

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

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The Graduate School

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NOT FOR THEM: WOMEN AND THE PUBLIC SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENCY

ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in the
College of Education at the University of Kentucky

By
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Lexington, Kentucky

Director: Dr. Susan J. Scollay, Associate Professor of
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Women continue to be vastly under-represented in the public school superintendency in relation to their numbers in the teaching force. In this study, data was collected on 11 women aspirants to the superintendency from three southeastern states, who participated in one of two special superintendent-preparation programs specifically designed for women and minorities. The study explores the assumptions held by these women about accessing the position of superintendency, as well as how they perceived their participation in these programs as helpful or not in gaining the position of superintendent. The study examines the meanings these women ascribe to their own professional experiences in the context of their intention to secure a superintendency; how they conceptualize the superintendency itself; how they characterize their own leadership qualities in relationship to the superintendency; and, the extent to which their experiences are consistent with the existing literature. The examination of the experiences of this special group of women deepens our understanding of women, women's career in education, and the superintendency.

A concern about the ongoing differential access women have to the public school superintendency provides the underlying motivation for this qualitative study. This study utilizes a multi-level research design which includes pre-existing data, survey materials, telephone interviews, and in-depth face-to-face interviews. The women of this study share most characteristics of women already in the superintendency, and they conceptualize the

superintendency as a position of advocacy for children. These aspirants rate teamwork, building relationships, and shared decision-making at the heart of ethical leadership. Other findings show these highly credentialed women's aspirations are stymied by lack of career planning, little encouragement by mentors and/or networks, and issues of preference (rejection by hiring authorities and anti-feminism); prejudice (discrimination and stereotyping); and perception (social norms and being the "other"). In the three years that have elapsed since the conclusion of these programs, not a single one of this study's participants has been hired as a superintendent.

KEYWORDS: Women Aspiring to the Superintendency, Leadership Preparation, Women's Leadership, Barriers, Gender

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Prologue

This dissertation is about a group of ambitious women. Like me, they have devoted their careers to educating children. Like me, they have pursued advanced educational credentials. The leadership positions we have held in our schools and districts are similar. Some of these women are my age or older, and some of them are younger. Some moved out of the classroom sooner than I did; others stayed there longer. What differentiates this group of women from me is that they have all made a career decision that never occurred to me. They aspire to be the superintendent of a public school district.

What makes them want to be a superintendent and why did it never occur to me to want to be one? My curiosity about this translated into open wonderment throughout my discussions with them. I found so many similarities between us (enthusiasm for teaching, a love of curriculum development, interest in professional development, for example); why the stark difference on this issue? Raising this question forced me to do some thinking about who I am, and what I bring to this study.

I come from a family that places a high value on education and achievement. My mother and her two sisters were all college graduates, in a time (late 1940s early 1950s) when this was not the norm. My father was in a car accident when I was only 6 months old, and he was left disabled and in the VA hospital for the rest of his life. Mother was left with a need to use her education to support two small children. After 5 years of finding that a college degree for a woman did not necessarily translate to a career in rural Kentucky, we moved to Chapel Hill, NC where she earned an MSW and began working for the VA Hospital in Durham, NC. The family mantra was always this: my mother's education is what saved us from a distinctly poorer existence.

My older brother and I were latch-key kids before it was fashionable, and I was always encouraged to be independent. I was also expected to dream big about the future. If I spoke of being a nurse, my Grandfather would say, "why not a Doctor?" Early on I showed an aptitude for memorization and public speaking; the family was certain that my future lay with the law. In college I discovered (or at least refined) my life-long interest in History. "What will you do with that?" my family asked. Their answer was that I would go to graduate school, get my doctorate, and teach at the University. A University

professorship would have the proper cachet for an extended family of cousins rapidly filling up with doctors, lawyers, writers, and CPAs. I received my MA in History, but along the way received a teaching fellowship and fell in love with my life-long vocation, teaching. Always, at some level, as far as my family is concerned, I have been “just a teacher”. There has always been this unspoken criticism that in some unarticulated way, I have wasted my talents; that I could have been something “more” (important). And yet, no one—ever—said: “Why don’t you be a superintendent”? A doctor, yes. A trial attorney, yes, but a superintendent? Their assumption, and one I shared, was that if you are a woman going into the public schools, you are destined to be a teacher. What is it about this position that makes it seem so unattainable (un-natural?) for me?

Certainly no one in my professional life encouraged the belief that I could be a superintendent. As a first year teacher, my principal told me not to “worry my pretty little head” when I asked a serious question about school finance. That same year, I asked my instructional supervisor a question about text books and was told to “Shut up.” A male principal who I respected asked me why I was pursuing my administrative credentials saying, “We need to keep our good teachers in the classroom”. And the sad thing is I was flattered. And I agreed, I was (am) a good teacher. And I should be in the classroom.

Perhaps there is karma, or at least some irony that, as I earn this doctorate (and my family’s respect at long last) it will be in seeking to understand a group of women who dares to dream of something that I could not even imagine for myself. In the exposition of their aspirations, I might illuminate the way for many more of the 88% of teachers comprising the classroom work force to see women in the superintendency as a logical place for them to be.

Chapter 1

In the introduction to *Sacred Dreams: Women and the Superintendency* (1999), Brunner states:

“If women wanted to be superintendents, they were told to remain teachers. The fact that most superintendents of schools are men bears this out. Do women even want the job? Our research indicates they do...the greatest untapped pool of candidates for the position of superintendent of schools is that group of women of all races who are credentialed and trained, but not hired into positions because of gender and racial bias... We insist that that it is not only natural, but also important that women become superintendents, if that is what they want to do” (xv-xvi).

The best and the brightest of women in the teaching profession are encouraged to remain in the classroom rather than be fast-tracked to positions of leadership. And women who seize the initiative to prepare for leadership positions are often denied opportunities for advancement. As the number of women in educational leadership and superintendency certification programs attest, women do “want the job” of superintendent. Yet, almost a full decade into the 21st century, the public school superintendency continues to be dominated by white males. Despite Brunner’s and others’ insistence that the public school superintendency is a “natural” fit for women, the evidence is that it is anything but.

Women who “want the job”

This is a story of a group of 11 credentialed and trained women who “wanted the job” so badly that they invested considerable time and money in professional development and mentoring programs specifically designed to give women and minorities enhanced access to the position. Not merely “credentialed and trained,” all these women are the recipients of numerous honors and awards, and all are members of prestigious associations. They all have attained at least 30 hours of graduate work above a Masters degree, and all hold their state’s certification to be a superintendent. All speak with an unreserved passion for teaching and public education. All are advocates for children.

These are women “who want the job.” Perhaps one summed it up best when she said, “I’m ready. I’m more than ready!”

Research Questions

The 2000 *Study of the American School Superintendency* (Glass, et al, 2000) is the ninth national study conducted by the American Association of School Administrators and is a comprehensive survey of America's superintendents. The 2000 study contains the largest sample of superintendents of any of AASA's 10-Year Studies, representing the views of one in five of America's public school superintendents. In this study Glass notes that "considering the small number of minority and female superintendents (about 14.6%), job discrimination should be a national concern" (45). Even more notable, 70% of the 2,262 survey respondents "thought discrimination against women posed little or no problem"(45). Glass points out that if this is true then the following questions are in need of serious research: "What deters large numbers of women from becoming superintendents? Is the position not alluring to women? Are preparation program entryways blocked? Are school board members not inclined to hire women? Are search firms not bringing women into their pools?" (45).

I set out to explore these very issues with a small, distinctive group of women for whom being a superintendent is "what they want to do." I wanted to know, as aspiring candidates for the position, whether they perceive discrimination as "posing little or no problem" as they sought to be hired for the position. I wanted to learn more about their formal preparation for administrative leadership, as well as why they felt it necessary to participate in special professional development and how they expected that participation to help them achieve the superintendency. I wanted to know what they thought about the school boards and search agencies with whom they interacted. These are the underlying questions that led me to study these 11 female candidates for the superintendency. My study was guided by the following research questions:

- 1) What are the assumptions held by the women in these special superintendent preparation programs about accessing the position of superintendent?
- 2) What meaning do these women ascribe to their own professional experiences, particularly in the context of their current intention to secure a superintendency?
- 3) How do these women conceptualize the superintendency and how do they characterize their own leadership qualities in relationship to that position?

4) What were their expectations upon entering the Women's Superintendent Initiative (WSI) ¹ or the Mentoring Minorities Superintendents Program (MMSP)? In what ways were these expectations met? Not met? Changed because of their involvement with the program?

5) To what extent, if at all, these women and their experiences are consistent with what the literature tells us and how, if at all, they and their experiences might deepen our understanding of women and the superintendency?

In situating these "women who want the job" in the current educational leadership literature, and in the context of these research questions, I investigated the factors that encouraged and or inhibited both these women's participation in each of these programs, and their quest for the superintendency. At the individual level I examined the body of literature about career paths, desirable competencies, necessary qualifications, and the presence (or lack of) mentors and networks. In exploring how these women conceptualize the superintendency and their own leadership qualities, I sought to situate their perceptions about gender, socialization, and discrimination into the existing literature, examining specific barriers, leadership attributes, and the role of socialization.

Review of the Literature

Some 30 years ago, Charol Shakeshaft (1979) articulated the need to study the careers of women in educational administration, "It is time for us to use firsthand accounts, rather than secondhand guesses" (220). In her doctoral research she analyzed dissertation literature on women in educational administration from 114 studies spanning the years 1975 to 1978. She recommended that the number of women at all levels of administration be recorded systematically, asserting that this is essential information for both political and practical purposes. She called for research which would stress practical solutions and practice-related data, saying leadership studies are too often done for the purpose of seeing whether women "measure up" to men. From the perspective of 1979 she observed, "The woman administrator is still a mystery" (225). Twenty years after her initial work, Shakeshaft (1999) found that there is still "no reliable, uniform, nationwide database that lets us know just how many women are school administrators and at what

¹The names of people, programs, and places are all pseudonyms.

levels” (99). Tyack and Hansot (1982) called the absence of such a data base an intentional “conspiracy of silence” (13) which Shakeshaft contends makes it even more difficult to determine inclusion and equality of the representation of women in the educational leadership ranks. While Tallerico (1999) conceptualizes the body of research on women in the superintendency in terms of three interrelated, overlapping domains: profiles (studies that inform about demographic characteristics, superintendent attitudes, opinions, and perceptions on selected issues); patterns (studies which examine career paths, mobility from one incumbency to the next, and other issues including access, mentoring, sponsorship, selection, retention, and exit) and; practice (studies which seek to understand the nature of superintendents’ work), Shakeshaft (1999) argues that research on women in educational administration is progressing “through six stages in the evolution of a paradigmatic shift” (113). These stages include the documentation of the absence of women, research on women who have been administrators, women who are disadvantaged or subordinate, women studied in their own terms, women as challenge to theory, and the transformation of theory (113). This review of the literature reflects the six stages of Shakeshaft’s “paradigmatic shift.”

Stage 1: The Absence of Women

Shakeshaft (1999) identifies this first stage of research on women in educational leadership as addressing the need for documenting the numbers of women in administration. She contends that this was not done in the 1970s and 1980s and it still has not been properly done today. Bell and Chase (1993) investigate the present and past numbers of male and female superintendents, and Blount (1995) documents the under representation of women in school leadership. Tallerico (1999) notes studies of women in educational leadership positions have relied mostly on white male samples, making little if any mention of sex, racial or ethnic backgrounds. It had been customary until the most recent 2000 *Study of the American School Superintendency* for groups other than white male superintendents to be studied as aggregates (Glass, 1992) and only intermittently disaggregated by sex, race, and ethnicity. Brunner addresses this issue in the 2000 ASAA study, noting the necessity for pulling data on female superintendents out of the larger

sample because “the representative sample of female superintendents almost disappears when it is analyzed as a part of the full sample of superintendents” (77).

Women superintendents and superintendents of color have only been targeted for research in the past 20 years. Jackson (1999) and Ortiz (1999) document the numbers and location of African American and Hispanic female superintendents. Finding that little research has been done on the combination of race and sex, Jackson notes that black women superintendents are “doubly marginal” (141); their numbers never reaching 50 in any given year. Ortiz describes women Hispanic superintendents as leading troubled districts with large numbers of Hispanic students and families, most often in urban areas. The U.S Census Bureau sums up the absence of women and minorities in the position succinctly: it is the most white, male-dominated, executive position in the United States (Glass, 1992).

The pipeline to the superintendency is literally full of women. For example, while nearly half of all central-office administrative positions are filled by women, only about 12 % of the nation's school superintendents are female. These numbers have led some to conclude that women are content to maintain administrative roles as “assistants” occupying peripheral positions to the superintendency. However, in a survey by the American Association for School Administrators (2003), Brunner and Grogan report 40% of the women in central-office administration identified themselves as aspiring to the position of superintendent. Toward that end, 74 % had either earned their superintendent credential or were working toward certification. Large numbers of women are not only interested, they are positioned in terms of experience and competence to assume the superintendency—but it is not happening. One reason may be that women spend more time in the lower ranks of classroom teaching than men do. The majority of the women superintendents who responded to Brunner and Grogan’s survey say they spent up to 15 years in the classroom, with the largest number of them spending 6 to 10 years. This compares to men who only spend an average of up to 5 years in the classroom. One search consultant in Brunner’s study stated that a “model candidate” for a superintendency position should spend a total of 3 to 5 years in the classroom before moving up the administrative ladder. Grogan calls it a “common misperception...that women don't want the Superintendency,” and points out that at least one-third of her

survey respondents report they are "actively seeking the superintendency." Perhaps women are beginning to understand what it takes to be a "model candidate" for superintendent, because 16% of the respondents to Brunner and Grogan's survey are in an administrative position and are 30 years old or less. Also, 33% of the women central-office administrators are serving as assistant deputy and/or associate superintendents-- the positions most closely associated with advancement to the superintendency.

Stage 2: Women Who Have Held Administrative Positions

According to Shakeshaft (1999), the second stage of her "paradigmatic shift" in research on women in educational leadership concerns documenting those women who are or have been administrators in order to show that there is a history. In *Destined to Rule the Schools: Women and the Superintendency* (1998), Blount describes how the superintendency has changed over the last 150 years from a position that was part-time teaching and part-time supply clerk to one combining the duties of a business manager, chief executive officer, and educational leader. Noting that by 1910, 80% of all teachers were women, Blount recounts women's early successes in gaining entry into the superintendency, especially during the Progressive Period and World War I. However, far from "ruling the schools of every city" as Chicago superintendent Ella Flagg Young declared in 1909 (Blount, 1998, 1), the number of women superintendents fell from a high of 28% in 1930 to 1.3% in 1971. It rose to 14.6% in 1999 (Glass *et al.*, 2000). Brunner and Grogan (2003) put the percentage even higher, at 18%. As Shakeshaft (1999) points out, this disparity is particularly ironic in a profession in which women currently make up 65% of the teachers, and fully half the graduate students receiving superintendent credentials in educational administration degree programs are now women.

Blount (1998) suggests that at the very moment of Ella Flagg's ascension to the superintendency, forces were in motion to by-pass newly enfranchised women. The superintendency became an appointive position and Blount asserts, "Women rarely received appointments because they tended to be excluded from the male superintendent networks responsible for placing most superintendent candidates" (25). The tight linkage between women's suffrage victories and regional efforts to remove the Superintendency

from politics causes Blount (1998) to suggest that the appointive system was less about expertise and more about limiting women's growing power in school affairs. The Depression dealt another blow to women in administrative positions, leading local boards to cut back on the number of women teachers and administrators. In many instances state legislatures passed laws that barred married women from being administrators citing the financial needs of men with families for the jobs women had previously held. After the 1930s the number of women superintendents continued to decline, except for a brief period when they filled in for the shortage of men in WWII. At the war's conclusion, employment patterns returned to pre-war conditions and male veterans returned to school on the GI Bill. Men would then turn out in large numbers to be educated as teachers and administrators.

Shakeshaft (1999) notes that the 1950s were also discouraging years for women educators; men were encouraged to become teachers and administrators, while women were encouraged to remain at home. The 1950 yearbook of the American Association of School Administrators urged superintendents to recruit men so that "more competent" staffs would exist in public schools" (110). Influenced by America's insecurities over education in the Cold War, fear of the "feminization of the public school" (as articulated by Patricia Cayo Sexton in *Schools are Emasculating Our Boys*, 1969) harkened back to the similar fears held by some at the beginning of the 20th century. Then, as during the Cold War, cultural critics became concerned that boys were being feminized by mothers and female teachers. Earlier "solutions" to this feminization were to create places where "boys could be boys" leading to the creation of program such as the Boy Scouts. The public consensus to the perceived problem in the 1950s was for more men to enter the ranks of teaching and administration. The belief that men could take charge (particularly of male children) more efficiently and could be relied upon to maintain discipline, dovetailed nicely with the large number of men entering the teaching profession in the mid-1960s to avoid the draft. As Shakeshaft (1999) points out, most of these young men moved quickly into administration just as school systems expanded. This effectively served to keep women administrators to a minimum through the 1980s (112). During the late 1980's some women's caucuses and professional organizations actively encouraged women to enter school administration. While women are still not represented in

administration in the proportion to their numbers in teaching in the late 1990s, the majority of students acquiring educational administration credential are women (Pounder, 1994). Shakeshaft (1999) notes that as career options have opened up for women they have been discouraged from entering teaching as a “notion that teaching is not an appropriate career for a high-achieving female” (112) limiting the pipeline of potential candidates for high-level administrative positions.

Stage 3: Women Who are Disadvantaged or Subordinate

In Shakeshaft's (1999) third stage, researchers study the barriers women encounter when trying to access administrative positions. Almost all superintendents have been “married white males...middle aged, Protestant, upwardly mobile, from favored ethnic groups, native born, and of rural origins” (Tyack and Hansot 1982, 36). The barriers to women obtaining superintendency positions as well as the barriers that can emerge once women have positions as superintendents have been extensively investigated (Bell and Chase, 1995; Blount, 1998; Brunner, 1999; Grogan, 1996; Ortiz, 1999; Schmuck, 1992; Skrla, 2000; Tallerico, 2000). Within the research findings, several themes emerge such as lack of confidence, lack of support (particularly networks), family responsibilities, socialization and sex-role stereotyping, lack of preparation, lack of opportunity to learn administrative skills, too few role models, and resentment by others. Berman, 1997; Brunner, 2000; and Hale, 1999 examined the barriers caused by the existing patriarchal system and professional culture, and ‘out-dated’ educational administration programs. Additional examples of studies of the barriers to women in accessing the superintendency include exploring career paths (Ortiz, 1982; Glass, 1992; Björk *et al.*, 2003) gatekeepers/access (Chase and Bell, 1990; Marietti and Stout, 1994; Grogan and Henry, 1995); lack of aspirations (Grogan, 1996); and exiting after a short tenure in the superintendency (Forsythe and Tallerico, 1993).

Opinions abound as to why the number of female superintendents remains so low. Kowalski and Stouder (1999) argue that the primary cause is institutional bias. While overt acts (such as not hiring a woman because she is a woman) continue despite their illegality, the presence of gender discrimination and its effects are hard to detect. Kowalski and Stouder's study of women superintendents in Indiana (1999) found that

women had higher qualifications than their male counterparts, and this was true regarding academic preparation as well as professional experiences. This is in keeping with Shakeshaft's (1999) finding that women must generally have superior credentials if they are to compete successfully with men. "The expectation of superior credentials is likely rooted in a lingering stereotype that administration is a male occupation" (36).

Kamler and Shakeshaft (1999) examined the role of search consultants in the career paths of women superintendents and found an increased number of women applicants for the superintendency. Nonetheless, the search consultants in this study reported several preconceived ideas that school board members hold about women applicants that put women at a disadvantage. For example, most board members view the high school principalship as the logical stepping stone to the superintendency. Yet, few women ever hold that position. "It's much more difficult, even for a male, to go from the elementary school principalship to superintendency than it is from a secondary school" (53). Similarly (and obviously), women are at a disadvantage when a board will only consider candidates who had experience as a superintendent. The search consultants also claimed that women were easily discouraged and would stop competing for a position after one or two rejections. Still, most search consultants reported a higher percentage of women presented as finalists in comparison to the percentage of women who were in the original field of applicants. One said, "I think, today, almost every board that I work with, in terms of, if there isn't a female...or a number of females in that group of fifteen or twenty, would raise questions and say, 'Why not?'"(55). In Kamler and Shakeshaft's (1999) study, women were reported as finalists in all 75 superintendent searches; however, only 9 (12%) were selected. "Thus, the search consultants report that women candidates are in the final pool in the superintendent search. This is a change from a decade ago, when women were not presented as finalists. Nevertheless, national statistics confirm that although women have made it into the candidate pool, they are still are not being hired in proportion to their numbers in the profession or their skills as administrators" (58).

However, women must deal with the perceptions and, better put, misperceptions of board members, administrators, and teachers who voice concerns that women administrators are not 'tough enough' (Richardson, 1993). "Women leaders confront

gendered assumptions—for example, in the form of threats to authority—and must take the male-dominated context into account as they develop leadership strategies” (Bell and Chase, 1995, 222). One superintendent search consultant discusses the “dichotomy between the perceived weaknesses of women by boards and what defines the current thought about effective leadership, which emphasizes the need for ‘considerate, more caring, more nurturing administrators’ and concludes:

“My sense is that there are myths about women...women are too emotional and can’t see things rationally and so that effects their decision making. The other thing is that women are nurturers to a greater extent then men are. That doesn’t sit well in the superintendency; we [superintendents] have to make tough decisions...women are not as strong in dealing with the major issues as men would be” (56).

Another consultant in the Richardson study stated that women were in “a no win situation.” The bias that board members have means “the women can’t win...its wrong if they are not too feminine because they are too male, and that’s no good because they can’t show weakness. They have to be tough. They have to be able to do what men can do” (Richardson, 1993, 21).

Stage 4: Women Studies “In Their Own Terms”

Shakeshaft (1999) sees the focus of this fourth stage of research as studying women administrators in the context of being female in a male-dominated profession. Feminine leadership practice has been the subject of research by Gilligan, 1982; Helgeson, 1990; Rosener, 1990; Wesson and Grady, 1994 and; Bruner, 1998. Bell and Chase (1995) examine the diversity of women superintendents’ practice. They investigated the lives of 27 women school administrators in order to “make sense of their contradictory experiences of power and subjugation” (x) referring to the women’s leadership practice as “ambiguous empowerment.” In an analysis of urban women superintendents, Wesson and Grady (1994) found that the primary reason boards hired women is to “manage change”. These boards scored women superintendents high on personal qualities (particularly communication skills), inspiring a shared vision, and enabling others to act. Tallerico (1999) observes that women superintendents’ perspectives and experiences are now being studied on their own terms with some

andocentric theories being challenged. “In virtually all cases, it is women and persons of color who are studying women superintendents and superintendents of color” (43).

Many female superintendents, and those aspiring to the position, would probably agree that their personal choices, career aspirations and even leadership styles differ from those of their male counterparts. One of the pressures women face in this high profile position is the role of wife/partner and/or mother. As Chase (1995) observes, the timing of professional careers around the male life cycle fortifies the assumption that women who have children are not committed professionals. Grogan (1996) notes that a woman/mother/partner has to do a juggling act that a male does not: “A good administrator focuses his or her energy primarily on the school or district. Family concerns must remain in the background and must not be seen to interfere with the business at hand” (128). Although there is plenty of rhetoric applauding schools for being family oriented and administrators for being good parents and active community members, there is still a tension created for those who try to meet the demands of family and administration equally well. Blount (1998) speaks of the traditional male administrator who was ably supported by a wife whose participation in the traditional mothering and partnering discourses freed him to concentrate on school leadership (95). And Hansot and Tyack (1981) assert that marriage has operated with an opposite effect for men and women. Marriage was an asset in upward professional mobility for men superintendents while a liability for women living in a culture decreeing that they belonged at home and hearth.

Skyra *et al* (2000) believe the reason that the superintendency has been overwhelmingly filled by men is that boards of education are overwhelmingly male and their social construction of the superintendency is masculine. Approximately 15,400 public school districts are governed by boards of education whose primary responsibility is appointing and evaluating the superintendent. In researching factors that boards use in superintendent selection, Bell (1988), found that . . .”Given a general cultural preference for male leaders in our society, the tradition of male leadership in schools, and the predominantly male membership of school boards, the most persuasive characteristic a candidate for superintendent could possess seems to be maleness . . . Maleness signifies to board members. . . shared language and experience, predictability, connection with the

power structure, and leadership that satisfies stereotyped preferences” (50). This social construction of the public school superintendency is therefore not compatible with the social construction of femaleness. Blackmore (1989) describes the results of this incompatibility: “[Educational] leaders display attributes and behaviors . . . which are generally associated with ‘masculinity’. It is a view, which has effectively displaced women in educational thought, and therefore rendered women invisible in administrative practice” (93).

In a Different Voice (1982), Carol Gilligan speaks of “the ethic of care”, in which she describes the differences between men’s and women’s ethical senses. According to the “ethics of care” women are centered on caring for others and are constrained by a sense of responsibility to others, particularly family members. Women form lateral relationships and fear a lack of connection with others. Gilligan claims “women’s thought patterns are more contextual and more embedded in relational concerns than those of men” (167). Women are supposed to be co-operative rather than competitive, more inclined toward empathy and less toward seeking dominance. In opposition to “the rationalism, separation and false ‘objectivity’ of masculinist models of knowledge,”(173) women are touted as caring more about personal experience, feelings and intuition, which are felt in the body (“gut” feelings) rather than the head. Gilligan focuses on female development as opposed to social critique, and she is primarily concerned with differentiating between male and female moral and identity development. She seeks to prove that male psychologists tend to sample from a group of males, later drawing conclusions based upon the data derived from the entirely male experimental group. They then apply the information to males and females alike. Gilligan’s work is groundbreaking because she exposes this bias in psychological research which does not include a variety of sampling and interviewing. She asserts that not only have psychologists derived false and misleading conclusions regarding female adolescent development, but they have also unfairly generalized female and male moral and identity development. Her studies of the voice of the “other”—one not much included in the heavily dominated white male superintendency—contribute a core concept for this research.

Beck also takes up the issue of “care” (1992) finding that there are two goals of care: to promote human development and respond to needs that are realized within

interdependent relationships occurring in communities. Openness and good communication are essential elements to a positive learning environment. Involving parents as leaders in the school—as tutors, program coordinators, volunteers and as community liaisons is essential to building a climate of nurturing and engaging learning in schools. Ideally there should be a collaborative partnerships built upon all the community's resources in addressing the needs of parents, health and social service agencies, businesses, and community organizations. Culturally defined, desirable feminine behavior is nurturing and caring for others; placing importance on relationships and the quality of life; and using interpersonal skills, consensus, and negotiation for solving problems (Broverman *et al*, 1970; Hofstede, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1989).

Other gender-focused studies such as Kanter (1977), document that “Women are rewarded for routine service associated with a secondary job market class, while men are rewarded for decision making and leadership, a primary job market class”(82). Alston (1999) argues that remaining in female dominated fields such as teaching influences women's socialization process causing them to accept subordinate roles and limit their aspiration (82). The few women in school administration occupy the lower ranks and they are generally older than their male counterparts. To obtain the superintendency, Alston contends that women must possess credibility, prestige, and the strong advocacy of an influential person higher up in the organization, as well as what Alston refers to as, “pure luck” (82). Once they obtain top leadership positions, women then encounter problems with tradition and stereotypes which place more obstacles in their path. Women do not get the top jobs because of the perception that women have different leadership styles, are “different” and “outsiders” (82).

Chase (1995) seeks to explain how little is known about the female perspective in this key educational leadership position. Ascribing the current status quo of women in educational administration as a by-product of colonization and misogyny she states:

“This process is complete when we believe and feel that, yes, our concerns, our ideas, our feelings, and our life experiences are educationally irrelevant, secondary, limited, and inappropriately particularistic. Under colonization, women's voices -- when we speak at all -- are marked by hesitancy, timidity, self-denial, and self-depreciation. We are encouraged to see the emperor as fully clothed wearing only the raiment of white masculine intellectual paradigms, modes of cognition, standards of achievement, research

methodologies, and agendas of curiosity and interests. We come to feel honored by being admitted to the inner circles of his educational court, granted presence and legitimacy as -- and only as -- good colonized subjects who can aspire only to be faint approximations of the educated man. Girls' and women's colonized educational behavior is then taken as (circular) proof of the patriarchal assumptions about woman's nature and limited potential, thereby reinforcing those very assumptions. The ultimate misogynistic twist occurs when women themselves are held responsible for this situation. Simone de Beauvoir (1952) bluntly dismisses this misogynistic analysis by remarking, "**Her wings are clipped, and it is found deplorable that she cannot fly**"(37) [emphasis added].

For much of American history women were barred from certain positions of public authority. Gender disqualified women from participating in political affairs, and for a long time their ability to collaborate for political and social action was stifled by their own acceptance of society's narrow definitions of women's roles and abilities. All this, as well as the continued perception that power and leadership roles are masculine constructs, led Chase (1995) to conclude that although the education system has undergone a great deal of change during the 20th century, the social characteristics for the superintendency has not. Thus, in seeking to study women "on their own terms" we need to look at other models of organization as well as ways in which the organization can change to fit the aspirations of women. The causes of women's inability to achieve the superintendency are multi-faceted and as de Beauvoir noted, "blaming the victim" is counter-productive at best.

Stage 5: Women as Challenge to Theory

Shakeshaft argues that women's experiences should challenge traditional theories of educational administration. Rejecting these theories as the theory of men, not women, she says (1979) it "has no room for women and needs to be rethought, questioned, challenged, and ultimately, rewritten "(225). While tradition must first be challenged to come to a greater understanding of women administrators, she emphasizes the importance of not putting female lives into traditional male theory. Logan (1998) optimistically cites several reasons as to why the 1990s and beyond should be the 'window of opportunity' for women entering administration in educational settings. She states that school-based governance as well as changing leadership paradigms are

affecting the role of both the superintendency and the principal, and therefore, results in a new look at the knowledge and skills required for these roles. As more school-based councils decide on the selection of principals, the 'good 'old boy' network of the school board has less to say in the hiring. School-based councils are looking for new kinds of leadership such as the leadership style associated with women. Logan (1998) further states that "essential leadership skills in restructured schools promote collaboration, consensus building, and empowerment of others" (1). Because the baby boomers' generation is retiring in vast numbers, "an increasing number of vacancies and a dwindling applicant pool for the positions of principal and superintendent create high-demand conditions for qualified aspirants for these positions" (Logan, 1998, 1). Logan argues that at some point, sheer numbers are going to have to count for something. "Women have made up at least half of educational administration program enrollments since the mid-80s and [there has been] an increase in the percentage of women in the educational administration professorate" (2). Finally, on a legislative level, antidiscrimination laws have provided for a more "open environment for hiring women in nontraditional roles" (2). For all these reasons, this may be a point in history when women have an excellent outlook for careers in educational administration.

Several studies note women's exceptional abilities as school leaders, frequently rating them more favorably than men administrators. As early as 1972, the *Report of the New York State Commission on the Quality, Cost, and Financing of Elementary and Secondary Education* noted that "nothing in our studies has convinced us that males are inherently superior to females as educational administrators and we view the de facto discrimination as totally unjustifiable" (as cited in Blount, 1998, p.132). Chase (1995) notes that "although there is a great range in how women superintendents talk about experiences of discrimination and much diversity in how they articulate their responses to such treatment, all of them acknowledge that such experience must be addressed within their work stories" (10). Chase follows Shakeshaft's directive to demystify what a woman superintendent does by examining the narratives of women superintendents. She conducted extensive interviews with ninety-two female administrators before focusing on the four women superintendents featured in her study. Two theoretical commitments anchored her method of inquiry: "first culture is manifest in the actual, particular

practices of everyday life; and second, talk is a form of social action worthy of study in itself” (25). Chase weaves her pattern of narrative discourse for these four school leaders by connecting their *settled talk* about their professional work with the *unsettled talk* about their perceptions as subjected persons. She calls for researchers to “listen much more carefully to professional women’s stories as they are told...in the safe spaces produced by relationships with those they trust” (216).

Brunner (1999) points out that when the women in Chase’s study talk, during unsettled moments, about being silenced, they are explicitly describing and admitting experiences of gender bias. One of the ways that they frame their own silence in more comfortable and settled ways is to talk about the individual coping skills that they use to overcome or live with the silencing that they experience. In this case, the women themselves draw attention away from their own experiences of silencing and point to (1) the methods they use to succeed in spite of gender bias and (2) the importance of silence—listening—as a part of successful performance. In addition, the women superintendents avoid a focus on structural constraints that create their unnatural silence by referring to their choice to listen as an important part of leadership practice (93). Furthermore when the women administrators in Chase’s (1995) study were asked to define the term *power*, several of them had difficulty. It seems to be unnatural for them. One of the women superintendents, for example, reveals that even while in the powerful position of superintendent of schools, she still does not feel comfortable with the notion of power as the dominant culture defines it. “I’m always a little bit surprised when people talk about the power that one holds as a superintendent because it really doesn’t seem that particular concept of what power has been is part of *my* definition” [respondent’s emphasis](84). Brunner concludes, “Women in my study struggled when talking about power. Because it was not safe to talk about it in most settings, they did not have the language to talk about it even in the safety of a private interview. This struggle was especially intense given the fact that they occupied a position that is viewed as powerful—the superintendency” (85).

A number of qualitative studies about women in the superintendency have been undertaken in the past two decades. Grogan (1999) uses a theoretical framework of feminist post-structuralism to analyze the narratives of those who have obtained the

superintendency. She states that "...every attempt must be made to learn what it is like to be a woman superintendent. As the discourse is revealed, more women who aspire to the position will be able to imagine what it is like and to picture themselves in it" (204). According to Grogan (1996) the specific discourse these women encounter demands a high level of preparation for the job, but the foundation of educational administration leadership is predicated on men's lived experiences on the job and informed by andocentric theory. Thus, the onus is on a woman to demonstrate enough of the behaviors assumed desirable for a superintendent, so that "her gender will not count against her" (184). Brunner (1999) conducted extensive interviews with women superintendents in order to begin a larger conversation with practicing women superintendents articulating "collective solutions" (179). Mendez-Morse (1999) in her qualitative study of four Mexican-American Women superintendents found that women will redefine themselves in relation to the position. "First [they] rejected the definition of the superintendent as a white male. Moreover, they rejected an identity and identity of themselves...that placed the superintendency outside their realm of possibilities....They asserted their competency and claimed their definition of themselves as females capable and empowered to be superintendents." (139).

Regan and Brooks (1995) identify five feminist attributes of women's leadership: collaboration, caring, courage, intuition, and vision. Brunner (1998) found that "women separated themselves from the definition of power as control, authority, or dominance over others . . . to understand that perceiving the self as separate from the dominant culture's notion of power as power over seemed to be necessary for a woman to be truly collaborative. Genuine collaboration occurs when all participants are considered equals" (156). This builds upon research done by Gilligan (1982) and Diller (1996). Gilligan (1982) describes the different ways that men and women discuss moral decisions, finding that men talk about rights and justice while women are concerned with issues of responsibilities. Referencing Gilligan's earlier work, Diller *et al* (1996) speak of women's practice of an "ethics of care" with an emphasis on care, nurturance, human connections, and responsibility (89). Helegelson (1990) and Rosener (1990) each take the position that women lead differently because of "essentially different" qualities which come from socialization. They argue that this socialization gives women a leadership

advantage because they are facilitative, communicative, and empowering. Others contend that it is the role which prescribes behavior and that gender is just one variable. Schmuck (1999) embraces both ideas. She thinks women and men are more alike than different, but that they lead differently.

Grogan (1996) finds a central reason for the difference in leadership style may be that women's personal and professional style also contrasts sharply with those of the white males dominating K-12 educational administration. Highly qualified female candidates for the superintendency are overwhelmingly seen by hiring agencies such as Boards as women first and administrators second. Women's alternative approaches to assuming leadership positions, their differences in style and being seen as women first and administrators second are the top three reasons identified by Grogan's work as explanations for why so few female administrators become superintendents. Underpinning Grogan's (1996) research is an advocacy for social change, and an interest in determining how and under what conditions the status-quo of this male dominated position might change.

Stage 6: Transformation of Theory

Shakeshaft theorizes that the research undertaken in stage six will transform theory so that both male and female experiences will be recognized. This transformation will not happen unless both male and female researchers challenge traditional theory.

Schmuck (1999) contributes to this issue by addressing the issue of the difference in leadership styles of men and women. "They will lead differently for two reasons: 1) Males and females live in different realities in our gendered society and have learned different socially appropriate behaviors, and 2) Gendered, the social meaning given to being female or male, includes a transactional relationship between people. Others' expectations and one's sense of self will be formed through the construction of being female or male (x)." She argues further that schools are gender-bound institutions and that reality is not the same for male and female superintendents and that we need to understand women's experience, arguing that men's experience is not relevant. "Gender is the mediating force in the superintendents' selection, effectiveness, and retention" (x, xi).

Sergiovanni (1992) states the more traditional (male-oriented) conceptions of leadership will be replaced by leadership that emphasizes the feminist tradition. Citing research from both Gilligan (1982) and Shakeshaft (1987), Sergiovanni notes that women emphasize successful relationships, affiliations, power as a means to achieve shared goals, connectedness, authenticity, and personal creativity. Sergiovanni concludes the feminine perspective on school leadership is important and predicts it will gain legitimacy in the changing era of school reform efforts.

Using feminist theory, Grogan (2000) contends that contemporary organizational leadership requires facilitative leadership that empowers others and values diverse discourse as a means of reaching better decisions. School principal and superintendent roles are being reconceived, renegotiated, and reshaped. Grogan thinks we can use feminist postmodern theory for a reconception of the superintendency. She sees the most important contribution of feminist theory to understanding the superintendency is to

“...adopt its paradigm of social criticism. Feminist scholarship advocates action that results in a more equitable distribution of resources and opportunities for those who have been marginalized. We might look more closely at how the superintendency does or does not concern itself with such issues. We might question whether a focus on equity and care could prompt different approaches to the superintendency...” (126).

Björk (2000) concludes that women approach school leadership differently than men do and cites extensive literature (Andrews and Basom, 1990; Dillard, 1995; Frasher and Frasher, 1979; Grady and O’Connell, 1993; Grogan, 1996, 1999, 2000; Hill and Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1989, 1999) which indicates most women in administration have the following characteristics matching the demands of current reform efforts: they are child-centered with a an understanding of both child development and student achievement; their expertise is with curriculum, instruction, and assessment; they are more likely to be facilitative and collaborative in their working relationships, and their leadership style tends to be democratic and inclusive.

Brunner (1998) notes that literature on women in positions of power supports the notion that women bring to administrative practice many characteristics necessary for school reform. She also sees hope in the current reform movement. The realization that

the superintendent is important in advancing the reform agenda means that research aimed at helping superintendents transform their practice is pertinent. Her review of the literature on women in positions of power indicates women bring to the practice many of the characteristics noted as necessary for reform, specifically: collaborative decision making that advance student achievement, and moral issues (social justice, democratic values, ethics of care,). “We believe that research on women in the superintendency would inform and sensitize all people, men and women, either seeking or already in the position of superintendent, to issues raised by the two major reform thrusts discussed above. Essential leadership skills in restructured schools promote collaboration, consensus building, and empowerment of others (Common and Grimmit, 1992; Cuban, 1988; Leithwood, 1995; Murphy, 1995).

Brunner (1999) cites five “breaking insights” emerging from research on women and the superintendency. Women superintendents:

- 1) are inclined to share power
- 2) experience gender bias, and they acknowledge it
- 3) recognize that the articulation of difficulties/complexities/strengths of Superintendency by women of color is important to all
- 4) find ways to talk about their successes and these strategies are helpful to others
- 5) are at their best when the needs of the students come first (1-6).

Summary

This review of the literature demonstrates that investigations into the way women superintendents gain their positions are limited (Hodgkinson and Montenegro, 1999). In 1996, Grogan observed that the superintendency is "not a particularly well-researched leadership position" (119) and Johnson (1996) characterized the research on the superintendency as "scant" (p. 19). Chase and Bell (1994) note that several state departments of education, university colleges of education, and some state legislatures have publicly identified the under representation of females in the superintendency as a problem. Grogan (1996) states that despite documented interest in the position (by women) the number of women superintendents remains consistently small. Unreliable statistics on women superintendents, coupled with the small number of women in the superintendency, has deterred many interested researchers from investigating the female experience in the superintendency (Kowalski and Stouder, 1999). More knowledge about

how women attain the superintendency is needed (Grogan, 1996). Brunner (2000 a) states that the investigation of women superintendents has been a "previously neglected" area of research (76). Isaacson (1998) recommends that further research be done on the career pathways of female superintendents. Women aspiring to the position of superintendent must have a clear picture of the role that career paths, mentoring, and networking play in reaching the superintendency. A study such as this one is important because the pool of candidates willing to take on the role of school superintendent is dwindling. Glass and Björk (2003) state "Women remain a rich and untapped resource for the job. Finding ways to encourage women and individuals of color to choose the superintendency as a career is a serious concern of most state policy makers...and many are on record as saying that the under-representation of women and people of color in the profession is shameful" (278).

It is indeed "shameful" and the women of this study are a unique example of the "rich and untapped resource[s]" to which Glass and Björk refer. In essence, the experiences of this group of 11 aspirants are reflective of the "paradigmatic shift" Shakeshaft's (1979) called for. This truly is a study of a group of women "on their own terms." These women have unequivocally asserted their ambition to seek the most powerful district-level position in public school leadership. In doing so, they have committed precious time, money, and energy into participating in specially designed preparation programs in the belief that these programs will further that ambition. Shakeshaft's paradigm is helpful in understanding the sense they make of their aspiration to be a superintendent. The narratives of their careers and experiences will add new insights into both the historical absence of women in the superintendency and the burgeoning presence of newcomers such as these 11 women. We will learn from listening to them how they have been helped or impeded in their quest for the position. From their narratives we will discover how they envision their own superintendency (to be) and, more importantly, in what ways they are reconceptualizing the position itself—moving into that sixth transformative stage of which Shakeshaft spoke. At the very least, their stories will inform our understandings of women and their aspirations for the superintendency.

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Chapter 2

Methodology

Purpose

Fourteen female educators with superintendent certification spent 2003-2004 as members of the Women's Superintendents Initiative (WSI)², a yearlong program sponsored by an Educational Cooperative in a southeastern state. WSI offered professional development activities and materials to highly qualified women educators for the stated goal of "breaking the glass ceiling for female superintendents." The program's curricular materials centered on issues of leadership, finance, and gender and were delivered during a series of three-day retreats, one in each of the participating states. Additional issues were presented in the form of videos, web-based sites, and books. Throughout the year, each participant had a telephone mentor. WSI was envisioned by its director to be a multi-year program. However, its initial (and only) year was funded by a grant from a philanthropic entity which did not renew support for a second year. The director's intention was to identify and train a pool of female educators to successfully meet the challenges of the superintendency in a three-state area.

Because I was interested in women's perceptions about advancement to the position of public school superintendent who had participated in professional development programs specifically designed to facilitate that move, I also drew upon participants in an entirely separate program that focused on advancing minority candidates to the position of superintendent. This one-year, mentoring/networking program is called Mentoring Minority Superintendents Program (MMSP). MMSP was established in 2002 under the auspices of a state education authority. In preparing minority candidates for the superintendency this program established mentorships between their participants and current superintendents. This program has "graduated" 5 African-American candidates (4 female), 2 of whom (both female) have subsequently achieved the position of superintendent.

² The names of people, program, and places are all pseudonyms.

Research Questions

A concern about the ongoing differential access women have to the school district superintendency provides the underlying motivation for this research.

Recognizing both the enormity and complexity of that issue, I set out to explore a single, but significant element of it: how a particular group of women understand, give meaning to, and address the issue of access to the position of school district superintendent. The following questions guided my research:

- 1) What are the assumptions held by the women in these special superintendent preparation programs about accessing the position of superintendent?
- 2) What meaning do these women ascribe to their own professional experiences, particularly in the context of their current intention to secure a superintendency?
- 3) How do these women conceptualize the superintendency and how do they characterize their own leadership qualities in relationship to that position?
- 4) What were their expectations upon entering either of these programs? In what ways were these expectations met? Not met? Changed because of their involvement with the program?
- 5) To what extent, if at all, are these women and their experiences consistent with what the literature tells us, and how, if at all, they and their experiences might deepen our understanding of women and the superintendency?

Approach

I utilized a qualitative approach in order to achieve an understanding of how these women think about their participation in these programs. Central to the qualitative paradigm is the conviction that realities cannot be studied independently from their contexts and the beliefs that people assign meaning to the objective world, that their valued experiences are situated within a historical and social context, and that there can be multiple realities (Tesch, 1990). Strauss and Corbin (1990) contend that qualitative methods can be used to better understand any phenomenon about which little is known in

order to gain new perspectives and/or more in-depth information that is difficult to convey quantitatively. Qualitative research pays attention to the idiosyncratic, looks for the uniqueness of each case, and has an emergent design. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), “If you want people to understand better than they otherwise might, provide them with information in the form in which they usually experience it” (120). Written with rich details, qualitative research makes the insights into participants’ perspectives more meaningful. Further, hermeneutic phenomenological research (Van Manen, 1990) calls for studying specific events such as personal anecdotes to more richly understand the dynamics of an event. By nature, people interpret the world around them and that world is the sum of their experiences. Such understanding is described by Schleirmacher as the “hermeneutic circle” within which exists a formal relation between the parts and the whole of a phenomenon (Love, 1994). Butler (1998) explains that a formal relation exists between the parts and the whole of a phenomenon and that “through prejudice laden pre-understanding each part will be interpreted and its meaning and relationship to the whole consolidated into an emergent understanding of the whole phenomenon” (290-291). The qualitative paradigm aims to understand the social world from the viewpoint of participants, through detailed descriptions of their cognitive and symbolic actions and through the richness of meaning associated with observable behavior (Wildemuth, 1993). Thus, the mission of qualitative research is to discover meaning and understanding, rather than to verify truth or predict outcomes.

Participants

The meaning and understanding I sought concerned the careers and hoped for futures of women seeking a non-traditional path [for the role] to the superintendency. I also was interested in learning why such women, already highly experienced and credentialed, would commit substantial time, energy, and financial resources to participate in professional development designed to assist them in securing the position. Thus, I selected two such programs and invited their participants to be part of my study.

The Women’s Superintendent Initiative (WSI) was a one-shot, grant-funded program designed to prepare women in a three-state area to become superintendents. I invited 13 of the 14 members of WSI to participate in this study. I did not invite one

participant because a previous professional relationship introduced complexities into the process that made establishment of the requisite levels of trust and rapport problematic. The 13 women indicated their initial willingness to participate in this study by a written release and later, by signed informed consent forms approved by the University of Kentucky Non-Medical Institutional Review Board (IRB). The Mentoring Minorities for the Superintendency Program (MMSP) operates under the auspices of a state department of education and was designed to help identify and train a pool of highly qualified, minority superintendent candidates for school districts in that state. I surveyed 2 of the female MMSP participants and had follow-up interviews with both of them, after they gave informed consent to participate in the study.

Design and Data Generation

Qualitative research is an inquiry process intending to build a holistic, complex understanding of a social phenomenon. It is characterized by data generation in a natural setting where the researcher acts as a key data generator. Furthermore, the research contains deep, rich description and is more concerned with process than specifying outcomes or products. Generally, the data are analyzed in an inductive process to provide meaning. A basic assumption of qualitative research is that the researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

In order to study the meanings and essence of the lived experience among the WSI and MMSP participants, the primary data generation technique was one-on-one interviewing. This study generated multiple layers of data from smaller and smaller groups as the focus narrowed to fewer and fewer participants. Pre-existing data, and survey responses were used in addition to the in-depth interview data.

Pre-existing Data

I was fortunate to begin this study with an abundance of pre-existing data to analyze from the 13 WSI participants. However, no similar data exist for the 2 MMSP participants. The pre-existing data from WSI came in the form of written materials submitted by program applicants and taped interviews conducted by the administrators of WSI as part of their application process. In their acceptance agreement with WSI, all the women agreed to allow these materials to be used for research purposes. I was given

unfettered access to the pre-existing data by the WSI director and thus obtained and analyzed copies of the application materials consisting of limited responses to written questions, demographic information, current salary, a list of accomplishments, and memberships in organizations. Participants also discussed their expectations for the program, their learning goals, and learning styles. Data set 1 became a comparative chart developed from these materials.

A second set of pre-existing materials also pertaining only to the 13 WSI participants consisted of interviews conducted by the director of WSI in April and May, 2003. The WSI candidates were asked to respond verbally to a list of 12 predetermined questions. These telephone interviews, each lasting approximately 20 to 25 minutes, were preserved on audio-tapes, and the originals were presented to me by the director. Initially, I listened to all 13 tapes, taking notes. Later, I copied the tapes and sent them to my transcriptionist who transcribed them verbatim. Upon receiving the transcripts I read them for accuracy, making notes of any errors and misunderstandings. These interviews were later coded and compiled into data set 2.

Researcher Designed Survey

Using data set 1 (application materials), my notes from the WSI interviews (data set 2), and my initial research questions, I designed a survey which was reviewed by my committee chair and approved by the University of Kentucky IRB. The purpose of the survey was to up-date the pre-existing materials and to assist in framing the questions for the interviews which were to follow. The survey consisted of 12 questions seeking to 1) determine whether any of the participants had been hired as a superintendent or interviewed for the position in the interval between their completion of the program and this study; 2) their perceptions of forces which either encouraged or inhibited them in achieving the superintendency; and 3) how they believed their participation in WSI had or had not improved their chances to become superintendents (see Appendix A). I hoped to find commonalities of perspectives that would enable me to begin raising the generative questions which would guide the research. Prior to mailing the survey, the WSI director assisted my access to the informants by sending them an e-mail reminding them of their research commitment to the program and encouraging them to reply to both the survey and any requests I made for interviews. I sent the survey by mail to the 13

identified participants from WSI asking for a response within 2 weeks. At the end of 2 weeks, having only received 5 responses, a follow-up letter and an e-mail went out. These garnered a total of 12 WSI responses.

I sent the same survey (with a few minor changes—program name, etc.) to the MMSP participants. Problems locating and receiving permissions from the 3 MMSP participants necessitated their survey being sent out on a different time-line. An additional problem occurred when one of the 3 MMSP participants actually was hired as a superintendent before she could respond to my survey—removing her from the “aspiring” list, and leaving me with only 2 MMSP surveys. I recorded the responses of the participants in a spread sheet which became data set 3.

In-depth Interviews

Based upon both the survey responses and the analysis of the pre-existing data, I developed a two-stage interview protocol which was approved by my committee Chair and the IRB. Using the survey responses as well as my impressions from listening to the WSI tapes, I selected 5 WSI participants for a second interview. One criterion for my selection was location. WSI involved participants from a 3-state area, and I wanted representatives from each state. I also selected informants with different levels of service time and experience to ensure diversity. Finally, on these facets, I selected participants who had written lengthy additional comments on the survey, theorizing that these women might prove to be the most forthcoming in an interview. I then contacted each of these women by e-mail and asked for the opportunity to interview them by phone. Every participant I contacted agreed to be interviewed, and we worked cooperatively by e-mail in setting up mutually acceptable times for the phone interviews. These phone interviews occurred during March-April, 2005, from my home office using a speaker phone and tape-recorder. It was stated for the record that the interviews were being recorded. Following each interview, I wrote a brief summary of the impressions I gleaned from the interview. I then copied the tape and sent it to my transcriptionist who returned a verbatim transcript within two weeks. Upon receiving the transcripts I would check them for accuracy and write a summary as well as some notes to prompt me for the next round of interviews.

In the first round, I interviewed 9 WSI participants and 2 MMSP participants. These interviews averaged 25 minutes in length. The objective in this first interview was to explore the reasons why these aspirants had decided to join WSI and MMSP. The “grand tour question” (Spradley, 1979) was: “Please tell me how you learned about WSI (or MMSP); why you decided to participate, and what do you feel you gained as a result of your participation?” To prompt them I included questions about their career ladders, the desirable competencies and necessary qualifications for being a superintendent, and questions about their expectations of the programs in which they participated. I also sought to find out to what extent they were supported in their aspirations, both personally and professionally (see Appendix B).

In the second round of interviews I still wanted geographical diversity, and so I selected 2 informants from each of two states and one from the third state. This second group also had considerable differences in age and experience. Another reason I selected these five WSI women was the emphasis they put on the importance of mentors and networking in their first interview, because the presence of networks and mentors emerged early as a theme in data analysis.

My access to the MMSP participants was not as easily accomplished. Initially I obtained the names of the women who had participated in the program from the state department web page. I had crossed paths with one of them professionally, and I contacted her by e-mail requesting her help with the survey. She was entirely willing to do so, but within a week of my contacting her, she was appointed to a superintendency. She gave me the name of another participant even contacting her on my behalf. This MMSP participant completed the survey and agreed to a telephone interview. Later, I traveled to her office, and we continued our conversation. It is she who put me in touch with the second MMSP participant who had completed her term with the MMSP program in its first year. By the time I was introduced to this third MMSP participant, I was in the final stages of my interviews. I was unable to set up a face-to-face meeting with her, but we did do a telephone interview combining questions from both rounds of interviews with WSI participants.

Thus, the second round of interviews consisted of in-depth, face-to-face conversations with 5 WSI participants and 1 participant from the MMSP program. These

conversations averaged 60 minutes, were tape recorded, and transcribed verbatim. This second interview explored two major sets of issues: 1) the influence of gender, age, education, marital status, family, and upward professional mobility on their decisions both to join these specialized programs and to seek the superintendency; and 2) the potential existence of restrictive forces working against women who seek the superintendency. The grand tour questions (Spradley, 1979) were, “What are your understandings of and how have you constructed and negotiated your educational leadership career to the point you aspire to be a superintendent?” And, “Why do you aspire to be a superintendent?”

The second round of in-depth, WSI interviews were conducted from May to October, 2005. This extended period allowed for interim data analysis as well as time for me to reflect and refine my ideas. Except for one participant, who had business in my district and generously offered to come to my office for an interview, I traveled to the towns where my informants lived. I interviewed 3 aspirants in motel rooms they had recommended for that purpose. I interviewed the others in their offices after work hours. I was alone with the informants for the duration of these interviews.

Ritchie (1995) lays out the fundamental rules and principles which I applied to my interviews: “do your homework; be prepared; construct meaningful but open-ended questions; do not interrupt responses; follow up on what you have heard; promptly process your tapes; and always keep in mind and practice the ethics of interviewing” (57). Prior to every interview I reviewed the interviewee’s application and survey materials so as to personalize the interaction and to provide for specific follow-up questions. I immediately sent the tapes to the transcriptionist who generally provided a two-week turn-around for the transcripts. Upon receiving the transcripts, I reviewed them for accuracy and wrote summaries of the content. Finally, desiring to also understand the genesis of the 2 programs, I conducted 35-minute telephone interviews with the directors of both programs. These telephone interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. I have assured the confidentiality of my informants by disguising the name and location of the two professional development programs and by providing my informants with pseudonyms. In assigning the participant pseudonyms, I made a list of women I admire, and then just assigned them randomly to my participants.

Data Analysis

In qualitative inquiry it is difficult to separate data generation from data analysis because of the constant movement between the two. In a qualitative study the investigator starts with an open-ended question and refines it as the analysis continues (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Qualitative research calls for an inductive analysis so that the critical themes emerge out of the data (Patton, 2002). In order to break up and conceptualize the data, investigators use open coding, which explores the data in a detailed way, identifying the process in the data, and finally conceptualizing it. (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Consistencies between codes reveal categories. Axial coding attempts to connect the categories by paradigms and includes situations, phenomena, and contexts. The next stage is selective coding which is the process of choosing the core categories, aiding revision and confirming the relationship among categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1998; Wolcott, 1994). It is an iterative, not linear, process (Cresswell, 1994). The interpretation of the data is presented in a rich narrative which “closely approximates the reality it represents” (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 57).

Data analysis began by organizing the WSI participant responses to the application questionnaire in a table (data set 1). I also added the information from the application materials provided by WSI. These application materials included information about the participants’ experience, recognitions and honors, as well as their stated objectives for entering the program, and their self-assessment of their learning style. This table became a reference point for me in setting up the interview protocols for the first set of interviews.

Even as I began the first round of 9 interviews (conducted March-May 2005) I started to analyze the data from the 13 interviews conducted by the director of WSI as part of the application process (data set 2). In this telephone interview, the applicants responded to 12 set questions, asked in a pre-determined order. I examined the transcripts looking for things I felt pertinent to my research questions, highlighting words and phrases and writing descriptive headings in a column on the side. These labels were not very precise and essentially served as general indicators of what I thought was important. I highlighted 46 different labels. Given that the participants were directed to comment

upon leadership, decision making and teamwork, it is not surprising that most headings clustered around these concepts. Other issues I noted related to expectations, accountability, ethics and responsibility, and a laser-like focus on students. I sought to develop these issues further in my round one and round two interviews.

I continued this same descriptive coding process with the round one and round two interviews (data sets 3 and 4). Altogether I arrived with 93 descriptive codes. At this point in the process I went back to my research questions and developed a document which I called “Emergent Categories” that responded to each question (see Appendix C, Preliminary Codes and Categories). After assigning a different color to each category, I then went back through all 4 data sets highlighting passages and quotations in the color that represents the category and assigning it a sub-category code. I then developed a 75-page, color-coded document which I titled “Categories, Patterns, and Themes” that organized these quotes under the umbrella of the seven categories. I included a reference list that clearly shows the participant, data set, and transcript page number for every quotation.

At the next stage of analysis I moved from simply organizing data to analysis and interpretation and generated a document which I entitled “7 Big Ideas.” These ideas were: 1) lack of clear career goals 2) the “other”;(social norms and stereotypes); 3) anti-feminism; 4) integrity/ethics; 5) networks and mento; 6) discrimination and prejudice, and 7) unique leadership attributes. These “big ideas” formed the basis for the themes presented in the discussion of findings.

Trustworthiness and Validity

Guba and Lincoln (1985) set forth four criteria for examining the trustworthiness of qualitative research; credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Transferability refers to the degree to which the results can be generalized or transferred to other contexts or settings. From a qualitative perspective credibility is only achieved through the eyes of the participants; transferability is primarily the responsibility of the one doing the generalizing; dependability is about the need to account for any change within the study; and confirmability refers to the degree to which the results can be confirmed or corroborated by others.

I relied upon the strategy of data triangulation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998) through which the use of dissimilar methods of data generation allows for the flaws of one method to be compensated by the strength of another. By combining them, the best of each can be gained. In this study, triangulation was used to construct believable, credible, and trustworthy accounts of the participants' perceptions. The different perspectives of the participants, the accounts of the two directors, as well as the analysis of the pre-existing data and survey responses provided multiple sources of data and multiple perceptions to produce a plausible explanation for how these aspirants constructed their understandings.

Role of the researcher

I also demonstrated the trustworthiness of my data by achieving fluency with my participants. As the researcher in this study I found talking to the participants of my study came very naturally to me. Very shortly into every one of the interviews, I felt like I had known the participant my whole life. And in a way, I have. I spent 26 years of my life working with women very similar to them. The "prejudice laden pre-understandings" that I bring to this study include my 23 years experience as a high school teacher, my administrative certifications, positions in instruction at the State Department of Education, and my current Central Office position in a large public school district. Except for the fact that I do not hold superintendent certification, I am a professional peer of the women in these programs. These commonalities of experience helped me to achieve rapport with my informants and to build trust. We "talked the same talk"; jargon was not an impediment; and my familiarity with many of their experiences encouraged them to open up in the interviews. As a result, the conversations flowed freely along the lines Gluck and Patai (1991) argue makes interviewing such a valuable method for qualitative research: "... preserve a living interchange for present and future use; we can rummage through interviews as we do an old attic –probing, comparing, checking insights, finding new treasures the third time through, then arranging and carefully documenting our results (11)."

My role as the researcher in this study was complex. As I mentioned in my prologue, I deeply identified with these women. Their professional background, education, and experiences mirrored my own. An additional benefit to my "insider status"

was easy access to the participants. They never failed to answer the e-mails I sent and were quick to rearrange their schedules to accommodate my interviews. One participant felt comfortable enough to actually come to my office for her second interview. In most cases my understandings of their professional lives gave me insights which allowed us to leap-frog over the stilted moments that often occur in an interview setting and achieve almost instantaneous rapport which enhanced the quality of the data.

The down-side of all this empathy and shared experiences was the difficulty I had in maintaining perspective. I was inclined to find their accounts and perspectives very credible and sometimes did not ask the hard follow-up questions. I also was quick to accept their judgments and assumptions because they so frequently concurred with my own experiences. When I examined the first transcripts I noticed that I was talking entirely too much and too eagerly; and I often assumed a common ground that I had no evidence existed. I made some mid-course changes in my interviewing techniques which I think improved the later interviews.

I feared being too empathetic and worried about the implications of bias in my research. I was concerned that I was pre-disposed to being overly empathetic and overly accepting of their qualifications to be a superintendent. While I worked hard to maintain perspective, my biases must be considered a limitation of the study. Keeping with Patton's (2002) idea that "reflexivity involves discomfort and self questioning" (328), I began keeping a reflective journal at the time I began analyzing the data, in order to record my ideas and personal reactions as well as maintain a record of the decisions I made during the emergent design. This journal provides a record of my data management and includes the codes, categories, and themes emerging from the data, and it proved to be absolutely essential to the completion of this work. Because I have taken such an inordinately long time in completing the writing of this dissertation, I was away from the writing for as long as 6 weeks at various times. I always began by revisiting the journal in order to recalibrate and remember. Whether it is a condition of aging brain cells, or the sheer volume of data characteristic of qualitative analysis, this journal helped keep me straight. At the stage when I began to "see" what I first called "the big ideas," (later labeling them emerging themes) it was because I had recorded my thoughts as I went along.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that maintaining a critical dialog among trusted colleagues (critical friends) about the data as they emerge helps challenge one to think beyond one's own conclusions and assumptions. In achieving a level of reflexivity, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) caution qualitative researchers to be aware of their own views and prejudices. When doing my summaries for the interviews, I looked at how my life intersected with the participants in so many areas: culture, age (in some cases), gender, class, social status, family, political praxis, language, and values—the similarities are so many; I worked hard to make this their story, not mine. I did this by acknowledging this bias, and I also used my committee Chair as a sounding board and an advisor to me and to my work (McNiff, Lomax, and Whitehead, 1996). Familiar with my methods and intentions, she has provided me with feedback about my preferences for certain kinds of evidence, interpretations, and explanations and helped me consider alternatives as well as locate blind spots and omissions. Over the course of this study we have met frequently so that she could provide direction and feedback. When I entered the data generation and analysis phase of research she reviewed the general progress of the study. I shared my concerns about the research process and her role as my “critical friend” also helped establish the trustworthiness of the research.

Summary

This chapter presented a research agenda comprised of qualitative methodology to address the perception of women seeking a non-traditional path to the superintendency by participating in specialized professional development programs. This multilayered approach to data generation and analysis is intentional and has been constructed in such a way so as to include the voices of all eleven women, while at the same time “filtering down” to the rich emerging narrative of two of these women. What follows is the narrative of two specialized preparation programs and the women who participated in them.

Chapter 3

A Tale of Two Programs and the Women Who Joined Them

If any single quality identifies the women of this study as a “matched set” it is their unreserved passion for teaching and education. Virginia* describes herself as strongly committed to education and refers to it as “missionary work”. Elizabeth has a “life commitment to education in general.” Having spent 27 years as an educator, Paula believes public education is a “calling”. Sharon thinks that as an educator she has the power to reach people and to influence them. She notes that a career in education means

“...the hours are long and the stress level is high. I know that if we didn’t have caring people at every level working in the public schools that... we think we have problems now, I can’t imagine how much worse the problems of our society would be...”

This dedication to education began at an early stage for these women who all told remarkably similar stories about “playing school.” Kate says she played constantly,

“I have a couple of sisters, ones just a couple of years younger than me and I remember us playing school. When we were little we had little desks that I don’t know where they came from and my grandpa worked as a custodian in his later years...and I think that might even be where the desks came from. He got ahold of these old desks and we got the crayons out and the paper and one of us would be the teacher, we would take turns. I liked being the teacher... and I always enjoyed being in school. I hated for school to end and couldn’t wait for it to start.”

Lea remembers “being in charge”

“Usually it was summertime and I was forcing people to read or write, my brother, my cousin whoever. I was in charge... I wanted to control them and to keep them from that running and screaming. I would say, “Let’s school!” I was in charge I was the teacher and you had to do something, you had to write or read...I was the teacher, I was the leader.”

Did they, as Susan suggests, “play as a child what they wanted to do as an adult?”

“...I even have old photos, of course with my dad being a professor, teaching and learning were encouraged in the home, so I played as a child what I wanted to do as an adult. Probably all of us did. ... I had a space in my basement, with tables and my dad hung a small blackboard, book shelf, crayons in a basket, I kept everything from school and even talked teachers into old books. Then I would

* In order to protect their confidentiality, pseudonyms have been assigned to all participants in this study.

gather small children in the neighborhood, if I couldn't convince them, I used my dolls. Now that is admitting a whole lot, but it is true.”

United in their lifelong interest, passion, and commitment to public education, this group of women aspires (“want the job”) of superintendent. All of these women entered one of the two specialized professional development programs in the expectation that they would get help to achieve that goal.

The Women Superintendents Initiative (WSI)

The Women’s Superintendents Initiative (WSI) was the brainchild of Gillian who worked as the director for an educational cooperative primarily dedicated to professional development initiatives for teachers and administrators. It is located in the rural part of a southeastern state. In the grant application, to obtain financial support for WSI, Gillian describes the educational cooperative as having an annual operating budget of \$250,000. . Besides Gillian, the co-op has 1 other full-time and 3 part-time staff members who the grant application describes as collectively having more than fifty years of educational and professional development experience. The stated mission of the cooperative is to enhance educational opportunities for each child within its service area by providing educators with the resources to teach with growing confidence and to lead with assurance. Through its leadership activities, the cooperative seeks to redefine and redesign the professional development as needed for leadership preparation in order to produce school leaders who will guide schools to high levels of student performance.

The WSI grant proposal requested \$50,000.00 from one of the largest philanthropic institutions in the United States. This Foundation is known for its support of important cultural institutions such as art museums, symphony orchestras, and educational projects. Founded in 1921 by the wife of a publishing entrepreneur (a self-described feminist), the Foundation’s stated objectives are to strengthen education leadership to enhance student achievement; improve after-school learning opportunities; and expand participation in arts and culture. Its funding mandate is to enable institutions to expand learning and enrichment opportunities for all people by supporting and sharing effective ideas and practices. According to its vision statement, the Foundation believes it

can play a role in generating solutions to national problems by putting forth innovative solutions to pressing problems in places that appear poised for change and with people who are committed to driving that change. This focus on educational leadership and history of funding women's initiatives made the Foundation the perfect funding source for Gillian's proposal.

It is interesting to note that Gillian's career experiences follow along the lines of most of the WSI participants. She is a retired elementary and special education teacher who spent 13 years of her career in a Central Office post as an instructional supervisor. In commenting on her career she said,

"...when I went to college you had two, well you had three choices. If you didn't want to go to college, you could be a secretary. If you did want to go to college you could be a nurse or a teacher. And I didn't want to be a nurse, so I became a teacher."

Gillian had been the director of the educational cooperative for four years when she wrote the proposal for WSI. In explaining her rationale for the WSI grant proposal, Gillian stated,

"Well it seemed strange to me that there were so many women in the field of education and such a small percentage at the superintendency level. And, umm, I won't say I was interested to find out why because it didn't really matter to me why. I just thought that if I could help more women who wanted to be in that position get in that position, it would be a good thing to do. And putting the program together once we got the money, I sort of got more interested in the why." (What was your master plan?) "Well we had a grant-writer, and the first thing I told her was, umm, find us some money for women who want to be superintendents. And that was all I told her. And then she would come back to me and say, 'Ok, what do you want to do with them?' And I'd say, 'I don't know, I've never been a superintendent. I never wanted to be a superintendent. I guess we should ask some women superintendent's what we should do.'... Umm, so not knowing what we were going to do, we got the grant. I mean, the grant was in very general terms. A year-long project for women who wanted to be superintendents."

In the grant application Gillian proposed to: 1) identify potential female leaders; 2) to prepare female educators to be outstanding leaders in the role of superintendent; and 3) to break the glass ceiling for female administrators. She proposed to identify and

develop a core group of 20 female candidates for the superintendency by providing the professional development to equip them for the challenge and the continuing support as they moved into leadership roles.

The goals listed in the application were:

- 1) Identify and develop female leadership talent
- 2) Design, deliver, and evaluate a school leader program for females that emphasizes school improvement and prepare leaders who can succeed in superintendency roles.
- 3) Increase the number of qualified female candidates eligible for superintendency
- 4) Build a support base for potential female education leaders
- 5) Build a support network for female superintendency candidates (WSI Application Materials)

In the application Gillian and her grant writer argue that “strong leadership enhances the potential for student achievement. This project will identify those potential female leaders, provide the skills for leadership through intensive professional development, and sustain those skills through a support and network system.” Describing their proposal as unique “in its intent to identify and train a pool of female educators as potential superintendents... [and] if funded, female superintendents in X, Y, and Z [states] and the nation will be surveyed and recruited to serve as consultants and coaches/mentors for the project”(WSI grant application).

Gillian describes the proposed project as a year-long program for women who want to be superintendents. Her preliminary planning consisted of posing these questions: “What would have helped you in your career advancement?” and “What have you done to help other women who want to become superintendents?” to a brainstorming session with women superintendents, and women in state departments of education. Members of the brainstorming group said the key to their advancement had been the presence of a mentor. While a unique feature of WSI (and something of a draw for some of the participants) was the inclusion of women from a three-state area, this was not in the original planning. In fact, Gillian does not remember how or why it became a grant covering 3 states.

Gillian asked the Foundation for \$50,000.00, but it only funded \$35,000.00. Still, faced with the shortfall, Gillian decided to expand rather than contract the scope of the program. She decided to charge participants from the outset:

“...even if they [the foundation] had given us the entire amount we had asked for, built into that was a charge simply because you feel like you get what you pay for. And if there was no charge we figured there would be some women who would say they would do it and then they wouldn’t.”

Gillian asked for funding from the same source for a second year but was denied.

“To be honest I think (the foundation) had a pot of money that was to go away when they figured how they were rewarding money and I think it was just, ‘OK, let’s throw that over there to the superintendent’s program.’”

The program that emerged (Gillian acknowledges that she and her grant writer “were building the airplane as they were trying to fly it”) consisted of three, four-day professional development workshops, each located in one of the 3 targeted states. The first workshop centered on leadership and reform. The focus of the second workshop was on finance and budgeting. At the third workshop, the participants underwent mock-interviews and received feedback from school board members and superintendent headhunters. Gillian assigned each participant to a “telephone mentor” and gave each of them a phone card good for 5 hours of consultation. The two “mentors”, Janet and Beth, were former superintendents, and Janet is now a professor at a state university. Each of these mentors had taken an active role in her state to mentor and promote women into the public school superintendency, and each had a successful track record for doing so. In the early planning of the program, Gillian hoped to involve a group of incumbent women superintendents whom the participants would have the opportunity to shadow, listing them as advisors in the promotional materials the participants received. This advisory board of women superintendents never became operational, and the WSI participants did not have the opportunity to shadow women superintendents as had been proposed as part of the program.

Gillian’s ideal candidate for the program would already have Superintendent credentials and a “proven track record for leadership.” The application process was “lengthy” and a telephone interview was part of the process. Gillian’s grant writer checked the candidates’ references. WSI took all the applicants, but one who applied dropped out during the selection process telling Gillian that when “I shut my eyes I can’t see myself as a superintendent”. Another dropped out during the first professional

development workshop. Gillian thought 10 of the candidates “were over and above” what she expected and the other 4 were “about what she expected.” She said,

“I don’t think we would have taken everybody if there would have been some real weak candidates.”

Approximately one year after the conclusion of the WSI program, Gillian had trouble remembering its specific goals,

“I don’t know that our goal was ever to move these women more quickly into the superintendency.”

Some two years after the end of the program, Gillian acknowledges being disappointed that none of the participants had yet moved into superintendency,

“I am disappointed that some of them haven’t made it to that level. I don’t think we slowed them down any. I think we gave some better insight into the position and all of the nuances in to the superintendency. **And I think that two or three decided that it was not for them,**” [emphasis added].

Gillian is most proud of the

“level of professional development the women received” and the network that they have access to now. Not just each other, but also people at (private University) and (state University) and the presenters and those kinds of people.”

Upon reflection, she thinks if she had it to do over again she would design it to be longer; 18 months instead of 12.

“It was so crammed in those three times that we got together. I mean every minute was used. We started on Thursday and Friday and Saturday. We even did dinners together, the evenings were together... I do have a high level of energy. And I guess I just assumed that any woman who wanted to be superintendent would have a high level of energy. Sometimes I may have crammed too much into too short a time.”

Gillian thinks the WSI candidates will do a better job interview because of the mock interviews with real Board members that were conducted as part of the program. She also cites the “life-coaching” from Jane as a strength of the program. However, in considering whether the participants were satisfied with the program she reflected,

“I would say there are some that are just as disappointed that they don’t have a job as superintendent. And that maybe that they felt initially that this would

quicken their path to superintendency. So while I'm disappointed that no one's there yet, I feel certain that some or most or many or all of them are also disappointed that it didn't seem to, I won't say it didn't make any difference because maybe it did, but it didn't land them the job they said they wanted."

Mentoring Minority Superintendents Program (MMSP)

The Mentoring Minority Superintendents Program (MMSP) was established by the State Department of Education in a mostly rural southeastern state in 2001. The current director of the program, Stephen, said it was established because of "a dire perceived need. In the history of (the state) there had never been a person of color occupying the position of public school superintendent." According to Stephen, the state education commissioner at that time was committed to a diverse work force and was directly responsible for the creation of the program.

MMSP was designed to help identify and train a pool of highly qualified, minority candidates for the superintendent of school districts in its state. To help develop the program, Stephen stated that its creators examined the research on barriers to the superintendency. One barrier which struck them as significant was the absence of minorities at the Central Office level which is the pool from which the majority of superintendents are hired. They also noted hiring agencies' concerns about minorities lacking experience in finance and public relations. Based upon this research, the program they developed sought to strategically place minorities into the pipeline as well as "fix" any perceived deficiencies of the candidates through special professional development. (The latter aspect of their program neatly dovetailed with the objectives of WSI).

Stephen describes the program which evolved as a "one-year, non-traditional leadership development program that appreciates that a minority school superintendent faces unique challenges as an educational leader" and seeks to reduce barriers s/he will encounter. MMSP provides qualified candidates with actual hands-on experience in the form of an internship with a practicing superintendent. Stephen states that "the goal of MMSP is to enable the interns to interact with practicing superintendents, board members, search consultants, state policy makers and educational thinkers in order for them to understand the work of superintendents." Because the research the State Department had done indicated some barriers to minorities accessing the superintendency centered on their lack of central office experience and their lack of

training in finance and management, the program sought to maximize experiences in media relations, school finance, organizational leadership, board-superintendent relationships, and labor relation/human resources (just to name a few), so the interns would gain as much experience as possible with their mentoring superintendent.

Participants of MMSP were actively recruited, and from the outset, the program was intentionally kept small, with 3 candidates accepted the first year (2002-2003) and 2 for the following year. In 2004-2005 the State Department did not recruit new candidates but allowed one from the previous year (Lea) to continue working with the program, calling it a “year two.” While possession of superintendent certification was considered a plus, individuals close to acquiring proper certification were also eligible. Stephen said “we were looking for individuals with a commitment to public education and who had the drive to pursue a career in educational leadership. We wanted people with strong communication and interpersonal skills.”

Once accepted in the program, participants were employed in a responsible, district-level leadership position in their mentoring superintendent’s district. They were also guaranteed return to their own position in their home district at the end of the year, making participation in the program relatively risk free. They were also required to attend quarterly meetings of a Leadership Development Institute and to devise an Individual Leadership Development Plan. They attended monthly coaching discussions with program staff and mentors and were given meaningful on-the-job assignments to practice and observe leadership behaviors.

In June, 2003, one of the women participants in MMSP became the first African American public school superintendent in the state’s history. The following year, a female graduate of the second year of the program followed in her footsteps. Of the 3 other MMSP participants to date, one is a principal and the other 2 hold district-level positions. While these Central Office positions fall short of the superintendency, in light of the research on barriers, Stephen still sees their move to important leadership positions as a “win-win “for the program. But for all its success, the program is not currently training any candidates. Stephen attributes this to a lack of ownership for the program. The directorship of MMSP has been something of a revolving door, with 3 different directors in 3 years. “We lost our impetus,” he explained. However, he is proud of the

success of the program and is hopeful that MMSP will be revitalized. He is optimistic that a “new and improved” program will begin again in June of 2007.

Two very different programs: one privately envisioned and funded by a philanthropic organization; the other an affirmative action initiative to address evident inequities. Both attracted a distinguished group of credentialed women sharing the same aspiration: achieving the superintendency.

The Women Who “Want the Job”

A Snapshot of Elizabeth, Paula, Sharon, and Virginia

I never personally met Elizabeth, Paula, Sharon, and Virginia (see table 1) so my understandings of them are limited—a “snap shot”—drawn from their WSI application materials and interview and from their responses to the survey I sent out (see methodology). At the time they participated in WSI, Elizabeth, Paula, Sharon, and Virginia had all held administrative positions for 6 or more years. Paula and Elizabeth are both assistant superintendents in their districts; Sharon and Virginia are both high school principals. Virginia is African American; the others are white. Sharon is the youngest—in her mid 30s—the other 3 are in their mid-40s. Elizabeth’s classroom tenure was the shortest and unlike most of the other WSI participants, she describes herself as on a “deliberate career path to the superintendency.” She spent a mere 2 years in the classroom before moving into a guidance position. After 5 years as a counselor, she became an elementary principal for 4 years, and at the time of WSI she had been an assistant superintendent for 4 years. Paula spent 11 years as a classroom teacher and also interrupted her career with 4 years of family leave. Virginia, who taught for 11 years, is currently a principal in a large urban high school. Sharon is also a high school principal and spent 12 years in the classroom before moving into an administrative position. Virginia’s school is in her state’s largest district which has a 95,000 student enrollment while Paula’s district is small with 5,000 pupils. Sharon and Elizabeth’s districts could be considered tiny, each with less than 2,000 students.

Table 1: A Snapshot

<u>Name</u>	<u>Current Position</u>	<u>Age/Range</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Classroom Experience</u>	<u>District Size</u>	<u>Highest Degree</u>
Elizabeth	Assistant Superintendent	Mid 40s	White	12 years	1,900	Ed. D
Paula	Assistant Superintendent	Mid 40s	White	11 years	4,990	MA
Sharon	HS Principal	Mid 30s	White	2 years	1,500	MS
Virginia	HS Principal	Mid 40s	African American	11 years	95,000	MED

Allison, Karen, Margo, Rhonda, Kim, Kate, Joan, Sonia, and Lea: Filling in the Lines

I can draw a stronger portrait for these women because in addition to the aforementioned materials, I had at least one telephone interview with each of them (see table 2). I did an additional interview with Kim, Kate, and Joan. I include MMSP participants Sonia and Lea in this group because I have both survey and interview data from them.

Of all the WSI participants, Rhonda stayed the longest in the classroom, leaving to take an elementary principalship after 22 years. She was a principal for one year before moving to a position with her state’s department of education. Interestingly, Karen had the same role with the state department while she was a WSI participant. Younger than Rhonda, Karen spent 10 years in the classroom before becoming an assistant principal, followed by 5 years as an assistant superintendent before moving to the state department. Kate taught 12 years and assumed she would be a teacher until retirement:” You know, I never, ever thought in my wildest dreams that I’d be an administrator.”

Allison and Kim both spent 10 years in the elementary classroom before moving directly into central office positions. Joan was a high school science teacher for 6 years before becoming an assistant principal. She then moved to Central Office as an instructional supervisor. Margo taught for 5 years before interrupting her career to be with her children for 6 years. She returned to education as a counselor before moving into Central Office as an instructional supervisor. In her mid-50s, Sonia was in the first cohort

of MMSP. She spent 16 years as a classroom teacher before moving to first an elementary and then a middle level principalship. At the time she participated in MMSP, she had spent 10 years as an administrator. In the third MMSP cohort, Lea had the shortest classroom tenure—2 ½ years before moving into an assistant principal position. All nine of these women are from small districts of 10,000 students or less.

These WSI and MMSP participants cite a variety of people—both personal and professional—who supported them as they advanced their careers. Rhonda and Sonia both mention a supportive spouse. Rhonda says it is “very helpful” and “good to have” a supportive husband, and Sonia’s husband “actively supports” her. Both husbands are willing to relocate in order for them to achieve the position of superintendent. Karen describes her father as “the key person leading me toward a leadership role.” She was also encouraged by an assistant principal while she worked on her educational leadership credentials. Joan credits a former superintendent with bringing her to Central Office and refers to him as her mentor. And it was Allison’s current superintendent who encouraged her to join the WSI saying “There’s a program I think you should get into.”

For all this support, every participant recognizes barriers she encountered in her career. Rhonda had trouble getting her first principal position because people saw her as a highly successful music director but had trouble envisioning her in another role. She was also surprised about another (unusual) barrier to her career after she interviewed with a site-based council: members feared she might work too hard and that her expectations might be too high! Margo thinks there is social pressure on women not to “step out and take a chance...because they’ve never done it before.” She also thinks another reason that there are not more women superintendents is because “elected school boards...that don’t have a clue what’s going on in education.” Allison believes the public school superintendency is dominated by white males because of “tradition...” “Statistics tell” Allison that bias exists against women in attaining the superintendency. The men in her Central Office say things like, “Well you know that’s going to be really tough just because you are a female.”

Several of these aspirants interviewed for a superintendency at the conclusion of their programs. The one interview for superintendent Karen had left her feeling as if “the deck was stacked against me.” While she “felt very prepared” for the interview, she

found the white male chair of the Board “very controlling” and said he “tried to put her on the spot.” Karen told the Board as she walked out “that it wouldn’t have been the best position” for her. Margo had a similarly negative experience with an all-white, all-male Board of Education. Immediately following the WSI, she applied to be superintendent in her own district. The Board decided it would hire a consulting firm and specified that the position would be given to someone with a doctorate—which Margo has. The Board chose a white male who was still working on his doctorate. Margo explains that the Board did not hire her because “they did not want to make anybody mad” and that “they were listening to the former superintendent” whose competency she had previously challenged.

Table 2: Filling in the Lines

<u>Name</u>	<u>Current Position</u>	<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Race/Ethnicity</u>	<u>Classroom Experience</u>	<u>District Size</u>	<u>Highest Degree</u>
Allison	Director (CO)	Mid 30s	white	10 years	6,500	MA
Joan	Supervisor (CO)	Mid 30s	white	6 years	10,000	Ed. D
Kate	MS Principal	Early 50s	white	12 years	10,000	Ed. S
Karen	State Dept.	Mid 30s	white	10 years	(state)	MA
Kim	Supervisor (CO)	Mid 40s	Af. American	10 years	8,100	MA
Lea	Supervisor (CO)	Mid 30s	Af. American	2 ½ years	8,000	MA
Margo	Supervisor (CO)	Early 60s	white	5 years	1,300	Ed. D
Rhonda	State Depart.	Mid 50s	white	22 years	(state)	MA
Sonia	MS	Mid 50s	Af. American	16 years	3,600	Ed. D

Susan and Theresa: Full Portraits

Two of the women, Susan and Theresa, stood out among all the others in their drive and determination to become superintendents. They spoke at such length and with so much enthusiasm, that their stories became a complete portrait.

Susan

Susan has been determined to be a superintendent for most of her life. She describes the acquisition of the superintendency as a lifelong goal, remembering both a 5th grade teacher and a principal (both female) whom she admired. Education is a constant in Susan's life; her father was a university professor, and she earned her doctorate. She continues to teach as an adjunct at a state university in addition to her career as a middle school principal. Susan majored in special education and was a special education teacher for 14 years in a secondary setting. She thinks her background in special education was good preparation for being principal of an alternative school where she served in that capacity for 3 years. She sees that position as a "hotspot" and believes she was put there to be a "change agent".

Administration has always been Susan's career objective. She made a practice of informing her principals of her interest and purposefully never stayed in any school more than 3 years because she wanted to watch principals in action. She found ineffective principals were intimidated by her approach; the others were complimented by it. Her principals were generally men, but she had one female principal who served as an early mentor.

According to Susan, it was her doctoral committee who urged her to move away from the large urban district where she began her administrative career. Her chair told her:

"Susan if you want to be a superintendent one day, you've got to get out of ____ County and the big urban districts and get in the small outlying counties because if you really want to be a superintendent, you'll never get to go up through the ranks, there will never be a female superintendent in your lifetime in ____ County. It will happen sooner in the smaller districts."

Susan left the district for a principalship that she describes as a disaster. She followed a principal of 27 years in the same building and saw herself as coming in to "clean house." In her attempts to implement "necessary reforms" she encountered extreme resistance from the teachers in her school. Her contract was not renewed.

Susan "loves" her current position as a middle school principal. However, she is actively letting everyone know she is interested in becoming a superintendent. Susan plans to "hang on" for the next couple of years, but if a superintendency does not

materialize, she will retire and “put herself in the hands of Beth” (her mentor in WSI). She is hopeful that the current superintendent in her district is planning to retire in the next year. However, a recent change of Board membership troubles her. She describes the new Board chair, who is a woman, as highly critical, anti-administration, and as actively undermining one of Susan’s school initiatives:

“...people have gone to her as a previous teacher and complained and she’s been kind of hard on me and kind of hard on my school. And in fact she’s looking at things. Like she’ll show up at my council meeting, she tries to call and question my voting practices for SBDM and that is so out of line for Board Chair, and I want to say that to her and try to play the ‘here is your role and function as a Chair’... And if she gets a complaint from a teacher, she should go to the superintendent, because there is a chain of command and she is breaking down that chain of command. As a matter of fact I had one person in the Central Office tell me that she had come to them and asked him to spy on my SBDM meeting. So it’s really upsetting the culture of our district. That’s ok, I can deal with going back in and fixing those things and teaching and re-teaching, but I’m not sure with after her being able to do that and being allowed to do that for so long that it’s worth it. So I may open myself back up, I’m kind of in a stage right now where I’m re-evaluating, and I may just open myself back up and look through other districts right now or begin looking for other districts at this point in time.”

She has female friends who are superintendents who have told her that being a superintendent is “better than anything she could imagine”. She sees obtaining the Superintendency as a culmination of her career as an educator, and after 14 years as a principal, she feels constrained: “Like a bird in a cage.” She is convinced she is up to the work and time demands of the superintendency, believing it could not possibly be more demanding than a building principalship.

One reason Susan applied for WSI is her lack of success in the interview process. She had interviewed for the superintendent position several times and had been considered as a finalist twice. Both times she did not get the job, and both times these positions were awarded to white men who were “insiders”. She first heard about the WSI in an e-mail sent state-wide and joined because a friend encouraged her. Susan saw two benefits from the WSI: as a resume builder and the valuable contacts in other states. From her experiences, Susan concluded that she needed to cultivate a position where she would be the “insider”. She also thought her participation in WSI might “help her figure out what she needs to do to be successful.” Her chief interest was that the program would

offer the chance to network. She was disappointed that WSI did not connect participants into a meaningful network or give them opportunities to shadow women superintendents. “Everyone always talks about men having ‘the good ole boy’ system and women don’t know how to do that yet.” Her sense is that the program did not deliver the mentoring component in the way originally planned, but that the back up plan (phone cards) put her in touch with one of the two out-of-state mentors, Beth and Jane. She found Jane particularly helpful. For Susan, the program “did not go far enough.” She would have liked on-the-job training such as an internship with a successful Superintendent. Susan mentioned the MMSP program as one to emulate and one which she wished would include females as part of the definition of “minority.”

While Susan believes the preference for local (in-county) people is a barrier for her aspirations, being female is also a “huge barrier.” For her, the biggest barrier to her becoming a superintendent is “being female” and even worse, “being a smart female.”

“... On one hand I think people are intimidated by women who appear intelligent and know what they’re talking about. And then on the other hand, I forgot how I was going to say it exactly; they hold you to a higher standard...”

She cites an example of when she did an extensive data analysis of a county’s test scores in preparation for an interview. When she presented the data to the interviewing committee she was met with shock --she describes it as “deer in the headlight look”. The committee would not believe that she had compiled the presentation herself. She thinks people in general, and men in particular, are afraid of smart women, and that is what she is up against because she “is a smart, assertive woman.” She concedes that women are held back by home and family obligations, more than men, and she delayed her move into administration until her own children were older and more independent. But she believes that if a woman will stay focused, she can overcome these barriers.

Susan wants to “blaze a trail” for other women and voices interest in introducing cutting-edge innovations as a superintendent. She does think that there are common stereotypes about women’s capabilities, especially in managing finances.

“... I think one of the things that hold women back in the term of the superintendency is people assume that women don’t know too much about finances. And so that’s kind of the double-edged sword there. They’re intimidated

if you show that you're intelligent, but then they assume that you're not intelligent because how could it be possible that you know about finance?

Susan, however, is confident about her own ability to manage district-level finances.

Susan refers to “old boy networks” and women’s own failure to support each other as reasons for women’s lack of advancement. She thinks women compete for men’s attention, do not know how to network, and tend to criticize rather than support other women.

“In fact women feel like they’re competition with each other sometimes and I think the glass ceiling is thicker in education than in other organizations because there is such a higher rate of women at the basic level of the organization, be that certified teachers. The vast majority of them are females. We’re seeing some changes in gender, but overall most educational organizations are top heading women and it’s very difficult for women to rise up through the system because women tend to hold other women down. Women, I think, are harder on other women than men are on other men...”

For Susan, power is working through others—to collectively move forward as a group. She relies on others’ leadership as well. As a building principal she has instituted many difficult but necessary reforms. She is not afraid to use positional power if necessary and sees managing conflict as uncomfortable but necessary for leaders—she does not see managing conflict as connected to gender. As a leader she cannot turn her back on confronting people. She thinks confrontation takes finesse—that it is important to be seen as helping someone improve, “not someone who is trying to do somebody in...I think confronting an employee that’s making a mistake or doing something wrong is an uncomfortable situation regardless of your gender, so I don’t think that’s gender related.”

Like Theresa whose story follows, Susan is a highly experienced and credentialed administrator, doing everything within her power to become a superintendent.

Theresa

Theresa’s passion for public education stems partly from being very active in her children’s schools, in and out of their buildings almost on a daily basis. What she saw as

she walked the school corridors did not please her. She decided to become a teacher because she saw poor teaching in her own children's school.

“...I would go into school and I would see things that teachers weren't really doing a very good job, they weren't trying and my children were in classrooms and by the luck of the draw they'd have a good teacher or they'd have a teacher who wasn't on focus and on task... and I knew what it was like trying to come from a hard background and that education is a door out for these kids. It's a door to their futures, and when that's wasted or that's not, that people don't value that or don't help those children, I wanted to make a difference and that was exactly why I went back into education was because I thought I could give these kids something...”

Theresa returned to college for her teaching credential and followed up with an MA in Early Childhood Education. She taught 6th grade for 6 years and then left the classroom at the age of 40 to become a writing resource teacher. The training she received from the state department, and her experiences in working with other teachers in a leadership position, caused her to first think of going after the superintendency.

“I had worked in a leadership position for two years with teachers, I had done a lot of workshops in that leadership role and at that point I was just ready to go on into administration... And that was probably a critical turning point for me being placed in a leadership position throughout the district. Because I understand what's going on out in the school, I understand what it's like working with marginal teachers and what it's like trying handle everything and bring about school improvement, and I also understand when principal's aren't getting the job done how to go in and talk to them and tell them, 'You need to do this or this.' And help them, and that's part of my job too, I give evaluations to principals. But I'm able to work at the teacher level, I'm able to work at the principal level, the Central Office level, just about all the jobs that you have...”

Theresa worked as an elementary resource teacher for 4 years (2 of these as a regional coordinator for the State Department of Education), and then moved into an elementary principalship, also for 4 years. At this point she moved into Central Office as an instructional supervisor, the position she presently holds. Except for the two-year stint with the State Department, Theresa's entire experience (both as a parent and an educator) has been in a tiny, rural district. This is how she describes her current position,

“I am the instructional wing. I am the curriculum supervisor, assessment coordinator, comprehensive planning coordinator—I never stop...”

As an instructional supervisor, Theresa still roams the halls of the schools in her district, looking out for all the children, just as she once did for her own. She is passionate about children (all children) deserving a quality education. She believes when teachers are in the classroom they have a role and a responsibility to teach every single child—and that was not happening in the school her children attended and still is not happening in their district where she is now the instructional supervisor. If Theresa realizes her aspiration of becoming a superintendent, she wants to be remembered as someone who led with integrity and that everything she did was primarily to serve the students and children,

“...that when I leave, that school system is known for being one of the top school systems in the United States. That children learn at high levels, that teachers believed kids can learn...“ it is in purely wanting to see happen in the school district what can happen when the focus is on education. I believe, I truly believe the school systems can alter these children’s lives, and the leadership is important.”

She wants to be a superintendent because of the position’s critical role in “seeing the district as a whole,”

“They’re in school buildings, they see each sub-system that comes in and how it impacted education. It’s a science and there’s so much preparation that goes into being a good teacher and there’s so many layers of professional development that builds a teacher’s skills...There’s children who are not learning and there’s no excuse for it. We’re professionals. I want to be a person who can lead a district and lead people within that district to want a school system to reach out there and reach out to every child and not leave children sitting in the back of the classroom not learning or children with their heads down on their desk or children coming in and the teacher saying in front of them they’re special ed. I grew up in ___(rural part of the state), I know how hard it is to, for these children if people do not educate them.”

Integrity and ethics are important subjects in Theresa’s mind. She thinks a great deal about making the right decisions for the right reasons, and she stresses how important it is for everyone to take responsibility,

“If you’re hired into a position and you’re paid money, there’s a responsibility that comes with that position and if you’re a team member of the central office or even a teacher in a classroom or even a classified staff person what you do impacts the success of that school or that program, and everybody has to assume their role and responsibility.”

While Theresa believes her greatest asset is her instructional background, she is very confident about her ability to do all aspects of the Superintendent's job. She has administered large budgets and worked at a bank prior to becoming a teacher. She has never had anyone question her abilities to work with finances,

“It's not been mentioned to me directly. I worked in the bank for years, I've worked in bookkeeping before I was ever a teacher, I worked with budgets with the principal, I worked with budgets here, and it's just never been an issue for me. ... I worked in a bank before I started into education, so I understand finances fairly well.”

Like Susan, Theresa believes her participation in the WSI program will “open doors” and gives her “a little more leverage into a superintendent position.”

Additionally, the WSI program helped her “recognize herself”

“I think at the time I went into this training I was a Central Office person, I work very hard, I do multiple jobs, have multiple skills, but that's where the ceiling ended. It's difficult in (her part of the state) to get a superintendent position. It's traditionally male and it's a political position to a great extent.”

According to Theresa, more women are not superintendents because of culture and

“men are better at politics than women... (women) probably have the leadership ability, but the perception, and I would never have believed it until I started applying for superintendent job, it is very hard for a female to get a superintendent's position. And I know that women have the same/equal leadership abilities, it depends on the person, as the male, but a lot of schools and districts are just not looking at a female superintendent. You have men who absolutely do not do a good job, and yet they'll stay in a superintendent's position...”

Now in her late-fifties, Theresa has adult children and a husband who are actively encouraging her to seek the superintendency. Her husband is retired and willing to relocate:

“My husband is really supportive about my hiring and the position, no problems with relocating.”

Theresa has participated in multiple interviews for the position, some of them far-removed from her current home. She thinks the WSI program's focus on mock interviews

helped ready her for these interviews and gave her confidence and she was completely prepared for her interviews:

“Everything they asked me were things I’ve dealt with and just from experience I was very prepared for what their questions had to do more with school improvement, umm, working with the Board, working with team members, working with a drug grant in the school system, teacher and kids.”

While finding the going rough, she remains optimistic,

“I think that women and men interview for the same position, we just haven’t broken that barrier in the superintendency, but look at principalship, Central Office positions, I mean it’s going to happen, it just hasn’t happened yet. But, I think more and more women are moving into roles and on Boards and they will monopolize the Boards...”

If “it’s going to happen” these are the women who are trained, available, and positioned to make it happen. They make up what Brunner (1999) refers to as “the greatest untapped pool of candidates for the position of superintendent of schools” (xv). They are “more than ready” and in their drive to be “tapped” they committed extraordinary effort and resources to participate in these two specialized programs. What follows is the sense they make of this quest, in terms of their own leadership capabilities and their perceptions of the role itself. All eleven contribute to this story: some only peripherally (a snap shot); other with greater detail (filling in the lines; and Susan and Theresa, with unmitigated passion.

Chapter 4

“More than Ready”

One of this study’s research goals was to understand how these women characterize their own leadership qualities and the superintendency itself. As a starting point for understanding how they characterize their leadership qualities, I begin by comparing the aspirants to current female superintendents. Not surprisingly, the profile of this group of eleven women aspiring to the superintendency matches up in many ways to the women who currently are superintendents. Brunner (2000 b) found that 60% of women superintendents currently in the job spend 10 years in the classroom before beginning their administrative career (83). For this group of aspirants, Lea was in the classroom the shortest amount of time (2 1/2 years) before moving into an assistant principalship. Rhonda remained in the classroom the longest amount of time: 20 years. The others all taught a minimum of 6 years, and the average for the whole group was 11 years, making their experiences similar to sitting women superintendents.

According to Brunner (2000 b), women superintendents are most often appointed to their first administrative position later than men are. Nearly 53% of men move into their first administrative position before the age of 30. Only 21.1% of women superintendents receive an administrative position before they are 30. Women superintendents spend considerably more years in the teaching ranks than superintendents do in general (84). Of the 11 aspirants, only one (Lea) entered administration before the age of 30. The others fell into two ranges: Joan, Kim, Karen, and Allison entered administrative positions while in their early 30’s. Theresa, Rhonda, Margo, Kate, and Sonia were all in their later 30s or early-to-mid 40s before accepting their first administrative position. Of these 11 aspirants, only Kim is between the ages of 41 and 50. Margo is in her 60s and 5 of the women are in their mid-to-late 50s (Susan, Theresa, Rhonda, Sonia, and Kate). Lea, Joan, Karen, and Allison are all in their mid 30s. Susan spoke directly about delaying her decision to move into administrative positions until her children were older. Margo stayed at home with her children, delaying her career until they were of school age. Theresa delayed the decision to finish college until her children were of school age. Nine of the women served as principals or assistant principals at

some point in their careers. Of these, 4 were elementary positions, 3 were middle school, and 2 were high school principals.

On one point of comparison this group of aspirants differs from between current women superintendents. Brunner (2000 b) finds that current women superintendents are more often than men to jump from the classroom directly into a Central Office position. Women superintendents move most often into the position of instructional coordinators as their first administrative position, with the principal position the second most often (86). Only four of these aspirants' first positions was as a coordinator (resource teacher; instructional consultant, etc). Six of the other women's first position was as an assistant principal, and one began her administrative career as an elementary principal.

Brunner (2000 b) states that "...because men and women have been socialized differently in our culture, both men and women bring important and sometimes different attributes that enhance the role of superintendent of schools" (77). Glass and Björk (2003) enumerate the skills that Boards of Education actively look for in a superintendent: "...board relations, management, communication, interpersonal skills and community relations" (281-282). Brunner (1999) notes the literature on women in positions of power supports the notion that women bring to administrative practice many characteristics necessary for school reform. Björk (2000) concludes that women approach school leadership differently than men do. Citing literature (Andrews and Basom, 1990; Dillard, 1995; Frasher and Frasher, 1979; Grady and O'Connell, 1993; Grogan, 1996, 1999, 2000; Hill and Ragland, 1995; Shakeshaft, 1999) to document most women in administration have characteristics matching the demands of current reform efforts: they are child-centered with an understanding of both child development and student achievement; their expertise is with curriculum, instruction, and assessment; they are more likely to be facilitative and collaborative in their working relationships, and their leadership style tends to be democratic and inclusive.

A Child-Centered Approach

Ethical conduct and advocacy for children are the most important leadership skills in the minds of the women in this study and in their way of thinking, the two are inextricably linked with one another. The advice given in "Lesson 5" of Gupton and

Slick's (1996) *Highly Successful Women Administrators* is titled: **Honor, Preserve, and Protect your Integrity** (56). Many of their respondents alluded to the importance of maintaining integrity at all times.

“...it seems that if it is not right for children, these women will risk their jobs and their reputations to do what they believe is right...They appear to be saying that a woman in a position of leadership must never stray away from exemplary integrity; her conduct and values must be unrepachable. It is almost as if the woman must be perfect in morals, ethics, conduct, and principles. The female administrator has no room for error lest she be judged by the male-dominated world of educational administrators as lacking in integrity and ethics. (57).

Presaging the future work of Brunner (2000b), Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) advise women who “decide to play the institutional game” about a variety of political rules, including: “assume opposition; be persistent; and choose your fights” (57). Brunner's (2000 b) 3rd principle for “women warriors” is “Choosing Battles” (58-59). The theme dominating the narratives of female superintendents she interviews is their focus on the primary reason for being in the position. That primary purpose is children. For the women in Brunner's study, the focus on children is the essential requirement for success in their roles as superintendents. “Battles done for children were directly tied to their success” (76-77). Brunner came to understand from these women superintendents that they are much more involved in curriculum and instruction because of its direct relationship to the lives of children.

“Doing right by children” is at the core of WSI participants' ethical practice. During their interview as applicants for the program they were asked “What do you want to be remembered for as a superintendent?” To a one, their responses center on children.

“I have made a difference in the lives of the children that I've served, because as an educator that is my number one role, to make sure that the children get the highest level of education they can possibly get”(Rhonda)

“My biggest accomplishment, if anybody would say anything about me, would be that I cared about the kids...That ultimately that our goal was to provide a setting for children, for all children, to be successful.” (Paula)

“...you have to have a passion for students, you have to want to be around them, you have to want to know that, want them to believe that what you can do is make a positive difference in their lives.”(Virginia)

However, it is Theresa who is the most passionate on this subject:

“There’s children who are not learning and there’s no excuse for it... I want to be a person who can lead a district and lead people within that district to want a school system to reach out there and reach out to every child and not leave children sitting in the back of the classroom not learning or children with their heads down on their desk or children coming in and the teacher saying in front of them they’re special ed... I grew up in ___ (rural part of the state); I know how hard it is to, for these children if people do not educate them. They’re going to have hard lives. And they deserve a chance. They deserve a chance, they deserve the same chance as children anywhere else in the United States and our school system should be the same...I knew what it was like trying to come from hard background and that education is a door out for these kids. It’s a door to their futures, and when that’s wasted or that’s not, that people don’t value that or don’t help those children, I wanted to make a difference and that was exactly why I went back into education was because I thought I could give these kids something.”

This focus on doing what is right for children specifically, and doing right in general, is another re-occurring theme especially in the context of making difficult decisions. Virginia seems to speak for everyone when she says,

“...the ground rules are there and we can agree to disagree, but we have to first look at what is best for students.”

Karen would not be afraid to have her actions criticized,

“If I keep those decisions focused on what’s best for the kids and remind our staff why we’re there to begin with for the children...”

With the welfare of the children at the heart of what they do, these women are prepared to be “warriors” in the sense of the most unpleasant of duties: letting someone go. Rhonda says,

“...and if they do not improve, you have to dismiss individuals that are just not performing. That’s very hard too, I’ve had to do that, but our children deserve the very best and if we’re not putting forth those best efforts then either we have to change and improve ourselves or we need to go somewhere else.”

Theresa also asserts that one cannot

“let things go and you let someone not contribute and not do what it is that they want to do, the morale falls apart in a job, in an organization. And not only that, if you’re looking at a school system, kids don’t learn. And money’s not being spent that’s helping kids in a positive way.”

The WSI participants often saw “doing the right thing” in direct opposition to “doing the political thing.” This sets up a dilemma: “If the superintendency is inherently political, can someone with integrity do the job?” Gupton and Slick (1996) articulate this dilemma clearly, “And so it seems that once again, female administrators must work harder even at being ethical. Suffice it to say that especially in the area of ethics, the female administrator does not get to play on the same field as her male counterparts”

(57). Elizabeth dwells extensively on the topics of ethics and integrity:

“...it’s important that, uh, people understand that there’s a level of professionalism and a level of conduct that we are all about in this organization. And it’s focused on being a professional, it’s focused on caring for kids, it’s focused on being prepared instructionally, it’s focused on, uh, conduct in public... I feel like I have developed, umm, a relationship with people based on integrity and based on, umm, genuineness and honesty... I think, you know, you have to have banked enough integrity and honesty and compassion and care for people that when those tough decisions have to be made, they understand that you have thought about everything and they’ll trust you enough to follow you even if you have to make the tough decision.”

Kim is extremely concerned that her actions be seen as “fair,” “made with integrity,” and with “no hidden agenda.

“I’d like for people who served under me to say I was fair...I will make hard decisions and they are fair and they are with integrity and no hidden agenda.”

On the other hand, when reflecting on the superintendency, Theresa differentiates between “good politics” and “bad politics.”

“I think that very much so, that they don’t want to be put in a position of compromising what they feel is right and good and being able to keep everyone on the Board and fight it out. And I know there’s some politics in everything that you do, but a superintendent’s position, you have to have the support of your Board and you have a team, and if politics can be working like a team, that’s one thing, but politics comes down into doing things that you don’t think are right ... that are unethical, then that’s something no one wants to do. I think women especially don’t want to do that because if they’re going to put themselves out there and go out for the superintendency, it has to be because of the drive within them and the politics part can be a favorable part or unfavorable thing, it can be very, and I just think... You will prevail as long as you’re on the side of the right because even though someone may not agree with you or may not want you to do it, they know you did it for the right reasons... and with the superintendent’s position there’s a chance you’re going to be out of a job because some will

disagree with what you're doing and that's not good. And being able to say I'm going to do what's right no matter if I lose this job... I want to be remembered that I had a school system that was ethical, that everything I did was with integrity and with in mind that students and children are the primary reason that I served as a superintendent."

Theresa sees politics in two lights; "good politics" which allows for team work and collaboration and "bad politics" which is "doing something you don't think is right." In essence, she and all the aspirants, define the superintendency in stark terms. They feel a moral imperative to be "ethical", and fair-minded" and harbor no "hidden agendas" in their quest to provide services to the students.

Advancing the Reform Agenda

Glass *et al* (2000) cites a growing body of research suggesting the characteristics of female school administrators, while different from those of men, are highly desirable qualities for initiatives in educational reform. Brunner, (1999) notes that the realization that the superintendent is important in advancing the reform agenda means that research aimed at helping superintendents transform their practice is pertinent. Organizational leadership for the 1990s requires facilitative leadership that empowers others and values diverse discourse as a means of reaching better decisions. Superintendent roles are being reconceived, renegotiated, and reshaped (Grogan, 2000). According to Grogan, women are relational leaders, that is, leaders who strive to get to know students, teachers, and other members of the school community. Based on having good knowledge of others, relational leaders see themselves in relationships that are facilitative of others' efforts rather than in control. Attributes of women leaders identified in studies conducted over the past 30 years confirm the notion that their characteristics tend to correspond to the emerging demands for school reform. While this should be seen as a valuable asset, it is often discounted.

Natural Born Collaborators

Theresa thinks women are naturally more collaborative than men,

"Overall I think women, they're more in tune than men, and they'll share the power in that they'll share finding solutions and they'll work more as a team, so I'd imagine that they probably are when you come down to it. Because a male

superintendent may just say, 'I want it to be this way'...Where a woman superintendent will sit down and talk to her Board or she'll think about things different and make a decision that includes other people and then she'll include the people around her...I think women leaders, it's just like when women started being principals, they're very detail-oriented, they look at everything, they're very much on the job, you might see a woman superintendent or a woman principal that works more hours, they're more engaged in each aspect of what's around them, and I think women have very good qualities to be a superintendent."

Almost all WSI participants make reference to the superintendent as the district's instructional leader. Theresa sums up these thoughts best,

"Superintendents, they have, they're in a position that they see the district as a whole. They're in school buildings, they see each sub-system that comes in and how it impacted education. They know that what they do is going to make a difference in providing the leadership for teachers to be able to do their job and do it well... I think a superintendent is the instructional leader in a district and they look at everything and they react to everything and they're proactive in making sure that the very best is offered to their teachers and that they're supported in becoming better teachers."

Joan adds the concepts of "fairness," "fun" and "passion" to the job description,

"So I guess being fair, being an instructional leader, and just having fun, showing people that if you're not passionate about what you're doing and you're not enjoying what you're doing, you should be doing something else...just as the principal has to be the instructional leader in the school, the superintendent has to be the instructional leader and be the model for the school district..."

In addition to being inclusive and team players, Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) found that when dealing with "the rules of the game," women put their faith in a merit system, sought to decentralize decision making, and practiced negotiation and persuasion when setting policy (138). Without exception, the WSI participants believe teamwork and shared decision making are critical attributes for successful school leaders. Margo states,

"Teamwork is the key. Anytime one person tries to do it all, then the whole system's in trouble."

Theresa ties team work to a "common vision."

"...you have to have teamwork in order to get everything done one, but in another sense you have to know and understand one another's jobs so that you can, you understand how their job is impacting what you're doing and how the pieces fit together. Umm, teamwork is essential... have a common vision, have a common

understanding of what it is that you're about...everyone understands their roles and how it's impacting someone else's role, and that when you sit down you're a team that's working together...And working with team, not only can you get the job done more efficiently, but also everyone has a shared responsibility in making things happen and they feel ownership with it... You're never going to be as good separated into isolated offices, as you will be working as a group and looking at everything together, of how you work together, that you are a team."

Elizabeth asserts that teamwork is "critical" and Allison, Rhonda, and Sharon call it "essential."

"...so teamwork is critical for the health of the entire school district. When there is teamwork – and by teamwork what I mean is that everybody understands the strategy, the game plan, the end result... And so teamwork is that everybody, everybody - board members, umm, district administrators, school level administrators - umm, understand the rules of the game. And that, umm, it's important that we're all working and using our time and our energy towards the same goal." (Elizabeth)

Sharon, agreed but went further in taking the position that not only was she a team player, she was prepared to see that everyone in her particular orbit would be a team player,

"A lot of people may want people that are kind of puppets in nature..., my philosophy is totally the opposite. I want very competent people who have the ability to help me in the leading. They have to be team players. They have to know they may not always get what they want, but as long as we're both working towards the same goal, umm, you don't tend to have as many problems."

Joan describes the excitement and energy that comes from being part of a successful team,

"...that we do have a very strong team and there's just something incredible about working with people when you feel the synergy and you know you can bounce ideas off of people and you know they're going to give you their honest opinions... teamwork can be fostered and can be fueled if the group continues to work together."

Finally, Susan passes on her observation about those superintendents who fail in their capacity, do so because they fail to create teams.

"[the superintendents] that I've seen that haven't been successful it's because they didn't know how to build that rapport and team belief and the system of sharing information back and forth..."

The notion of shared decision-making goes hand-in-hand with their emphasis on teamwork. All recognized the need to include others in the decision making process.

Rhonda states,

“...whenever possible my idea is shared decision making and that’s the approach that I prefer taking and that gives you different viewpoints and, of course two heads are better than one and so forth as you work through committees and work with your council men and work with your parents and other staff members, you do gain insight and so one of my best ways is that of listening to others and hearing their viewpoints.”

Virginia adds,

“...if you look in the decision making it is not just you the individual person, you have a cabinet of people, a cadre of individuals that you’re working with and so this decision is based on not just one person making that decision but a number of people making a decision...”

Theresa believes sharing ownership cuts down on negativity,

“...if they have no ownership of the decision or they have no ownership of solving the problem, they set themselves apart, they don’t help, they don’t support what you do, they’ll criticize when everything doesn’t go straight down a road...If they’re not part of discovering what’s wrong and discovering how to fix it, you have no support, and you can’t get things accomplished if you have no support.”

The Quiet Exercise of Power

Brunner (1998) observes that “women who attain positions of power are most successful when they practice female approaches to power which stress collaboration, inclusion, and consensus-building—models based on the belief that one person is not more powerful than another” (24). Kim sees the building of relationships as important to her success.

“I usually easily identify who the right people are who are truly interested in education and interested in the children. And I’m constantly looking for opportunities to bring them on board to have them assist me putting on workshops or getting with groups and working on the curriculum and things such as that. But once I identify them, I find ways to bring them in to assist me with tasks in this office.”

Several of the other women emphasize how important building relationships are. Karen believed that taking time to build relationships results in earning respect; capital which can be used when it is time to make unpleasant decisions.

“I found that if you can build good relations, uh, and good relationships with your staff and with your coworkers that, uh, any unpleasant news is easier handled that way if they respect you and understand that you have to make decisions.”

Joan speaks in the context of developing a relationship with “all those stakeholders,” so as not to “harbor hidden agendas,”

“So I think it’s all those stakeholders who have some part and might have that unique viewpoint, uh, who have to be listened to and listening is the key factor... just being able to foster that open communication, umm, being open to disagreeing with each other but being able to lay everything out on the table and discuss it honestly as opposed to harboring hidden agendas...”

Theresa adds her thoughts to this topic of building relationships and “trust” with the community,

“A lot of building relationships is starting to know who these people are, to recognize who they are, and to make deliberate efforts to meet these influential people in the community who can share your ideas and then take that back out to people that they can influence and that, in the end, you can build your support within the community and the trust levels.”

Intrinsic to any discussion of working “through others” and shared decision making is the question of the exercise of power. Some participants showed a certain level of discomfort when discussing the exercise of power. For example, Sharon, a building principal, thought it was important to deny her actual status as “boss.”

“the boss in my building...I really don’t act as a boss. I feel like I’m a worker, a servant, just like the rest of ‘em... I’m a hands-on person.”

Kim sees the need to consult with others in the exercise of power. She offers her definition of power and its exercise,

“...the ability to make decisions, final decisions, that can not be questioned and have to be executed out about the total school program. That’s what I see as power. Power to make changes...” [If I] “wanted something to happen then I would work to convince every Board member that a particular thing needed to be done or stopped and we needed a new policy and we needed to make sure that everyone understood the policies...I am disturbed when people are not happy with the decision that I make... certainly I do like to keep everyone happy.....I

think I'd get along with whomever else is part of the group, I've been told I have a very pleasant personality..."

Joan's comments indicate that exercising this type of power take a toll on her emotionally,

"I like to think that if you're gentle with people and you say, 'This is what my expectations are.' Most people, just like kids, are going to do what you want them to do. But yeah, it's difficult, and I've had those conversations. And you save those conversations for the end of the day where can you leave and get away from it because it's so emotionally taxing that you can't try to do anything else after you do this. But it's like this is it, black and white, these are the expectations, if this doesn't happen, this is what will happen, and just sticking to it."

In fact, several of the participants indicated discomfort when they exercised power and people were unhappy with their decisions. Rhonda wishes 'everybody could be happy,'

"...what I have finally decided and the decision has been made and it's what's best for children, then, although I wish everyone could be happy, I can live with that 'cause I know I've done the very best I could to try to resolve the situation to a point where everyone could live with it.... And I've learned in this decision it is very difficult and almost impossible, at sometimes, to make everyone happy at all times, but it's something you have to learn to live with and accept."

Paula says,

"Well I mean I'm human, and you know, I don't like it... (making unpopular decisions)"

Sharon does not suffer from the "wanting everyone to be happy with her" syndrome and questions whether there is something wrong with her,

"I sometimes think there's something wrong with me because I feel good that I'm able to make a decision and present it to people. And I often find that what, a lot of time when people think something's so hard to make, I find that not making a firm decision and standing firm is harder than making the decision because then you have to deal with all the fallout... I think it's much better to hit a hard decision straight on being sympathetic, empathetic, but no need beating around the bush. If it's got to be done, it's got to be done. You make the decision and then you move on..."

Margo is comfortable as well, because she has

"put a lot of thought and research into it (the decision) before it is made."

While Virginia acknowledges that you have to “also have thick skin, that you’re not going to please everyone,” she has confidence that if she does her job well by fully communicating the reasons for the decision, people will “understand.”

“What I like to provide is information, keep the lines of communication open, provide a rationale for the decision and because once you provide that and it’s sound and it’s of sound basis or of a sound basis, I mean, it’s reliable, it’s about, you know, making a hard decision based on facts, based on data, based on evidence, then, and you make a decision, then you provide that information to your constituents. And once you provide that to them many times people are going to understand and say ‘oh ok!’ ... Because basically there are only so many hours in a day and we need to make sure that whatever we’re doing that it counts and that it is results oriented.”

For Susan, making unpopular decisions is part of the job of “being a leader”,

“...there’s times when you have to step up and make the decisions and they’re going to make people unhappy. And you also have to know that if you’re working with a large group of people no matter what decision you make somebody’s not going to be happy... And it’s being a leader, that’s just part of the job.”

While Kim and others find the use of positional power distasteful, they also say they are capable of exercising it as “a last resort”. Others, like Joan exude, complete confidence in her understanding of power and its exercise,

“...I always think of the movie “Gladiator” with Russell Crowe and how everyone was willing to follow him when he was a general and even when he was beaten down and in prison with all these other gladiators people were reacting the same way to him because they see someone who is a leader and they want to follow and they see someone who is making the right decisions. I guess that’s how I see power. I guess I believe in what you believe and I’m willing to follow you, I know you’re going to take us to the right place...”

Still, she strives for what she considers a “win-win” situation:

“... my goal is I want everyone to come to some conclusions. We won’t necessarily be hugging and singing “Kum ba Ya” when we’re done, but I keep that in the back of my mind. It’s not always going to work out, but let’s see if we can get as close to a win-win situation if possible.” (However) “Once a tough decision has to be made, as soon as you show any signs of wavering or that someone can convince you that you’re not doing the right thing, and you yourself aren’t convinced you’re doing the right thing, I think that’s when problems start. So it’s just standing firm and believing in what you’re doing.”

Finally, Theresa puts a unique perspective on the motivation behind the exercise of positional power,

“I think they [women] could [exercise positional power]. It depends on what they’re there for. Are they there for power or are they there to lead a school system? And I think it depends on the person and what it is that drives them, and is it being able to tell someone to do something, or is it being able to lead a group of people to accomplish the goal that you’re after, which is a good school system.”

Conceptualizing the Superintendency

In light of these aspirants’ own leadership skills, their dedication to students, and their passion for instruction, it is not surprising to find that they conceptualize the role of the superintendency according to these attributes. In response to one of the survey questions, the women in this study ranked communication and listening skills as the most important competency a superintendent should have, followed by leadership and knowledge of curriculum, instruction and assessment. The other competencies receiving two or more responses were political savvy, integrity and honesty, being a team player, and interpersonal skills.

Almost all the women situate the superintendency in the greater context of community leadership and discuss the importance of communication skills, and building trust. Theresa warns that establishing trust with the community is essential

“...because you won’t be there long if you don’t become part of that community and a person that they trust and that they work with.”

While Elizabeth discusses the importance of building relationships,

“I think as a superintendent you become a vehicle for the communication, you invite, you get to know those folks and build relationships and then invite them to come and just sit down at the table with you and just talk about the exchange between the school and the community and making that better... I believe you must be able to communicate affectively. And I don’t just mean, umm, verbally. I mean in written form, when you are in groups with various stakeholders in your community you must be able to relate to people on all levels.

Virginia says the superintendent needs to be “mindful”

“of his or her community and be able to provide the resources to the students and to the staff because...it is a community and that community should be working hand-in-hand with each other.”

Most of the women also thought a most important role for the Superintendent is that of instructional leader for the entire district, particularly in the context of promoting professional development. Elizabeth references,

“visionary leadership...to model best practices for everyone.”

Rhonda calls the superintendent “the number one learner for your district.” Joan puts a superintendent in the context of other leadership roles, noting

“...just as the principal has to be the instructional leader in the school, the superintendent has to be the instructional leader and be the model for the school district...”

While Sharon sees the superintendent as “the umbrella over the whole picture” to

“make sure their [instructional] focus is where it should be.”
looking at test scores, looking at instruction, looking at the personnel issues, how to offer the instruction, and I see that they need to mostly be a leader of leaders.”

To “be a leader of leaders,” these women envision many personal qualities a superintendent needs to have in order to be effective. High on the list is the ability to motivate others. Susan sees the superintendent as a “cheerleader and motivator,”

“... and I really truly think in this day of school-based decision making and under a lot of those other changes that have come about, a superintendent is somebody that stands out in the front and says, ‘OK everybody, follow me!’ It’s the person that kind of gets behind the group and says, ‘Let me help you get to the top.’”

Virginia speaks of the importance of persistence and grit,

“... as the leader of any organization, whether it be principal or superintendent, then you have to be able to find ways to make it happen. You can not just be swayed by the first no or the first sign that money may be an issue. You have to have the ...competence and the desire to go out and make some things happen for your organization... You have to be savvy enough and have the desire and willpower and the stamina... to go out there and...make it happen and to get what you need for your organization.”

Elizabeth and Joan think a personal style which combines a “spiritual” component with a positive attitude are desirable qualities in a superintendent. Elizabeth believes people respond to

“folks that are positive and who feel like there’s more to life than what this life brings, so that there’s a spiritual component to who people are. And people who really enjoy, you know, that life is good, that people are innately good. And that our job is to just figure out how to, umm, tap in to that potential that people have. And, you know, sometimes if a leader doesn’t come from that kind of belief system you’ll stifle productive, creative, energetic leaders in your district.”

And Joan thinks it important “to have fun” in the job,

“So I guess being fair, being an instructional leader, and just having fun, showing people that if you’re not passionate about what you’re doing and you’re not enjoying what you’re doing, you should be doing something else.”

These aspirants clearly know what essential qualities they themselves would lend to the role. Kate describes how she would like to be remembered as a superintendent as

“a person who really cared about not only the people who worked in the district, but the people that passed through with their children in the course of twelve or thirteen years, umm, and really had provided a school district and a set of schools where those people felt at home and comfortable and happy and that their kids received a great education.”

Susan knows exactly what she would bring to the table. She sees the superintendency as an opportunity to do at the district-level what she had already successfully done at the classroom and building level:

“I’d like to have the same opportunity at a district level and to be able to implement some of the innovations I’ve developed... that if I ever get an opportunity to institute some of the things that I’ve created in my head that I know would be wonderful cutting-edge initiatives for school districts...”

Summary

One of this study’s research goals was to understand how these women characterize their own leadership qualities in relationship to the superintendency as well as how they conceptualize the position. Advocating for children is at the heart of their practice as is their concern for ethical behavior. These women share most characteristics of women who are already in the position of superintendent advancing the current reform agenda. Without exception, they believe teamwork, building relationships, and shared decision making are critical attributes for successful school leaders. Thus, both according

to the literature and in comparison to those currently in the job, these women are ready, “more than ready” to lead school districts in the current era of reform.

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Chapter 5 Not for Them

Introduction

As I began, this was a story of aspiration, hope and anticipation. It intended to explain: what assumptions the women in these special superintendent preparation programs held about accessing the position of superintendent. I know now that all of these women united in their lifelong interest, passion, and commitment to public education, aspired to be superintendents. They all entered one of two specialized professional development programs in the expectation that these programs would help them advance to that position.

Another of this study's research goals was to understand how these women conceptualize the superintendency as well as and how they characterize their own leadership qualities in relationship to that position. Without exception, they believe teamwork, building relationships, and shared decision making are critical attributes for successful educational leaders. Also, not surprisingly, the profile of this group of eleven women aspiring to the superintendency matches up in many ways to current women superintendents. These are women who are fully certified, amply trained, available, and "want the job."

As is so often the case with qualitative inquiry, where this study started and where it ends are very different places. It has been three years since the completion of the WSI program and Lea's participation in MMSP. It has been five years since Sonia's MSSP participation. Of the eleven women in the study, not a single one has yet to "get the job." Once the data for this study were generated, I no longer believed the aspirants' assumptions about accessing the position (research question 1) or the meanings they ascribed to their own professional experiences (research question 2) are central to the story. Instead, I wanted to know what forces, circumstances, or conditions were responsible for the inability of this accomplished and talented group of women to achieve their dream of being a superintendent.

Status Upon Completing the Program

Despite the fact that in order to participate in WSI the women had to complete an extensive application process, pay \$5,000.00 and attend 3 four-day professional workshops, it does not appear that all the women did in fact actually aspire to become superintendents. After successfully completing the program, several participants decided they would not seek that position. Joan “kind of played around with the thought” of being a superintendent but “kind of ran out of time” and that while she does “want to do it and has the experience and the energy“ she does not “feel 100% confident” that she wants it. The program caused Kate to really think and she cites as a constraint her

“personal uncertainty over what I really want to spend my time doing. At 50 years old, I could retire in a few short years if I want to.”

Neither Sharon nor Virginia followed the completion of the program by actually applying for a superintendent’s position. However, Paula did apply to two different districts and was a finalist for both positions. Both the Boards with which she interviewed consisted of 4 white males and 1 white female. The winning candidate in each instance was a white male from within the system. She was very disillusioned with the experience,

“I have almost given up on the position. The interviews in my area have proven that the male administrator lead the way in this area.”

Elizabeth also was a finalist for the one position for which she applied at the completion of WSI. The Board interviewing Elizabeth consisted of 5 white male members. The successful candidate was a white male from outside the system. Her response to her failure to secure the position was less distressed than Paula’s. She will accept a superintendency “if one comes along” but does not wish to relocate. For all her deliberate career planning, she finds herself “very satisfied” with her current position as an assistant superintendent.

A year following the end of the program found Rhonda “mulling over the possibility” of applying for a superintendency but ultimately deciding not to because “the timing just didn’t seem right.” Allison believes she needs “more experience” before she applies to be a superintendent because her expertise is almost entirely in instruction and assessment. She cites work with budgets and personnel as experience she needs. Feeling

no urgency in seeking the position of superintendent, Allison does not think she “will throw [her] hat in the ring for another 8-10 years.”

Margo is now retired and has been elected to the School Board who rejected her candidacy to be its superintendent and indicates she has no intention of making any future application to be superintendent. She thinks

“[the] superintendency right now is not an attractive position. With No Child Left Behind, funding cuts everywhere, expectation’s up everywhere. Unless you’re very young and energetic, and at my age I just don’t want to tackle that...”

Sonia, meanwhile, is looking for a superintendency that will be “the perfect fit.”

“...I would want to find the perfect fit. And you have to find the perfect fit for your leadership style and for the link of a community as well as a school district. And if were to go into a district and it’s not a perfect fit, I would do more harm to what I would consider do more harm to children than anything. And you have to examine your Board. And if your Board and you are not a perfect fit or have the same common goals for what are the best interest for children then it’s not going to work. While I don’t mind going in and having to face the hard challenges, I just don’t find that it’d be a perfect fit for me if there are adult driven behaviors vs. student oriented behaviors.”

For Kim, it is “possible” that she would seek the position “at some point,”

“Presently my goal is to get instated as supervisor. At some point I do intend to apply for directorship, so it’s not a direct goal in mind.”

Unlike the other women, Susan and Theresa have no ambivalence about their desire to be superintendents. Both have been finalists for the position on several occasions. The *2000 AASA Study of the American School Superintendency* found that over 70% of first-time applicants (for both men and women) secure their first superintendency in one year or less. Susan’s first interview for a superintendent’s position was 8 years ago—long before her participation in WSI. Theresa has been making every effort to secure a position since the end of the WSI. Both are highly frustrated by their inability to be hired as a superintendent; yet, both remain determined to pursue it. Susan despondently summed up her lack of progress,

“I am still the principal at ____ so my position has not changed. Frustrated about it too. I have applied to two superintendent positions. My own county of ___, I have been waiting for 6 years for it to open to be a “leading internal candidate” the reason being that the 5 positions I have previously applied for in which I was a

finalist, the job went to the internal candidate every time. So I waited. Then we had a shift in the board with 4 of the 5 being new, and they were all about hiring “outside” so I didn’t even get in the group of the 5 finalist. They were all from out of state or out of county. They hired a person from Missouri. I then applied to one of the surrounding counties. I was in the final 3, and really thought I was going to get it, they re-contacted me after 2 interviews and began discussing salary. Then all of a sudden, someone that was from the county that was a highly skilled educator was named, and she wasn’t one of the finalists. So once again the internal person got picked. I will keep trying...”

Like Susan, Theresa has been unable to secure the position of superintendent, although three years after the conclusion of the program she has been a finalist several times.

“I have not had opportunities for Superintendent interviews recently....Only one or two positions have opened and Districts hired from within. I have changed positions, too, from Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction to “School Business Administrator” and I am currently learning and overseeing District Financial System. I am hoping this will be a plus for me when positions become available for me to interview. I will apply for any available positions as Superintendent... I think a woman has to work very much harder to move up in the position and to remain in those positions they have to work very, very hard, they have to prove themselves over and over and over. Not being hired because you’re a woman. Being prepared for a job interview, driving a long way for an interview, going through the motions, and not even being considered for the job once you get there...”

As I reflected on the ambivalence on the part of some of the women, on the one hand, and Susan and Theresa’s lack of progress on the other, I remembered Gillian’s earlier remark about the WSI’s failure to move any of their women into the superintendency:

“I don’t think we slowed them down any. I think we gave some better insight into the position and all of the nuances in to the superintendency. **And I think that two or three decided that it was not for them**” [emphasis added].

Whether it was the “nuances” and “insights into the superintendency” of which Gillian spoke, some of these eleven aspirants made the decision that it was not for them. Others had the decision made **for** them. In coming to this decision, most of these women were hurt by the absence of mentors and professional networks. Most had spent their lives in education, with literally no career planning. And all suffered setbacks to one degree or another by issues of preference, prejudice, and perception.

Lack of Clear Career Goals

Perhaps one reason white males continue to dominate the superintendency is they, unlike most women, have clear professional goals. A chief piece of advice offered by the highly successful women administrators of Gupton and Slick's (1996) study was "plan for your career". As Gupton and Slick (1996) point out, "Unfortunately, the majority of [their respondents] learned the importance of career planning by not having done so themselves—a common characteristic of women who are now in their 40s and 50s"(14). Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) remark on the "striking tentativeness in women's stories about the early stages of their careers" and note they frequently used phrases like "I sensed that..." "I just thought it would be fun to..." "I don't know why..." "I drifted" and describing their career moves as occurring "accidentally" and "coincidentally" (23). Aisenberg and Harrington note further that women "notoriously lack professional counseling—guidance and instruction in the actual rules of the game" suffering "chronically from lack of professional mentors" never even asking themselves the "classic career minded question—Where do I want to be in five years? Lacking instruction in general career strategy, women frequently remain unaware of specific steps important to their advancement" (45). They note that while women generally have long-term goals or aspirations, "they approach that goal...through ad hoc, reactive maneuvers, almost on a day to day basis...Perhaps the most important specific rule is to plan strategically for a career, to make five-year plans and ten-year plans as part of a process of conscious decision making" (146). Paula, Sharon, and Virginia's responses to the question as to "when she knew she wanted to be a superintendent", is the essence of a "reactive maneuvers." Paula replies, "[When I] found I had prepared myself for the challenge." Sharon states, "When I moved to a district as a principal that has potential for moves when I am ready." And Virginia, "I interacted with other superintendents and learned the intricacies of the job and became a participant in the WSI."

A strong correlation exists between women's lower career goals and their lack of advancement (Bonuso and Shakeshaft, 1983; Weber, Feldman, and Poling, 1981). A study of 24 highly ranked female executives (Gallese, 1991) found that women breaking into the senior ranks were "comfortable with pursuing power "and those women "who failed, by contrast...didn't scramble as aggressively for power" (18). Gupton and Slick (1996)

conclude that many women aspire to less than the top-level administrative positions in education because they still see themselves in supportive roles. It is interesting to note that the majority of the 151 women in their study of “highly successful women administrators” were assistant superintendents, and most of those were in curriculum and instruction, an area traditionally staffed by women. Only 21% of their “highly successful women administrators” actually occupied the position of superintendent.

This lack of strategic planning is evident in many of the women in the WSI project. Their reasons for deciding to enter the profession varied somewhat, although most spoke of having a commitment (dedication, mission, calling) to education. Margo was the exception noting that she obtained her teaching credential as “insurance.” She commented,

“I entered (college) in ’61 and finished in ’65, and that was a time when you kind of got your teacher’s certificate as insurance in case you can’t find a job doing something else, you can always teach. Jobs were plentiful then.”

With the exception of Susan and Elizabeth, the career advancement of the WSI women shows a clear lack of strategic planning.

“...I never imagined that I would come out of the classroom to begin with...”
(Kate)

“When I look at everything that I’ve done I never intended to be superintendent. If you had asked me 15 years ago even would I ever be in central office, would I ever go beyond a classroom teacher, probably I would never have dreamed I would have. I was satisfied being a teacher; I loved being a teacher in a classroom. It’s probably been one of the most satisfying things I’ve ever done. ...
(Theresa)

“...And so I stayed five years in the classroom, and then my husband I married taught second-year English, then I stayed home with our daughter and pretty much ran a day care here for 6 years.... And all the way through, it’s almost like I’ve been at the right place at the right time, and fallen into place as for what was planned for my life. I don’t know about your religion, but I feel like there’s always a purpose for life.” (Margo)

“...Just like the educational specialist, it’s just 12 more hours, so why not? I got it and I had it and really had no thoughts of using it. I had no aspirations to be a principal. I loved being the assistant. Loved my role as an assistant superintendent.” (Lea)

Elizabeth is one WSI participant who believes that she had been very strategic about getting to the position of assistant superintendent (which qualified her to be a “highly successful woman administrator” under Gupton and Slick’s definition). She states that she first knew she wanted to be a superintendent “when at a young age [I] charted my path: teacher-coach-counselor-principal, asst. supt., supt.” However, she also noted that she was quite satisfied to remain at the assistant level, accepting a superintendency “if one comes along.” And lack of career planning is clearly not what is holding Susan back.

“...this is my chosen profession and um, I think back to... I’ve been in education for twenty-five (25) years... I think as early as fifth grade I was starting to think towards superintendency, even though I didn’t know what to call it that...

I never stayed in one school for longer than three years, and right after a transfer because I wanted to see other principals in operation, and I would tell them that, ‘I’ve been here three years, I’ve seen your style, I want to move on and see somebody else.’ When I got to other schools I said I wanted to be a principal some day and I want to see you in action

...and I went over and took business courses in organizational theory and finance management and personnel management. And, so make sure that when I’m talking to these Board members and I interview with them, I make sure that they know that, they know that I went above and beyond the minimum requirements for what they perceive as a weakness in women...

...I’ve been sitting back waiting in ___ County, I’ve purchased land in ___ County, and was just continuing to stay focused on the principalship and thinking, because I was a finalist... I mean, I’ve applied to six districts, was a finalist in five and got down to the final three in four of them...and it got down to me and two others and every time the in-county person got the job. So I thought, ‘Well I just need to quit interviewing, sit back and wait, I know (her current superintendent) Mr. ___ isn’t going to stay a whole lot longer, and then I’ll become the in-county person in ___ County.’”

Still, several saw participation in the program as a “resume builder” and as a useful credential and made comments similar to Susan’s,

“...it’s always nice to have something else like that on your resume, and they see that you are thinking about it before it actually happens. And so I’m trying to, you know, overcompensate with whatever might be perceived as a weakness on the part of the Board members.

Only Susan puts it in the context of a life long goal,

“I can’t seem to get to the point where I’m the one out of the three that they pick... So I thought by joining this I might be able to, you know, get one more step up there to see what it is I need to do to have me be the one that’s selected...And I felt like that WSI that, you know, I had that on my resume and

could say and they could see that even though I wasn't in a superintendency yet, I was doing everything I could to prepare myself for that position ahead of time...why I wanted to be in the WSI. I was just so excited when I saw the program advertised because I have been a finalist, last year two school systems I was one of the three finalists for the superintendency, and then this spring I applied to three districts and was a finalist at two of them. So I keep getting close, I just don't get there. And I saw this program offered and I thought, "Maybe there's something that I'm not doing-- that I need to know," cause I keep getting so close, but I can't seem to be the one to get picked ...But I keep thinking maybe there's this magic information out there that somebody might have that could help me to see the way to finally accomplishing my lifelong goal."

Susan articulates clearly her life-long drive to obtain this position. Her self-description as a "caged bird, needing to stretch her wings...to be an educator, just at a different level." She elaborates

"I think it's just, I'm an educator... A superintendent is an educator. They're teaching their Board, they're teaching the Central Administrative Staff how to deal with teachers and the certified and classified people in the organization so that those people can teach the children that they're assigned to, and so it's just another step up to do the same thing you are doing, and that's to educate. And I can remember the years that I was trying to become a principal and I was still in the classroom. I used to tell people that I felt like a bird in a cage, a caged bird. I was in my classroom and I was bound by the four walls in that classroom, and I'd been there for nine or ten years and I was good at it, I was named teacher of the year, I was good at it. I really tried hard to be the best I could be, but I felt like I needed to stretch my wings, to do something more than what I was doing... And I've been a principal, I'm just finishing my 14th year, and I feel again like that caged bird, like I need to stretch my wings, and so moving from a principal into the superintendent would allow me the opportunity to have a place to stretch those wings again. But again, even though you're stretching your wings, you're still an educator, just at a different level. And so that's, you know, I just need to stretch a little bit more."

Lack of Support

The stated goals of WSI included "building a support base for potential female education leaders" and "building a support network for female superintendency candidates." Of the 286 women superintendents who participated in the *2000 Study of the American School Superintendency*, 76.9% responded that the "old/boy/old girl" network supported them into their positions as superintendents (87). The number one reason given by WSI participants for joining the program was to gain a network for professional support and to establish meaningful mentorships. The lack of networking, the scarcity of

positive role models, and inadequate sponsorships and mentoring among women are often cited as major barriers to women's career advancement in educational administration (Coursen, 1989; Swiderski, 1988).

In Gupton and Slick's (1996) study, 57% of "highly successful women administrators" said they are not part of a network for public support. Their responses identified "insufficient role-modeling, networking, and mentoring among women as the second most prevalent reason women were underrepresented in positions of leadership in the profession" (65). Women have not benefited from meaningful networks, positive role models, support systems and have suffered a scarcity of sponsors and mentors. "On the other hand, the network among men—informally referred to as 'the good old boy system'—is strong and, although sometimes viewed pejoratively, is often considered a major vehicle used in selecting job candidates (Schmuck, 1986). When Gupton and Slick (1996) asked women administrators to rank-order five reasons for the under representation of women in administrative leadership, more than 70% ranked insufficient support systems as either the first or second cause for the continued under representation of women in educational administration (68). A growing body of research (Garland, 1991; Pavan, 1987) suggests women's career advancement in the field of educational administration can be significantly enhanced by improved support systems and discusses the importance of women having mentors—either male or female—in order to make significant advances in administrative careers.

Furthermore, Gupton and Slick (1996) assert that "The culture of educational administration is dominated by white males and their orientations. Women and minorities have not had access to networks or sponsors who frequently help males gain entry into this culture, nor have they had access to on-the-job nurturing that networks and support systems afford many male administrators, which contribute significantly to their career success and longevity in a position (136)." They conclude that women need stronger support systems among themselves as well as the male networks in order to succeed. The potential for career success is "greatly enhanced" (137) with the help of a mentor. Some WSI participants spoke of early role models and of having career mentors. Susan, for example, made up her mind that she would be a superintendent because of a female teacher and principal who she encountered in the 5th grade:

“And I just thought that was so neat that she [her 5th grade teacher] was willing to be different than everybody else and was taking a leadership role in getting that done. So she was a role model, but then the principal was a role model too, and I can remember her walking down the hall thinking, Oh my gosh, you know she just had such a commanding presence about her. And I just wanted to be like that, and I thought well, I remember thinking at the time, “Well if she can get to where she is and be a woman, I can end up by the time I’m grown up, being her boss...And I could remember thinking I want to be like her, and then, you know, I could also remember thinking as young as I am now, by the time I’m her age and I got her age maybe I could end up being her boss. I didn’t even know what the superintendency was actually called, but I can remember running this through my head when I was like young.”

Joan feels the presence of sponsors for most of her career, including her current (white male) superintendent.

“...but most of it has been just someone higher up, whether it be a professor or a principal or a superintendent saying, “You got something, go for it.” (Have most of these people been women or men?) Umm, the first was a female college professor at _____. I could finally say, “I got accepted from the program so get off my back.” So I would say she was the first. And after that it’s been male.”

Kim is equally effusive discussing her current [white male] superintendent:

“He is an absolute pleasure to work for. He was the superintendent in the office, or director in the office, when I was selected. So even though he had a team of three, he made the final decision. And I think because he’s been in the district for so long, he was aware of the work that I had done in the district and the reputation that I had built. He selected me for the job, which means he values my work and trust my opinion.”

Almost to a one, WSI participants explained that the main reason they applied to the program was to be a part of a meaningful professional network. Forging a strong professional network of women was a major reason for committing to the program.

Speaking to Gillian, Joan enthused,

“... I went to an all women’s college, and that was my first taste of how powerful a female network could be and just some of the relationships that have continued to this day and how supported I feel by that whole thing...when this opportunity opened itself up, it’s like wow this will almost be like going back to college again...and we’ll all be there supporting each other and it just seemed so exciting and so invigorating that I just wanted to give it a shot.”

Virginia, too, joined the program expecting to form a network, commenting on the difficulty women seem to have in creating and maintaining such a group:

“...Also networking. Looking at opportunities to network with individuals from other states or even within the state. Because as a female, many times you do not have the opportunity to network... hopefully this organization will provide an opportunity for us to be able to enhance our skills and our knowledge and be able to be a network and a supportive group to each other.”

Several participants remarked about how “close they had grown” over the course of the program. Theresa certainly found a strong basis for fellowship and networking with her fellow members saying:

“I felt like every member of the group from what my interactions with them and listened to them in the group that they were all similar to me. They were hard workers, they had worked, a lot of what we do is the work that is done in school systems and that we were hard workers. We had a lot in common and a lot of our vision of what we wanted to do with our lives and that it was a commitment to education. But I saw a lot of similarities in other ladies that were in the group, passionate about education, passionate about what we do.”

Others share Theresa’s admiration for the women in the group. Joan’s comments are typical:

“And also having a very supportive group of women who are going through the same things. Some of them taking bigger chances, some of them sitting back and watching how things are going. But just having a supportive group and knowing I could send an email or pick up the phone and any one of them would take the time to listen to what I was going through.”

And Margo cites the “chance to network and meet other people” as the most stimulating aspect of the program. However, a year after the program ended contact between the women was sporadic and unintentional. Theresa speaks of seeing

“several (other participants) at state meetings” and says, “... I know I will run into the other people... and I think we will start communicating more, I can assure you the first one that gets a superintendents position, we will have an email.”

Kim spoke of e-mailing the group in order “to find out what they thought” on a couple of occasions. However, Kim’s vague comment shows that time and distance are fraying the connections:

“Well I would say that the contact with J and B certainly has been appreciated as a group, but I think probably just the contact with each other has been beneficial. (Can you give me an example of how it’s been beneficial to you other than what you just talked about with J__?) Well let’s see, I talked to A emailed me back and forth a lot... As far as what’s going on and some ideas and things. And another

one, umm, can not think of her name, she sometimes sends information that's beneficial to us as educators, forwards things to us. Can't think of her name now. She was an assistant principal. And then I can't think of anything right off hand except for sharing information. And then a group of them got together and went to a conference. I don't know if they mentioned that to you or not, and did a presentation on the group. I'm not sure what conference it was. I can't remember."

Theresa acknowledges that the women are not in touch regularly but she remains hopeful.

"...I think that when the WSI (women) start getting in positions that they will be a network, they will be calling one another for this or for advice or for I have this problem, have you faced this issue. Umm, or once you get several of them in, they will be calling, I heard about an opening down in so-and-so County, can you tell me about that position? Umm, what do you think is going to happen there? And then these women superintendent that are in place will be able to advise these Counties over the next Counties, saying hey I know a wonderful candidate. And I think it's going happen naturally."

A major difference between the Mentoring Minority Superintendents Program (MMSP) and WSI program centers on the involvement of mentors. A key component of the MMSP was moving the superintendent candidates from their home districts and assigning them as assistant superintendents under the mentorship of an acting superintendent. Lea found this to be enormously beneficial stating

"it was an opportunity for superintendent's to mentor minority aspiring superintendents and give them an opportunity. It really is a great program as far as it's changing of ideas and network across the state."

Sonia, who was a member of the first cohort (2002-2003), spoke glowingly of the (white-male) superintendent who served as her mentor:

"He's wonderful. And basically what he did for me in this process was to get me in a mode of networking that I had thought about before... He introduced me to all of the right people and opened doors that I would have never been able to cross as a female... As a female I would not have been able to go... it is so politically connected and he's a business person, and the types of meetings he took me to, they were all men. They were involved in these meeting with strictly men. And in those meetings you just as a female you couldn't get in there. You had to have a financial background to sit at the table and talk..." (How did you feel while you were at that table? Did you feel like you were able and ready?) Yes, and I will tell you, there's such a high regard for (her mentor) that he brought me to the table, he brought me into it. Never brought me as his intern. He brought me as his, I'm trying to think of the word he called me, he may have referred to me as "partner,"

may as referred to me as the person who represented the district. He gave me the titles the very first day I walked in as an assistant superintendent. I noticed the other candidates at that time never immediately got that title. But when I walked in the district he treated me as an equal. Never anything less.”

Her mentor showing such confidence in her had a powerful effect on Sonia’s self-confidence,

“I thought, hmm, I can do this job. And do it well. I was very thankful that I had met, first of all, a man that did not see color. A man that of his own choosing selected me based on the skills that he saw. And to have (her mentor) choose you, I have such a high regard for him, but to have him choose you and say “Yes you’ll be a superintendent one day,” meant the world to me.”

On the other hand, WSI was not successful in bringing in a group of incumbent superintendents (male or female) to act as role models or to serve as mentors. Gillian’s fall-back position was to bring in Jane and Beth to serve as “phone mentors.” Susan explains how this “phone mentorship” worked for her:

“...what they ended up doing was, they assigned Jane and Beth to everybody and they gave us these phone cards and we’d go to these meetings and we’d get five one-hour phone cards, and then Jane would take the time to sit and have these one-hour phone conversations with each one of us that was in the program. And that worked out really good. I mean, Jane knows. She would sit talking on the phone long enough to know what my objective was, so she was giving me all these little pointers and things to do, like she’d teach me how to read the body language of the Board members and she’d say, “Ok now, between now and the next time we talk on the phone, I want you to keep a journal on each one of your five Board members and record the body language you see every time you go to a Board meeting, and then the next time we’ll talk about it.” I learned a lot of really good information like that.”

Susan also speculates about the reasons behind using “phone mentors” which testifies to the paucity of role models and mentors available for aspiring women leaders.

“...I got the impression that the plan was that they were going to try and select several women who were going to serve on like, sort of, a Board, and they were assigned candidates to one of these superintendents that eventually came along. And it ended up not happening that way because they couldn’t get enough women to actually do that... Somebody who’s been there and done that, and I just don’t think they could get enough of a pool to actually make that happen that each one of us got a different mentor.”

The participants were divided on just how effective the “phone mentors” were. Margo had been acquainted with Beth before the program and was very complimentary of her credentials but did not really see her assisting in her present search:

“I had known her (Beth) for years, where they may have not. I have worked with her as a supervisor and mentor many years ago when she was a supervisor in another district and knew her. Had a lot of respect for her. She was, where some of them were having doubts about the superintendency, I pretty much had my feet on the ground. I knew that this position would be coming open. I had really had my eye on it for years. And that was for me more important than this time for me.”

On the other hand, Joan believes she established a “lifeline” of support with her mentor, and Kim gives specific examples of help she received from both of these “phone mentors” stating:

(Beth) “... who was a former superintendent in the ___ district. She was very helpful Just as far as giving advice on how to go about certain situations in the district...these second grade teachers had asked that I make a request for textbooks for them this past year. With our district in a budget crunch I was hesitant to ask for the funds, so I called ___ and we talked about the rationale and gathered data from the teachers and from previous test scores and with the rationale I did decide to request textbooks for the second grade teachers. And so we kind of outlined how I’d go about that, and it was very helpful, and I did make that request, and it was granted. That was just one example of how she helped me think through a situation...Jane, do you remember her? She kind of worked with us in Nashville, she and I have kept in contact quite a bit. Actually I think she’s instrumental in having me appointed to the post committee in staff development council. Actually I’ve seen her two or three times in those meetings as we plan for the National Conference that’s going to be in Opryland in 2006.”

Still, several others voiced their dissatisfaction that a more meaningful mentoring relationship was not part of the design of WSI. Susan comments, “I would love to shadow an effective superintendent sometime or something.” Virginia states:

“... Therefore I would, umm, looking at possible, umm, sometimes where we could just shadow a female superintendent who could act as a mentor just to see what goes on there, what their job is all about. And I know that each situation is different, each school system is different, each state is different. But just being able to get a picture of many women, female, superintendents who are doing very, very well in their positions.”

Theresa actually references the MMSP as a program to model:

“... that’s one component that I’d like to see that maybe we’d have a mentor who is a very good superintendent who maybe they’d put us with on the job for a few days. And of course we work that way anyway, but I just noticed today that they’re coming out with minority superintendent’s, or they’re trying to form a cadre of minority superintendent’s, they’re wanting to put them with other superintendent’s, and I just thought that would be a wonderful way of mentoring. I would like to see that fused in just a little bit more.”

The lack of meaningful mentors and networks in these women’s professional lives left them with a dearth of encouragement or support, which in turn, translated into a lack of planning for advancement. Yet, no matter how circuitous the route or how poorly supported they found themselves, many of these women were committed to advancing to the superintendency. They would discover some of those “better insights and nuances” to which Gillian alluded.. And as they encountered the forces of preference, prejudice, and perception they would find the superintendency “was not for them.”

Preference

The numbers speak for themselves. Clearly, white men administrators are preferred for the position of superintendent. According to Björk (2000), the United States public school superintendency continues to be the most gender-stratified executive position in the country. Brunner (2000) notes that the 20th century began with about the same percentage of female superintendents that it ended with, showing a total lack of progress for women in the position. This preference for male administrators begins early; men are 40 times more likely to advance from teaching to the top leadership role in schools than are women (Skrla, 2000). Gupton and Slick’s (1996) study of how highly successful women administrators “got there” addresses this issue of preference. Their study found that the number-one complaint by these women administrators of biased treatment related to being given less respect and being left out of the dominant male network of administrators (40).

It is instructive to note that only 29% of the respondents in the Gupton and Slick (1996) study were actually in the chief position of superintendent. Most (49%) were assistant superintendents, the majority of whom were in the area of curriculum and instruction, an area traditionally staffed by women. The highest position obtained for

21% of their other “highly successful women administrators” was the high school principalship. Gupton and Slick note in their introduction that “although many women are clearly aspiring to administrative positions, the positions they acquire are less than the most powerful in the profession” (xxix).

According to Gupton and Slick (1996), 70% of these highly successful women administrators reported obstacles to their careers because they were women. It was not the choice of a career in education that was problematic. The barrier was in choosing to move into an administrative career after having taught for many years. “One has to wonder what these women would have achieved had they been the beneficiaries of counseling. Mentoring, diversity in occupational choice, role models and positive support in the preparation phases of their careers, either as undergraduates choosing careers initially, or later as experienced educators pursuing entry into their profession’s administrative arena. ...the ‘woman’s profession’ has often not nurtured those who supposedly lay strongest claim to it! The label has been too loosely applied to the whole profession, when in fact it references women’s proliferation only within the classrooms where they have been typecast as most naturally belonging: working with children, not making organizational decisions” (31). Gupton and Slick (1996) further contend that education and certification attainment are no longer the impediment to women’s career advancement in educational administration: “The main impediment ...seems to be the unstated but understood requirements that aspiring candidates must look and act like those already in power”(xxix). This attitude is “Pervasive and seems typical of both those in power and others, including, ironically, women themselves within the profession (xxix).” When that preference for white males in the role of superintendent is held by the hiring agencies it becomes a formidable obstacle for women’s advancement. Margo, who holds a doctorate, certainly can attest to these “unstated but understood requirements”:

“I had a first-hand experience with the “good ole’ boy” network last year. ...We had a Board that could not make a decision... so of course I applied and another person in Central Office applied, but she had only a Master’s +, and in their advertisement they said “Doctorate Preferred.” So when it came down to it there were several with Doctorate’s that applied. Another lady from the county that neighbors ours that would be elementary principal of the year, very dynamic person, and they wouldn’t even consider her. But here is a small rural area, but they couldn’t make a decision. So they hired the “_____ Search Group... the

two people that came up here, I knew both of them, two superintendents in this area... One of them was run out of two different places. And ended up in Virginia and didn't stay there very long, and so he was retired on the beach in South Carolina, kind of like coaches. So he stayed a few years and they wanted rid of him so bad, they bought his contract. It probably ended up at a million dollars. These are the two men that chose the superintendency that we have now. So, it came down to three males, which I knew very well, and had worked with them. And the third one was in South Carolina. And it was very obvious that this was their pick. But then when you go back and start looking, this same company had chosen the superintendent for this fellow as an assistant. And it's just a good ole' boy network...He was getting his doctorate from that online group out of Florida, Nova. And he hadn't finished it yet, I don't look for him to finish. In the interview he said he'd be finished in 6 months. So, anyway, this is how he ended up here...But when you step back and look, I've ended up in the best, in a much better situation..."

The "much better situation" Margo "ended up in," is as a member of the very board which did not hire her when it had the opportunity to do so.

As Margo's experience illustrates, preferential treatment as practiced by the hiring gatekeepers (this includes consultants, headhunters and Board members) destroys women's opportunity for advancement. According to Tallerico (2000), "...gender biases and other unwritten rules present unique challenges for women and others who are unlike most incumbent, white, male superintendents"(4). Gupton and Slick (1996) also found a gender-related barrier in the discriminatory nature of school system interviewing, hiring, and promotion practices (44). Radich (1992) finds that overt discrimination against women in educational administration was evident in the superintendent hiring process (183). Grogan and Henry (1995) find that "the superintendency continues to be constructed as a male arena" and concludes that a male-centered "warrior, military, or business mentality" disadvantages female superintendent candidates (172). A headhunter (quoted by Tallerico) explains that "old mythologies" still surface in the search process. Questions like, "Can she do discipline? Can she do a budget? Can she be tough enough? Can she do the job"? A school board member (in Tallerico's study) said, "Sure, gender biases still exist on boards. Even when the woman candidate becomes a finalist, then the question becomes, 'Do we have to pay her as much as the male contender'" (93)? According to Tallerico (2000), "Overt biases can negatively influence every stage of the process from preliminary discussions about the search (e.g., is this district ready for a

woman superintendent?), through finalist interviews (e.g., what does she know about athletics or transportation?), to appointment (e.g., do we have to pay her as much as a man?) (107-108). Finally, Tallerico (2003) notes women are stymied by their very lack of experience "...gatekeepers favor experiential backgrounds that are infrequently occupied by females. They want previous superintendents, assistant superintendents, and high school principals" (359).

Theresa, who at this writing has participated in four interviews as a finalist, speaks of the clear preference Board members showed for a male in the role. She states that one of the Board members who contacted her for a background check actually asked her,

"...if I thought I could make it in a man's world... I feel like I can do any job, if I'm trained in it then I can do it. And the perception with people is that it takes the strength of a man to run a school system...Leadership strength, strength to withstand pressure and criticism and to push forward and bring about change and to stand up to what needs to be stood up to. Basically they see women as they won't take the rings and move on... (women might) be too sensitive or emotional about issues; get their feelings hurt and not step up to the plate..."

One aspect of this bias on the part of hiring gatekeepers comes from what Glass (1993) describes as the "natural superintendent career path" of "a sequence of positions and experiences [that] tends to occur in a logical and ordered progression of positions of increasing responsibility and complexity"(67). Joan refers to this as men "working their way up" and notes that,

"...so much of it is the people who moved up into either principalships or whatever are the coaches, and they were the guys, and those same people then, when rehired, then I can count a number of people who sort of worked their way up in our district. Everyone from our Director of Technology who is now retiring, to our Director of Student Services. It was just that "good ole' boy network" about putting in time and taking over."

Glass (1993) finds a small portion of superintendents, especially women, have been observed to deviate from this "natural" progression. "But...some variation in career from the norm is not unexpected" (30). Tallerico (2000) notes the assumption of this "norm" implies those who deviate from the "norm" (women) are something other than "ideal" and are "slower" than those on the fast-track to the superintendency. "Some may

be overly immersed in the ‘norms of teaching,’ which by implication are somehow inferior to or less desirable than the ‘norms of administration’” (76).

Although Aisenberg and Harrington’s (1988) work centers on women in the university ranks, their insights on why women are relegated to the teaching ranks are instructive. It is their contention that “the male-dominated academe” invokes “the common cultural assumption that women are ‘natural’ teachers, and that such positioning agrees with their own preference. This attitude...grounds the ‘natural’ gift for teaching in the ‘naturally’ nurturant qualities that are supposedly, *sui* generic in women—and that are irrelevant to the discipline and creativity required in serious research”(39.) Tallerico (2000) also sees preference in the male dominance of high school principalships which she considers to be the major stepping stone to the superintendency.

Whatever the leadership position, the preference for white males over their female counterparts is clear. Bell (1988) finds “the most persuasive characteristic a candidate for superintendent could possess seems to be maleness...Maleness signifies to board members...shared language and experience, predictability, connection with the power structure, and leadership that satisfies stereotyped preferences”(50). Linn (1998) concludes that “even well meaning decision makers often subtly advantage people like themselves” (19). Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) agree arguing that “Women are excluded in the professions because... Authority holders buttress their positions by mentoring and grooming those that are like themselves. Groups made up of people not like the authority holders are excluded and that exclusion is justified by finding these groups in some way inadequate—women aren’t serious, aren’t tough enough, will focus on irrelevancies, or will not commit to the hours”(137). Kim stated this preference succinctly,

“I think if someone has power and position and influence and they’re not a white male then the first reaction from people is surprise.”

Immediately following their professional development program which purported to groom them for the position, Theresa, Karen, Margo, and Elizabeth applied for superintendent positions once, and Paula applied twice. Karen and Elizabeth were finalists for their targeted positions—Paula was a finalist both times. There was no finalist interviewing in Theresa’s case; a white male principal designated by the out-

going superintendent was hired. In all cases, a white male was the candidate hired by the Board. Reflecting on her search for the position, Paula states,

“I have almost given up on the position. The interviews in my area have proven that the male administrator leads the way in this area.”

Theresa is equally discouraged,

“It’s difficult in (her part of the state) to get a superintendent position... It’s traditionally male and it’s a political position to a great extent...It’s so hard! And you know I really did not realize how hard that it would be and you have to fight for the position and then when they come up it’s hard to get interviewed. And they have a person they’re already wanting in that position, lots of times internal, someone they have groomed for the position, and I understand that, and it’s just, it’s a very unique position in how you go about getting it, a superintendent position...And actually if you have worked Central Office position for a number of years, you do have the experience because you’re doing a lot of what a superintendent does. And I don’t know that they don’t see that...”

Adding injury to insult is the under-current of anti-feminism which results in women not supporting other women in their quest for advancement. To a one, the aspirants state they feel a need for strong mentors and networking. However, in Gupton and Slick’s study (1996), 17% of the respondents said they did not have a mentor and that they did not need or want such support. Furthermore, 20% of these “highly successful women administrators” admitted that they had not been a mentor to others—and saw no reason to do so. Schmuck (1996) sees a “thread of antifeminism running through the narratives and survey results”, and further contends that an “ultimate shift” has occurred in the past decade “from access to equity”(x). She suggests gender will be an operational variable for women in leadership; it cannot be ignored. “As individuals women leaders must ascertain in what situations their femaleness matters. Sometimes it will not matter at all; other times, it will matter very much.” (Gupton and Slick, 1996, xi). Schmuck asks the “elephant in the room question”: Why do gender inequities persist after 25 years of affirmative action? (Gupton and Slick, 1996, xiv).

Perhaps part of the answer lies in this stunning result from Gupton and Slick’s (1996) work: 23%--almost one-fourth of a national sampling-- disagreed with the statement: “Women are supportive of other women in the profession” (26). This affirms

many women administrators do not feel positive about women's' support for other women. Some aspirants speculate that one reason for the glass ceiling being "thicker" in education is the high number of women in education—holding each other back. Susan addresses the issue head-on:

"In fact women feel like they're competition with each other sometimes and I think the glass ceiling is thicker in education than in other organizations because there is such a higher rate of women at the basic level of the organization, be that certified teachers. The vast majority of them are females. We're seeing some changes in gender, but overall most educational organizations are top heading women and it's very difficult for women to rise up through the system because women tend to hold other women down. They don't support each other because of that whole competition thing and I've tried to not do that..."

Nationally there are approximately 15,000 school districts. Since women only lead 17% of them it is evident that white men are preferred by Boards, head hunters, and other hiring entities. While fighting this preference women are also undercut in their ambitions by the lack of support by other women. This lack of support from other women is a recurring theme for this group of aspirants. In addition to countering the preferences and preconceptions of gatekeepers and other women, these aspirants also face other forms of discrimination.

Prejudice

The bias on the part of gatekeepers that women are on a different track feeds into another bias—age discrimination. Tallerico (2000) states "tacit age biases that disproportionately affect women can be reinforced in the interview setting" (105). A professional headhunter in Tallerico's study noted that the "typical person" in their Educational Administration program is a 40-42 year old female who has taught 17 years and has no interest in being a principal. "We're looking at 54 and 55 year-old women looking for their first superintendencies. Boards say, 'Why hire them? In another year, they'll be eligible to retire, and we'll be looking again.' So is there age discrimination? Yes. Absolutely...it's particularly more acute for women because many of them start their career path later...Does that limit women for getting the superintendency? Absolutely...Of course, the variable there is child bearing and child rearing" (78).

Glass (1992) found that the median age of 50 for superintendents has remained constant for the past 6 decades. Female superintendents are on the average older than the

average male superintendents with 39.8% of women superintendents being between 41 and 50. For men that percentage is 31.1% (Brunner, 2000). Brunner also notes that women report waiting for children to get older before seeking a position that makes heavy demands on time (79). Susan alludes to this when she comments that she is now “free to make commitments to those 15 hour days” because of her status as a single woman with grown children. Several aspirants pointed to their age to help explain their ambivalence in seeking the position. Kate acknowledged the effect of age in her deliberation about applying for the position,

“Personal uncertainty over what I really want to spend my time doing. At 50 yrs. old, I could retire in a few short years if I want to.”

And even though Margo had interviewed for a superintendent’s position the month before, she said,

“The superintendency right now is not an attractive position. With No Child Left Behind, funding cuts everywhere, expectation’s up everywhere. Unless you’re very young and energetic, and at my age I just don’t want to tackle that anymore...Well at this point in my life, I’m 61...”

In addition to ageism, these aspirants encountered overt sexism in their interviews.

Theresa was amazed,

“...I would never have believed it until I started applying for superintendent jobs. It is very hard for a female to get a superintendent’s position. And I know that women have the same/equal leadership abilities, it depends on the person, as the male, but a lot of schools and districts are just not looking at a female superintendent. And it doesn’t matter what your strengths are, they’ll go with a male anyway...”

Several of the women point to an underlying bias contributing to their belief that women have to have stronger/better credentials than male candidates. Theresa explained,

“I think a woman has to work very much harder to move up in the position and to remain in those positions they have to work very, very hard, they have to prove themselves over and over and over. I think it’s a much higher standard than men.”

Joan describes the discrimination she has experienced as “more subtle than overt”. She speaks of the need to go “above and beyond” because male staff is watching to see “if the little girl messes up”.

“Although, you know, and I think I’ve mentioned this before, it’s subtle. I think it’s more subtle than overt. I have a predominately male staff. And it’s not so much what people say, but it’s kind of how people look at you and they’re kind of watching your every move to see whether the little girl messes up or not... That is expected. So you have to go above and beyond.”

Only Lea, an African American woman, attributes her inability to secure the position to lack of credentials. Her highest position had been assistant principal of a middle school. She believes it is her lack of Central Office experience which explains her failure—not any overt bias:

“At this point I don’t think it’s a male/female thing. And I don’t necessarily think it’s a race thing at this point in the positions that I applied for. I think its credentials. I applied in (town A) and there were 52 applicants. How could I even get to the cut? I applied I think in five different places and I got interviewed for only one superintendency position. And did not get that position because it was given to an internal candidate. So I was knocked out because of an internal candidate or someone with more credentials... because most of the places I applied had 20 or more applicants and I have a notebook full of all my letters that told me no, no, no, no, no. And so I work really hard on not being bitter. And I’m not. I went to a meeting with the new superintendent’s who just came on this year who have started the training for the superintendency and I think that I’ve completed this program. You all are in it; you’re all trying to be superintendents. And not one of them had a clue. I have a clue. But how do you get to that interview and tell the Board, ‘Yes I have a clue.’ Because if you just look at me on paper I may not read like someone who’s been instructional supervisor.”

Just as these aspirants found their advancement impeded by the clear preference for male candidates, and the lack of support they received from other women, they also encountered gender and age discrimination. In the public school superintendency, white male incumbents and applicants are the norm; females and nonwhites are the “others” (Chase, 1995; Chase and Bell, 1990). These aspirants struggled with another impediment to their advancement: the perception, particularly by those in a position to hire them that they are, because of their gender, “outsiders.”

Perception

In attempting to explain why women are not in top positions in proportion to their numbers at the university level, Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) put forth a thesis that may well explain the same perception phenomenon in the public school superintendency. They argue that as women rise in the profession they are stymied by the remaining force

of the old social norms that divide responsibility (public roles for men, private ones for women) with the assumptions about male and female natures drawing connections about tendencies and roles. “Women’s identity was located in the body and the emotions, men’s in the mind. Women gave birth, suckled infants, nursed the sick, cleaned homes, cooked meals, provided sympathy, enchantment, inspiration. Men learned, calculated, bought, sold, built, fought, wrote, painted, philosophized” (4). Writing from the vantage point of 1988, they note that the women’s movement of the 1960s brought opportunities as well as new rules which resulted in a situation where two sets of norms co-exist. “While there are new social and political commitments to equality, we retain the old assumptions of male and female nature. Assumptions which deny the power of female minds, denying them advancement” (5). Thus they see the status of women as “informed outsiders”.

“The most significant commonality in the experience of women academics is the stance of the informed outsider. Women in the late twentieth century are informed about the world and about their society by their inclusion in most of the education and experience of their brothers—often in the same schools, the same sports, the same travel, many of the same freedoms. But, with the old norms still powerful, the woman seeking to use her knowledge in roles of serious responsibility remains an outsider. She holds authority on sufferance, under the perpetual suspicion that she will not be able to fulfill her demanding role, perpetually subject to the accusation that she should not claim serious authority at all. Surrounded by male colleagues, she is perforce “other.” Thus she sees her world from the dual perspective of close knowledge and psychological distance—which is classically the perspective of a questioner or a critic” (86).

In attempting to access public education’s most powerful position these “informed” women have shared the same education and professional experiences as their male counter-parts. They face the “perpetual suspicion” that they cannot do the job, are viewed with skepticism, and unable to claim serious authority. They are outsiders.

Tallerico (2000) suggests that because of the absence of similar role models in the past, “leaders who are ‘others’ face extraordinary expectations for proving themselves” (95). This is similar to the kinds of discrimination Kanter (1977) found in the corporate world, where token representation, rather than a critical mass of females, characterized executive leadership. Joan refers to her outsider status as “not being one of us.”

“The old way of doing things is you have to be there and you have to be here and you forget about your entire life and you don’t have any balance and I think that’s one of the things that frustrates me out of the whole entire thing, the expectation,

and if you buck it it's like, "What's wrong with you? You can't cut it. You're not one of us."

Gilligan (1982) also addresses perceptions about male and female natures drawing connections about tendencies and roles. Gilligan's research suggests that men and women "speak different languages that they assume are the same" using similar words to encode disparate experiences of self and social relationships... Just as the language of responsibilities provides a web like imagery of relationships to replace a hierarchical ordering that dissolves with the coming of equality, so the language of rights underlines the importance of including in the network of care not only the other but the self...in the different voice of women lies the truth of an ethic of care, the tie between relationship and responsibility, and the origins of aggression in the failure of connection. The failure to see the different reality of women's lives and to hear the difference in their voices stems in part from the assumption that there is a single mode of social experience and interpretation" (173).

Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) think these perceptions persist because women are "fated" to practice the virtues bequeathed by the old norms that reinforce their centuries old supportive role. They label these practices those of "the good girl" and their common quality is passivity. In this capacity women take on staggering burdens, make few demands, lie low, and are treated badly (16-17). Furthermore, women are caught between two sets of rules. "If they seek to practice a profession by following the rules and habits long established by its male practitioners—competition, aggression—they offend the old conventions defining womanly virtues. But if women behave in a professional milieu according to the old female norms, if they are patient, deferential, accommodating, smiling, soft-spoken, they appear weak. Consequently, they are likely to be regarded as not serious in their commitment to work, or incapable of exerting the necessary authority" (18).

This group of aspiring women superintendents sees evidence of how these old norms still affect the careers of women. Margo spoke of "social pressure" women feel.

"I think a lot of women are afraid to step out and take a chance. Because they've never done it before. There's social pressure not to. Social pressure to be submissive, this type thing, in this area. And I think maybe, pretty much, across the country."

Aisenberg and Harrington (1988) argue men and women enter competitive professional worlds from differing starting points and for women, the weight of the old norms fosters suspicion about their professional capabilities. Women still face the question of why they want the position, and if they are prepared to pay the price it exacts, while for a man such entry is considered as the natural order of things (50). These different starting points and the weight of the old norms are clearly evidenced in Kate who felt constrained by “Aging parents with health concerns” and Karen who had just adopted a baby. She said, “Until my son gets older, I may have to wait to apply for a superintendent.”

Brunner (2000) found that more female superintendents than male superintendents report being single. Only three quarters of women superintendents are married, while 94.7% male superintendents are married. Examining the “role conflict” of women superintendents in her study she finds, “The women felt that because of societal expectations, most men had difficulty accepting the fact that their wives were fulfilling the masculinized role of superintendent and often were primary wage earners...most men had difficulty allowing their wives to fill that role...Because of this difficulty and others, for some women, discarding blocks to their success meant letting go of their husbands or partners rather than to giving up their careers to save their marriages or intimate relationships...While I know about a few women who gave up marriages for a career, I will never know how many women let go of their dreams for becoming superintendents to stay in marriages that blocked their career goals” (61). It is interesting to speculate about this group of eleven aspiring women superintendents in this regard. All except Susan are married, and all except Allison, Joan, and Lea, have children. Susan is the only aspirant in this group “who gave up marriage for a career.” When reflecting on her former husband and her efforts to carve out a career in school administration, she said,

“...my husband was supportive only to an extent. And what I mean by that was, he always like to be kind of like the power person, and the contact with the business people he knew. It was his thing, not my thing, and you know, honestly me being a principal at an alternative school made really uncomfortable

conversation. Stories of kids getting arrested and hanging off the back of a truck, and it really didn't make good cocktail talk... So he was not real, real supportive. Not like he should have been...I honestly had to hire babysitters a lot of the time for my classes, and that was always a big mess for me. When they got old enough to where I could leave them at home long enough to go to class, it was a great relief for me because I was managing for several years to get my doctorate finished because I had to, you know, I could only handle one class at a time... Working full time, taking care of your house and kids, you just can't do it."

Theresa, on the other hand, is freely pursuing all options and interviewing all over her state, noting that her husband "is really supportive,"

"As a matter of fact when I saw that opening I thought, you know, I would love to have a chance to work in __County. They have a good school system and the location's very nice and I live down the road and it's an area where we've always wanted to live. My husband is really supportive about my hiring and the position, no problems with relocating."

However, Theresa acknowledges the unusualness of her position, noting that most women are constrained by the old norms,

"..I think the man would be the husband would be less willing to relocate, change schools, and it's like everything is upset. Yet if a man, same situation, takes another position somewhere, it is expected that we'll change schools...It is expected, no question to pick up and go and change schools and change jobs, the woman is. And that most men would not be willing to change jobs. And they would be furious to have to make a major change in life."

In fact, one of Aisenberg and Harrington's (1988) chief arguments is that regardless of advancements made by the women's movement, we retain the old perceptions of male and female nature. These assumptions deny the power of female minds and thus deny them advancement. They categorically assert, "As things stand now, women must take primary responsibility for shared living arrangements, whether in a marriage or other relation, if they want to have close, intimate bonds as important parts of their lives. And if they also want to engage in a demanding professional life, the usual understanding is that it is up to them to make the ambitious scheme work without jeopardizing the private arrangements for which they are responsible....In other words, the allocation to women of primary responsibility in the private sphere effectively excludes them from full participation in the public sphere" (139). Several of the women

fear “jeopardizing the private arrangements for which they are responsible.” Joan speaks as a “married woman with a committed relationship,”

“...so I think females tend to be more geographically bound, or at least married females with a committed relationship, are more geographically bound than males are. They won’t pick up the whole family and move them from one place to another.”

Margo’s circumstances drastically changed in the 3 months between interviews showing a clear example of shouldering the “primary responsibility in the private sphere” and counting herself out from “full participation in the public sphere.”

“And then also my husband had a stroke and I’ve started that program. His short-term memory is severely impaired because of it. I don’t think he’d be happy anywhere but here. I’ve got three rental houses and we’re right here in the middle of the big south fork, I’ve got a resort in my backyard. So I don’t think I could live in an apartment or in a subdivision crammed in with others.... I have one grandchild. And she in the light of my life. And I would not consider moving where I couldn’t get to see her as often as I wanted to.”

Sadly, perception is reality for these women. For all of them so far, perception coupled with preference and prejudice, has effectively formed a triple wall of obstacles as they attempted to advance to the superintendency.

Thus, one reason white men continue to dominate the superintendency is they, unlike most women, have clear professional goals. Both the WSI and MMSP sought to build a support network for the aspirants, and all hoped to find meaningful mentorships by participating in these programs. In addition to countering the preferences and preconceptions of gatekeepers and other women, these aspirants also faced other forms of discrimination. Female superintendents are on the average older than male superintendents. Women often report waiting for children to get older before seeking a position that makes heavy demands on time, and several of these aspirants pointed to their age to help explain their ambivalence in seeking the position. Because the superintendency is conceived as a masculine role, women aspiring to this position suffer role conflict, forcing some of them to give up marriages and intimate relationships in order to accomplish their career goals. For the women who desire marriage and children, the superintendency is often an either-or proposition.

Chapter 6

Implications and Conclusions

Implications

Much of the preceding chapter is about perception. One has to wonder at what precise critical juncture do people—both men and women—become uncomfortable with women wearing the mantle of authority. I know, as a high school student council sponsor, I was always delighted to see a young woman running for student council president. In fact, it was not unusual for the entire ticket to be female. No one questioned their leadership skills or made any argument that they were in anyway unfit for this important leadership role because of their sex. Just like the young men who served in that office, some were highly effective leaders and some were not. Whatever their shortcomings, it did not occur to anyone to ascribe them to sex. If high school is the quintessential building block of *Americana*, then when does that female high school student council president lose her authority to command respect for her leadership? Somewhere between entering college and running for President of the United States?

This study shows that women do aspire to be superintendents, and these eleven aspirants in particular went to extraordinary lengths to prepare themselves for the position. This study also shows that women have not been considered seriously for the position, and they have not been encouraged to think of it as a career goal. This lack of encouragement and the lack of professional and personal networks and mentors has resulted in a deep ambivalence on the part of these women about seeking the job. Gillian refers to some of the WSI participants as gaining “some better insight into the position and all of the nuances in to the superintendency” that caused them to realize that the superintendency was “not for them.” What exactly are these “better insights” and “nuances”? Is it the 24/7 nature of the superintendency? Is it societal expectations of their role as women? Is it the exclusion from the “old boy network”? Is it women working against women? Is it ageism? Sexism? A combination of the two? What “better insights and nuances” caused these women who were at one point so determined to become superintendents to instead become deeply ambivalent and in some cases give up

their aspirations entirely? Why did they decide the position, for which they once aspired, is not for them?

Certainly, too much cannot be made of the importance of networks and meaningful mentorships in any professional career and educational leadership is no exception. The absence of women in the role of superintendent speaks volumes about their inability to access and negotiate the maze of unwritten rules, norms, and standards which make up the informal networking as practiced by what even the participants referred to as “the good ole’ boys network.” Lacking the information only available through this network very much affects women’s advancement. The MMSP program overcame this obstacle for its participants by placing them as “protégés” under the tutelage of powerful male members of that network. These superintendents used their clout to ensure the participant’s entrée to the network and also acted as interpreter and “decoder” of the unwritten rules, norms, and standards. On the other hand, WSI failed to give its participants this type of access to the informal network. Since two MMSP participants moved fairly effortlessly into superintendent positions, there are lessons to be learned from this model. Perhaps efforts should begin with those who currently hold “the keys to the kingdom”--engaging all the men who currently hold educational leadership positions. How might we best motivate and equip men to champion inclusiveness in their organizations, i.e., to see the benefits to be gained through extending access for qualified “others” to their traditionally privileged preserve? Other questions important to this subject would include: How do networks and relationships affect career advancement? How do these vary for men and women? And looking at current superintendents, what career advancement strategies do they adopt?

Shakeshaft (1979) urged researchers to study women “in their own terms” and warned against putting female lives into traditional male theory. “It [educational leadership theory] needs to be rethought, questioned, challenged, and ultimately re-written” (225). In her later (1999) work, she speaks of moving into a transformative stage where the position of superintendent would be reconceptualized. The stories of these women are a testimony for this need. Perhaps Theresa stated it best when asked to comment on the exercise of power. Looking beyond the question, she went straight to the heart of the matter. She said [when leaders use power]

“It depends on what they are there for. Are they there for power or are they there to lead a school system? And I think it depends on what drives them, and is it being able to tell someone to do something, or is it being able to lead a group of people to accomplish the goal that you’re after, which is a good school system.”

These women are **there** to lead school systems. And what matters to them is accomplishing the goal of having a good school system. It is as if the superintendency is full of round holes and these aspirants are the square pegs that will not fit. Perhaps, as Shakeshaft notes, it is the superintendency which needs to be reconceptualized. These women seek to be school system leaders, as well as the chief educational advocate, and also a community leader. They seek to be ethical and intellectual leaders, and they are fully able to articulate and execute a vision of the superintendency which encompasses a comprehensive learning community. And above all, in their quest to “have a good school system” they advocate for the success of all students. These women are proud examples of leaders who will fit that new, reconstituted superintendency that high stakes accountability and current reform measures seem to demand.

Finally, this study’s participants are from three mostly rural southeastern states. Is there any way to know if their perceptions, experiences, ambitions, and career aspirations form the same trajectories as women aspirants in other states? Does their background and their context (mostly rural, mostly small districts, mostly politically conservative) serve to make them more or less likely to achieve a superintendency? Are women who reside in more rural settings more or less likely to even aspire for it? Or more fundamentally, how strongly and in what specific ways do the geographic, socio-political and cultural settings affect the relative viability of qualified women candidates?

Conclusions

Sadly this study confirms the assumption that the public school superintendency is part of the “public realm” belonging to men. It is certainly proving resistant to the inclusion of women. This is troubling on many levels, but in particular it is a critical loss for public education when we fail to leverage such a significant source of high potential leadership talent as represented by the women in this study.

In listening to this group of women for whom being a superintendent is “what they want to do” it becomes clear why, at least for now, the superintendency is not a “natural” fit for them, or for any woman. Issues of preference (rejection by hiring authorities, and anti-feminism); prejudice (discrimination and stereotyping); and perception (social norms and being the “other”) emerged. Of these barriers, stereotyping is the most insidious. Because of stereotyping, women’s leadership talent is underestimated and undervalued. By creating the false perceptions that women lack key leadership skills, stereotyping results in women being over-looked—regardless of their strong credentials. Because of its pervasiveness, and the difficulty in detecting it, removing this barrier to women’s advancement is the key challenge.

This study concludes that lack of career planning played a detrimental role in the career advancement for these women. Upon reflection this is not as surprising as it might first seem to be in considering this ambitious group of women when one remembers that they all began their careers as **teachers**. And while teaching provides a great deal of creativity and autonomy it does not offer a clearly defined career ladder—one that might have provided these women with tangible rewards for their accomplishments, professional recognition, and a path by which to chart their advancement. Their inability to set concrete professional goals and priorities adversely affected them in two ways as they sought the superintendency. They found themselves competing with younger men who had taken the “prescribed” career path, and their seriousness in obtaining the position was open to question. Women have also demonstrated the tendency to “settle for less” than the number one position as was evidenced in Gupton and Slick’s pool of “highly successful administrators.” As Gupton and Slick so aptly observed the “woman’s profession” has not nurtured those who lay the strongest claim to it (87).

There also remains the role of the two specialized professional development programs in this study. Both MMSP and WSI were specifically designed to help aspiring women and minorities to realize their goal to become superintendents. Almost to a one, the women in these two programs gave their highest praise and stated many times that the programs had met their expectations. One has to ask, “Expectations for what?” Certainly not the expectation that their participation in the program would move them quickly into a superintendency. Because in the 3 years since the conclusion of these programs, not a

single one of these participants has been hired as a superintendent. While MMSP had the “clout” of a state agency and was able to situate its participants in meaningful relationships with highly influential superintendents, its actual “professional development” offerings were very similar to those of WSI. For both, the focus of activities and “training” was on “fixing” a perceived “problem” with the candidates. Why did these agencies assume that credentialed, experienced women needed special preparation to take a job they are qualified to do? Second, why did these women assume they are in need of special preparation (for a job they are qualified to do)? One need look no further than the curricula these programs offered to see the biases inherent in the assumptions upon which the programs were based which indicated these aspirants were in need of “shoring up their skills” and “boning up” on subjects ranging from managing budgets, preparing for interviews, and understanding Board relations. These topics lend credence to every stereotype discussed in chapter 5. Why was it necessary to create “special” preparation programs for all women and men of color but not for white men? And why were the women so quick to believe that they needed what was being offered? Why are traditional preparation programs sufficient for men but not for women? The literature is full of the reasons female aspirants ultimately decide that the superintendency is not for them. As already noted, this is a tragic waste of leadership talent. However, the literature fails to account for the failure of aspirants such as Susan and Theresa who are doing everything possible to achieve the position but who are coming up short. If nearly half of all central office positions are filled by women, and if, as Brunner and Grogran’s (2003) survey indicates, fully 40% of those women have identified themselves as aspiring for a superintendent’s position, then is not the “pipeline” literally at the bursting point with women seeking the position? If so, should we not be seeing the numbers of women superintendents growing exponentially? Why is this not happening? This is clearly a very complicated question, but this study offers some provocative insights into what will eventually constitute its answer.

The 2000 AASA Study of the Superintendency reports 73% of women (and 72% of men) secured their superintendency within a year of beginning their search. But the women in this study are those who have secured the position. Further studies need to find out how many women, like Susan and Theresa, are out there trying and what the

commonalities of their experiences, if any, are. Further work needs to be done to determine why other women, like these eleven, who compare so favorably to current women superintendents, who have the desirable leadership attributes for the current era of reform and high-stakes accountability, who are actively pursuing the position have been unable to get hired. How many other women are attempting to advance to the superintendency and are failing to do so? What accounts for the success of the current women superintendents, on the one hand and the failure of the WSI and MMSP candidates on the other?

Finally, are programs such as WSI and MMSP part of the part of the solution or part of the problem? In the aftermath of WSI's failure to place a single candidate in the superintendency, is it possible that the women's participation in these programs was viewed negatively by hiring agencies? And while MMSP was successful in the placement of two women superintendents, with so many women seeking the position does not that very number speak of tokenism? We need to achieve a critical mass of women in the position if we are to change old biases and ensure that preference, perception, and prejudice do not continue to undermine women's advancement to the superintendency.

As we enter year 7 of the 21st Century it is evident that white men administrators continue to be preferred for the public school superintendency. They continue to dominate while women such as these studied here, *i.e.*, ones armed with an arsenal of leadership abilities, highly attuned to the current reform agenda, and who above all else advocate for children, are discovering that no matter how able they are, how ready they might be, the superintendency **is not for them** (emphasis added).

APPENDICES

Appendix A
Women's Superintendents Initiative
2003 – 2004 Participant Survey

The information requested will up-date on the data you have already provided the program, as well as assist in the framing of questions for the interviews to follow.

1). Was there a charge to you for participating in the WSI program?
_____ YES _____ NO. If, YES,

Was it paid by?

_____ You personally
_____ District (e.g., Professional development funds)
_____ Other (please specify): _____

2) Since you began the WSI Program have you changed positions within your district?
_____ YES; _____ NO

If YES, from what position _____
to what position _____?

3). Since you began the WSI Program, have you applied to be a superintendent?
_____ YES _____ NO

If yes, how many times? _____

If you received 1 or more interviews, please answer the following for each interview:

Interview 1:

Were you a finalist for the position? _____ YES NO _____

If YES, what was the composition of the group who interviewed you?

total number: _____

men _____ #women _____

#white _____ #African-American _____ #Hispanic _____ #other _____

Interview 2:

Were you a finalist for the position? _____ YES NO _____

If YES, what was the composition of the group who interviewed you?

total number: _____

men _____ #women _____

#white _____ #African-American _____ #Hispanic _____ #other _____

Interview 3:

Were you a finalist for the position? _____ YES _____ NO _____

If YES, what was the composition of the group who interviewed you?

total number: _____

men _____ #women _____

#white _____ #African-American _____ #Hispanic _____ #other _____

4) Since you began the WSI Program, have you been actively encouraged by someone in your district to become a superintendent?

_____ YES _____ NO

If YES, what is this person's position? _____

gender? _____

approximate age? _____

5). Since you began the WSI Program, have you been actively encouraged by someone in your family to become a superintendent?

_____ YES _____ NO

If YES, by whom (relation)? _____

6). Please fill in the blanks:

"In my professional career, the people most likely to encourage me

were _____ . Those most likely to hold me

back were _____ ."

7). Do you feel constrained by any of the following factors as you search for a possible superintendent position? (Check all that apply)

____ Concerns about family disruption/displacement

____ Concerns about loss of community/friends

____ Concerns about personal readiness

____ Concerns about professional readiness

____ Concerns about leaving a familiar district for the unknown

____ Other, please explain: _____

8). please ✓ one of the following: “Generally speaking, my professional peers:

_____ see me as an administrator first and a woman second.

_____ see me as a woman first and an administrator second.

9). What 3 words would your professional peers use to describe your leadership style?

10). What are the 3 most important competencies for superintendents to have?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

11). Please complete the following sentence: “I first knew I wanted to be a superintendent when

_____.”

12). Have there been any changes in your professional or personal life since you entered the WSI program that would affect your actively seeking a position as superintendent?

_____ YES; _____ NO.

If YES, please explain:

If this short survey sparked any other thoughts about your experience with the WSI program, the superintendency and /or your professional goals and plans, please share them below:

Thank you very much for your participation. PLEASE use the enclosed, stamped and addressed envelope to return the completed survey within the next two weeks.

Appendix B Interview Protocols

TITLE:
SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY

NOT FOR THEM: WOMEN AND THE PUBLIC

DATA COLLECTION PLAN:

Preliminary Survey

Analysis of existing data

Taped in-depth interview with each of 6 – 8 individuals from the Aspiring Women Superintendents Program and 2 individuals from the Minority Superintendent Recruitment Program

Follow-up interview with 4-6 individuals from both programs

INTERVIEW CONTENT OUTLINE:

Interview #1: Reasons Why Women Decide to Join Such Programs

In this first interview I want to explore the following:

1. The motives of the participants for joining these programs.
2. The factors which encourage as well as inhibit their participation in these programs

Grand Tour opening: *Please tell me how you learned about the WSI/MMSP program, why you decided to participate, and what you feel you gained as a result of your participation?*

(Questions will be streamlined to the individual based upon their survey responses.)

Probable Prompt topics:

Career Ladder: *Nearly all superintendents previously worked as building principals and a majority are former assistant principals (Glass, Björk, and Brunner, 2000). Therefore the ladder from the classroom to the superintendency often begins as an assistant principalship or as a high school department chair. Additionally, coaching provides opportunities for initial administrative experience. Typically, the advancement from assistant principal to principal to central office to the superintendency begins at age 27 for men, while women don't begin the progression to central office until their early 30s. My questions will explore these topics:*

Educational background
Initial decision to enter teaching
Teaching experience
Academic success
Initial administrative experience

Desirable competencies and necessary qualifications: *The number of women holding doctoral degrees and advanced certifications in educational administration has increased dramatically over the past two decades, but the number of women superintendents has not (Brunner, 2000; Grogan, 1994) Studies that focus on women's decisions to seek the superintendency suggest that their career aspirations are related to their career commitments and positional goals. Issues I am interested in include:*

Perceptions of status
Timing of this decision
Perceptions of barriers
Self-confidence

Personal qualities
Validation, inclusion, and
authenticity

Expectations: *The stated goal of the Women's Superintendent Initiative program is to become the premier national model for enhancing the knowledge and skills of women educators who want to become superintendents. The Mentoring Minorities into the Superintendency Program (MMSP) seeks to prepare highly qualified minorities to assume leadership roles such as the superintendency and provides resources, guidance, and support in order to reduce some of the traditional barriers and challenges encountered during the certification process. I would like to know to what degree the goals of these two programs are in accordance with the participants' individual goals. I would be examining the following issues:*

Participant expectations
Benefits of participation
Program contribution to
successful candidacy
Participant fears
uncertainties,
Perceptions of
negatives (costs) to
participating

Perceptions of Encouragement: *Two factors that affect women's entrance into administration are their administrative role models and the endorsement and/or support they receive. The WSI program seeks to provide a network of friends and supporters across the country while the MMSP interns develop individual growth plans and have regular meetings and networking sessions with superintendents, board of education members and search firms. I want to explore the participants' perceptions of the encouragement they have received during their careers in general and in these programs particularly by asking how the following relationships and experiences have impacted their career decisions. I would want to ask about:*

University connections
Co-workers
Friends
Family
Presence of role models
and mentors

Interview #2: Conceptualizations about the superintendency.

In this second interview I intend to gather data with which to explore the following issues:

1. The influence of gender, age, education, marital status, family obligations, and upward professional mobility on their decision to join the program, as well as seek the superintendency.
2. The potential existence of restrictive forces (i.e. traditional gender socialization, discrimination, glass ceiling) working against women who seek the superintendency.

Grand Tour opening: *What are your understandings of how you have entered, constructed, and negotiated your educational leadership career to the point that you aspire to be a superintendent? Why do you aspire to this position?*

Probable Probe topics:

Constraints on applying: Several studies (Bell and Chase, 1995; Grogan, 1996; Kamler and Shakeshaft, 1999) document the existence of barriers for women who want to be

superintendents. Factors contributing to the under representation of women in the superintendency include: school boards not actively recruiting women, lack of professional networks, perception of school board members that women are unqualified to handle finances, perception that women will allow their emotions to influence administrative decisions, perception that women are not strong leaders, and lack of mentor/mentoring in school districts. I want to use question to explore the following topics:

- Motivations
- Recruitment challenges
- Preconceptions and negative stereotypes by hiring agencies
- Leadership qualities
- Presence of mentors
- Access to professional networks

Leadership: Recent studies about ways in which women lead conclude that women lead differently from men. Brunner (2000) offers “breaking insights” that are occurring in research on women and the superintendency that I would like to explore. Women superintendents are:

- 6) inclined to share power
- 7) experience gender bias and acknowledge it
- 8) finding ways to talk about their successes and these strategies are helpful to others
- 9) at their best when the needs of the students come first

Topics that will guide my questions include:

- The use of power
- Assumptions about gender
- Communication skills
- Administrative priorities
- Leadership advantages/disadvantages

Role of socialization: Some studies (for example, (Betz and Fitzgerald, 1987). argue that the basic exclusion of women from administrative positions is the subordinate position of women in all parts of society. In exploring the impact of socialization on these women’s careers I want to focus on their thoughts and perceptions about:

- Gender-role expectations
- Societal expectations
- Gender-based perceptions
- Equity
- Work and achievement

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Appendix C Preliminary Codes and Categories

Question	Categories <i>Responses were sorted into</i>	Sub-categories
<p>Why did the women decide to participate in WASP? What (in their view) was gained by participating</p>	<p>Motivation (M)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Qualifications/Competencies (QC)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Expectations (EXP)</p>	<p>Encourager (en) Inhibitor (in) Presence role model/mentor (rmm)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Background & Experience (bx) Self-confidence (selfc) Personal qualities (pq) Validation (v) Inclusion (inc) Authenticity (au)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Perceived benefits (pb) Contributions to successful candidacy (csc) Fears,uncertainties (fu) Perceived negatives of participation (n)</p>
<p>What are the participants understandings of how they entered, constructed, and negotiated their educational career to the point that they aspired to be a public school superintendent? Way do they aspire for the position?</p>	<p>Influences on decision to join/aspire (INJA)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Restrictive forces (RF)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Leadership (L)</p>	<p>Gender (g) Age (a) Marital status (ms) Family obligations (fo) Upward professional mobility (upm) Presence of mentors (m+) Presence of network (nw+) Assumptions about nature of superintendency (aas)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Gender socialization (gs) Discrimination (d) Glass ceiling (gc) Hiring agencies (ha) Lack of mentor (m-) Lack of network (nw-)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Use of power (p)</p>

	<p>-----</p> <p>Socialization (S)</p>	<p>Gender assumptions (ga) Ethical leadership (eth) Student-centered (sc) Power-sharing (ps) Communication skills (cs) Decision-making (dm)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Subordination (sub) Societal expectation (socX) Equity (eq) Work & achievement (wa)</p>
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