that hindered their obtaining the superintendency. Counter to previous research, 100% of the respondents stated “they had experienced both active participation in professional networks and received valuable mentoring, often from the superintendent whom they succeeded” (p.1). Hanson’s (2011) study indicated that the superintendents had similar personal characteristics including: determination, drive, commitment, and hard work. Their successful tenures as women superintendents were attributed to their problem-solving skills, knowledge and expertise, perceptive abilities, high moral character, and skills in team building. The respondents’ recommendation to aspiring women administrators is to “pursue the superintendency without fear of barriers as well as to participate in professional organizations and to seek mentorship opportunities” (p.2).

### **Literature Review Synthesis/Summary**

In Chapter 2, the researcher examined literature that addressed the following issues: (a) the historical perspective of women in education from the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present, (b) characteristics of women administrators as they relate to their careers and professional decisions, (c) the poststructuralist theory as a philosophical framework and a correlation to the experiences of women administrators, (d) the perceived obstacles and barriers faced by women administrators as they pursue the superintendent position in education, and (e) suggestions for enhancing the advancement of women administrators who pursue the position of superintendent in K-12 public schools in the United States. The studies and findings have been relevant and thorough analyses of historical factors as well as ever-changing societal norms. The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing research by investigating and fostering an understanding of factors influencing women administrators’ decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Further, this qualitative study determined the relevance of identified

factors on the decisions made by the participants and explained the impact of shared experiences on those decisions. Chapter 3 will introduce the research problem and the methodology.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

Chapter three describes the research methodology for this study. Kallet (2004) defined methodology as the rationale for the application of specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, and analyze information used to understand the research problem, thereby allowing the reader to critically evaluate a study's overall validity and reliability. The methods and procedures used to conduct the study are discussed and explained. There are four sections in this chapter: Research Methodology, Procedures, Data Collection and Data Analysis.

The Research Methodology section includes the purpose for the study, research study rationale, the data collection framework and the role of the researcher. The Procedures section explains the criteria for the selection of the study site and the guidelines governing participants and confidentiality. This section also reviews entry, reciprocity, and ethics concerns. Data collection techniques and procedures for data analysis and methods for determining reliability and validity are detailed.

#### **Research Methodology**

*Purpose of study.* The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing research by investigating and fostering an understanding of factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Further, this qualitative study determined the relevance of identified factors on the decisions made by the participants and explained the impact of shared experiences on those decisions. The data were gathered through an interview protocol designed to capture perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The interview protocol was designed to analyze the factors influencing women administrators' decision to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. This study was a multiple subject analyzing the lived experiences of women administrators who are superintendents, who aspire to be superintendents, or who have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

*Rationale for research design.* This study proposed to determine the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent of PreK – 12 public school divisions in the United States. The method of study was a multi-case study by which the lived experiences of women administrators will be investigated (Rossman &

Rallis, 2003) with a particular interest in why they chose to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. In 2001, Merriam described qualitative data as consisting of “direct quotations from people about their experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge” obtained through interviews. (p.85) All the women administrators in this study possessed the qualifications to serve as central office level administrators.

Merriam (2001) described five characteristics of qualitative research. First, the precondition is that the key understanding of the phenomenon is from the participants’ perspectives, not the researcher’s. Second, the researcher’s primary role is to be the instrument for data collection and analysis. Third, field work is essential and is conducted first hand by the researcher. Fourth, inductive research is used by the researcher to build abstractions, concepts, hypotheses, and theories. Lastly, the researcher’s product will be descriptive and focus on process, meaning and understanding.

Merriam (2001) described qualitative study methodologies as being 1) Basic or Generic; 2) Ethnography; 3) Phenomenology; 4) Grounded Theory; and, 5) Case Study. Listed below are the identifying characteristics of each:

Basic or Generic: Researchers attempt to identify and understand a phenomenon, a process, or the perspectives or world views of people involved.

Ethnography: Researchers interpret data from a “socio-cultural” viewpoint.

Phenomenology: Researchers use data that are the participants’ and their firsthand experience of the phenomenon.

Grounded Theory: Researchers derive theory from data that is collected in a structured manner and analyzed. Grounded theory begins with an area of study and allows the theory to emerge from the data.

Case Study: When the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident, researchers study a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context.

Based on these characteristics, a multiple subject study using phenomenology methodology was determined to be best suited for this study (Stake, 2006). The researcher interviewed nine women administrators to gain an understanding of factors influencing their decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent.

*Framework.* Maxwell (2013, p. 39) described a Conceptual Framework as “the system of concepts, assumptions, expectations, beliefs and theories that supports and informs your

research.” During the initial stages of writing the literature review, the researcher used a “researcher identity memo” (Maxwell, 2013) technique to guide the construction of the study’s framework. The researcher recorded all of the beliefs, expectations, experiences, understanding, and assumptions gathered in the study. Maxwell (2013) defined a concept map as a tool for developing and clarifying theory. The researcher used this technique to create a visual display of the phenomena of the study.

The literature review for this study considered the historical perspective of women in United States Education; described the characteristics of women administrators; explained studies, grounded in feminist-poststructuralist theory, that focus on women aspirants to the superintendency; addressed obstacles and barriers faced by women administrators; and analyzed suggestions for enhancing the advancement of women administrators. Through the use of the concept map, ideas evolved to suggest areas for in-depth and further study. The following questions guided the direction of this research study.

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of acting women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendents?
2. What factors influence women administrators’ decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

*Role of researcher.* The researcher’s task is to depict the essence or basic structure of the experience (Merriam, 2001). Stake (2006), known as one of the major architects of the phenomenological method of research, outlined the following process of conducting a study: 1) the researcher must gather all information in multi-case studies to examine the different interpretations of phenomena; 2) the researcher must select at least four cases (but no more than ten) for sufficient interactivity and optimal comprehension; 3) the researcher must show how the phenomenon appears in different contexts; 4) the researcher must gather data across cases using the most common methods (observation, interviews, coding, management of data, and interpretation; and finally, 5) the researcher must seek assurance that the interpretation reflects what the participants intended to convey.

*Maintaining validity.* Merriam (2001) described the following six strategies to enhance internal validity:

1. Triangulation – using multiple sources of data, investigators, and methods to confirm findings;
2. Member Checks – taking data and the initial interpretations and referring back to individuals who were the source the information for validation throughout the study;
3. Long-term observation – gathering data through repeated observations over the same phenomenon;
4. Peer examination – consulting colleagues to provide input on the findings as they emerge;
5. Participatory or collaborative modes of research – including participants in all components of the research from beginning stages to the final product; and,
6. Researcher’s biases - clarifying the researcher’s worldview, theoretical orientation and assumptions before beginning the study. (pp. 204-205)

To insure internal validity in this study, multiple strategies were used. During the interview process, the researcher carefully consulted with interviewees to clarify and validate findings. As findings were gathered, the researcher solicited input from appropriate peers and colleagues. Due to potentially similar characteristics and experiences between the participants and researcher, special attention was given to strategies to prevent personal biases from emerging.

In summary, the role of the researcher included these four essential tasks. First, the researcher needed to judge the validity of collected data throughout the data collection processes. Second, the researcher brought focus to the study by synthesizing the collected data. Third, the researcher arranged the collected data to avoid bias and to draw valid and reliable conclusions. Finally, if alternate findings were revealed in the study, the researcher needed to present information supported by collected evidence. The following section describes the experience of the researcher.

*Experience of the researcher.* The researcher in this multiple subject study is a female public education central office administrator, possessing similar characteristics to the participants she studied. The researcher began her career thirty five years ago in a small city school division located midway between Washington, D.C. and Richmond, Virginia. The researcher served as a teacher, assistant principal, director of instruction, assistant superintendent of instruction and personnel, and presently as the deputy superintendent. The researcher’s entire career has been

within the same school division. The researcher was aware that personal experience could generate bias and took precautions to prevent skewing of results.

## **Procedures**

*Selection of the setting.* The study was conducted with selected women administrators who are or were employed in Superintendents' Regions I, III, IV, and V in the Commonwealth of Virginia. These regions include school divisions that are categorized as being "small" (under 5,000 students), "medium" (between 5,000 – 20,000 students), or "large" (over 20,000 students). Merriam (2001) suggested purposeful sampling should be used for site selection. Therefore, site(s) were chosen where "the most can be learned." The researcher was aware of a large potential sampling of women administrators concentrated in the identified four regions.

*Selection of the participants and assurances of confidentiality.* The nine participants of the study were selected from small, medium, and large school divisions, with three women administrators chosen from each category school division. Each participating woman administrator was aspiring to the position of superintendent, a sitting superintendent, or a school board administrator who was not interested in obtaining the position of superintendent. The researcher identified and contacted women administrators representing Region III Key Instructional Leaders, Region III Superintendents' Study Group, and the University of Virginia K-12 Advisory Council, inviting them to participate in the study. Informed Consent forms were required of all participants. The Informed Consent document and materials explained the study, indicating participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time.

*Entry, reciprocity and ethics.* Approval to conduct this research study was confirmed by Informed Consent executed by individual women participants. Approval to conduct the study was sought and received through the researcher's committee chairperson and the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board. (see Appendix B) The identities of the participants were protected, and the completed study will be made available to the study participants. Additionally, permission was sought and received from each participant's employing school division using methods prescribed by the school division.

Nine women administrators were interviewed for this study. Three participants were employed by small school divisions, three worked in medium sized school divisions, and three

participants served in large school divisions. Participant interviews were conducted during winter of 2016-2017 in the participants' assigned school divisions.

School Division Size	Acting Superintendent	Aspiring Superintendent	Non-aspiring Superintendent
Small	Participant 1	Participant 2	Participant 3
Medium	Participant 4	Participant 5	Participant 6
Large	Participant 7	Participant 8	Participant 9

*Figure 2.* Study participants.

*Interview protocols and procedures.* The interview protocol is the instrument used to elicit responses from the research participants. The researcher assumed the primary role of data collection and analysis (Merriam 2009). The interview protocol was developed directly from the research questions.

*Instrument validation.* The data collection instrument was developed by the researcher and was field-tested for participant understanding and presence of bias. The protocol was presented to non-participant women administrators as a field-test examination. The input and feedback provided assisted with finalizing interview questions. The interview protocol and types of questions are based on Merriam's (2009) research. When developing an interview research instrument, Merriam (2009) describes six types of effective question categories, including these: 1) experience and behavior; 2) opinion and values; 3) feeling; 4) knowledge; 5) sensory; and 6) background and demographic questions. These categories are essential for prompting and stimulating responses from research participants (Merriam, 2009).

In the study, the researcher developed a research interview protocol from five of the six question categories: experience and behavior, opinion and values, feelings, knowledge and background and demographic questions. The researcher analyzed responses to develop understandings of women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the superintendency. Figure 3 shows the alignment of research questions with interview questions.

<p><b>How do the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents compare to women aspiring to the superintendency and to those women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?</b></p>	<p><b>What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent?</b></p>
<p>Tell me about yourself, your educational background and your career in education.</p> <p>What influenced your decision to become an educational administrator? Did a person (parent, student, administrator, teacher, or friend) influence you? Did any event(s) or occurrence(s) influence you?</p>	<p>Share with me the leadership skills that describe your expectations for a superintendent.</p> <p>Are there skills women may be more effective at than men?</p> <p>Conversely, are there skills men may be more effective at?</p>
<p>How did your career path support or impede your progress toward obtaining your present position?</p>	<p>Describe those skills and traits making you effective in your present position.</p>
<p>Share a story that demonstrates your leadership style. How would you describe your style of leadership? Follow-up: What best describes your method of conflict resolution? What best describes your decision-making practice?</p> <p>As a woman administrator, describe what you believe are the elements of a supportive working environment.</p>	<p>What experience(s) influenced you to become a superintendent, pursue the position of superintendent, not pursue the position of superintendent?</p> <p>What may be external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent?</p> <p>Give examples of barriers</p> <p>What, if any, personal challenges face women who are seeking leadership roles?</p> <p>Follow-up: If you were to categorize these challenges, do they fall under social (or societal), organizational, relationships family, other?</p> <p>Compare how men and women are viewed as leaders. Are women superintendents perceived differently by the school board and community? If so, how? What may influence these perceptions?</p> <p>Are there any other thoughts you might like to add?</p>

*Figure 3.* Alignment of interview question by research question.

## Data Collection

All research participants were informed that personally identifiable information disclosed in the interview would not be used to identify them. Participant names were presented using

pseudonyms. All participants received Informed Consent forms outlining the purpose(s) of their participation in the research study, interview procedures and protocol, and expectations of the researcher. All participants were informed of their rights, including the option to decline participation in the study at any time before or during the interview. Every effort was made to respect and accommodate the needs of the participants to include full explanation of each research question.

The interviews were conducted with nine women administrators. To ensure accuracy, Merriam (2009) suggested the use of a recorder. Participants were informed that interviews would be recorded, allowing the researcher to accurately retrieve and analyze participant responses at a later date. A prepared transcript of recordings was available for review by participant request. The researcher stored the recordings in a secure location that was not accessible to any other individual. The researcher informed the participants that recordings from each interview would be stored in a secure location for one calendar year following successful defense of the study.

*Data management.* Merriam (2009) suggested verbatim transcription of recorded interviews is the most effective database for analysis. The researcher used a transcription service to transcribe the nine interviews and format the transcriptions to enable analysis. The identification information stating when, where, and who was being interviewed was listed at the top of each page. The size of the participants' school divisions and their current positions (superintendent, aspiring superintendent, or not an aspiring superintendent) were also noted. Merriam (2009) recommended the process of *line numbering* down the left-hand side of the page. The researcher began with the first page and number sequentially to the end of the interview. Spacing is another formatting tool was considered. The researcher single spaced responses from the interviewees and double spaced between speakers. The researcher's questions were printed in bold for easy identification of questions and responses. A wide margin was available on the right-hand side of the pages to add notes and codes during the analysis process. The researcher continually evaluated the data collected during the interviews. Merriam (2009) discussed the constant comparative method of data analysis developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) as a base for grounded theory. The researcher constantly analyzed the collected data during the interviews by comparing the data to previous data and developing categories that

support conceptualization until a theory formed. Special attention was given to conditions that might have impacted the interviewee, such as health, mood, and the time of the interview.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, the researcher is the primary instrument of data analysis. Patton (2002) stated that grounded theory research methodology is inductively generated from fieldwork through observations and interviews and is representative of the real world as opposed to laboratory or academic settings. For the researcher, the inductive stance and aim of deriving meaning from the data justified grounded theory, which emphasizes developing a theory directly from the data discovered. Merriam (2001) concluded that the goal of this type of qualitative research is a theory that emerges from or is “grounded” in the data.

Multi-case study is a step by step method of analyzing the data of the study. Following are the steps of the researcher’s multi-case study:

- Step 1 – Describe goals and rationale
- Step 2 – Design interview questions and protocol
- Step 3 – Identify and contact participants
- Step 4 – Acquire necessary permissions
- Step 5 – Schedule interviews
- Step 6 – Visit sites
- Step 7 – Conduct interviews
- Step 8 – Collect, study and review data
- Step 9 – Code and index text
- Step 10 – Analyze data
- Step 11 – Develop anticipated themes and new themes
- Step 12 – Compile and organize data
- Step 13 – Develop a theory

Stake (2006) stated that as multi-case study researchers, describing, interpreting, and qualifying the phenomenon in context lead to better comprehension of the quintain or target. In this study, a feminist perspective was referenced to determine whether or not evidence of influence was found. Patton (2002) suggested that a feminist perspective presumes the importance of gender in human relationships and societal processes and orients the study in that

direction. Principles of feminist inquiry (Guerrero 1999a: 15 – 22; Thompson 1992) may include the following:

- a sense of connectedness and equality between researcher and researched;
- explicitly acknowledging and valuing “women’s ways of knowing,” including integrating reason, emotion, intuition, experience and analytic thought;
- participatory processes that support consciousness-raising and researcher reflexivity; and
- going beyond knowledge generation, beyond “knowledge for its own sake,” to engage in using knowledge for change, especially “knowledge about women that will contribute to women’s liberation and emancipation” (Guerrero 1999a: 16-17).

### **Summary**

The research design for this study was qualitative and multiple subject, using grounded theory methodology in which the lived experiences of nine women administrators were investigated. This chapter included a discussion of qualitative measures and the justification for the methodology. The chapter highlighted a theoretical framework that placed the study in context with literature on the topic. The role of the researcher was explained and a discussion of validity and reliability, biases and methods for assuring integrity, and quality of the study were included. Procedures and analysis techniques were discussed along with ethical guidelines. Lastly, strategies for data analysis and management were explained. The next chapter discusses the findings of the study.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Results**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing research by investigating and fostering an understanding of factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Further, this qualitative study determined the relevance of identified factors on the decisions made by the participants and explained the impact of shared experiences on those decisions. The data were gathered through an interview protocol to capture perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The study was a multiple subject study designed to explore the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents, compare them to the experiences and characteristics of women administrators who aspire to be superintendent and to those of women who have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The interview protocol was designed to identify and analyze the factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent

#### **Research Questions**

The questions that follow guided the direction of the research study.

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of acting women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?
2. What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

#### **Description of Sample Data**

The data collection process for this research study involved interviews of women administrators who are or were employed in Superintendents' Regions I, III, IV, and V in the Commonwealth of Virginia. These regions included school divisions that were categorized as being "small" (under 5,000 students), "medium" (between 5,000 – 20,000 students), or "large" (over 20,000 students). The nine participants of the study were selected from small, medium, and large school divisions, with three women administrators chosen from each category school

division. Each participating woman administrator was a sitting superintendent, a candidate aspiring to the position of superintendent, or a central office administrator who was not interested in obtaining the position of superintendent. The researcher identified, contacted, and invited women administrators representing Region III Key Instructional Leaders, Region III Superintendents' Study Group, the University of Virginia K-12 Advisory Council, and Women Education Leaders in Virginia (WELV) to participate in the study. The participants shared their educational backgrounds, career choices, and experiences as central office administrators. They were questioned about what influenced them to become administrators and their individual leadership skills. They were queried about their expectations for a superintendent, the barriers and challenges facing women administrators pursuing leadership positions, and whether there were different perceptions of female and male superintendents. The interviews were conducted beginning February 20, 2017 to March 2, 2017. Each interview was recorded on a Sony IC Recorder and was approximately forty five minutes in duration. All of the interviews were transcribed for the purpose of coding and theme analysis. The research questions are in Appendix G. The interview questions are in Appendix H.

### **Data Reporting**

The research investigator invited the study participants to take part in an interview. Each study participant agreed to be interviewed. The study participants were issued a notice to consider participation, a confirmation letter, and an informed consent form. At the time of the interview, the informed consent form was reviewed. The study participants were asked to sign the agreement highlighting the terms of the study. There were eleven interview questions developed. These covered factors identified through the literature review and included the following questions:

1. Tell me about yourself, your educational background and your career in education.
2. What influenced your decision to become an educational administrator?
  - 2.1 Did a person (parent, student, administrator, teacher, or friend) influence you?
  - 2.2 Did any event(s) or occurrence(s) influence you?
3. Share with me the leadership skills that describe your expectations for a superintendent.
  - 3.1 Are there skills women may be more effective at than men?

- 3.2 Conversely, are there skills men may be more effective at?
- 3.3 Describe those skills and traits making you effective in your present position.
4. What experience(s) influenced you to...
  - 4.1 become a superintendent,
  - 4.2 pursue the position of superintendent,
  - 4.3 not pursue the position of superintendent?
5. How did your career path support or impede your progress toward obtaining your present position?
6. What may be external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent?
  - 6.1 Give examples of barriers
7. What, if any, personal challenges face women who are seeking leadership roles? Follow-up:
  - 7.1 If you were to categorize these challenges, do they fall under
    - 7.1a social (or societal),
    - 7.1b organizational,
    - 7.1c relationships
    - 7.1d family?
    - 7.1e other
8. Share a story that demonstrates your leadership style.
  - 8.1 How would you describe your style of leadership?Follow-up:
  - 8.2 What best describes your method of conflict resolution?
  - 8.3 What best describes your decision-making practice?
9. As a woman administrator, describe what you believe are the elements of a supportive working environment.
10. Compare how men and women are viewed as leaders.
  - 10.1 Are women superintendents perceived differently by the school board and community?
  - 10.2 If so, how?
  - 10.3 What may influence these perceptions?

11. Are there any other thoughts you might like to add?

### **Introductions of Study Participants**

The following three administrators were superintendents:

Study participant Jane (SS) has served in the position of superintendent for more than ten years. Her educational background included earning a bachelor's degree in special education, two master's degrees, and a doctorate degree. She started her career as a teacher. Jane (SS) was employed as an assistant principal, principal, director of leadership development, director of instruction k-12, and assistant superintendent prior to being selected superintendent. Due to her skills as an administrator and reputation, she was recruited by numerous school divisions. She has held educational leadership positions in four school divisions throughout Virginia. She credited a male superintendent for helping her "develop a vision in her mind and in her heart for doing the work of a superintendent." (SS, *l* 220) She described herself as a situational and transitional leader. Jane (SS) advocated for students as a teacher and administrator. She projected confidence and shared progressive ideas when discussing the role of women superintendents. Equal treatment for both female and male educational leaders was important to her. As an extremely capable, focused, strategic, and engaged superintendent, she had a wealth of knowledge and experiences.

Study participant Fran (SM) has served in her present position of superintendent for less than five years. Some years ago, she had been a superintendent in a different Virginia school division for six years. Fran (SM) has had an eclectic career as an educational leader. After obtaining her bachelor's degree, she taught elementary school in two Virginia school divisions. While obtaining both her master's and doctorate degrees, she held numerous positions. Fran (SM) was a gifted education coordinator, trainer of effective teaching, director of professional development and associate professor at the University of Virginia, chief academic officer in South Carolina, consultant in schools in Illinois, employed by the Virginia School Board Association and Virginia Association of School Superintendents, and served as an interim superintendent. Even though Fran (SM) knew that she wanted to be an educator at the early age of six, it was never her goal or desire to be an assistant principal, principal, or superintendent. Her work ethic, experiences in K-12 positions where she interacted with principals and "learned the system," (SM, *l* 285) opportunities to observe and provide professional development to all

educators, and willingness to relocate led to her two appointments to the position of superintendent. Fran (SM) viewed all employees as equals and prided herself on being able to communicate and collaborate with stakeholders in all types of settings. She credited a male superintendent for being her mentor. The encouraging words of others revealed her strengths as a leader and gave her the courage to take on some of her most challenging positions. Although she is not a traditionalist, it is evident that she is a highly skilled superintendent who is a risk-taker and successful leader.

Study participant Mary (SL) has served in her present position of superintendent for more than ten years and planned to retire this year. Her educational background included both bachelor's and master's degrees. She earned her doctorate degree from the University of Virginia. Her research on the pursuit of the superintendency and who was applying prepared her for the superintendent position. She was employed as a teacher and reading specialist. Her teaching experiences and reading specialist endorsement were the foundation for her passion and desire to teach students and lead adults. Mary (SL) never feared relocating and thrived on the challenges of every new administrative position she held in five different school divisions throughout Virginia. A male superintendent encouraged her to pursue her doctorate. After completing her degree, he promoted her to assistant superintendent and involved her in every aspect of the role and responsibilities of a superintendent. Mary (SL) valued her ability to establish relationships, communicate, and assist in the success of all of her stakeholders. As a realist, she recognized the perceptions that limit the advancement of women administrators, but she had the confidence, intelligence, and political astuteness to not let them hinder her progress. Mary's (SL) love for people and the profession was evident by her positive demeanor and responses.

The following three administrators were aspirants to the superintendency:

Study participant April (AS) has been in education for 23 years and has served in her present position as assistant superintendent of curriculum and personnel for five years. Her educational background included both bachelor's and master's degrees. She started her career in education as a first grade teacher and was promoted to assistant principal, principal, and human resource director before obtaining her present position. As a result of her wealth of knowledge and the experience of working in three Virginia school divisions, her next endeavor was to pursue the position of superintendent. Influenced by administrators early on in her career, it was

her female principal who encouraged her to obtain her degree in administration and supervision. Likewise, working with and observing three male and female superintendents influenced her to develop her own leadership style that will hopefully make her successful in the position of superintendent. April (AS) believed in doing what is the best for students through setting high expectations, collaboration, and inclusion. Her commitment to excellence and no-nonsense professional manner were revealed throughout her interview.

Study participant Marie (AM) has served in her present position as director of elementary education for six years. Her educational background included both bachelor's and master's degrees. She started her career as a teacher and was later promoted to assistant principal. After completing her master's degree, she had the unique experience of being told that she looked too young to hold a principal position; as a result, she returned to the classroom as a teacher. Appreciative of the unique opportunity, she experienced teaching through the lens of an administrator, and the experience influenced her career. Following her second stint of teaching, she was promoted to assistant principal where her duties were split between two elementary buildings. After one year, Marie (AM) advanced to principal and served in the position for six years. Her superintendent asked her to lead a different elementary school, and she accepted the offer. The next year she applied for her present position in a different school division. In total, she has been employed in four school divisions throughout Virginia. In an effort to positively influence the lives of students, a female director of instruction, a male principal, and a superintendent encouraged her to become an administrator. She planned to pursue the position of superintendent and credited three male superintendents who demonstrated strong leadership qualities for influencing her decision. Presently, in addition to her administrative position, she has taught aspiring teachers at a local university for more than five years. Her love for teaching and learning is evident. Marie (AM) based her view of educational leadership on three prongs; wisdom, humility, and courage.

Study participant June (AL) has served in her present position of assistant superintendent for five years. Her educational background included both bachelor's and master's degrees. Presently, she is working on her doctorate degree. June (AL) started her career as a teacher. While working in the school where she was first hired as a teacher, she was promoted to assistant principal. Six years later, June (AL) became the principal. She served as principal for three years and then pursued and was successful in obtaining a central office position. Due to the

economy and cuts in the school budget, she served as director of elementary education, executive director of instruction, and executive director within a two-year span. She had been employed in the same school division for over 20 years. Inspired by the strength of her mother, faith, encouragement from her female principal, and a male superintendent who valued her experience in the school division to hire her as assistant superintendent, Jane (AL) continued to pursue administrative positions. In addition, her inherent leadership traits and problem-solving skills have influenced her decision to consider one day applying for the position of superintendent. Doing what is best for students and building strong relationships were vital in all aspects of her decision-making as an educator. Jane (AL) had a keen interest in research related to the disproportionate number of female superintendents compared to male superintendents.

The following administrators were non-aspirants to the superintendency:

Study participant Julie (NS) served as director of elementary instruction for two years before retiring in 2016. Her educational background included earning a bachelor's degree in physical education and two master's degrees. Julie (NS) started her career in education as a high school teacher. After two years of teaching, she married and had children. Twelve years later, she returned to the workforce as an elementary teacher. Ten years later, she was hired as the coordinator of technology. She also served as a director of human resources, director of curriculum and instruction, and assistant superintendent for school improvement, and superintendent. Throughout her career, she has been employed in four Virginia school divisions. The support of her family and a male principal influenced her decisions to further her education and pursue administrative positions. However, she never had any intentions or desire to become a superintendent or pursue a doctorate degree. As a mediator and team-builder, it was evident that Julie (NS) valued being in a supportive role as an administrator.

Study participant Ann (NM) has served as executive director of special education for more than ten years. Because her original professional goal was to become a clinical psychologist, her educational background included earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. Due to financial restraints, she could not enter the doctoral program in psychology. Ann (NM) decided to enter the workforce where she assisted adults with disabilities. After a few years, she earned her master's degree in special education and obtained her teaching license. She taught in two Virginia school divisions. Due to her spiritual convictions, she described her career path as God's plan. Moving from teaching to a transition position in central office to middle school

specialist, she obtained her administration and supervision endorsement. In her position as supervisor for special education, she set a goal to be in her present position. Her husband's support and the encouragement of a female special education director influenced her to pursue administrative positions. Ann (NM) contemplated aspiring to the position of superintendent, but presently is not interested. Through her expertise in special education and collaborative leadership style, doing "what's best for kids" was her most important professional goal. (NM, 1273)

Study participant Sara (NL) has served as the director of elementary instruction for ten years. Her educational background included a bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's degree in educational leadership. Sara (NL) started her career as an elementary teacher. For nine years, she taught third and fourth graders. She was promoted to supervisor of elementary education and served in the position for seven years. With a total of 26 years in education, she spent her entire career in the same school division. Influenced by her mother, who was an educator, and being sought out to serve in leadership roles were the experiences that influenced Sara (NL) to pursue administrative positions. She had no desire to be a superintendent because she loved the direct influence she had on teaching and learning in her present position. With her strong convictions toward her family and her role as an educator, it was evident that she was committed to improving the quality of life for those under her care.

**Research Question 1: How do the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents compare to women aspiring to the superintendency and to those women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?**

Six interview questions were asked in response to this question. Interview questions #1, #2, #5, #8, #9, and #11 were associated with research question #1. Study participant responses are as follows.

**Interview Question 1: Tell me about yourself, your educational background and your career in education.** The basic demographic information found within Figure 4 reflects the educational background of the study participants. Of the nine participants, all have both undergraduate and master's degrees in education. Three of the participants also had doctorates. Of the three study participants with doctorates, they are all employed as superintendents in school divisions in Virginia.

Participant	Bachelor	Master	Doctorate	Teacher	Principal	Central Office	Superintendent
Jane	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Fran	X	X	X	X		X	X
Mary	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
April	X	X		X	X	X	
Marie	X	X		X	X	X	
June	X	X		X	X	X	
Julie	X	X		X		X	X
Ann	X	X		X		X	
Sara	X	X		X		X	

Figure 4. Educational background of participants and career paths of study participants.

Interview question one provided information about the study participants' career paths. As shown in Figure 4, study participants had been employed throughout their careers, starting as teachers and later serving in a variety of central office administrators' positions. All of the study participants had served as teachers. Five of the nine study participants had been principals. All of the study participants are currently in or have served in central office positions. Two of the three superintendents' career paths included teacher, principal, and central office administrators' positions. Study participant Fran (SM) is the only superintendent who had never been a principal prior to serving as a superintendent. The superintendents were the only participants with doctorates.

**Interview Question 2: What influenced your decision to become an educational administrator? Did a person (parent, student, administrator, teacher, or friend) influence you? Did any event(s) or occurrence(s) influence you?** In response to the interview question, interviewees shared the following answers. Study participant Jane indicated she was influenced by her mother, serving her students, watching other administrators who were real role models, and by a professor who suggested she had the personality profile of an administrator. Study participant Fran shared she was influenced by participating in a leadership program and being encouraged by others including her professor; she said,

Dr. Fakenname, who is sitting at the classroom table, kept pushing me. He said to me one time, 'you're more ready that you realize you are.' (Fran, / 169)

Study participant Mary said that receiving her master's degree in reading and becoming a reading specialist influenced her to pursue administration. She stated,

As my career opportunities advanced, I recognized that my circle of influence widened to be able to make things happen that are right for kids (Mary, / 116)

Study participant April shared, when she was a second grade teacher, her principal encouraged her to earn her master's degree in administration and supervision. Study participant Marie recalled three administrators who influenced her to become an educational leader. She remembered them in the following order: director of instruction, superintendent, and principal. Study participant June credited being blessed with a very strong mother figure and a principal who saw teacher leadership potential in her when she was in her second year of teaching for influencing her to seek administrative positions. Study participant Julie stated that both her principal and a superintendent suggested that she work on her master's degree to prepare for administrative positions. Study participant Ann confirmed the most important factor influencing her decision to pursue administration was the director of special education whom she had the privilege to work with in a previous school division. Study participant Sara identified her mother, who was a teacher, as an influence in her career pursuits. She added that progression in obtaining many leadership positions both in college and in the workforce and an education leadership program all contributed to her decision to become an administrator.

Figure 5 summarizes primary and as well as secondary responses that emerged when subject participants were asked what influenced their decision to become an educational administrator. Responses were identified from the interview transcripts of each study participant.

Response	Jane	Fran	Mary	April	Marie	June	Julie	Ann	Sara	n
Mother	X					X			X	3
Students	X									1
Professor	X	X								2
Leadership Program									X	1
Education			X							1
Mentor Principal	X				X		X			3
Mentor Superintendent	X				X		X			3
Mentor Director	X				X			X		3
Progression in Career									X	1
Thought of Greater Influence			X							1
Experience as Specialist			X							1
Being asked to Pursue		X								1

Figure 5. Participant response to what influenced your decision to become an educational administrator.

The data from Figure 5 illustrate the study participants' perspectives regarding what influenced them to become educational administrators. The response that emerged with the greatest frequency was mentors (n=9), followed by mothers (n=3), and then by professors (n=3). All study participants, except Mary and April, indicated at least one – mother, mentor, or professor -as influencing their decisions to seek administrative positions.

**Interview Question 5: How did your career path support or impede your progress toward obtaining your present position?** All study participants responded that their career paths, which included both a variety of leadership opportunities and encouragement, supported them in obtaining their present positions. In response to question 5, study participant Jane credited a principal, director, superintendent and professor as supportive and responsible for

advancing her career. The individuals had frank conversations with her, afforded her an opportunity to observe them at work, and ask questions. They exposed Jane to school policies and budgetary procedures and asked her to implement new initiatives. Study participant Fran had a “fantastic mentor” (Fran, *l* 290) who let her experience many opportunities outside of her job description. She added her central office administrative experiences K-12 and consultant work were instrumental throughout her career. Study participant Mary stated her positions as reading specialist, principal, and central office administrator provided the knowledge, administrative skills, and credibility to advance to the position of superintendent. Study participant April said she went the normal route, teacher, assistant principal, principal, director to assistant superintendent and was encouraged by people to pursue administration (April, *l* 146). She emphasized how important building relationships was to advancing her career. Study participant Marie described how she built upon her experiences as an elementary teacher, elementary principal, and presently a director and professor and the positive impact the positions had on her career. As a prayerful person, study participant June expressed how blessed she was to hold a number of central office administrative positions and have people believe in her and value her administrative abilities. Being employed as a central office administrator in a small Virginia school division, study participant Julie had the opportunity to experience overall how a school division operates. Those opportunities supported her ability to serve in a number of positions throughout her career. As a spiritual person, study participant Ann believed God puts people, experiences, and situations in our life that, if we are open, shapes who we are and she felt that that was what happened to advance her career in education (Ann, *l* 154). Lastly, study participant Sara mentioned a mentor who saw potential in her and encouraged her to pursue her present position. Intrinsically motivated, Sara described her career path as “being her calling” in pursuit of excellence in all that she does (Sara, *l* 288).

**Interview Question 8: Share a story that demonstrates your leadership style. How would you describe your style of leadership? Follow-up: What best describes your method of conflict resolution? What best describes your decision-making practice?** In response to interview question 8, study participants shared a story in which they were afforded an opportunity to demonstrate their leadership style. Study participant Jane discussed her role in bridging the gap between the new superintendent and the superintendent who exited the school division. During the beginning of the a school year, while meeting with the transportation staff,

study participant Fran shared her mother was a bus driver, and it was the first time she had spoken to a group since her death. She started crying and couldn't stop. Her staff appreciated her willingness to share her feelings openly. Study participant Mary said one of her favorite initiatives was hosting middle or high school students as "superintendent of the day." (SL, l 274) Both study participants April and Marie mentioned leading the restructuring process of instructional programs. Study participant June described the experience of leading the administrative team to be a more effective team with shared goals. Study participant Julie described the leadership skills she employed when faced with the challenge of a fire at her elementary school. Study participant Ann demonstrated her leadership skills by facilitating a team in the development of strategies to address the needs of students with autism. Lastly, study participant Sara facilitated the combining of staff of several schools into one at a new school. After the study participants shared their stories demonstrating their leadership styles, they were asked to describe their leadership style. Out of the nine study participants, seven described themselves as collaborative leaders. The seven study participants described collaborative leadership in terms of seeking input, asking questions, having conversations and building positive relationships. Study participant Jane stated she was a situational and transitional leader. Study participant Marie described herself as having wisdom, and being humble and courageous.

There were two follow-up questions that asked the study participants to describe their conflict resolution and decision-making skills. Eight of the nine study participants described their conflict resolution skills as gathering the appropriate people together, providing an opportunity for discussion, listening actively, mediating, developing a plan, and resolving the issue. Study participant Marie resolved conflicts by being direct, genuine, and assuming the best about people. In response to the follow-up question on decision-making, all of the study participants described themselves as either collaborative and/or highly participatory.

Figure 6 shares participant stories that demonstrated their leadership, conflict resolution, and decision-making styles. Themes were identified as the research investigator studied the transcripts of each study participant.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Leadership Story</b>	<b>Leadership Style</b>	<b>Conflict Resolution</b>	<b>Decision Making</b>
<b>Jane</b>	Bridged the Gap Between Superintendents	Situational Transitional	Participatory	Collaborative
<b>Fran</b>	Revealed Personal Traits to Transportation Staff	Collaborative	Participatory	Collaborative
<b>Mary</b>	Middle and High School “Superintendent of the Day” Initiative	Collaborative	Participatory	Highly Participatory
<b>April</b>	Restructured Literacy Program	Collaborative	Participatory	Collaborative
<b>Marie</b>	Restructured Instructional Program	Wise/Humble/Courageous	Direct/Genuine/Assuming the Best	Collaborative
<b>June</b>	Led Effective Team and Shared Goals Process	Collaborative	Participatory	Collaborative
<b>Julie</b>	Led During the Crisis of Elementary School Fire	Collaborative	Mediator	Collaborative
<b>Ann</b>	Led Process to Address the Needs of Students with Autism	Collaborative	Participatory	Collaborative
<b>Sara</b>	Facilitated the Combining of Staff from Schools	Collaborative	Participatory	Collaborative

*Figure 6.* Participant shares story demonstrating leadership, conflict resolution, and decision-making style.

Data from Figure 6 describe the study participants’ experiences that demonstrated their leadership, conflict resolution, and decision-making skills. Collaboration and participatory were the themes that emerged with the greatest frequency in regards to leadership (n=7), conflict resolution (n=7) and decision-making styles (n=8).

**Interview Question 9: As a woman administrator, describe what you believe are the elements of a supportive working environment.** When asked by the research investigator to describe the elements of a supportive work environment, study participant Jane listed opportunities for professional development to build capacity in staff, open communications, and support. Study participant Fran described a supportive work environment as being a place where the administration is accessible, where there is clarity in regard to responsibilities, open communications, a sense of caring, and fun. Study participant Mary mentioned trust, respect, and transparency. An open door policy, active listening, caring, and enjoyable were the elements of a supportive work environment discussed by study participant April. Study participant Marie highlighted the following elements of a supportive working environment: positive relationships, clarity, open door policy, collaboration, being viewed as a valuable employee, student-centered, respect, and no sarcasm. Study participant June emphasized active listening, relationships, trust, transparency, and caring in supportive working environment. Study participant Julie stressed that the team should feel valued. She said the elements of active listening, trust, and positive relationships are her view of a supportive work environment. Study participant Ann brought to light the need for a supportive superintendent as an element of a supportive work environment (NM, / 281). She added trust, joy, and letting people know they are valued. Study participant Sara identified caring, an open-door policy, communications, active listening, follow-through, and humor as being critical in a supportive environment.

Figure 7 summarizes primary and secondary responses that emerged when participants were asked to describe the elements of a supportive working environment.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Jane</b>	<b>Fran</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>Marie</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>Julie</b>	<b>Ann</b>	<b>Sara</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Professional Development</b>	X									1
<b>Supportive</b>	X									1
<b>Open Door Policy</b>		X		X	X				X	4
<b>Enjoyable</b>				X				X	X	3
<b>Trust</b>			X			X	X	X		4
<b>Transparency</b>			X			X				2
<b>Collaboration</b>					X					1
<b>Viewed as Valuable Employee</b>					X		X	X		3
<b>Caring</b>		X		X		X			X	4
<b>Student Centered</b>					X					1
<b>Clarity</b>		X			X					2
<b>Supportive Superintendent Relationships</b>								X		1
<b>Active Listening</b>				X		X	X			3
<b>No Sarcasm</b>					X					1
<b>Communications</b>	X	X							X	3
<b>Respect</b>			X		X					2
<b>Follow Through</b>									X	1

*Figure 7.* Participant perceptions of the elements of a support work environment.

Figure 7 contains data that illustrate the study participants' thoughts regarding the elements of a supportive work environment. The responses that emerged with the greatest frequency (n=4) were open-door policy, trust, caring, and relationships. While they were mentioned most frequently, no current superintendent mentioned "relationship," and only one superintendent mentioned "open-door policy, trust, or caring." Communications, active listening, being a valued employee and joy were popular responses (n=3) as elements of a supportive working environment. The only one of these areas mentioned by more than one

current superintendent was communication. No responses were shared by a majority of the participants.

**Research Question 2: What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent?**

Six interview questions were asked in response to research question two. Interview questions

#3, #4, #6, #7, #10, and #11 were associated with research question #2.

**Interview Question 3: Share with me the leadership skills that describe your expectations for a superintendent. Are there skills women may be more effective at than men? Conversely, are there skills men may be more effective at? Describe those skills and traits making you effective in your present position.** Study participant Jane described her expectations for a superintendent as a person who must exhibit strong written and oral communication skills, have sound judgment, be financially savvy, and demonstrate strong interpersonal skills. She added that the person must understand and know how to interpret school law and human resource issues. Communications, consistency in actions, self-awareness, collaboration, ability to articulate a vision for the school division, and a systems thinker were the expectations that study participant Fran listed. Study participant Mary stated a superintendent should be approachable, have strong interpersonal skills, be a good steward with finances, and collaborate with stakeholders. Study participant April also mentioned collaboration, as well as shared decision-making, transparency, and being open and honest as her expectations for a superintendent. Being ethical, wise, humble, supportive, approachable, courageous, were study participant Marie's expectations for a superintendent. She also included the ability to articulate a vision for the school division. Study participant June expected a superintendent to be about students first, to be an active listener, be an effective communicator, demonstrate strong interpersonal skills, have leadership presence, and be authentic. Study participant Julie described her expectations for a superintendent as an educator who has vision, integrity, can be respected and admired by people. She added that the person should be a servant, demonstrate strong interpersonal and collaboration skills and have a good sense of humor. Being an instructional leader, having a good sense of the political players and landscape, a visionary, strong interpersonal skills, and knowing how to collaborate were study participant Ann's expectations for a superintendent. Finally, study participant Sara listed diplomacy, being politically-oriented,



<b>Consistency</b>		X							1
<b>Self-Awareness</b>		X							1
<b>Shared Decision Making</b>				X					1
<b>Supportive</b>					X				1
<b>Leadership Presence</b>						X			1
<b>Humor</b>							X		1
<b>Servant</b>							X		1
<b>Respect/Admire</b>							X		1
<b>Communications</b>	X	X						X	3
<b>Respect</b>			X		X				2
<b>Follow Through</b>								X	1

*Figure 8.* Participant perceptions of desirable superintendent characteristics.

The data from Figure 8 illustrate the study participants' perspectives on the leadership skills that describe their expectations for a superintendent. The response that emerged with the greatest frequency was interpersonal skills (n=5), followed by communications (n=4) and approachable (n=4). The ability to articulate a vision for the school division (n=3) and ethical/honest/integrity (n=3) were also popular responses. Current superintendents were in greater agreement in their responses to the questions. Two of the three mentioned interpersonal skills, communication and approachable. None of the current superintendents mentioned ethics/honesty/integrity and only one mentioned vision articulation.

In response to the follow-up questions for interview question #3 which asked, "Are there skills women may be more effective at than men?" respondents also considered whether there are skills that men wield better than women do. The superintendent study participants, Jane, Fran, and Mary, stated absolutely not. They explained males and females exhibit some of the same skills. Mary added that most skills are seen in both sides. In regard to exhibiting effective leadership skills, study participants April and Marie agreed they felt it depends on the personality of the individual, not gender. Study participant June explained there is research suggesting there are gender-based skills and research suggesting there are not. She concluded she does not believe there are women who are inherently more effective in leadership than men and vice-versa. Study participant Sara concurred that it depends on the person, but felt men are probably

better networkers, hand shakers, and back patters. She attributed this to more men being in leadership positions and men participating on sports teams. Both study participants Julie and Ann delineated the differences between the leadership skills of females and males. Study participant Julie described women as being more detail-oriented, compassionate, understanding of human nature, empathetic, and more willing to meet others where they are. She added women are able to reach others on a better level because they do not have to come across as being so dictatorial or hardnosed. She concluded women don't look at themselves as being important or valuable. On the other hand, she stated men do not work as well with others. She described men as having a strong sense of self-importance, and suggested that sense might be the result of genetics. She added that men cut right to the chase, have an agenda, and they know what they want. Study participant Ann agreed with Julie in that women are more detailed and relationship oriented. She explained that women are criticized when they are critical and/or demanding of others. However, when she discussed males, she suggested men get away with ruffling feathers, being more demanding, more critical, and a little harder on people, but that men do not get any "flak." In reviewing the responses, all superintendents and aspiring superintendents indicated skills were not dependent on gender, while the three non-aspiring superintendents gave examples to illustrate differences based on gender.

When asked to describe those skills and traits that lead to effectiveness, the study participants shared the following responses. Study participant Jane described herself as possessing intuitiveness in engagement with stakeholders and her belief that it is her role to serve at the will of the stakeholders. She continued by saying she knows how to adapt her leadership style depending on the situation. Because of her interpersonal skills, study participant Jane stated that she can relate to people and understands their needs. Lastly, she advised leaders to not take events or circumstances personally. Adaptability was also mentioned by study participant Fran. She listed collaboration and communication as skills and traits make her effective in her present position. Study participant Mary stated she is approachable, understands the diversity in the community and shows appreciation for all. Putting kids first, collaboration but knowing when to employ authoritative skills, understanding diversity, and her educational background and experiences were the skills and traits she discussed that make her effective in her current position. Study participant Marie described herself as being able to develop relationships and remain focused. She also indicated she was a planner, fair, a skilled

communicator, trustworthy, supportive, wise, resourceful, humble, and courageous. Building upon her years of experience, she proclaimed her passion about doing the right things for students. Study participant June agreed with both April and Marie with regard to putting students first. Empowering people and her interpersonal and communication skills were described as traits that make her effective in her present position. She said that she is supportive, provides guidance, encourages open dialogue, and likes to have fun. Study participant Julie described collaboration, showing appreciation for the team, being resourceful, and a sense of humor were the skills and traits that have made her effective. Study participant Ann stated that she is a strong instructional leader, collaborates, and is intuitive when selecting staff members. She added that she can see the big picture as well as being detail oriented. Study participant Sara attributed her effectiveness as a leader to her communication, interpersonal and collaboration skills.

Figure 9 summarizes primary as well as secondary responses that emerged when the study participants were asked to describe those skills and traits that led to their effectiveness in their present position.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Jane</b>	<b>Fran</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>Marie</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>Julie</b>	<b>Ann</b>	<b>Sara</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Intuitiveness</b>	X							X		2
<b>Service</b>	X									1
<b>Adaptable</b>	X	X								2
<b>Understand Needs</b>	X									1
<b>Interpersonal Skills</b>	X					X			X	3
<b>Do Not Personalize</b>	X									1
<b>Collaboration</b>		X		X		X	X	X	X	<b>6</b>
<b>Communications</b>		X				X			X	3
<b>Approachable</b>			X							1
<b>Understand Diversity</b>			X	X						2
<b>Shows Appreciation</b>			X			X	X			3
<b>Students First</b>				X	X	X				3

<b>Authoritative When Needed</b>				X						1
<b>Education</b>				X						1
<b>Experience</b>				X	X					2
<b>Develop Relationships</b>					X					1
<b>Focused</b>					X					1
<b>Planner</b>					X					1
<b>Fair</b>					X					1
<b>Follow - up</b>					X					1
<b>Trust</b>					X					1
<b>Supportive</b>					X	X	X			3
<b>Wise</b>					X					1
<b>Resourceful</b>					X					1
<b>Humble</b>					X					1
<b>Courage</b>					X					1
<b>Empower Others</b>						X				1
<b>Guide</b>						X				1
<b>Open</b>						X				1
<b>Fun/Humor</b>						X	X			2
<b>Instructional Leader</b>								X		1
<b>Big Picture and Detailed</b>								X		1

*Figure 9.* Participant responses to the skills and traits making them effective in their present positions.

The data from Figure 9 illustrate the study participants' thoughts on those skills and traits making them effective in their present positions. The response that emerged with the greatest frequency was collaboration (n=6). Collaboration was followed by the responses interpersonal skills (n=3), communications (n=3), showing appreciation (n=3), putting students first (n=3), and being supportive (n=3). While collaboration was the most frequent response, only one superintendent mentioned it. All three non-aspiring superintendents mentioned collaborations.

“Students first” was mentioned by all three aspiring superintendents but was not mentioned by any other group.

**Interview Question 4: What experience(s) influenced you to become a superintendent?**

Study participant Jane stated her experience as a classroom teacher sparked her interest in becoming a superintendent. She recognized the influence she had over her students and parents could be on a larger scale if she became a superintendent. Another experience influencing her decision to become a superintendent was when she was serving as an assistant superintendent. She credited a male superintendent mentor as an influence in her career choice to become a superintendent and noted that she was asked to apply. Study participant Fran said she also had a male superintendent mentor, was asked to apply, and that other people encouraged her to seek out the position. She shared these thoughts:

One of the deciding factors that influenced me to pursue the superintendency was when I would sit in a board meeting and feel myself saying, well, if I were superintendent, I would do it this way. You know that maybe your brain is leading you to become a superintendent. So I thought, maybe I should try this. (Fran, l 130)

Study participant Mary attributed working with a male superintendent mentor as the experience that influenced her to become a superintendent. All three current superintendents were influenced by male superintendents.

**Interview Question 4: What experience(s) influenced you to pursue the position of superintendent?** Both study participants April and Marie stated the experiences of working with three superintendents influenced their decisions to pursue the position of superintendent. Study participant June explained she views her leadership skills as inherited traits, that she is intrinsically motivated, and the experience of watching her mother’s strength as a single mom influenced her to pursue the superintendency. She added a female principal mentor influenced her, too. Two of the three aspiring superintendents were influenced by a superintendent and the other was influenced by a school principal, suggesting school and division leadership influenced their decisions.

**Interview Question 4: What experience(s) influenced you to not pursue the position of superintendent?** Study participant Julie said she did not pursue the position of superintendent because she did not want to have the final responsibility of making the really tough decisions,

did not want to be on call 24 hours, seven days a week, did not want the extra stress, and never had any aspirations of being a superintendent. She added that she is happy being in a supportive role and values her family time. Study participant Ann described the position of superintendent as being too political, thankless, difficult, and very, very stressful. She said she can make just as much of a difference doing what she does now and enjoys her present position. She added that she has no experience as a building level principal and that she might be typecast because her entire career has been in special education. Study participant Sara stated that the position of superintendent is not the work she wants to do because a superintendent is never home and as superintendent is in the community spotlight. She shared that the farther away you are from the classroom you get, the less you are able to do, and that you don't have the direct influence on teaching and learning. She expressed her love for the work she is presently doing and wants to give her husband and children her full attention as a wife, mother, and parent. All three non-aspiring superintendents indicated that the intensity of the work was a deciding factor.

**Interview Question 6: What may be external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent? Give examples of barriers.** Study participant Jane elaborated on how, in the past, the demands of the long hours, days, and weekends would impact a woman administrator in terms of being a spouse, raising children, and home responsibilities were barriers for obtaining the position of superintendent. She emphasized conditions are changing. Women leaders are “thinking outside of the box” and making it all work. Study participant Fran responded with the conflict of raising children and having to relocate as a barrier for women. She said there is still a perception the female will follow the male rather than the opposite. Study participant Fran added that people saw men as the superintendent like high school principals and females are good at teaching but can't manage finances, or keep buildings safe. She believes some communities are just not ready for a female. Study participant Mary concurred women administrators had difficulty with relocating due to the fact that they are married and raising families, and the husband was probably the “bread winner.” She mentioned salaries as a barrier because women administrators watch their male counterparts get higher salaries. Study participant April stated balancing a career and raising a family as barriers to women who consider pursuing the superintendency. On a personal note, she added caring for aging and sick parents as a potential barrier. She expressed it takes women longer, they have to work harder, and they may conclude that it is not worth it. Perceptions of women

leaders, situational biases, and balancing a career with family/home responsibilities were barriers listed by study participant Marie. Study participant June highlighted the salary concern in which women are still not paid at the level that men are paid in similar positions as a barrier to women administrators. She repeated the observation of communities not supporting female superintendents and that the “good ol’ boy thing” exists and is real. The cultural bias and perception of women’s inability to properly balance a career and motherhood were shared by study participant June as barriers, too.

Study participant Julie listed the “good ol’ boy” network, community resistance, male/female stereotypes, and balancing career and homemaker/mother as barriers to women administrators becoming superintendents. She shared that women are not as aggressive as men and that men expect to be superintendent. She felt women realize that they have to work twice as hard for the same position and that they need to prove they are just as good as men. As a result of raising children, study participant Ann said the fact that women get started later on the administrative track is also a barrier to women in pursuing the superintendency. Her thoughts were that women are not taken seriously. She concluded by saying that maybe women go into education because they really want to teach, and they have no desire to be administrators. Study participant Sara stated that certainly the woman’s role in the family and the guilt associated with balancing a career and motherhood were barriers. She suggested that there may be a perception that women cannot handle leadership positions, that women are viewed as being softer, that they are not “good ol’ boys,” and that these perceptions are all barriers to women obtaining the position of superintendent. She added

“[A] woman has to prove herself ten times more than a man.” (Sara, *l* 330)

Figure 10 summarizes primary as well as secondary responses that emerged when study participants were asked what may be external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Jane</b>	<b>Fran</b>	<b>Mary</b>	<b>April</b>	<b>Marie</b>	<b>June</b>	<b>Julie</b>	<b>Ann</b>	<b>Sara</b>	<b>n</b>
<b>Long Hours/Days</b>	X									1
<b>Children/ Families</b>	X	X		X			X	X	X	6
<b>Husband/ Spouse</b>	X			X	X				X	1
<b>Home Responsibilities</b>	X						X			2
<b>Moving/ Relocating</b>		X	X							2
<b>Females followed Males</b>		X	X							2
<b>Superintendent Male Role</b>		X								1
<b>Teachers Female Role</b>		X								1
<b>Community Not Ready</b>		X				X	X			3
<b>Salaries Males Paid Higher</b>			X			X				2
<b>Balancing Career and Family/Guilt</b>	X			X	X	X			X	5
<b>Aging/Sick Parent</b>				X						1
<b>Women Work Harder/Longer</b>				X			X			2
<b>Perceptions of Women</b>					X	X	X		X	4
<b>Situational</b>					X					1
<b>Good Ol 'Boy System</b>						X	X		X	3
<b>Cultural Gender Bias/Stereotype</b>						X	X		X	3
<b>Males Expect Position</b>							X			1
<b>Women Have to Prove Themselves</b>							X		X	2
<b>Women Start Administration Later</b>								X		1
<b>Women Not Taken Seriously</b>								X		1
<b>Women Want to Teach Politics</b>								X		1

<b>Women Viewed as Softer</b>										X	1
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*Figure 10.* Participant perceptions of what may be external and/or internal barriers to the superintendency.

The data from Figure 10 illustrates the study participants' perceptions of external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent. The response that emerged with the greatest frequency was Children/Families (n=6). Children/Families was followed by the response Balancing Career and Family/Guilt (n=5). The Perception of Women Leaders was the next response that was mentioned by four of the five study participants, followed by Community –Not Ready (n=3), Good Ol' Boy System (n=3), and Cultural Gender Bias/Stereotype (n=3). Two current superintendents agreed on Child/Family and one current superintendent also mentioned Community/Not Ready and Balancing Career and Family/Guilt. None of the current superintendents mentioned any of the other frequent responses. Additionally, all three non-aspiring superintendents mentioned Child/Family, while all three aspiring superintendents mentioned Balancing Career and Family/Guilt.

**Interview Question 7: What, if any, personal challenges face women who are seeking leadership roles? Follow-up: If you were to categorize these challenges, do they fall under social (or societal), organizational, relationships, family, and/or other?** Study participant Jane said that home responsibilities, the perception that women superintendents are not financial leaders and all of the listed categories (societal, organizational, relationship, and family) are personal challenges that women face. Study participant Fran stated that it is “our life,” the management of family and spouse, and many people are not pleased that they have to discuss a tough topic with a female, and some people don't want to interact with a female. The main personal challenges are family and children, according to study participant Mary. She added that people think that a woman cannot handle maintenance, construction, architects, or renovations. Study participant April listed family and organizational challenges, and the idea that society often expects the head of a school division to be male because of the personal issues women face.

Study participant Marie narrowed her response to balance of family, balance of life situations, and battling perceptions of women leaders as personal challenges women face. The challenges study participant June highlighted are the belief that you can't be a leader and be an

effective mom, societal preconceived notions, the struggle with balancing family and relationships, and traditional roles and stereotypical behavior. Study participant Julie concurred with the notion of marriage, children, family, and relationship barriers, but added that sometimes husbands believe that the wife's first duty is to him and the children. Study participant Ann said making sacrifices like working long hours, being willing to relocate, and giving up their interests outside their jobs as personal challenges. She wondered if women have the confidence to compete against men. Lastly, study participant Sara shared that women are their own worst enemies because they accept the idea of what women are supposed to be and do, related to family and societal views. She pointed out that organizational challenges like maternity leave are personal challenges women face. She suggested that women work twice as hard and sometimes "play catch up" because they also have families. She concluded her response by saying that women don't have the same freedom she thinks that men often have. Most of the participants, regardless of their interest in the superintendency, indicated that family and societal expectations were issues.

**Interview Question 10: Compare how men and women are viewed as leaders. Are women superintendents perceived differently by the school board and community? If so, how? What may influence these perceptions?** Three study participants (Jane, Fran and Mary) agreed that the way female and male superintendents are viewed as leaders depends on the school board and community. Study participant Jane said that, in general, females are instructional people who are the deliverers of instruction. They have to guide instruction, then get in and actually do the work. In contrast, she commented that she is not sure that the expectation of being well-versed in instructional practices for males is the same as it is for women. Males generally guide the work rather than doing the work. Study participant Fran elaborated on the views of the school board and community. She felt that some school boards see strength in the traditional model where men lead school divisions. She described it as some communities being more reserved than others. In her situation, she wondered if the school board would be willing to hire two females in a row or whether they would feel obligated to hire a male. When comparing females to males in educational leadership, she sees the expectation that men have strength to manage and control, discipline, work big projects, teach a while, become an assistant principal, and then move up the ladder. She described the expectation for women as that they have a deeper understanding of the curriculum, are good with children, great with

instruction, spend a longer period in the classroom, but are lacking in some of the other skills and are in the minority when it comes to being superintendents. Study participant Mary discussed her own experiences. She said that the relationship between superintendent and school board is like a marriage. Similar to study participant Fran, she questioned the selection process, whether women candidates are treated fairly. Study participant Mary revealed that her salary is lower than her male counterparts; the board of supervisors, who are all men, have not always held her in high regard, and they have not given her credit or recognition even though they know that she has earned it. She added that the community still has work to do in the area of accepting women as leaders, that the “glass ceiling” is still not broken, and that there is still a preference that men should be in her role. However, she recognized that she has to work with the school board in order to secure resources and support for her students (Mary, 1412). When comparing men and women as leaders, study participants April, Marie, and June agreed that the way the school board and community views women as leaders compared to men is based on the culture and the situation. Study participant June concluded her response by observing that perceptions are very personal and are based on individual experiences and interactions that can form prejudices or bias. Three study participants Julie, Ann, and Sara, shared that they either witnessed or experienced members of the school board and the board of supervisors treat female and male superintendents in different ways. In her role as interim superintendent, study participant Julie shared that in some cases the school board does not show the same trust in or value the depth of knowledge or leadership skills demonstrated by a female. She revealed that it is easy for a female superintendent to generate opposition from the school board, and that one board member who does not have faith in her can do and say enough to turn the others against her. After being reassured that she could be honest and open with her response to the question, study participant Ann described how the board of supervisors responded differently to the male superintendent compared to the female superintendent in her division. She said the male superintendent was not questioned about the budget as harshly as the female superintendent was questioned. She had to work harder to convince the board of supervisors about the needs of the division. Male superintendents told the principals what to do, but when the female superintendent told the principals what to do, she would get resistance. She was cautious with directives to principals. Study participant Ann observed how careful and cautious the female superintendent was when dealing with the community. She concluded with the thought that she didn’t think the male

superintendent got the same scrutiny. Study participant Sara expressed her comparison of men and women superintendents by first stating how men are generally viewed as strong leaders, having authority, and worthy of respect just because they are male. She suggested women have to really fight for the same perception. She further claimed that when women are assertive, they are labeled negatively and are subject to name-calling, whereas assertive men are received affirmatively. Study participant Sara shared a personal experience in which she was completely supported by the school board, but not the board of supervisors. In her opinion, the board of supervisors had a “good ol’ boy” mentality; she believed they would listen politely, but would dismiss her concerns without considering them seriously. She said that a male superintendent would not be treated that way. There was consistency among the participants, regardless of their aspirations, that women and men superintendents were viewed differently and women’s strengths were perceived to be in instruction.

**Interview Question 11: Are there any other thoughts you might like to add?** Study participant Jane shared the following observations. She said that being a superintendent is hard work and that males seem to have it easier. She observed that male superintendents play golf, and females superintendent are excluded from that social environment. She concluded her remarks with expressing how the superintendent of the year award is male-dominated. Study participant Fran suggested people should understand that it is not necessary to follow the traditional ladder of a high school principal becoming the superintendent. She explained that other paths to the superintendency are just as viable. She stated her extensive K-12 central office administrative responsibilities and consultant work prepared her well for the position of superintendent. Study participants Mary, April, Marie, and Ann had no additional comments. Study participant June suggested that there are not enough women superintendents, but that once women break through the “glass ceiling,” they will have a positive influence on the education of children. Study participant Julie advocated for women to continue to put themselves in competition to become administrators because of their skills and talents in working with children of all ages. She observed similar skills may be lacking in men. She reiterated that many women have virtues that men do not. Study participant Julie listed the following virtues many women have that men do not: women are more detailed oriented, compassionate, and more understanding of human nature. She added that women are able to reach others on a better level without coming across as being dictatorial or hardnosed. She said that women are more

empathetic and much more willing to meet others where they are (Julie, *l* 149). Because of the heightened awareness of women's rights, study participant Sara stated that the topic of the study was timely. She added that it is something we all should be thinking about.

### **Summary**

Chapter Four collected and analyzed data on the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents as compared to the experiences and characteristics of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those who choose not to seek the position of superintendent. The data reveal factors that influenced women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Data were also presented on the study participants' expectations of a superintendent. Study participants shared the skills and traits that make them effective in their current positions. Study participants were asked to share a story that demonstrated their leadership styles, and described their methods of conflict resolution, and their decision making practices. Lastly, data were highlighted regarding the external and internal barriers, personal challenges faced by women administrators, and the way in which men and women superintendents are viewed differently by school boards and the community. These data will lead to findings, implications and recommendations for additional research. Chapter 5 presents study findings.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Findings**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of the study was to contribute to existing research by investigating and developing an understanding of factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Further, this qualitative study determined the relevance of identified factors on decisions made by study participants and explained the impact of similar experiences on those decisions. The data were gathered through an interview protocol to capture perspectives, perceptions and experiences of the study participants. The study was designed as a multiple subject study to capture and analyze the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents and compare them to women administrators who aspire to be superintendents or who have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). The interview protocol was designed to collect and analyze those factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. The research questions follow:

#### **Research Questions**

These questions guided the direction of the research study:

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?
2. What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

#### **Summary of Findings**

Chapter five describes findings based on perspectives, perceptions, and experiences of the study participants. The findings were identified based on the interview transcripts of the participants. As part of the analysis process, the findings are presented in association with the relevant research literature.

### **Finding One**

**Study participants suggested that educational leaders influenced their decisions to become educational administrators.** Of the nine study participants who were interviewed, the following were reported. Seventy-eight percent of study participants identified a principal, superintendent, and/or director as influencing them to become educational leaders. This finding supported the research of Brunner and Grogan (2007) in their survey regarding the support practices that help women administrators obtain leadership positions. Female respondents to their survey said they mentor others aspiring to administration, were mentored themselves, and were encouraged to become central office administrators by male superintendents.

### **Finding Two**

**Study participants described their style of leadership, their method of conflict resolution, and their decision-making practice as collaborative.** Out of the nine study participants, seven study participants (78 %) described their leadership style as collaborative. In response to the two follow-up questions, eight of the nine study (89%) participants described their conflict resolutions skills as gathering the appropriate people together, providing an opportunity for discussion, active listening, mediating, developing a plan, and resolving the issue. All of the study participants described themselves as either collaborative and/or highly participatory in their decision-making practices. Study participants employ these skills by involving staff in data analysis, seeking input regarding new initiatives, and empowering people to share in the ownership of final outcomes. The research of Brunner and Grogan (2007) and Prince (2005) aligned with this finding, noting that men tend to lead from top down, while women tend to be collaborative in their leadership roles.

### **Finding Three**

**Study participants described interpersonal skills, good communication, and approachability as the leadership skills needed by a superintendent.** Fifty-six percent of the study participants expected superintendents to exhibit strong interpersonal skills; slightly fewer expected good communication and approachability. Due to the changing demographics and increased diversity in public schools, Grogan's (2000) research suggested superintendents continue to enhance their human relation skills.

All of the superintendent study participants and aspiring study participants explained that females and males exhibit the same leadership skills. On the other hand, all of the non-aspiring study participants claimed that there were differences in the leadership skills of female and male educational leaders.

Crosby-Hillier (2012) and Grogan (2000) described the following practices as attributes for educational leaders in response to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century teacher and learner: empowering others, commitment to listening and learning, taking into account how differing voices contribute to a better understanding, considering issues from multiple perspectives, and promoting positive working relationships. According to Brunner and Grogan (2007) and Prince (2005, the male model of leadership tends to lead from top down and the female model of leadership tends to be collaborative.

#### **Finding Four**

**Study participants who are superintendents agreed that a male superintendent role model/mentor influenced them to become superintendents.** The three sitting superintendents credited a male superintendent role model/mentor as influencing them to become superintendent. Their responses aligned with Brunner and Grogan's (2007) research stating that women administrators who became superintendents were mentored by male superintendents.

Two of the three study participants added that they were asked to apply for the superintendent position. Young and McLeod's (2001) research found three main factors that emerged in impacting female leadership: "role models, exposure to leadership styles, and endorsements." All three factors must be present for women educators to seek an administrative career.

**Study participants who were aspiring to become superintendents stated that being mentored by administrators had influenced them to pursue the position of superintendent.** All three participants who are aspiring to become superintendents said that mentors have influenced them to pursue the position of superintendent. Two of the three study participants discussed being mentored while working specifically with three superintendents. Marshall (1984) stated that successful women superintendent aspirants have a mentor or sponsor during pursuit of the superintendency. The mentors help them by affording them role models for administrative functions; ways to learn attitudes, behaviors, and norms; support so that women

can maintain their confidence and aspirations during difficult times; and information about and recommendations for administrative positions.

**Study participants who were not seeking the superintendency indicated that the intensity of the superintendent's work influenced their decision not to pursue the superintendency.** All the study participants who were not interested in pursuing the position of superintendent expressed satisfaction and love for the work they do in their present positions. Two of the three participants described the position of superintendent as difficult work and valued their family time too much to pursue the position of superintendent. A synthesis of Brunner and Grogan's (2007) research suggested that women administrators who choose not to pursue the position of superintendent for the following reasons: content in their present positions, dislike the politics of the superintendency, view the position of superintendent as too stressful, and belief that the superintendent's salary is not high enough for the weight of the job.

### **Finding Five**

**Study participants suggested that having a family/children and balancing a career with family responsibilities were potential barriers for women seeking the superintendency.** Sixty-seven percent of the study participants stated having a family and children is an internal barrier preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent. Grogan's (1996) study revealed competing tensions among partnering, mothering, and homemaking and the decision of women administrators who elect to pursue or not pursue the superintendency. Women administrators stated tensions felt in the following ways: fear of failing as a mother, responsibility for the maintenance of personal relationships, and coping with household labor. Brunner and Grogan (2007) found that despite the changing roles of husbands and wives in the home, women still maintain the majority of childcare and household chores and responsibilities; women are well aware of the demands and challenges superintendents face in their positions. Overall, societal norms hinder women administrators as these relate to family responsibilities.

Balancing a family and career was mentioned by fifty-six percent (56%) of the study participants as an internal barrier. When faced with the experience of spoiled identity, women are cast into role conflict in making a choice between one role and another. The basic choice between the roles of wife-mother and career woman can create great anxiety given the time that

both take. But when faced with the issue of the stigma attached to the role of career, Darley (1976) asserted that women often avoid the career achievement-oriented role and accept the mother-wife role. (Jones & Montenegro, 1983).

A counterpoint to Finding Seven, Brunner and Grogan's (2007) research indicated in the area of raising their own children, seated superintendents and aspiring female administrators generally had more children than non-aspiring females, bringing into question the notion that women choose between motherhood and the superintendency, or that women who aspire put off the superintendency so that they can raise their children. Jones and Montenegro (1983) found that although role conflict existed for women educational administrators, they were not hindered by it. They were neither less efficient nor less effective than men.

### **Finding Six**

**Study participants suggested that negative perceptions of female leaders were potential barriers for women administrators seeking and obtaining the position of superintendent.**

The negative perception of female leaders was identified as an external barrier to women administrators obtaining the position of superintendent. Included in Grogan's (1999) research on the disproportionate numbers of women in the superintendent positions as compared to men, two main insights were revealed. First, women administrators experience conflicting discourse. Second, women's ways of leading are considered secondary or subordinate to men's ways. Derrington and Sharratt's (2009) surveys identified three major barriers. They included sex role stereotyping, sex discrimination, and the lack of role models/mentors to guide women into the superintendency. Prince's (2005) article claimed that obstacles women administrators face included the following negative perceptions: family obligations will limit women administrators; finances are not their strong suit; or that they are somehow less logical than men.

### **Finding Seven**

**Study participants stated that individual school boards and communities influence how women and men are viewed as leaders and whether or not women superintendents are perceived differently.** All superintendent and aspiring-to-be-superintendent study participants agreed that the particular school board and community determined how women superintendents

are compared to male superintendents. Brunner and Grogan (2007) found in their research factors influencing the hiring of women administrators for the job of superintendent: the views and composition of the school board, the number of women in the community who are employed in high-power jobs, and vocal advocates who may promote the idea that students should see women in the roles of authority.

One hundred percent of the non-aspiring participants stated that they either witnessed or experienced members of the school board and the community treat female and male superintendents in different ways. In Scott's (1986) research, she claimed that gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power. Historically, she added images of power evoked "manly" adjectives such as *strong*, *protective*, *visionary* and *fatherly*, while those not in power are *weak*, *vulnerable*, and *needy*. West and Fenstermaker (1993) argued that membership in one or other of the genders carries with it the accomplishments of activities of such gender, as to be seen as male or female. Consequently, it is not yet possible to conceive of an ungendered superintendent. Either the superintendent is a male, which is synonymous with the traditional idea of superintendent in many people's minds, or it is the opposite: it is a woman superintendent.

### **Implications for Practitioners**

Based on the findings from this study, the following implications should be considered by school leaders for advancing the careers of women administrators who are considering the superintendency.

#### **Implication One**

**Professional associations should develop mentoring programs to support females who have indicated an interest in pursuing the superintendency.** An essential component to the success of women administrators who are aspiring to obtain the position of superintendent is being mentored by both female and male superintendents. The establishment of formal mentoring and sponsorship networks could be effective for the professional growth and advancement of women administrators.

### **Implication Two**

**School divisions should develop training and support opportunities to enhance and expand the skills of females who have indicated an interest in the superintendency.** Women superintendents and central office administrators would benefit from acquiring the necessary skills to perform successfully in their positions by pursuing advanced degrees and participating in high quality professional development. Women administrators pursuing the position of superintendent would benefit from opportunities to demonstrate their leadership capabilities.

### **Implication Three**

**Professional associations should develop programs for school boards and community groups that will expand those groups' understanding and acceptance of female leadership.** Programs that highlight the contributions and achievements of women administrators should be developed and shared with school boards and the community, especially in areas of responsibility most often associated with male administrators. The programs should focus on such areas as budgetary matters, facilities, and maintenance.

### **Implication Four**

**Females who are interested in the superintendency should access networking opportunities to alter the stereotypical opinion of female leaders.** Women superintendents and administrators should share experiences related to their career paths, including any obstacles and/or barriers they have faced, with females interested in the superintendency. Both male and female superintendents should serve as resources and advocates to combat negative stereotypical perceptions of female educational leaders.

### **Implication Five**

**Higher educational leadership programs should include topics related to networking, mentoring, and division-level leadership to support females interested in the superintendency.** Networking, mentoring, and division-level leadership are important components to the success of women administrators interested in becoming superintendents. Higher educational leadership programs which instruct school leaders on how to network, serve

as mentors, seek out mentors and sponsorships, and enhance division–level leadership should be developed.

In addition to the implications for practitioners, following is a discussion of the tenets of the feminist poststructuralist theory and the need for its application in making the superintendency more attractive to nontraditional aspirants, the majority of whom are women.

### **Feminist Poststructuralist Framework – Results Analysis**

Because the goal of the feminist theory is to give voice to women, the interview questions in the study responded to Gardiner's (2000) definition of the theory as follows:

Feminist theory validates multiple and diverse perspectives, in particular the values of examining these perspectives to clarify one's beliefs and values, and for the pedagogical opportunities to help one to consider viewpoints of other individuals. Women learn from other women's voices and experiences. (p.29)

In 1989, Shakeshaft described the male-dominated context within which all women administrators work. Prior to her work, the research on the position of superintendent reflected the male position because men were the practitioners and the researchers. Grogan (2000) proposed that "if we accept gender as a useful category of analysis to help us understand the position of superintendent better, then we need to draw on the experiences of women in the position" (p.126).

In response to the study, participants who are not interested in pursuing the position of superintendent stated that the position of superintendent is difficult work. They added that they valued their family time. Grogan (2000) discussed the modern superintendent and advocated for action that results in a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for those who have been marginalized. The family time valued by female superintendents may have led to their marginalization.

The internal/external barriers and challenges faced by women administrators seeking leadership positions were discussed in the study. The perceptions and stereotypes of women leaders were clearly communicated as barriers and challenges. Scott (1986) claimed "gender is a primary way of signifying relationships of power" (p.1067). She supported her belief that a discussion of power is not simply a discussion of gender and argued "that gender is an inextricable factor. Historically, images of those in power evoked 'manly' adjectives such as

*strong, protective, visionary, and fatherly*, while those not in power are *weak, vulnerable, and needy*.” (p.1067).

When non-aspiring study participants were questioned regarding whether school boards and communities viewed female and male superintendents differently, they cited numerous examples of inequitable treatment. Grogan (1999) posited that there are main insights gained when one analyzes the research on the disproportionate numbers of women in the superintendent positions as compared to men:

1. Women administrators experience conflicting discourse.
2. Women’s ways of leading are considered secondary or subordinate to men’s ways.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

The findings outlined in this chapter suggest opportunities for further research to advance the careers of women administrators by eliminating barriers, challenges, and negative perceptions regarding their pursuit of the position of superintendent.

First, findings suggest the conducting of the same study with a larger number of study participants. The study could include a larger, more diverse group of participants and a wider geographical location. The results could provide better comparisons between sitting superintendents and aspiring/non-aspiring women administrators. Potentially, a larger study could identify additional factors influencing women administrators’ decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendency.

Second, a study on the characteristics, leadership skills, and experiences of successful women superintendents could provide women administrators insight for career advancement. Such a study could provide a resource for developing mentorships and sponsorship programs for women administrators who are aspiring to become superintendent.

Third, a study of administration and supervision programs and superintendent preparation programs and their impact on preparing women for administrative or superintendent roles is suggested. A focus on the development of the superintendent could assist women administrators in early career planning and leadership skills and enhance opportunities to advance their careers.

## Reflections

As I reflect on the wealth of knowledge I gained from interviewing the nine study participants, there are four focal points that were significant to me. The four focal points are the importance of mentoring, the leadership styles of women administrators, barriers hindering the advancement of women administrators, and the relationship between women administrators and the school board/community.

Throughout my career, I have valued the professional relationship between a mentor and a mentee. I have benefitted from being mentored and would hope that my colleagues have grown professionally from my services as their mentor. The study participants' responses clearly communicated the positive and career-altering influence a mentor can have on a mentee. As a result of mentoring, all study participants had grown professionally and advanced in their careers. The study participants who are superintendents had male superintendent mentors who mentored them, modeled their leadership styles, and endorsed their mentee's advancement to the position of superintendent. To the mentor/mentee relationship, the endorsement component appears to be critical to the mentee's success in obtaining the promotion to superintendent.

During the interviews, each study participant had her own individualism, characteristics, and qualities. Their careers paths and experiences varied. However, a collaborative leadership style dominated the responses describing their style of leadership, conflict resolution, decision making, and the skill which has contributed most to their success in their present position. This finding aligns with the research stating women tend to be collaborative leaders, a style necessary to lead the 21<sup>st</sup> century learner.

Interestingly, of the study participants who were sitting superintendents, only one cited collaboration as a desirable superintendent characteristic and a skill making them effective in their present position. In the male-dominated position of superintendent, where the tendency is to lead from top down, the sitting women superintendents appeared insightful regarding the common leadership style of superintendents.

As a woman administrator, as I reflect on the responses from the study participants, I have mixed emotions related to the findings in reference to balancing family and a career and the negative perceptions of female administrators. Historically, tremendous efforts have been made to advance the rights of women in the United States. Gains have been achieved. The study participants have benefitted from those gains and are outstanding representatives of competent,

strong, and effective educational leaders. However, their responses revealed that their career paths included elements of the barriers and challenges women administrators so often experience as they pursue advancements in their careers. I am extremely proud of the accomplishments and progress women have made in school leadership, despite all of the work that is still needed to be done.

The final focal point addresses the study participants' awareness of the political astuteness required of all central office administrators. An essential responsibility of the superintendent and administrative team is responsiveness to the needs of the school board and community. The study participants asserted that having a woman superintendent in position hinged on the individual school board and community. Educating school boards and communities, the visibility of women administrators, and the on-going effort to combat the negative perception of women administrators will hopefully address the disproportionate numbers of male superintendents leading school divisions compared to females.

## **Summary**

This qualitative multiple subject study was designed to collect and analyze the experiences and characteristics of women superintendents and compare them to those of women administrators who aspire to be superintendents and to those who have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent. The study's purpose was to contribute to the existing research by investigating and fostering an understanding of factors influencing women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. The theoretical basis for this inquiry was the feminist poststructuralist framework derived from the work of Grogan (1999), who studied women leaders in educational administration, specifically focusing on women aspirants to the superintendency. The methodology included structured interviews of three sitting superintendents, three women administrators aspiring to be superintendents, and three women administrators who have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent. Each participant was employed in Virginia school divisions.

The findings of this study are important to the field of educational leadership and the advancement of the careers of women administrators. Study participants' experiences, perceptions and perspectives are noteworthy in assisting women in their pursuit of advanced levels of administration, especially the position of superintendent.

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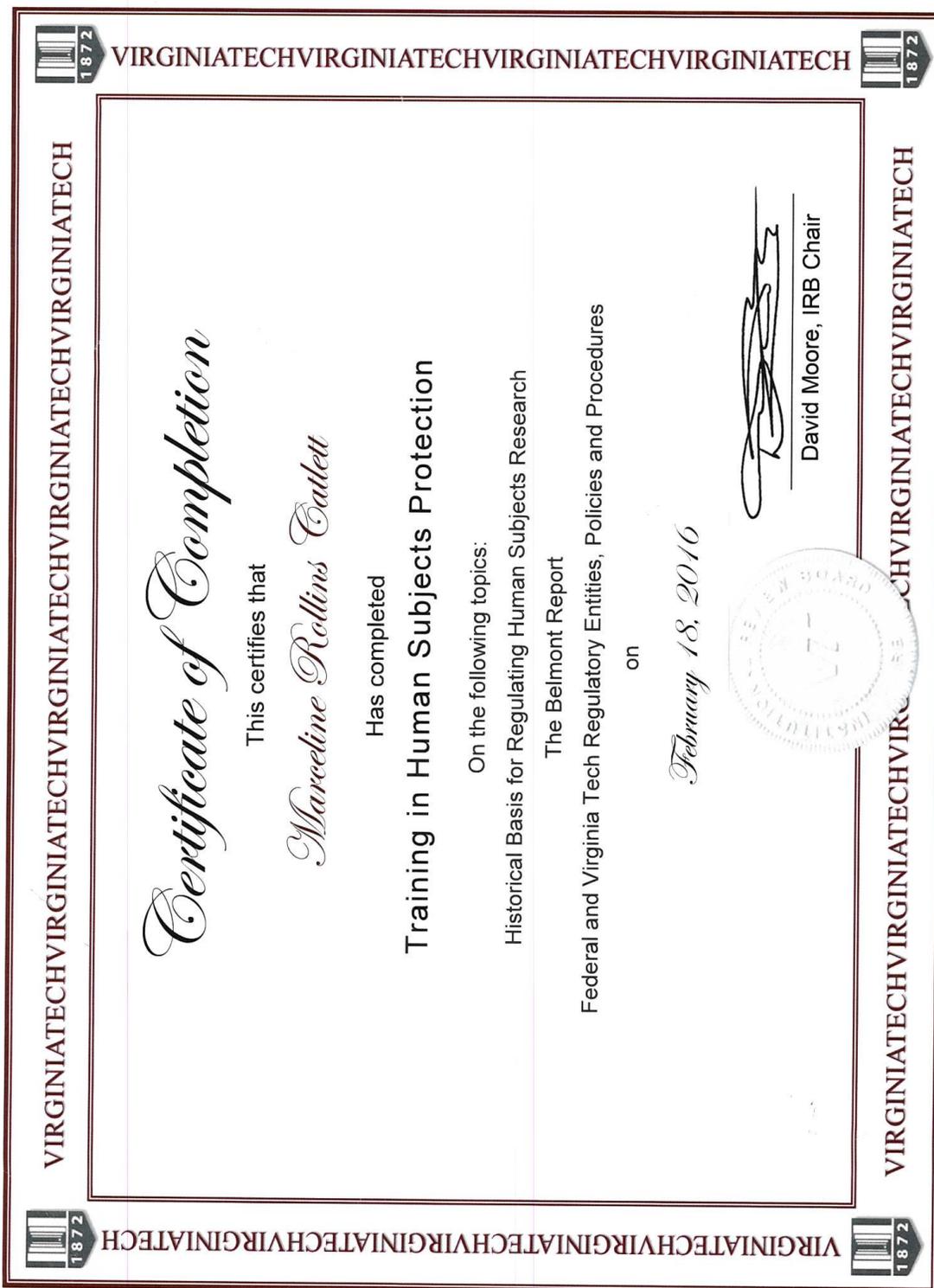
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Appendix A  
Certificate of Completion of Training in Human Subjects Protection



## Appendix B

### Instructional Review Board Application Approval Memorandum



Office of Research Compliance  
 Institutional Review Board  
 North End Center, Suite 4120, Virginia Tech  
 300 Turner Street NW  
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
 540/231-4606 Fax 540/231-0959  
 email irb@vt.edu  
 website <http://www.irb.vt.edu>

#### MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** February 13, 2017 

**TO:** Walt Mallory, Marceline Rollins Catlett

**FROM:** Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572, expires January 29, 2021)

**PROTOCOL TITLE:** To Do or Not to Do: What Influences Qualified Women Administrators to Remain in Division Level Positions While Others Pursue the Position of Superintendent?

**IRB NUMBER:** 17-019

Effective February 13, 2017, the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chair, David M Moore, approved the New Application request for the above-mentioned research protocol.

This approval provides permission to begin the human subject activities outlined in the IRB-approved protocol and supporting documents.

Plans to deviate from the approved protocol and/or supporting documents must be submitted to the IRB as an amendment request and approved by the IRB prior to the implementation of any changes, regardless of how minor, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects. Report within 5 business days to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before the commencement of your research.)

#### PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Approved As: **Expedited, under 45 CFR 46.110 category(ies) 5,6,7**  
 Protocol Approval Date: **February 13, 2017**  
 Protocol Expiration Date: **February 12, 2018**  
 Continuing Review Due Date\*: **January 29, 2018**

\*Date a Continuing Review application is due to the IRB office if human subject activities covered under this protocol, including data analysis, are to continue beyond the Protocol Expiration Date.

#### FEDERALLY FUNDED RESEARCH REQUIREMENTS:

Per federal regulations, 45 CFR 46.103(f), the IRB is required to compare all federally funded grant proposals/work statements to the IRB protocol(s) which cover the human research activities included in the proposal / work statement before funds are released. Note that this requirement does not apply to Exempt and Interim IRB protocols, or grants for which VT is not the primary awardee.

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this IRB protocol, and which of the listed proposals, if any, have been compared to this IRB protocol, if required.

*Invent the Future*

Date*	OSP Number	Sponsor	Grant Comparison Conducted?

\* Date this proposal number was compared, assessed as not requiring comparison, or comparison information was revised.

If this IRB protocol is to cover any other grant proposals, please contact the IRB office ([irbadmin@vt.edu](mailto:irbadmin@vt.edu)) immediately.

## Appendix C

### Sample Introduction Letter

Marceline Rollins Catlett  
316 Wolfe Street  
Fredericksburg, VA, 22401

Date

Participant Name  
Address

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in the School of Education. I am currently working on a dissertation that focuses on the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent. This study is part of my dissertation, which is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

Women administrators continue to be underrepresented compared to men in educational leadership positions, especially as superintendent. The goal of this study is to reveal the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent. The experiences and characteristics of women superintendents will be compared to women aspiring to the superintendency and to those women administrators who chose not to seek the position of superintendent. The aim of the study is to involve nine women administrators who are sitting superintendents, pursuing the superintendency, or have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent. Conclusions and recommendations from the study will be valuable for administrators and school divisions.

I am contacting my professional acquaintances employed in the Commonwealth of Virginia inviting you to participate in the study. Participation will involve a face to face interview in the location of the participant scheduled at your convenience. The interview will be audio-taped, and is expected to last an hour. Identifying characteristics such as name and school division will not be used and pseudonyms will be created.

Understanding how valuable your time is, I appreciate your consideration in assisting with this study. If you are willing to participate in the study, please notify me by telephone (540) 372-1130 office/ (540) 220-3214 cell or Email - mcatlett@vt.edu

Sincerely,

Marceline Rollins Catlett

## **Appendix D**

### **Sample Introduction Verbal Script**

Hello \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for agreeing to speak with me today.

I am inviting you to participate in a study, here are the details:

I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in the School of Education. I am currently working on a dissertation that focuses on the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent. This study is part of my dissertation, which is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies.

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I am contacting my professional acquaintances employed in the Commonwealth of Virginia inviting you to participate in the study. Participation will involve a face to face interview in the location of the participant scheduled at your convenience. The interview will be audio-taped, and is expected to last an hour. Identifying characteristics such as name and school division will not be used and pseudonyms will be created.

Understanding how valuable your time is, I appreciate your consideration in assisting with this study.

If you are willing to participate in the study, please let me know now or later by notifying me by telephone (540) 372-1130 office/ (540) 220-3214 cell or Email - [mcatlett@vt.edu](mailto:mcatlett@vt.edu)

Thank you for your time.

Marci

## Appendix E

### Formal Letter Following Verbal Consent from Participant

**Marceline Rollins Catlett**

Participant name

Address

Dear (Name of participant),

As a follow-up to our conversation, thank you \_\_\_\_\_ for agreeing to participate in a study I am conducting on the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. This study is part of my dissertation, which is partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Virginia Tech.

Women administrators continue to be underrepresented compared to men in educational leadership positions, especially as superintendent. The goal of this study is to reveal the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent. The experiences and characteristics of women superintendents will be compared to women aspiring to the superintendency and to those women administrators who chose not to seek the position of superintendent. The aim of the study is to involve nine women administrators who are sitting superintendents, pursuing the superintendency, or have chosen not to pursue the position of superintendent.

Participants will be asked to participate in an interview. This will be an audio recorded interview and will take approximately one hour. The interview will focus on your career choices as women administrators. Total time commitment for the interview should be no more than one and a half hours.

If you have questions relating to this research, please do not hesitate to contact me at 540-220-3214 (cell) or 540-372-1130 (work) or via email at [mcatlett@vt.edu](mailto:mcatlett@vt.edu) .

If you agree to be part of this study, please respond via email. My email is [mcatlett@vt.edu](mailto:mcatlett@vt.edu) . If you agree, your time, commitment, and contribution to this research are appreciated.

Sincerely,

Marceline Rollins Catlett

## Appendix F

### Informed Consent for Participants

#### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY

#### Informed Consent for Participants

#### in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

**Title of Project: To Do or Not to Do: What Influences Qualified Women Administrators to Remain in Division Level Positions While Others Pursue the Position of Superintendent?**

**Investigator(s):**

Name **Dr. Walt Mallory** E-mail / Phone number [wmallory@vt.edu](mailto:wmallory@vt.edu) / 703 538-8496

Name **Marceline Rollins Catlett** E-mail / Phone number [mcatlett@vt.edu](mailto:mcatlett@vt.edu) / 540 220-3214

**Please read this consent agreement carefully before you decide to participate in the study.**

**Research Title:** “To Do or Not to Do: What Influences Qualified Women Administrators to Remain in Division Level Positions While Others Pursue the Position of Superintendent”.

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Walt Mallory

**Co-Investigator:** Marceline Rollins Catlett

**Purpose of the research study:** The purpose of this study was to contribute to the existing research by investigating and fostering an understanding of factors influencing women administrators’ decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent. Further, this qualitative study determined the relevance of identified factors on the decisions made by the participants and explained the impact of shared experiences on those decisions. The results of the study will be used in a dissertation and published.

**Participation in the study:** The interview will be about the factors that influence women administrators’ decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent. The experiences and characteristics of women superintendents will be compared to women aspiring to the superintendency and to those women administrators who chose not to seek the position of superintendent. The interview questions will be about you, educational leadership, your career path and experiences. As a participant in this study you will spend one hour in a face to face interview. The interview will be scheduled at a time and venue convenient for you. Your responses in the interview will be audio-recorded and later transcribed.

**Anticipated Risks:** There are no apparent nor anticipated risks to persons who participate in the study.

**Time Period:** The interview will take one hour of your time.

**Benefits:** There are no direct benefits to participants in this study. However, findings from this research investigation may be instructive to women administrators regarding their career paths within the Commonwealth of Virginia.

**Confidentiality:** All information disclosed during the interview process will be held in strict confidence. The data generated from the interview and that which will be included in the dissertation will contain no

identifying information regarding the participants, the participants' school or school division. Due to the limited pool of women administrator participants in certain central office positions, there is a small risk of identifiability. As a result, anywhere participants' names and quotes are mentioned pseudonyms will be used. The interviews will be transcribed and coded. Information disclosed in the interview will be held under lock and key only accessible by that of the research team. Lastly, the content disclosed in the interview via audio recording device will be held for approximately one year following the successful defense of this dissertation.

**Participation:** Your participation in this research investigation is completely voluntary.

**Right to withdraw from the study:** As a participant in this study, you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time of your choosing. Your interview and transcript will be destroyed at the time of withdrawal and the data will not appear in the final dissertation.

**Research Title:** "To Do or Not to Do: What Influences Qualified Women Administrators to Remain in Division Level Positions While Others Pursue the Position of Superintendent".

**Process for Withdrawal:** If you elect to withdraw from the study, please notify the research team at any time at the phone number and address provided within this document.

**Payment:** There will be no financial compensation for participation in this study.

**Questions/Comments/Concerns:** Should you have any questions or concerns in any regard concerning this study, please contact the researcher below:

Marceline Rollins Catlett  
316 Wolfe Street  
Fredericksburg, Virginia 22401  
Phone: (540) 220.3214 or (540) 372.1130  
Email: [mcattlett@vt.edu](mailto:mcattlett@vt.edu)

Committee Chair:  
Dr. Walt Mallory  
Virginia Tech Northern Virginia Center  
7054 Haycock Road  
Falls Church, VA 22043  
Telephone: (703) 538-8485  
Email: [wmallory@vt.edu](mailto:wmallory@vt.edu)

### **Questions or Concerns**

Should you have any questions about this study, you may contact one of the research investigators whose contact information is included at the beginning of this document.

Should you have any questions or concerns about the study's conduct or your rights as a research subject, or need to report a research-related injury or event, you may contact the VT IRB Chair, Dr. David M. Moore at [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu) or (540) 231-4991.

**Participant's Consent**

I have read the Informed Consent Form and conditions of this study. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Printed Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

A copy of this form with your signature will be provided to you for your records.

## Appendix G

### Interview Protocol Guide

#### Marceline Rollins Catlett

Participant Name: (fictitious name) \_\_\_\_\_

Administrative position: \_\_\_\_\_

*Script – with audio recorder running.*

*I am sitting with \_ (fictitious name) \_\_\_\_\_ in (location) \_\_\_\_\_ for our interview today. It is approximately \_\_\_\_\_ (time) on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).*

I want to thank you for participating in this study. My name is Marceline Catlett and I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech and this study is for my dissertation which is partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Doctorate in Education. Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. The interview will take approximately one hour and I would like to have your permission to record it so that I may accurately document the information you share. All your responses are confidential. They will be used to develop a better understanding of the factors that influence women administrators' decisions to pursue, or not pursue the position of superintendent.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, but the researcher of record is the chair of my dissertation committee, Dr. Walt Mallory. You signed and dated the consent form, certifying that you consent with this interview. You will receive a copy of the consent form and I will keep the other under lock and key.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without consequence.

Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin?

Again, I want to thank you for your participation in this study. I believe your input will be valuable for this study on women administrators and the factors that influence their career paths.

Then with your permission, we will begin the interview.

1. Tell me about yourself, your educational background and your career in education.
2. What influenced your decision to become an educational administrator?
  - 2.1 Did a person (parent, student, administrator, teacher, or friend) influence you?
  - 2.2 Did any event(s) or occurrence(s) influence you?
3. Share with me the leadership skills that describe your expectations for a superintendent.
  - 3.1 Are there skills women may be more effective at than men?
  - 3.2 Conversely, are there skills men may be more effective at?
  - 3.3 Describe those skills and traits making you effective in your present position.
4. What experience(s) influenced you to...
  - 4.1 become a superintendent,
  - 4.2 pursue the position of superintendent,
  - 4.3 not pursue the position of superintendent?
5. How did your career path support or impede your progress toward obtaining your present position?
6. What may be external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent?
  - 6.1 Give examples of barriers
7. What, if any, personal challenges face women who are seeking leadership roles?

Follow-up:

  - 7.1 If you were to categorize these challenges, do they fall under
    - 7.1a social (or societal),
    - 7.1b organizational,
    - 7.1c relationships
    - 7.1d family?
    - 7.1e other
8. Share a story that demonstrates your leadership style.
  - 8.1 How would you describe your style of leadership?

Follow-up:

    - 8.2 What best describes your method of conflict resolution?
    - 8.3 What best describes your decision-making practice?

9. As a woman administrator, describe what you believe are the elements of a supportive working environment.
10. Compare how men and women are viewed as leaders.
  - 10.1 Are women superintendents perceived differently by the school board and community?
  - 10.2 If so, how?
  - 10.3 What may influence these perceptions?
11. Are there any other thoughts you might like to add?

*Pause.... Wait...*

**Conclusion:**

This concludes our interview today. I may find the need to speak with again for clarification or other reasons...

May I contact you if that is required?

Again, I want you to know that once I have a good written transcript of the interview, the recording will be erased/destroyed. I also want to remind you that your name will never be associated with this interview. The interview will all be identified by a fictitious name.

Upon completion of the analysis and writing the dissertation, if you would like a copy of the final study, please let me know.

Thank you again for your time.

I will now turn off the audio recorder.

## **Appendix H**

### **Research Questions**

#### **Marceline Rollins Catlett**

1. How do the experiences and characteristics of acting women superintendents compare to those of women aspiring to the superintendency and to those of women administrators who choose not to seek the position of superintendent?
2. What factors influence women administrators' decisions to pursue or not pursue the position of superintendent?

## Appendix I

### Interview Questions

#### Marceline Rollins Catlett

##### Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself, your educational background and your career in education.
2. What influenced your decision to become an educational administrator?
  - 2.1 Did a person (parent, student, administrator, teacher, or friend) influence you?
  - 2.2 Did any event(s) or occurrence(s) influence you?
3. Share with me the leadership skills that describe your expectations for a superintendent.
  - 3.1 Are there skills women may be more effective at than men?
  - 3.2 Conversely, are there skills men may be more effective at?
  - 3.3 Describe those skills and traits making you effective in your present position.
4. What experience(s) influenced you to...
  - 4.1 become a superintendent,
  - 4.2 pursue the position of superintendent,
  - 4.3 not pursue the position of superintendent?
5. How did your career path support or impede your progress toward obtaining your present position?
6. What may be external and/or internal barriers preventing women administrators from obtaining the position of superintendent?
  - 6.1 Give examples of barriers
7. What, if any, personal challenges face women who are seeking leadership roles?

Follow-up:

  - 7.1 If you were to categorize these challenges, do they fall under
    - 7.1a social (or societal),
    - 7.1b organizational,
    - 7.1c relationships
    - 7.1d family?
    - 7.1e other

8. Share a story that demonstrates your leadership style.
  - 8.1 How would you describe your style of leadership?  
Follow-up:
    - 8.2 What best describes your method of conflict resolution?
    - 8.3 What best describes your decision-making practice?
9. As a woman administrator, describe what you believe are the elements of a supportive working environment.
10. Compare how men and women are viewed as leaders.
  - 10.1 Are women superintendents perceived differently by the school board and community?
  - 10.2 If so, how?
  - 10.3 What may influence these perceptions?
11. Are there any other thoughts you might like to add?