A Contextual Analysis of Females Journey to the Superintendency in Indiana

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ABSTRACT

DISSEERTATION: A Contextual Analysis of Females Journey to the Superintendency in Indiana

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This study explores the career journey of female superintendents in Indiana and the educational contexts in which they serve (rural, town, suburban, and urban). Feminist theory and the connection between social and liberal feminist ideas and the difficulties women face as they manipulate personal, social, and political events on their road to the superintendency are illustrated. The mixed-method approach serves as the research methodology. The quantitative data establishes the core statistical background for the study and the reported discrepancy between the numbers of male superintendents as compared to females. Qualitative data provides a picture of the discrepancy and insight into the possible causes for the disparity. Female superintendents experience personal, social, and professional circumstances in terms of their home environment, their lifetime educational environment, and their professional career that are influenced by their gender. The inconsistency between the two sets of data is examined and emerges as a main theme of the research. Implications for further study involve the impact on students, the development of better support systems, the increase in qualitative research on the topic, and the steps involved in the interview process, selection and appointment of female superintendents to particular educational contexts.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Locating females serving as teachers, building leaders, and central office assistants or director level administrators currently in our public school districts would be a fairly easy task. Yet, discovering females occupying the position of superintendent proves to be more difficult, and also greatly varies depending on the geographical location of the particular school district. During the entire 20th century, men occupied 85% to 95% of all superintendent positions (Tallerico & Blount, 2004). In spite of the many efforts within the last 30 years to explain and implement a secure and consistent procedure to increase the number of women progressing to the position of superintendent, it is only within the last 10 years that a consistent increase has materialized. Quality research that analyzes the documented lack of female superintendents within American public school districts only began to emerge within the last two decades. Although a significant increase in female superintendents of 13.2% to 24% can be noted from 1999 to 2010 (Kowalski, 2011), when compared to men, women continue to be underrepresented in the top position in K-12 education, not only across the nation, but also in Indiana school districts. More educational research is needed to better explain this phenomenon and recommend procedures to help close the gender gap within the superintendency.

A closer examination, however, of the women currently serving as superintendent and the specific educational contexts in which they serve can illuminate another perspective for critical study and research-based solutions. The mixed-method approach to explore this phenomenon will give further explanation as to the lack of women superintendents across school districts in Indiana. Gathering the perspectives of current
female superintendents will help explain how educators can improve the inequality of female representation in the position of superintendent in Indiana school districts and across all educational contexts.

Drawing on feminist theory to establish why and what the obstacles are to females achieving the top position in education, the study will focus on the specific educational environment in which current women superintendents serve. Their perceptions will give awareness as to how the educational contexts differ in terms of cultural, educational, and social needs, and the part these women play in operating within the boundaries of these expectations while leading a school district in a particular educational context.

Statement of the Problem

Recent data from United States Census Bureau stated that in 2010, 82% of elementary and middle school teachers were women and 75% of all public school employees were women. According to the 2011 National Center for Educational Statistics, women represent 50% of the assistant principal and principal positions across the nation. It is clear that kindergarten through twelfth grade education is a field where females represent the majority in the area of instruction and exemplify a more balanced picture in terms of gender representation in the area of building level administration, when compared to men. Gender equality, however, has yet to be achieved across the nation and in the state of Indiana within the top position of school superintendent.

Although the proportion of women superintendents increased to an all time high of 24.1% in 2010 (Kowalski, Ellerson, McCord, Peterson, Young, & 2011), when compared to the proportion of men in the position, an obvious discrepancy still exists. At the current rate of increase in female superintendents in our nation, it will take 20 years to reach the
goal of equal gender representation in the position of superintendent in public school districts. This dilemma presents the issue that, at a minimum, over the next 20 years the young people within our public school systems continue to receive the message that males are superintendents and females are not superintendents.

Gender representation inequality is present not only nationwide but also within specific educational contexts. The 2004 study, *A three state study of female superintendents* (Sharp, Malone, Walker, & Supley 2004), which included Indiana, Illinois, and Texas, reported that 77% of the women did not perceive the size of the district to be a factor when applying for and obtaining superintendent positions. Although enrollment is not always a determining factor when labeling the school districts and their assigned geographical area in terms of rural, suburban, town, and urban, when analyzing the type of districts where these women actually served, the data were very contradictory of that perception. Women of the study did not believe that their professional position was related to enrollment and/or educational context, but the study indicated that women superintendents were overwhelmingly located in rural schools (rural schools report typically lower enrollment numbers). Admittedly, rural schools presently make up over 50% of the total school districts in the nation and in Indiana, but the 2004 study called attention to the fact that women were predominantly located in rural school districts.

American society is a reflection of its schools, and in turn, its schools are a reflection of American society. If the example that females are teachers but are not represented within specific educational contexts as district leaders proportionally, our students may develop ideas and values from a very early age about gender and power that are then passed on to society at large. The cycle continues as women continue to struggle to obtain the top job in education.

**Purpose of the Study**
Studying current female superintendents can illuminate the similarities and differences in these women so as to perhaps motivate placement of more women superintendents in specific locations and/or demographic areas, as well as create a better understanding of why these discrepancies continue to exist. Gaining further knowledge in relation to the individual experiences of practicing women superintendents can help researchers and educators identify barriers to the placement of women in particular educational contexts.

Research Questions

1. How do female superintendents in Indiana describe their ascendency to the position of superintendent within their particular educational context?
2. How do female superintendents in Indiana differ in their ascendency to the superintendency according to the educational contexts in which they serve?

Significance of the Study

This study will collect and interpret data that will reveal the events and circumstances that resulted in these women serving in a specific educational professional context and describe the distinctive way in which they have advanced to and operate in the position of superintendent. Explaining how these women evolved, what they experienced and are experiencing in their current positions, and how Indiana public schools can benefit from this information will provide meaningful research for future study. Explaining the various skillsets, characteristics, and biographical background that led these women to the top positions in Indiana public education, and describing why their rich, personal and professional history is a resource educators need to preserve and cultivate, is necessary in order to encourage a more diverse leadership representation throughout all of the school districts in Indiana. By focusing special attention to their impact within the educational context in which they serve, these experiences will further expand currently
limited research. Along with previous studies that explain the lack of female representation across all Indiana school districts, further study of individual female superintendents and the specific educational environment in which they serve will help to clarify the differences in terms of educational context, particular need, and female versus male governance.

**Delimitations**

The delimitations of this study were defined by the categorical definitions of the educational environments and the limited number of females represented in each category. The definitions of the specific educational contexts were changed in 2010, resulting in a very limited number of school districts moving to a different category in 2011. For the purposes of this study, the categorical representation of school districts was based on 2010-2011 school year data in the state of Indiana. Based on the historical foundation of the traditional public educational system and the role of superintendent, the study did not include charter or private schools currently operating in the state of Indiana.

**Definitions**

*Metropolitan statistical area (MSA)*: Area that has a city of at least 50,000 population, or it is an urbanized area of at least 50,000 with a total metropolitan population of at least 100,000.

*Metropolitan school district*: A school district inside of an MSA with a density of at least 200 students per square mile or containing all of a central city of the MSA.

*Urban school district*: A term synonymous with Metropolitan School District.

*Suburban school district*: A school district inside the metropolitan statistical area with a density
between 20 and 200 students per square mile.

Town school district: A school district outside the metropolitan statistical area with a density between 20 and 200 students per square mile.

Rural school district: A school district with less than 20 students per square mile.

Feminism – A belief that the social world is organized by gender and that universally women face some form of oppression, an agreed observation that women experience this oppression in various ways, a commitment to understand what are the root causes of the oppression, and a commitment to work to end the oppression (Maguire, 1987).

Feminist theory: A philosophy founded on the concept that the female perspective is extremely valuable to the attainment of new knowledge, as compared to men. (This theory can be applied to research methods in the study of gender discrepancies whereas most previous research and knowledge had been attained and communicated through the perspective of men). (Chinn, 2003).

The glass ceiling: An imaginary barrier that impedes women and minorities from obtaining the top leadership position in an organization due to discriminatory practices (Yousy, 2006).

Gatekeeper: A term used to describe the obstacle in place for women interviewing and/or showcasing their qualifications to targeted individuals appointing personnel to the school district superintendent positions.
*Good Ol’Boy Network*: A colloquial term that describes a group of men engaging in cronyism where partiality is given to appointments of positions of authority due to the social relationship, regardless of their qualifications.

**Organization of the Study**

Chapter 1 has presented an introduction to give the reader a general understanding of the study. Suggested research and historical information established the foundation for the statement of the problem and purpose of the study. Following this information, research questions were presented and are based on the existing data and are targeted to a specific audience of all educators in Indiana. In order to better prepare the reader for unfamiliar terminology, a definition of terms was provided. Finally the limitations of the study were explained so that there was no misrepresentation of any information presented.

Chapter 2 details the literature review that presents the context in which the research is based and explains gaps in the existing literature. Contents of the literature review are based on a critical feminist theoretical framework.

The research methods are the focus for Chapter 3. It explains the research design of the study, the sampling and designated population, the details of the collection procedure, an analysis of the data, the researcher’s perspective and the limitations encountered when conducting the research. Chapter 4 details the data collected and Chapter 5 describes the conclusions.
Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This chapter will describe the feminist approach to the research and the theoretical foundation for the study of gender equality in the role of superintendent in Indiana public school districts. A historical timeline based on conventional research will set the stage for the literature review, as well as the noted lack of qualitative data in relation to gender studies of the superintendency.

Theoretical Framework

Feminist Theory Research

Feminist theory research is guided by the principle that for most women some form of oppression and exploitation is evident (Maguire, 1987). Because of individual identities and diverse perceptions of all women, however, this oppression is experienced in a variety of ways. The purpose of using feminist theory to guide this line of inquiry to help women make sense of their lives and to contribute to the knowledge needed in order to change their social situation (Weston, 1988), specifically within an educational context. Weston describes feminist research as follows: “Feminist research is about taking women’s location and standpoint in the world as the basis for research, where ‘research will proceed from a perspective that values women’s experiences, ideas and needs rather than assuming we should be more like men” (p.148).

The framework of a feminist perspective is supported by theories developed from the landscape of women’s oppression and the part that this oppression plays within the context of social reality. Traditional research that asks critical questions and explores the issues to be studied has been defined by men (Maguire, 1987; Beasley 1999). Research through the lens of a feminist view also allows personal perspectives because the study is shaped by the life experiences I bring
to the research, as well as the influences of others. It is a woman-centered approach that illuminates the life context and experiences of women based on their frame of reference, experiences, and language (DuBois, 1985; Speedy, 1991). Cook and Fonow (1986) describe the value of the researcher and the importance of studies conducted on women by women as follows:

In feminist research, consciousness raising is central not only as a specific research tool but also as a general orientation. Women are in the best position to carry out research on women because, due to their particular position as members of an oppressed group and as scholars, they possess a ‘double vision’ and are therefore better equipped to identify, understand and interpret women’s experiences. The research process becomes a process of ‘conscientisation’, and through this research object becomes a research subject and learns to perceive contradictions and to work against oppression. (p. 6).

Feminist research focuses on the way women are represented and the way in which knowledge is formed, claiming that most knowledge has been generated and defined by males, and the view of men is not the only perspective and not always the appropriate perspective.

**Overview of Four Feminist Theories**

Liberal, Marxist, radical, and social represent the four basic cores of feminist theory. These theories, although varying in perspectives, attempt to explain the cause for the oppression of women and the appropriate response to eliminating the problem.

**Liberal Feminism**

Liberal feminism, defined by Mary Wollstonecraft in the 1700s, is based on the theory that women’s lack of rights and opportunity are rooted in family, gender, race, religion, and the unequal distribution of wealth. The goal is to achieve gender equality through equal access to
education, job opportunities with equal pay, and political movements (Jagger, 1983). With focus on the legal system as an avenue to achieve their goals, liberal feminism is primarily responsible for the Equal Rights Amendment of the 1970s, which was designed to generate comprehensive equal rights for women socially, economically, and politically.

**Marxist Feminism.**

Marxist theory, developed by Friedrich Engels in 1884, claims that women are oppressed because the right to own private property led to class systems and sexism. Utilizing a historical materialistic point of view, where it is believed the power and control over material resources within a class society was the beginning of female discrimination, Marxist feminists hold the view that oppression for women is embedded in the economic conditions that determine the structure of society. Economic structure, according to Marxist feminists, motivates the social actions that influence governmental, educational, cultural, legal, political, religious, and social institutions (Engels, 1884). According to this theory, the oppression of women is a result of class oppression that is maintained because it serves the interests of capital and the economically ruling class of the society.

**Radical Feminism**

Radicalists approach feminism with the idea that the oppression of women is the result of cultural institutions and the perceptions developed from accepted standard gender roles within American society. The radical feminist approach is that the world view must be woman-centered and actively challenge the existing patriarchal systems (Chinn, & Wheeler, 1985). Radical feminists believe that patriarchy within gender relations is the root of all forms of oppression for women. Believing that a reordering of society implemented by women-only small consciousness raising groups that band together to form an ideology, radical feminists see the collective impact of
small scale actions as the answer to equality for women. Although acknowledging an intrinsic and/or innate difference between males and females by nature, radical feminists see male dominancy as a result of the social structure and institutions that are male-defined (Beasley, 1999). Only the destruction of male dominance will liberate women.

**Social Feminism**

The term *social feminism* was first used in 1972 in a publication by the Chicago Women’s Liberation Union. In the article *Social Feminism: A Strategy for the Women’s Movement*, Peg Strobel and Sue Davenport report that social feminists operate under the premise that the foundation of women’s oppression is the patriarchal family, motherhood, housework, and consumerism. The focus for social feminist theory is on working class women, women of developing countries, and women of color. The socialist theory combines the Marxist belief of the role of capitalism in the oppression of women and the radical approach of the role of gender and the patriarchy. Social feminists see economic dependence as the driving force for women’s submissiveness to men.

**Summary of Four Feminist Theories**

Although there are many branches of feminist theories that have developed from these four models, the liberal, Marxist, radical, and social concepts represent the basic foundation for the establishment of feminist theory. Feminist theory explains various reasons for the oppression of women in American society. The common themes of gender, class, and economic structure of society are weaved throughout all four models, but there are compelling differences not only in the cause of oppression for women, but also the avenue for confronting the issue. Figure 2.1 depicts the relationships between the theories and the basic commonalities and differences that emerge from the core feminist research perspective.
Comparison and Contrast of the Four Feminist Theories.

There are many areas in which these four theories overlap, but there are also important differences. One example is that although social feminists adapt the component of capitalism within the Marxist approach as part of their theory, they do not agree with the Marxist claim that if the problem of class and class struggle for women was solved, all other oppression would cease to exist (Buchanan, 2011). Social feminists believe that the oppression is also caused by the relationship between gender and class, and that a broader view of the cause of the oppression of women is necessary in order to achieve the overall goal of economic, social, and political justice.
Another contradiction in theories exists between radical feminists and the followers of the Marxist approach. Radical feminists argue that the Marxists approach is wrong because it views patriarchy to be a result of capitalism, not as a stand-alone issue. Radical feminists believe that the only way to stop oppression is to eliminate male domination in all forms, and that a change in the structure of the economic society alone will not end oppression for women. The attitudes of men must be changed and the equality of power between men and women must occur (Bromberg, 1997).

Liberal feminists have been criticized by other feminist theorists for their focus on the individual woman and for ignoring the impact of community and/or society on the oppression of women (Fox-Genovese, 1991). Lack of appreciation for and acknowledgement of the impact of gender relationships and the accusation that liberal feminists appear to judge women and their success by male standards is also a point of criticism (Fox-Genovese, 1991). In addition, black feminists argue that liberal feminists reflect only the values of white middle-class women and ignore the plight of women of color and of different cultures and classes (Tong, 1998). Catherine A. MacKinnon, an American social activist, writer, and lawyer, and known as one of the current leading scholars in feminism, claims that even the terms liberalism and feminism are incompatible because liberalism itself offers women a “piece of the pie as currently as poisonously baked” (MacKinnon, 2005). In this sense, MacKinnon argues that the liberalist view pronounces the individualism of women and their focus to not be judged by any masculine-based ideas, yet feminism only exists because of men. The two terms are contradictory yet are linked together as a label for the liberalists’ philosophical approach to understanding and eliminating the oppression of women. The “pie” may also include an explanation and/or plan for the oppression of women that includes obstacles that may not be masculine based, but could be feminine based, making the “pie” poisonous, indeed.

**Application of Feminist Theory to the Research**

The current study of female superintendents in Indiana was derived from the socialist and
liberal approaches to feminism. The foundation for the socialist view is that research indicates that there are many socially based obstacles to the appointment of women as superintendents, and the focus of the study is on the experiences of women striving to progress in a clearly male dominated profession. As illustrated in Chapter 1, the distribution of females across districts in the state of Indiana, and the qualitative processes as evident in the interview questions are shaped by the social feminist approach, adding to the validity of the results. Also reflective of the social feminist approach to this study is the position of class for women as reflected by society in relation to the job of superintendent. In fact, one study reports that 70% of women identified personal and family barriers, derived from social expectations for females, as the most significant obstacle to their success (Morris, 2002).

The qualitative nature of the study and the individual perspectives of the women are representative of the liberal feminism point of view. Unequal access to opportunity in part due to legislation and in part due to the “gatekeeping” of superintendent positions also lends itself to this theory. Describing the perceptions and interpretations of women in these positions will convey the emphasis of the liberal view that focuses on the skills and abilities of the individual woman and how to compete in the world as it currently exists. The liberal view suggests that a complete paradigm shift must emerge in order to encourage the elimination of women being judged by male standards. The liberal feminist approach will support this research format, as I am a woman and the individuals to be studied are all women. This should reduce the possibility that the research and the women involved in the study will be judged by male standards.

With the foundation of the study based on the feminist perspective, it is vital that a detailed description of how males and male-based research, along with the political and societal events of the time, may have resulted in the male dominance of superintendents in the nation and in the state of Indiana. Beginning with describing the role of women as teachers in the early 1800s, and subsequently tracking the historical journey of females to the top leadership position of superintendent in 2013, the following content will create a better understanding of the foundation for the lack of equal gender representation, and will provide the data that supports it.
Historical Context of Female Superintendents

Historically women have struggled with “breaking the glass ceiling” (Morrison, White, & Van Velsor, 1992) in reference to entering professions occupied predominantly by men, and subsequently climbing the ladder to obtain the top positions within these fields. Leadership opportunities became available for women in other positions within the national work force long before the top positions in public education began to employ women. According to 2012 Catalyst census: fortune 500 women executive officers and top earners, the percentage of women occupying top board seats in Fortune 500 companies grew from 9.6% in 1995, to 16.6% in 2012 (Soares, Boneparte, Campbell, Margolin, & Spencer, 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau, decennial census 1940-2000 document also illuminates the information that the percentage of women in top managerial positions grew from 11% to 16% from 1940 to 1970 and from 16% to 38% from 1970 to 1990. In contrast, female superintendents in the nation decreased from 11% in 1930 to 1.3% in 1971, and increased from 1.3% in 1971 to 7% in 1990. Even in a male dominated area such as professional sports, as recently as 2011, 27% of managerial positions in the National Basketball Association are held by women, along with 21% in the National Football League and 18% in Major League Baseball (Galloway, 2012). Public education administrators serving in the role of female superintendent currently exists as an excellent example of where the top leading positions within the organization have historically been dominated by men. Although some may argue that the fields of law and engineering cannot be penetrated by women (Franzway, Sharp, Mills, Gill, 2009), according to a study (Bjork, 2000) that included data of the United States Census Bureau, the position of superintendent is described as “the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States.” In 1999 the odds for a male teacher becoming a superintendent were one in forty, and the odds for a woman becoming a superintendent were one in 1,667 (Skrla,
1999). Although the American workforce has a long way to go in terms of equal gender representation in top leadership positions, the highest position in education has not caught up with other top leadership positions in the country that are traditionally dominated by men.

From the early days of the one-room schoolhouse to the multiple contextual variations of public education in our country today, women have dominated the classroom but have failed to move toward top administrative positions in education. In the 1800s the profession of teaching began to grow for women. Social feministic concepts of the early 1800s produced an environment that fostered the perception that teaching was viewed as an extension of childcare, and white women were encouraged to secure teaching assignments that offered them the opportunity to also educate their own children. The presence of the Marxist feminism perspective during this time also added to the oppression of women in education by the supported practice of women’s acceptance of lower wages than men. These factors played a major role in the transferal of the profession of teaching from a male dominated field to a female dominated field and the sudden growth of women teachers (Blount, 2005). Given the social views at the time as to what was proper and the view that women’s work was not of equal value to men’s work, this increase in women as teachers resulted in the labeling of the profession as less desirable for men.

The time period between 1910 and 1930 in the nation, however, is referred to as “the golden age for women in education” (Shakeshaft, 1989). It was during this time when the percentage of female superintendents rose from 9% to 11% partially as a result of the women’s movement and women winning the right to vote in 1920. It was during this time also that economic modernization motivated the demand for workers to have the skills that could be transported across all occupations and geographical places. The American society transformed from an urban to an industrialized society. The need for high schools, especially in the
metropolitan areas, to provide an expanded curriculum that was generalized and at the same time individualized for specific grades and occupational tracks, resulted in a burst of growth of secondary buildings. The transformation and addition of high schools during this time that resulted in mid-level leadership roles such as supervisor, lead teacher, and principal, also helped to increase the number of female superintendents in our country (Pisapia, 2010).

After 1930, male superintendent groups began a successful national campaign to have superintendents appointed as opposed to elected due to the politically charged atmosphere of women’s suffrage. The individuals who were set up to appoint the superintendents were all men, and the number of female superintendents began to decline. At that time, school boards were appointed by elected officials. As a result, the make-up of the school boards reflected the opinions and norms of these elected officials, and did not support the women’s movement or the advancement of women in educational administration. The 1940s decline in female superintendents was also due in part to the GI Bill and the return of males from World War II. With the goal of economic growth in the country post war, men were encouraged to return to school in order to teach and become administrators, and women were encouraged to stay home (Blount, 2004).

Sputnik and the 1950s brought public attention to the quality and accountability of public schools, and superintendents were forced to become more responsive to community needs. By 1950 the number of female superintendents had declined to 9%, and by 1971 had sunk to an all-time low of 1.3%. The years between 1950 and 1971 were the years of desegregation in schools and women returning to work found that teaching positions were once again available. Aside from the fact that men dominated the field, women did not actively pursue the superintendency, and the percentage of female superintendents remained below 10% until the early 1990s (Sharp, Malone,
Walker, & Supley, 2004). Even though higher education began to change their teacher educational programs to incorporate sociological and psychological viewpoints that focused on teaching methodology and instructional leadership attracting and requiring the perceived “natural” instincts and characteristics of women (Chapman 2001), the number of women superintendents across the nation continued to decline. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title IX of the Civil Rights Act in 1972, both enacted to help strengthen the rights of women in higher education, did little to increase the number of women superintendents during the 1960s and 1970s (Dardaine-Ragguet, Russo, & Harris, 1994).

The feminist movement of the 1970s and 1980s was pivotal in that it drew attention to the nonexistent representation of women in school administration (Skrla, 2000). In addition, the early 1980’s brought the beginnings of a massive education reform effort due to the publication of A Nation at Risk (1983). This document, claiming that the United States educational system did not compare to other countries and was not producing graduates that could be competitive in the existing workforce, resulted in legislative changes federally (such as the 1994 Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Improving America’s Schools Act, Goals 2000), which prompted accountability measures in public education both statewide and locally. Following these legislative changes and the end of the 1980s, the percentage of female superintendents increased to 7% in 1990. By 1999 the number of female superintendents in our nation had reached 13.2% (Blount 1998). No Child Left Behind, signed into law in 2001, encompassed mandated legal steps that were initiated to focus on accountability and scientific data analysis from school districts that also demanded a different type of leadership. Superintendents were no longer managers but were expected to produce measurable output with financial input. Many school systems began to search for leaders that could practice a more collaborative style of approach in order to successfully drive
the demand for instructional change to meet the accountability expectations. During the next ten-year period (2001-2010) the percentage of female superintendents in the United States demonstrated a slow but consistent increase. By 2010 the United States could report a percentage of 24% female superintendents leading the public schools. Figure 2.2 depicts the historical timeline of the percentage of female superintendents in our public schools.

Figure 2.2 *Historical timeline of the percentage of female superintendents in public schools*

![Graph showing historical timeline of percentage of female superintendents in public schools](image)

*Data from Blount, 1998; Shakeshaft, 1990; Glass, 2000; Grogan & Bruner, 2005; and Kowalski, 2010

In referencing Figure 2.2, it is alarming to know that although in 2010, 84% of classroom instructors in our public schools were women (Feistritzer, 2011), only 24% of our country’s superintendents were female. Although the last decade can serve as evidence that an upward trend may be emerging for the placement of women in the position of superintendent in public education, investigating the historical information of past placements in terms of gender and the varying educational contexts in which they serve, can increase the understanding of that suggested trend.
Early Research on Gender Representation in Superintendent Role

There is a dearth of early evidence on gender in the position of the public school superintendent. According to Blount (1998) employment statistics from 1873-1995 were based on surveys; no analyses were disaggregated data by gender. Although substantive research began to grow in the 1990s, another contributor to the lack of research is that men were dominant in educational administration; therefore, research was conducted by men, based on the perspective of males, and analyzed by men (Brunner, 2000; Chase, 1995; Dunlap & Smuck, 1995). Although disaggregation of data by gender was not available because the discrepancy evolved as women’s roles evolved, the lack of early work coincides with feminist theory. Feminist theory research is subjective from a male perspective and quality data (both quantitative and qualitative) reporting by gender does not exist. Feminist theory points to the need for exploration of critical questions from women’s perspectives in order to help close the gap in the literature.

As the realization grew that the data was seriously lacking due to the male dominance in the field, studies from the women’s perspective began to emerge. One early study done in 1981 by Weber, Feldman, and Poling identified three areas causing the unequal distribution of male to female superintendents as personal and family constraints, personal and social roles, and discrimination in the areas of hiring, promoting, and training. Kowalski and Brunner (2005) gave insight into the issue and the value of a broader perspective by reporting that all leaders need appropriate role models, all leaders need to understand that current masculine-based leadership models are not the only successful way to lead, and all leaders need to share their leadership practices that may not necessarily be found in current literature. Later studies focused on the contributing factors to the low number of female superintendents based on three separate categories of information in relation to females in the superintendency. Miller, Washington, and
Fiene (2006) proposed a model that cites these three categories of barriers for women superintendents: Meritocracy Model (internal barriers), Discrimination Model (external barriers), and Women’s Place Model (societal barriers). Defined barriers admittedly are based somewhat on perception, but due to the lack of females in the superintendency an exploration of perceptions might be helpful.

**Barriers to the Superintendency**

**Meritocracy Model – Internal Barriers**

Obstacles such as the lack of confidence and a willingness to accept and live within the social expectations of the female role are cited as internal factors (e.g. Haute, Kowalski, & Stouder, 1999; Van Tuyle & Watkins, 2009). The perception of women that they must be twice as competent as men in order to be successful (Eagly & Carli, 2007) inhibits their pursuit of the superintendency and promotes their fear of rejection (Polleys, 1999). Additionally, weighing the personal cost of success and their perceptive lack of appropriate role models also serve as internal factors. Self-efficacy, a lack of motivation, socialization and personality issues, personal beliefs, and aspiration levels are also internally based (Kowalski, 2006), and serve as manifestations of feminist theory foundations. Self-efficacy, defined by Albert Bandura in 1977, involves the perception of one’s belief in their ability to reach a goal. Bandura’s social cognitive theory is based on the idea that experiences and observational learning contributes to cognition. Self-efficacy, according to Kowlaski, could play a role, along with other internally based barriers, as to why women do not even apply for superintendent positions.

**Discrimination Model – External Barriers**

Studies also describe external explanations for fewer women superintendents based on their perceptions of external factors. These include the acceptance of gender bias, stereotyping and
Good Ol’ Boy exclusionary tactics (Mertz, 2006; Kolwalski, 1999), all a reflection of the social feminist theory. The unwillingness or inability to relocate (Keedy, Bjork, Winter, Rinehart, & Ricciardi, 2007; Silverman, 2004) and the evidence of the lack of support among the females themselves (Brunner & Grogan, 2007; Dana & Bourisaw, 2006; Sherman, Munoz, & Pankake, 2008) are also outside barriers. Seemingly, both nationally and within the state of Indiana, the top external career barriers are cited as family responsibilities, unwillingness to relocate, and gender discrimination (Grogan, 1996). The perception that the glass ceiling still exists and that women lack political savvy are also cited as obstacles to the superintendency for females (McCabe & Dobberteen, 1998). Additionally, factors such as the organizational system of the educational environment (Sharp, Malone, Walker, & Supley, 2004) and the gatekeeping by consultants and school boards in terms of recruiting, promotions, and hiring (Mertz, 2006) are cited as external roadblocks to females obtaining the position of superintendent in public education. Kim and Bruner (2009) provide an example of the organizational system barrier claiming that the presence of a solid elementary background is a barrier to females pursuing the superintendent position because it illuminates their lack of a strong middle school/high school background. The typical career path for a superintendent includes high school administration experience, and the organizational structure supports the perception by school boards that middle school/high school administrative experience is critical to being successful as a superintendent. Evidence to support this theory can be found by Brunner and Kim (2010), based on data from the Shakeshaft (1989) study, where only 35% of all female superintendents possessed a secondary administrative background, while 65% of all the male superintendents had experience as secondary administrators.

In addition to the school boards’ perceptions of viable candidates, a description of the
discrepancies in the career paths of females and males can be noted as an organizational structure barrier. Studies conducted nationally and within the state of Indiana indicate that women attain the position of superintendency via a pathway that is typically different from their male colleagues. Women stay in the classroom longer (7-10 years), and they tend to reach the level of superintendent from a principal position to a central office position, such as Curriculum Director or Assistant Superintendent, then on to the superintendency. Men, however, spend less time (5-6 years) in the classroom and move from the principalship directly to the superintendency (Kim & Brunner, 2009; Pascopella, 2008). A study of female superintendents in Indiana, completed in 2008 by Angela Pascopella, indicates that of all of the females serving as superintendent (55% in small and rural districts, 35% in the suburbs, 9% in urban) 49.6% entered the superintendency from an assistant superintendent’s position, while 52.5% of men entered the superintendency directly from a principal’s position. Another study also explained how the career pathway for women aspiring to be a superintendent differs from men (Kim & Brunner, 2009). Women not only spend longer in the classroom, they also take on leadership roles within the school setting, and then obtain and work in assistant principal positions longer before moving on to the principal position. Kim and Brunner also reported that women also spend more time at the assistant level within the central office area before moving on to superintendent.

In addition, the selection of superintendents by consultants and school boards within the organizational structure propagates the differences in how superintendents are selected in comparison to other educational administrative positions requiring skilled leadership such as principal, assistant principal or assistant superintendent. These positions are generally filled from within by committees or the current superintendent of the particular school district, while the superintendent position selection process is fundamentally dependent on who controls the entry
from outside of the school corporation. The historical male-defined and male-dominated conceptualization of the position of superintendent influences the way school boards define the selection criteria for a successful candidate, and hired outside consultants typically rely on their standard networks to select candidates for consideration (Kamler & Shakeshaft, 1999). These factors also impact the ability of female applicants to be considered for the position of superintendent.

**Women’s Place Model – Societal Barriers**

Preconceived ideas as of the characteristics and/or leadership styles inherent in males and females represent societal barriers. Coleman (2003) states “the basic and pervasive stereotype which identifies management and leadership with maleness, and the archetypal views of women as caring, nurturing, and collaborative, confers an automatic status on both men and women and privileges the men” (p. 32). Studies have also detailed obstacles women face on their journey to the superintendency, such as lack of family support and lack of peer/collegial support (Kowalski & Strouder, 1999).

Other explanations in the area of societal barriers and reflective of the liberal feminist perspective lead to political events such as the return of men after the end of World War II and the women’s movement (Sharp, Malone, Walker, & Supley, 2004). Legislation of the current time also has an impact on female superintendent statistics. The lack of legislation to support equal hiring practices and an era of low quotas on the number of women to be admitted to higher education programs helped to contribute to the low percentage of female superintendents during the 1940s and 1950s, and then the passing of legislation such as Title IX is cited as a contributor to the large increase in the hiring of female administrators, although the position of superintendent was not impacted near as positively (Mertz, 2006).
In spite of the various obstacles previously explained, and the fact that there are fewer females in number as compared to males, females do become superintendents both nationally and within the state of Indiana. Early studies do not expand on how these women manage to seize these limited opportunities to obtain these positions, what qualities or unique circumstances frame their appointments to these positions, or the events that influence their successful route to the superintendency. Studies within the last decade, however, have begun to emerge that may help to address the female superintendency concern.

Catalysts to Attainment of Superintendent Position for Females

Women that manage to secure a position as superintendent share common skills and characteristics that make them attractive candidates for the position. Studies have cited and ranked certain female characteristics such as being perceived as caregivers, collaborative, and prone to consensus building as critical to being successful as a female superintendent in any school setting (Kowalski & Strouder, 1999). Glass and Franceschini (2007) identified nine factors associated with success as a superintendent (male or female), asserting that of the nine factors indicated in the study, interpersonal skills were the most important factor to their success. In support of this study Grogan (1996) found that females of his case study reported interpersonal skills as their greatest strength. Indiana studies cite previously proven leadership skills of female superintendents, such as their track record as instructional leaders at another level of educational administration, their ability to work within the system, their collaborative/participatory management practices, and their communication skills (Kolwaski & Stouder, 1999; Effie, Jackson, & Babo, 2009).

The make-up of the school board can also improve the odds of a female superintendent appointment. School districts that have a female majority school board tend to hire women more often as compared to school boards with a male majority (Tallerico, 1999). In 2001, the National
School Boards Association reported that 40% of the school boards were majority women, and in 2001, 18% of American school districts in our nation were led by women superintendents. At that time, this was the largest percentage of female superintendents ever recorded in the nation’s history.

The increase nationwide in women superintendents, specifically within larger districts, corresponds to the Kowalski (2011) research in the Association of American School Administrators that larger districts have more women-majority boards. School boards and search committees, however, are not required to report numbers, qualifications, and/or names of candidates for superintendent. As a result, data on how many women actually apply to positions is not systematically accounted. The Education Commission of the States published a study stating that 85% of the applicant pool for superintendents was female, but only 18% of these searches resulted in hiring a woman (Glass, 2002). The gender of the school board, the consultant employed for the hiring process, and the perceived skills of the female candidate play a major role in females successfully progressing to the role of superintendent.

With a basic foundation of the understanding as to why females fail to be represented equally as superintendents both in school districts and within particular educational contexts, along with the fluctuation of the numbers of women actually serving in these positions throughout history, exploring the females that hold these positions, and where they are located gives educators another perspective to consider.

**The Indiana Educational Context as Compared to National Educational Contexts**

In the state of Indiana, the position of superintendent has remained allusive to women for several generations. The first female superintendent in Indiana was not hired until the 1976-1977 school year in the North Vermillion School District (IAPSS). According to the Indiana Department
of Education females currently make up 70% of the teaching profession within the educational system. In stark contrast to the high percentage of female teachers today in Indiana, 21.8% of the superintendents are female, slightly less than the national average of 24%. Given that females make up the majority (75%) of our national public educational system (United States Census Bureau, 2010), and in the state of Indiana, it is certainly worth considering why the position of female superintendent has not consistently increased proportionally. A closer look at the specific Indiana educational environment where female superintendents serve, and how the individual and common life events of current female superintendents are linked to their position and the context of their professional environment will provide a deeper understanding of this discrepancy.

Research investigating the statistical data of the educational context (rural, town, suburban, urban) of female superintendents is limited. One study focused on the educational contexts of rural and urban from the feminist perspective (Wesson & Grady, 1993). This study concluded that most female superintendents, both nationally and in Indiana, serve in rural communities. Yet, there are predominantly more rural school districts in the nation, so it is not surprising by sheer number most females serve in such communities. Wesson and Grady also discuss the matching of the traits and qualities of female superintendents to the unique needs of rural schools; such as the perceived leadership skills of collaboration and consensus-building present in women, the notion of the stability and structure these women can provide, and their ability to be an agent of change while offering a relaxed and secure school climate within the rural context.

Admittedly, there are conflicting studies from the past on the issue of gender in relation to geographical location. Glass and Frencheschini (2007) reported that proportionally, more female superintendents served in rural areas in 1950 and also in 2000, and a study by Dana and Bourisaw (2006) claimed that women are more likely to be hired in rural and/or troubled urban districts. In
contrast, a study in 2006 conducted by the AASA described a more even distribution of female superintendents across all educational contexts. Nationally, of the 22% female superintendents in 2008, 55% were employed in rural school districts, 35% were in the suburbs, and 9% were in urban areas (Pascopella, 2008). Additionally, however, a report by Jallow cites that nationally in 2009 male superintendents served in 70% of our urban school districts while women led 30% of our urban school districts. All of these studies are limited in their scope and somewhat contradictory.

**Indiana Placements of Female Superintendents and National Data**

The Indiana Department of Education Data Center data demonstrates the current number of women superintendents compared to men. There were 290 school districts in Indiana 2013. Sixty-one of those districts (21.8%) are currently led by female superintendents, while 229 (78.2%) are led by men.

In terms of educational context, over one half of the school systems are rural. Table 2.1 reveals the number of metropolitan (urban) and town schools are parallel with 36 districts categorized as metropolitan (urban) and 33 districts fitting into the town definition. Finally, suburban school districts make up 61 (21%) of the school districts in Indiana.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.1</th>
<th>2013 distribution of Indiana school districts by educational context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When further exploring the 2013 Indiana data by specific educational context, of the 61 female superintendents, 44.3% are in rural districts, 11.5% are in town districts, 26.2% are in suburban districts, and 18.0% are in metropolitan districts. Table 2.2 indicates these statistics as
compared to male superintendents.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Context</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Metropolitan</strong></td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent within gender</td>
<td>10.9%</td>
<td>18.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Suburban</strong></td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent within gender</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>26.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Town</strong></td>
<td>26</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent within gender</td>
<td>11.4%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rural</strong></td>
<td>133</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percent within gender</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>229</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In a national study completed in 2009, 50% of the female superintendents were employed in rural school districts, 31% in suburban school districts, 12% in urban (metropolitan) school districts, and 8% reported serving in school districts that were a configuration of suburban/urban or rural/suburban (Effie, Jackson, & Gerard, 2009). The national study is comparable to specific Indiana data. Nearly one half of the women superintendents in Indiana are employed in rural school districts compared to 50% nationwide in 2009, but they make up only 16.9% of the total number of superintendents serving in rural schools, and only 9.3% of the total superintendent positions in Indiana. In contrast, in 2009 nationally, 12% of all women superintendents were employed in urban (metropolitan) school districts, while Indiana employed 18% of their women in urban (metropolitan) school districts during the 2012-2013 school year. However, female superintendents in Indiana make up 31% of the total number of superintendents serving in urban (metropolitan) school districts, and only .04% of the total superintendent positions in Indiana.

There is very little information on how any of this data detailing the composition of each educational setting is related to the way in which these women function in their profession, their personal backgrounds in relation to their current educational/professional context, or how the
demographic population they serve is related to their skill sets, their experiences, and their societal reality. The perceived embodied socialization of women impacts the development of their character and their thought processes. The socialization and networking skills of women can be instrumental in not only the attainment of a superintendent’s position but can have an impact on the location of that appointment. Women that do occupy these positions are reflective of the specific context in which they practice their profession, and learning how their perspectives of their individual behaviors are impacted by their educational contexts may help to explain how changes can be made to place more females in the position of superintendent in school districts that have alluded them in the past.

Research indicates that there are three explanations for the specific professional locations of women superintendents. First, in addition to the perceived inability to relocate as an obstacle to accepting or pursuing a position as superintendent, the inability to relocate can also be a deterrent to making a lateral move as a superintendent. This claim may help to rationalize the current number of female superintendents in Indiana and their location within their educational context (Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996; Grogan & Bruner, 2005).

Secondly, because men may view the superintendent’s position in a rural district as not as lucrative and/or as not encompassing the type of administrative duties they feel would enhance their professional goals and practices, male applicants tend to not apply to rural school districts (Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkinson, 1986; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996). If men do apply and are offered the job, they turn it down, leaving more opportunity for women candidates. Urban schools, although more lucrative, present challenges and obstacles that the desired male candidate is not willing or wanting to address (Bell, 1988). This leaves school boards with other alternatives, and provides more opportunity for women within the urban and rural school districts (Tallerico &
Thirdly, nationally, of the women that are employed as superintendent in urban school districts, a large percentage of them are African American (Pascopella, 2011). Because many urban schools are composed of minorities, and many of them African American, school boards tend to choose a professional leader that can relate to the majority culture and the particular needs of the specific students they serve (Tallerico & Burstyn 1996). Many of the urban schools contain a high number of African American students with cultural needs that it is assumed only African American (male or female) leaders can be empathetic to or understand. This perception by school boards has influenced and motivated the hiring of more female superintendents and especially African American female superintendents in urban and/or metropolitan public school districts.

There are complexities as to why unequal representation in terms of gender in the position of superintendent both within school districts and within the specific educational contexts in the state of Indiana. By narrowing the study to specific educational contexts and approaching the study through a feminist lens, valuable knowledge can be gained. The historical research, as described in this chapter, is lacking in terms of gender and educational contexts. Chapter 3 will describe the framework used for capturing data that will help addresses this issue, while Chapter 4 will explain the conclusions of the data.
Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This chapter describes the research methods utilized to guide the study. The beginning of the chapter defines in greater detail the rationale for and description of the mixed method research design. The design will be presented in two major categories, quantitative and qualitative. Under each segment I describe the sample utilized for the component and then explain the development of the instrument utilized to collect the necessary data. Procedures utilized to collect and interpret the data will follow. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a description of the limitations involved in undertaking this research project along with pertinent information in relation to my perspective as the researcher and a female superintendent in Indiana.

Although selected recent research concerning women in the superintendency can cite females as researchers and are based on feminist theory, this study utilized a feminist approach because it placed gender within a patriarchal society from which the oppression of women and the Marxist feminist theory first emerged. In addition, the goal was to address the concern about the opportunity structure for women, which is reflective of the socialist feminist theory. The research is based on these models, and the following questions support the study:

1. How do female superintendents in Indiana describe their ascendency to the position of superintendent within their particular educational context?
2. How do female superintendents differ in their ascendency to the position of superintendent according to the educational context in which they serve?

Research Design Rationale

The research design of this study incorporated quantitative and qualitative methods in order to establish a pragmatic approach to the phenomena of interest. Research took the form of a mixed
methods approach based on pragmatic knowledge claims derived from a feminist perspective (Creswell, 2003). Pragmatic knowledge claims, according to Patton (2002), “arise out of actions, situations, and consequences rather than antecedent conditions” (p. 7). While focusing attention on the problem in contrast to the results, pragmatism opens the door to “multiple methods, different worldviews, different assumptions, different forms of data collection, and different forms of analysis in the mixed methods study” (Creswell, 2003, p. 12). With the recognition that all methods have limitations, however, researchers first introducing the mixed method approach felt that biases inherent in any single method could neutralize or cancel the biases of other methods (Campbell & Fiske, 1959; Seiber, 1972). The mixed method approach allows the researcher to begin the study with a survey (quantitative) in order to report results from a particular population and then focus on open-ended interviews (qualitative) in order to collect detailed views from the participants describing the meaning of the phenomenon. Creswell describes it as follows:

“Researchers may first survey a large number of individuals, then follow up with a few of them to obtain their specific language and voices about the topic. In these situations, the advantages of collecting both closed-ended quantitative data and open-ended qualitative data prove advantageous to best understand the research problem.” (p. 22)

This research included a set of closed-ended measures to establish criteria and participants within the population, followed by open-ended responses to measure attitudes and beliefs.

Jick introduced the notion of triangulating as a benefit of the mixed methods approach in 1979. From this original triangulation emerged three basic procedures to systematically report results: sequential, concurrent, and transformative (Creswell, 2003). This research study was sequential in that it began with an analysis of quantitative data followed by qualitative procedures that involved more detailed explanation and the triangulation of both sets of data. It was also
transformative in nature, as it provided outcomes and/or anticipated changes as a result of the study. Finally, the rationale for conducting a mixed-method approach is based on the prerequisite that in order to get “the story,” research beyond close-ended questions is required.

**Quantitative Study**

**Study Design**

Due to the need to collect and analyze the statistical data of the female superintendents, the research design is consistent with a postpositivist approach, so it employed a survey. The survey was developed utilizing the existing data from the Indiana Department of Education relating the present statistics of female superintendents in Indiana. The closed-ended questions allowed for more detailed quantitative data, and the open-ended questions were designed to provide more in-depth information, which later could be expounded in the qualitative study.

**Sample**

The initial participants of the study included females who served as superintendent of a public school district in Indiana during the 2013-2014 school year, as indicated by data received from the Indiana Department of Education on June 12, 2013. The Indiana School Directory was utilized to obtain correct mailing addresses, e-mail addresses, and telephone numbers. A total of 61 female superintendents received the initial survey. The survey was sent in May of 2014, so data also included additional female superintendents appointed to their position from June 12, 2013, until the time of the initial survey. Data reporting also accounted for any female that had vacated their position since June 12, 2013.

**Instrumentation**

Appendix A contains the initial survey that assembled the quantitative data needed to aid in the selection of candidates. The survey contained four main sections. Along with demographics, the
questions within the professional history section reflected the number of years and type of educational environment of the candidates. The educational context questions gave insight into the current educational environment in which the candidates work. The questions in this section were based on the three models of oppression for women within the superintendency as described by Miller, Washington, and Fiene (2006) in Chapter 2, and three reasons as reported by Tallerico & Burstyn (1996), Grogan & Bruner (2005), Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkinson (1986), Bell (1988), Tallerico & Burstyn (1996), and Pascopella (2011), resulting in the placement of females within a particular educational context. Question four, for example, “Please list in rank order any obstacles that you perceive to have prolonged or historically prevented you from obtaining a position as a superintendent. Please list the educational context of that particular school district,” reflected data that may or may not relate to the three reasons cited for placement of women superintendents. Questions five through eight, however, were designed to reflect the three oppression Models as mentioned in Chapter 2. Question seven is based on the Women’s Place model where societal perceptions and events such as educational legislation and Title IX have influenced the placement of female superintendents within a particular educational context. “Do you perceive there to be a relationship between legislative changes such as No Child Left Behind and Title IX and female superintendency placement within a particular educational context? If so, please explain,” is a question based on the Women’s Place model.

Procedures

Each survey was sent via Qualtrics to the 61 female superintendents in Indiana. Contact with the initial participants was made a minimum of four times. An e-mail with a link to the survey was sent out in April (Appendix B), followed by an e-mail one week later to individuals not responding to the survey in the hopes of generating more responses (Appendix C). One week
later, another e-mail was sent requesting replies from those individuals not responding to the survey (Appendix D). After an additional week, another attempt to receive the survey was completed by making a personal phone call to the remaining participants, followed by resending the original e-mail and survey information.

**Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used in the form of measures of central tendency in order to derive at a mean for years of experience of the female superintendents within their current position and educational context, along with the number of years within different educational contexts as superintendent. This measure was the starting point used in order to determine who to interview. After these initial steps were exhausted, contacts were made according to the list created as surveys were returned. Responses were coded per question as they correlated to the three reasons for female placement in particular educational contexts, and their connection, if any, to the Meritocracy Model, the Discrimination Model, and the Women’s Place Model. The triangulation of the frequency distribution and questions applied to a created spreadsheet determined the individuals to be interviewed.

**Qualitative Study**

**Study Design**

According to Patton (1990), interviews are the most basic form of qualitative inquiry because they provide unconstrained responses that are not limited by the writing skills of the participant or the impossibility of being able to probe to extend or explain the responses. Cottrell and McKenzie (2005) maintained that in-depth interviews are valuable when there is a need to understand individual decision-making and valuable insight into individual personal circumstances. In order to add this information to the study, a structured form of in-depth
interviews were necessary. This data brought significant insight into the conditions that frame the events that led the women to be employed in the particular educational context in which they serve as a superintendent.

Qualitative methods are also utilized when a researcher seeks to understand the process by which events and actions take place (Maxwell, & Loomis, 2002). I wanted to gain a better understanding regarding the actions and beliefs of female superintendents in relation to their journey to the superintendency within their current superintendent position and the educational context in which they serve.

Sample

Responses on the initial survey helped to narrow down the participants to be interviewed for the study. The answers to these questions were included on a spreadsheet design of the initial survey instrumentation, allowing for the choosing of candidates. Experience in their current superintendent positions and as a superintendent in various educational contexts was the primary factor for selection. Secondary criteria were the administrative experiences leading to the superintendency.

Criteria for the selection of the 12 participants agreeing to be interviewed were as follows: three from a rural district, three from a town district, three from a suburban district, and three from an urban district. The 12 individuals were selected by the responses to the questions in the initial survey. Respondents were invited to participate based primarily on context, but years of experience were also considered in order to obtain a sample that was fairly representative of the survey sampling.

Instrumentation

Appendix E contains the interview protocol created in order to conduct semi-structured
interviews. These questions were open-ended to create a deeper understanding of the responses of the initial survey and to gain valuable insight into the individual personal circumstances and perceptions that frame the events that led the women to be employed in the particular educational context in which they historically served as superintendent, and are presently serving as superintendent.

These questions were separated into three sections, early background, educational background, and current superintendency. The formative years section helped to illuminate the early experiences of female superintendents, and how their personal backgrounds supported their perceptions of public education and the contextual environments of the educational experiences in relation to gender perceptions. The pathways to the superintendency section communicated the journeys of the candidates in terms of their education and educational career goals, and how these experiences may have shaped their views in relation to their educational philosophy, their views on gender in education, and their views in reference to the different educational contexts. The current superintendency segment explained the events and specific experiences of the current superintendency, and their current perceptions of the personal, professional, and social connotations in relation to each educational context. The purpose of these questions was to gain more insight into the perception of these women in terms of the research related to the three reasons why women superintendents serve in particular educational contexts, and the frequency of particular sources of perceived oppression in terms of the four models.

Procedures

Semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted with chosen candidates utilizing the interview protocol in Appendix E. The purpose of the interview was to present open-ended questions with non-scripted follow up questions to gain more in-depth responses and record the
verbal and non-verbal reactions not available utilizing a survey instrument. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The women were interviewed at one sitting, during a one- to two-hour period, throughout the months of April, May and June of 2014. The participants were informed that their participation in the study was completely confidential and voluntary, and that they could decline participation at any time during the study. In order to minimize risks for the individuals being interviewed, protocols for permission to interview were followed and the research was conducted in an ethical manner.

**Data Analysis**

The analysis of the interview data began with open coding as described by Strauss and Corbin in 1998. This allowed for categorizing to further examine the specifics and dimensions of the data. Axial coding was then implemented to understand connections between a category and subcategories. Finally, selective coding allowed for the selection of the main concepts and systematically relating them to other concepts, and searching for confirmed and disconfirming examples of the selected categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

The open coding matrix was developed through memoing so as to allow common themes to emerge that were reflective of the three reasons for female superintendents serving in their current educational contexts. The matrix also allowed for common themes to emerge describing the oppression of women within the superintendency and the relationship, if any, to the four oppression models present within the educational contexts. Dr. Serena Salloum, Assistant Professor of Education at Ball State University, assisted in the development and analysis of this matrix for trustworthiness, reliability, and credibility purposes. Conclusions and further study were suggested as a result of this analysis.
Limitations

Although there are women and men heading a growing number of charter and/or private schools in Indiana, these school districts were not included in the study because charter and private schools were not included in any historical data. This provided more consistency for the research process and results of the study, leaving a more equitable stage in which to compare. In addition, an obvious limitation was the number of current female superintendents available in the state of Indiana. Personal contact assisted in a higher percentage of return. Finally, as a female superintendent, I was sensitive to the journey of a female superintendent in the state of Indiana, but also exhibited the ability, insight, and flexibility to recognize and build on new knowledge.

Researcher’s Perspective

As a researcher, and with the qualitative information gathered for the study, it was necessary to examine my beliefs and how they may have influenced the collection, interpretation, and analysis of the research study. My interest in the lack of women superintendents within different educational contexts is rooted in experiences from childhood and throughout my professional career. Being denied the opportunity to play baseball or football on an organized team as a young girl was my first experience with gender discrimination. The support of legal nonparticipation simply because I was a girl resonated in my memory and has never left. Additionally, as a young adult pursuing a career choice, I was denied the opportunity to apply to aviation school because females were not permitted to become pilots for commercial airlines. Finally, as an adult being “counseled away” from the opportunity to apply for the position of high school principal and/or superintendent as a professional educational administrator because “the Board will never hire a woman,” has motivated me to explore this phenomenon. My experiences mirror the Discriminatory Model and fall into items 2 and 3 of the cited three reasons for female
superintendents serving within a particular educational context. The effect of my role in the research will be that my personal experiences added to the quality of data and the results that emerge. The writing illuminated the phenomenon in a way that reflected my personal experiences, yet added credibility to the results. Memoing and colleague checks helped to increase objectivity, and increase the possibility of offering developed generalizations in order to inform educators and share the data in an objective way. A limitation to my role in the research is that because of my position and gender, objectivity could be questioned.
Chapter 4

Results

Given that a mixed methods approach was taken in this study, the first part of the chapter details the results of the quantitative data, followed by the qualitative results. The summary of the information collected from both sets of data is then described, clarifying the information that emerges as a result of implementing the mixed method approach. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected in order to respond to the following research questions:

1. How do female superintendents in Indiana describe their ascendancy to the position of superintendent within their particular educational context?

2. How do female superintendents in Indiana differ in their ascendancy to the superintendency according to the educational contexts in which they serve?

Quantitative Results

The study began with the distribution of 61 surveys distributed via Qualtrics (see Table 4.1 for descriptive results). Forty surveys were returned (67%). The respondents include 16 rural (40%), 7 town (18%), 12 suburban (30%), and 5 urban (12%). By context the return rates were 59%, 100%, 75%, and 45% from rural, town, suburban, and urban female superintendents.

Table 4.1 displays the pathway taken by each individual superintendent. As described in chapter 2, the Traditional Pathway to the Superintendency is defined as any level between principal and superintendent such as curriculum director, assistant superintendent, or technology integration specialist. The Nontraditional Pathway is defined as not occupying any level of position between principal and superintendent. Superintendents on this track went directly from a principal position to a superintendent position. In this sample 64.5% indicated that they followed the traditional pathway compared to 35.5% on the nontraditional pathway.
The oldest superintendent reported age 67, and the youngest indicated she was 39. The highest number of superintendent positions held was 5 and the fewest number was 1. The longest any individual had currently been employed in their present position as superintendent was 13 years, and the shortest amount of time was 1 year.

Considering the small sample, a 12% minority rate of the 40 respondents is notable. Included in the data were 3 African American female superintendents and one Hispanic female superintendent. Most important, however, is that 80% of minority female superintendents served within the urban educational context.

In order to gather more information about the ascendency to the superintendency for the participants, a focus of the study was to learn more about why female superintendents decide to accept and/or apply for a superintendent position when given the opportunity, along with their perspectives of the circumstances under which they are offered the position. The participants responded to statements about their superintendent careers that are detailed in the survey instrument in Appendix A. A table with this data for the first superintendency organized by

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4.1</th>
<th>Descriptive data by educational context (N=40)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey Responses</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean Age</td>
<td>55.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Minority</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Caucasian</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Current Mean Yrs. Exp.</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean # Sup Positions Held</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Pathway</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nontraditional Pathway</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
educational context describes the results of those particular survey questions. The responses of strongly agree and agree, and strongly disagree and disagree, have been combined to offer percentage readings for cross-tabulation reporting.

The data illustrate that across contexts relocation was not an issue when determining whether or not to accept a first-time superintendent position. The female superintendents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement at a rate of 98%.

Over one half of the respondents (70%) were in agreement that the urbanicity of the school district was a motivating factor to their appointment of superintendent. They felt more comfortable taking on the challenges of the position because of their background and previous experiences within that particular setting/urbanicity, or they wanted to be located in a specific area because of the diversity and setting of the school district.

All superintendents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that a reason they were offered their first superintendency was due to the lack of male interest and male candidates applying for the position. Because they had little or no knowledge about the interview
process, the proof of other candidates, and/or information concerning board discussions during the hiring process the answers were based on their perspective and what information they did know.

Although 95% of the women strongly indicated that their race was not a factor in being offered their first superintendent position, there were two respondents who stated race was a factor. One respondent, a Caucasian, stated that she knew her race would be more compatible to the area and therefore helped her get the position. Other comments suggest that race may have had an influence on being offered the superintendent position, in spite of the fact that 95% of the respondents disagreed and/or strongly disagreed. In an open-ended question, a Caucasian respondent from the rural area wrote “Being White was a factor that did not eliminate me from being a candidate for the position.” This statement reflects the observation that race was a factor in being offered the position, in that it did not eliminate her. It also implies that the district would be hesitant to hire women of a different race for the superintendent position. An African American from the town context stated that she was the first female African American superintendent in her district, and the second African American superintendent in the history of the school district. Here, it is possible that race played a role in being offered the position, so as to publicly display the diversity from within the district. Finally, the remainder of the minority respondents was from the urban context, and they reported that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. This particular question did not reflect the realization that race could be a factor in them being offered their superintendent positions in the urban setting.

Considering the heavily weighted responses of disagree and strongly disagree (80%) to the statement concerning gender as a factor to the offer of their first superintendency, the summary of the written explanations are of note. Respondents reported that gender was not a factor and that qualifications played the biggest role in the decision to be offered the position, claiming that
females had been hired previously within that particular school district. Three respondents attributed the offer of superintendency to their previous experiences and successes within the particular district. Three respondents were proud to state that they were the first female superintendent in the district. Other comments that supported the overwhelmingly disagree and strongly disagree responses included the perception that gender was a hindrance and liability, claiming that they had to work harder and be more strategic when applying and interviewing for the position because of their gender. One respondent stated that the board was scared to hire her because she was female, and another respondent reported that she knew it was not a positive that she was a female. In revealing that there were obstacles to overcome because of their gender in order to even be offered the position, these explanations do not support the disagree and strongly disagree responses.

Most females strongly agreed (60%) or agreed (28%) with the statement that their evidence of leadership skills in previously held positions was the reason they were offered their first superintendency. Comments for evidence included specifically central office experience, multi-years of various building level supervision experience within the district they were offered the position or within districts they had been employed before being offered the superintendent position, or employment in districts that had received state recognition. None of the narrative responses offered a viable explanation for the few strongly disagree responses, but comments implied that the lack of experience within the particular school district they applied to may have been a reason for their response.

The responses to the statement “A reason I was offered my first superintendent position is the school board’s perception of my ability to relate to the demographic population of that particular school district,” were 100% agree/strongly agree. Of particular note is that all of the
superintendents in the urban contexts agreed or strongly agreed, which supports the research in Chapter 2 that described one of the reasons why high numbers of African American females serve in urban school districts. In addition, the rural responses supported the evidence of the non-traditional track (principal directly to superintendent) within the rural context, and suggested the reasons why women in rural districts are offered superintendent positions. Multiple respondents described their familiarity with the demographics of the district offering them the superintendent’s position because they had always worked in that school context and had proven successful. The one suburban superintendent who disagreed with the statement reported that she was good with all demographics and did not see particular specific demographics as a factor in the superintendency offer.

A large majority of respondents (92%) agreed with the statement that they were offered their first superintendency because of their experience at multiple levels within school district/districts. Of particular note is that although 92% agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, the analysis of the data shows that 64.5% indicated they experienced the traditional pathway. A figure of 35.5% taking the nontraditional route does not support the 92% figure of agreement that the respondents were offered their position because of their levels of experience. It should be noted, however, that the possibility exists that principals, especially those serving in rural schools, take on central office duties such as Title 1 Coordinator, Curriculum Director, and Transportation while they are serving as principals.

**Additional Superintendencies**

Nine superintendents (22.5%) served in at least two superintendent positions, with six of them now in the rural context. All respondents indicated the inability to relocate was not a factor. One indicated that race was a factor in her second superintendency. This respondent was
Caucasian and indicated that the educational context in which she worked during her second superintendency was conducive to the Midwest Caucasian culture, in that it was predominantly White. She reported that it impacted her offer and acceptance of her second superintendent position. All respondents, with the exception of one, disagreed that gender was a factor in being hired for their second superintendency. The comment from the suburban context could be interpreted otherwise, “I have never found my gender to be helpful.” This comment suggests that gender may have been a hindrance in other career opportunities in education. Another stated that she was the first female superintendent in the school district, implying that her gender was a positive attribute. Although prejudice transcends both genders, the strong response to gender not being a factor for the females within the second superintendency is in contradiction to much of the qualitative data reported later in this chapter and earlier literature reported in chapter 2.

There were five respondents indicating they served in at least three superintendent positions and four respondents who served in more than three superintendent positions. The urbanicity of the contexts played a key role in the appointments to additional superintendencies, along with the evidence of their leadership skills, the board’s perception that they could better relate to the demographics of the school district, and their multiple levels of experience.

**Obstacles – Superintendent Applications and Acceptances**

In order to gain more information about the obstacles female superintendents face in relation to applying for and/or accepting the superintendency, respondents were asked to rank specific obstacles and designate the educational context in which the obstacles were experienced. A total of 58% of the respondents completed obstacle questions.

Separated by application and acceptance, Table 4.3- 4.6 describe the results based on the superintendents’ responses. Some superintendents reported experiencing an obstacle in more than
one context.

**Obstacles – Superintendent Position Applications**

The first set of obstacles was ranked based on the total of each respondent’s decision whether or not to apply for a superintendent position within a specific educational context. The main obstacle to women applying to the superintendency in any educational context obviously is complex, but it is noted that the lack of confidence and aspiration levels is not a key obstacle to women applying to urban districts, whereas the lack of confidence was ranked higher for all other contexts. Alternatively, women are less likely to apply to rural districts because of the perceptions and/or agendas of the school board or selection committee. These results support qualitative findings that will be presented later in this chapter.
Table 4.3  
Obstacles to superintendent position applications—total

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Unwillingness/inability to relocate</strong></td>
<td>17% R (1)</td>
<td>100% R (3)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
<td>50% T (4)</td>
<td>25% R (2)</td>
<td>50% S (2)</td>
<td>33% R (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17% T (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>33% S (3)</td>
<td>50% S (4)</td>
<td>25% T (2)</td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>33% U (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Necessity of a longer and more varied career path</strong></td>
<td>100% R (1)</td>
<td>40% R (2)</td>
<td>20% T (5)</td>
<td>40% S (6)</td>
<td>100% S (3)</td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
<td>100% R (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>20% S (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Perceptions and/or agendas of school board or selection committee</strong></td>
<td>83% R (1)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
<td>20% R (3)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
<td>40% R (3)</td>
<td>20% S (3)</td>
<td>50% R (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17% U (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>20% S (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>D. Particular demographic needs and location of the school district</strong></td>
<td>50% R (1)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
<td>17% R (3)</td>
<td>25% R (4)</td>
<td>100% S (2)</td>
<td>14% R (2)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>20% S (3)</td>
<td>25% T (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>14% T (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33% U (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>25% S (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td>43% S (2)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>E. Lack of confidence and aspiration levels</strong></td>
<td>40% R (1)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
<td>100% U (1)</td>
<td>100% U (2)</td>
<td>14% R (1)</td>
<td>33% R (3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40% T (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>33% T (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>20% S (6)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>29% S (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>F. Willingness to live within the social expectations of the female role</strong></td>
<td>100% T (1)</td>
<td>100% U (1)</td>
<td>100% T (1)</td>
<td>50% R (2)</td>
<td>50% R (2)</td>
<td>16% R (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td></td>
<td>50% S (2)</td>
<td>50% S (2)</td>
<td>17% T (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>67% U (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>G. The org structure of district that valued MS/HS admin experience over elementary/central office experience</strong></td>
<td>100% U (1)</td>
<td>25% R (1)</td>
<td>100% R (1)</td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
<td>50% R (2)</td>
<td>29% R (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>13% T (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
<td>50% T (2)</td>
<td>43% T (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>50% S (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14% S (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>12% U (8)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>14% U (1)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The organizational structure of the school district that valued middle and high school administrative experience over elementary/central office experience and the necessity of a longer and more varied career path ranked as the second obstacle. Taking into consideration that these two statements are similar in interpretation, it can be noted that the second and third reasons are overwhelmingly related to career path issues. When considering whether or not to apply to a school district, female superintendents strongly reported as a factor their ability to relate to the particular demographic needs and location of the school district. The survey, however, indicated that female superintendent candidates believed this to be lesser value as an obstacle to overcome in being offered their first superintendency. One observation here, however, is that perceptions and/or agendas of the school board or selection committee emerged as one of the top reasons chosen by the respondents, but no respondent indicated this to be an obstacle within the suburban school district. Women applying to the rural, town, and urban settings chose the willingness to live within the social expectations of the female role as the last obstacle, and no respondent stated this as an obstacle when applying to a suburban school.

The necessity of a longer and more varied career path was not a major obstacle at any level. Since most of the superintendents did experience the traditional career path where they served in a variety of job positions at a range of levels, it seems logical that this item did not emerge as a major obstacle at any level or within any particular context. Table 4.4 summarizes the data from Table 4.3 and is categorized by educational context.
The data are not clear on the primary reason as to why the women in this study did not apply to town schools. In suburban schools, the lack of confidence and aspiration levels was a factor for females when determining whether or not to apply. Potential female superintendent candidates applied or did not apply to urban schools because of relocation issues. Finally, the perceptions and/or agendas of the school board seem to have been a major consideration for females when considering application to rural schools.

**Obstacles – Superintendent Position Acceptances**

In order to gain more information about the obstacles female superintendents face in relation to actually accepting a superintendency position within different educational contexts, respondents were asked to rank specific obstacles and designate the educational context in which the obstacle was experienced (see Table 4.5).
The inability or unwillingness to relocate is evident in all contexts and is rated as the primary reason that females do not accept superintendent positions. Respondents were more decisive when compared to the top obstacles for applying, which supports the historical information detailed earlier in the research. The particular demographic needs of the district

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacles to superintendent position acceptances – total</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>A. Unwillingness/inability to relocate</strong></td>
<td>56% R</td>
<td>100% R</td>
<td>67% R</td>
<td>50% T</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>33% R</td>
<td>33% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11% T</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>33% U</td>
<td>50% S</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>33% S</td>
<td>33% T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>22% U</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(0)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>67% U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>B. Necessity of a longer and more varied career path</strong></td>
<td>50% S</td>
<td>83% R</td>
<td>60% R</td>
<td>50% S</td>
<td>100% S</td>
<td>29% R</td>
<td>100% T</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>17% S</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>40% T</td>
<td>50% U</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>14% T</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(6)</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>(7)</td>
<td>29% S</td>
<td>(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>C. Perceptions and/or agendas of school board or selection committee</strong></td>
<td>50% R</td>
<td>100% T</td>
<td>33% R</td>
<td>67% R</td>
<td>33% R</td>
<td>33% S</td>
<td>100% R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25% T</td>
<td>(1)</td>
<td>67% S</td>
<td>33% U</td>
<td>33% U</td>
<td>33% U</td>
<td>(3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14% U</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>33% U</td>
<td>33% U</td>
<td>67% U</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>(3)</td>
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<td><strong>D. Particular demographic needs and location of the school district</strong></td>
<td>100% R</td>
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<td><strong>E. Lack of confidence and aspiration levels</strong></td>
<td>20% R</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>20% R</td>
<td>67% R</td>
<td>75% R</td>
<td>33% T</td>
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<td><strong>F. Willingness to live within the social expectations of the female role</strong></td>
<td>100% R</td>
<td>33% R</td>
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<td>100% R</td>
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<td><strong>G. The org. structure of district that valued MS/HS admin experience over elementary/central office experience</strong></td>
<td>25% T</td>
<td>33% R</td>
<td>100% R</td>
<td>50% T</td>
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support the earlier survey data in relation to urbanicity; however, it is interesting to note that this was more of an obstacle in suburban schools. In determining whether or not to accept the superintendency in town or urban school districts, female candidates did not consider the perceptions and/or agendas of the school board or selection committee as a key obstacle. For suburban and town contexts, this is even less of an issue. The willingness to live within the social expectations of the female role was not a strong consideration for females accepting a superintendent position in a rural, town, or suburban district, and it was not a consideration at all when accepting a position in an urban school district. When contemplating the documented career paths and qualitative data of many of the respondents, it is intriguing that the organizational structure of the school district that valued middle and high school administrative experience over elementary/central office experience emerged as the last choice obstacle for accepting a position. Although 60% of the respondents had middle school or high school level administrative experience, they did not see that as a major factor in accepting a superintendent’s position in any educational context. As demonstrated earlier, Table 4.5 contains the results of this analysis and Table 4.6 categorizes the topics by context.

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<tr>
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<th>RURAL</th>
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<td>#7</td>
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A perceived obstacle for females in accepting positions in rural and town districts is their unwillingness or inability to relocate. Although lack of confidence was a major obstacle seen in
suburban districts, the particular demographic needs and location of the school district was also listed as an obstacle within the suburban school districts. The organizational structure of the school district that valued middle and high school administrative experience over elementary/central office experience was the primary obstacle perceived in urban school districts, but the least valued obstacle in rural districts. Unwillingness/inability to relocate was of least consideration as an obstacle to accepting a superintendent position in the urban context, which is in total opposition to the rural context where it was the major obstacle.

When describing the data as a group and considering all educational contexts, rankings of the obstacles by the respondents and the explanations they offered as to whether or not to apply for a superintendent position were parallel to explanations on whether or not to accept superintendent positions. For example, a clear majority was evident in the decision to accept a position based on the unwillingness/inability to relocate, and it was also evident as the number one obstacle when considering application to the district. Additionally, the organizational structure of the school district that valued middle and high school administrative experience over elementary/central office experience appeared as the obstacle of least concern in both applying and accepting a superintendent position, with it being more evident in the decision on whether or not to apply.

Noteworthy information emerges, however, when organizing the data by educational context in reference to the respondents’ decisions to apply or accept a position. Although a major obstacle to applying to rural school districts was the perceptions and/or agendas of the school board or selection committee, the major reason for not accepting a superintendent position in the rural context was the unwillingness/inability to relocate. Even though the respondents totaled 98% (see Table 4.2) disagree/strongly disagree as to relocation being an issue to accepting their first superintendent position, in the urban context relocation was at the top of their list for applying. In
contrast, the organizational structure of the school district was the major obstacle for accepting a position in the urban school districts. Most intriguing, however, is the suburban context. Lack of confidence and aspiration levels were described as the major obstacle to both applying for and accepting a superintendent position for females within this context. Earlier research illustrated that one of the reasons that women are currently serving in particularly the rural and urban contexts, is that a higher population of men apply to the town and suburban contexts (Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkinson, 1986; Bell, 1988). This addresses the concept discovered in Table 4.4 where, when categorized by context, the leading factor in relation to female application to suburban districts is the lack of confidence and aspiration levels.

To better capture the multi-layered phenomenon of the status and lack of female superintendents in Indiana, and to offer in-depth interpretation, interviews were conducted with 12 female superintendents. The questions were designed to retrieve further explanation and expand on the breadth and depth of the journey to the superintendency for females in each educational context.

**Qualitative Results**

Interviews were conducted with 12 women, three from each educational context. Four superintendents were located in the northwestern part of the state, three were located in the northeastern part of the state, three were located in the southwestern part of the state, and two were located in the southeastern part of the state. The mean age of the women was 55.9, with the youngest participant at age 44, and the oldest 67. Two of the females interviewed were African American, both in the urban context, or 16% of the sample. Considering that the national minority rate for female superintendents in 2013 was 9% (McCord, Stream, Ellerson, & Finnan, 2013), it is important to point out that the interview sample is similar to the national population of female
superintendents.

The one-on-one contact with each female superintendent only served to enhance the understanding of the individual struggles that emerge as female administrators in Indiana move toward the superintendency, and the unique challenges they face not only on their journey, but also as they function in their positions as superintendent. The personal perceptions of Rita, Rose, and Robin from the rural context; Tonia, Tera, and Tina from the town context; Sara, Sherry, and Susan from the suburban context; and Mary, Margo, and Morgan from the urban context, support the research to better describe the phenomenon. Beginning with their formative years, where the foundation of their values and beliefs were established, and travelling through their professional journey and how it was affected by gender-based personal and social standards, the women revealed valuable information for consideration.

**Formative Years**

Because it is unique in the state of Indiana, and in the nation for that matter, to be a female superintendent, (21% in Indiana, and 23% nationally in 2013) it is justifiable to study the individual personal backgrounds of this group of women, and what may have been substantial in their formative years that may have contributed to their rise to a high position of power within public school districts. The women responded to questions that gave valuable insight into this phenomenon.

**Family dynamics.** The family structure was predominantly traditional with most of the women growing up with their biological mother and biological father and a combination of brothers and sisters. All interviewees from the town context experienced a traditional family structure. Sara, however, one of the suburban superintendents, grew up in what she described as a highly dysfunctional setting.
I came from dysfunctional poverty. My father spent time in prison for armed robbery, was an alcoholic, and a wife abuser and child abuser. My mother fled when I was very young. I spent my childhood trying to survive the abuse and living with different family members until I ran away from home at 17.

The family structure of the female superintendents was perceived not to be relevant in terms of their professional success and/or gender views, with the exception of Sara. Her experiences of not having a stable parental environment when compared to other children her age growing up, and observing the dynamics of the relationships between her and her siblings, she stated, had a significant influence on her desire to achieve. While the other women did not articulate that their desire to achieve was in any way related to their family structure, Sara was able to be very specific about the impact her family structure had on her eventually becoming a superintendent:

There is a direct relationship. Because of my genetic make-up I guess, I was determined that my abusive father would not win. He would not beat me. I would “win.” Since my teachers made such a positive impact on me throughout my life, I wanted to give back.

**Parental influences.** In addition to family structure, the underlying norms and values established within the family culture and under the direction of parental guidance can ultimately have an effect on individual decision-making. The journey to the superintendency for these women was guided by the specific choices they made along the way and the opportunities they pursued. When asked about parental influence on their professional ambitions, half of the women reported that their family valued education. Many described conversations in the home and boundaries applied within the home that sent the message that school, particularly higher
education, was of immense value. Even though only Rita and Tina could report that one of their parents was a college graduate, college was an expectation. Rita, for example, made the statement that “In my home it was just an expectation that we would all go to college. The decision was *where* [emphasis added] you would be attending, not *if*” [emphasis added].

It was a common theme in the homes of the women that higher education was valued and required, yet 80% of the women came from homes of parents that were not college graduates. That these women went on to become college graduates and that they entered the field of education is noteworthy. The value of higher education was a major focus within the homes, yet the parent and/or parents did not themselves experience higher education.

Tina, Mary, and Margo stated that the connection they made between their parental influences and their chosen career is the value of servitude. Their home atmosphere focused on serving others and how to give of one’s time and talents to help the less fortunate. Margo described it in this way:

I can tell you that as a child my house was always full. Everybody came to my house for whatever. But I think it is more so, and I guess I would have to say if it were something in particular, it would be a focus of servitude in the home. It was a service type of thing. I learned that it is my duty to give voice to those who don’t have a voice.

The idea of higher education and teaching as a profession was not necessarily preached or discussed in the homes of these three women as the only avenue in which to be of service to others, but more so as one of the many ways in which to do so. The pathway to higher education typically emerged, with teaching as a profession not becoming clear until later on in their educational journey.
Many of the female superintendents also voiced parental influences that stressed specific characteristics such as independence, risk-taking, and competition. These women were encouraged by their parents to be assertive and confident, motivating them to reach for their dreams. Sherry reported the following:

My mom would get frustrated with my independence, but my dad always nurtured my independence. My dad would say to me, “You are a driven woman.” I would say back to him, “Gosh Daddy, I wonder where I get that?” I dedicated my dissertation to him because he made me believe that I could do absolutely anything. [emphasis added].

This statement is an example of the strong influence Sherry’s father had on her confidence and ability to make independent decisions. Although 66 years old, Sherry still remembers her father’s influence and how it affected her character. Rita, however, also described the positive influences in terms of character and development that her mother and her father had on her as a child:

My mother was always [emphasis added] like “don’t ever back down, you have rights,” they both were of my personality that said, “You know, you should always do what is right. Always do what is right. Don’t embarrass yourself or your family, but do what is right and don’t back down.”

Having strong parental support in terms of confidence building and independence, both from mom and from dad, was a point discussed widely among the superintendents.

Although these females were guided to become independent and self-sufficient, these remarks seem contradictory to responses concerning parental influence and career choice in terms of gender. If career choice was discussed by parents in the home, it was stressed that a career
choice should be compatible to having a family and/or practical in terms of a traditional female role. Robin expressed the following:

I had planned to be in hotel and restaurant management at Purdue. My freshman year at Purdue my mom told me I shouldn’t major in that because I could not have a family with that career because I would be working all the time.

This statement is indicative of the Women’s Place Model as described in chapter 2 (Miller, Washington, & Fiene, 2006) and is contradictory to the low support documented in the quantitative data in terms of the superintendents making career decisions based on gender expectations. Robin changed her career goals and became a teacher because she was pressured to have a career that would not interfere and/or affect her role as mother and a wife.

Susan, on the other hand, was guided to teaching by her father due to pressure to pursue a more secure career. She described his words as follows:

My dad said, “What are you going to do with a degree in PR and marketing? You are going to get that degree and do what?” So he was not real critical as much as he was telling me that it was not practical. He told me to finish school and get my teaching license so I would have that to fall back on in case the other did not work out.

Although not guided to teaching because of her father’s perception of gender roles, Susan was routed to teaching and did not choose education as a career on her own because of her father’s wishes. Even though she described her father as “nurturing her independence” he certainly played a role in her becoming a teacher, which was not a decision she made on her own.

**Personal role models.** With the exception of one, all female superintendents described a personal role model that influenced them in a positive way during their formative years. Answers
included a particular parent, grandparent, aunt, and teacher/teachers. Learning the importance of a strong work ethic was stated by three superintendents. Rose, Robin, and Sherry reported watching their parents as role models as they provided for the family and the actions they took to demonstrate that particular commitment, was extremely valuable to their professional success. Sherry commented, “Between my dad and mom, I lived a very strong work ethic. They owned a grocery business. I started working when I was in the 8th grade at the store, even though my dad thought I was too young.”

A strong work ethic, although not mentioned in terms of parental influence by every superintendent, is woven throughout the interviews. It is also referred to by the superintendents in terms of obstacles related to advancing in the field of educational administration at any level, as will be explored later in this chapter.

Rita and Tera commented on their grandmother as serving as a role model for them. These superintendents trace their decision to choose education as a career back to the influence of their grandmothers. This particular role model, they stated, was critical in their development of a love for learning, a love for reading, and a strong sense of love and security. Tera explained it this way:

My grandmother was a teacher in a one-room schoolhouse. She had the most amazing experiences to share. My fondest memories of my childhood are Fridays of every week getting allowed to stay with my grandmother and go through her personal library and pick a different book to read. I would come back the next week and get another book. I would come back on Friday, and we would have these amazing interactions and discussions. She had an amazing memory and nurtured my love of reading. I think there has never [emphasis added] been a time in my life since I was old enough to recall that I did not want to be a schoolteacher. She was such a strong influence on me in that respect.
This statement is an example of the powerful effect a positive role model could have on a young person during their formative years not only in their ultimate career choice, but also in their development of their passion and/or interests. The context of this quote clearly communicates a relationship between Tera becoming a teacher/superintendent and the part her grandmother played in making that profession a reality for her.

As should be expected, two superintendents cited teachers as their personal role model. Tonia discussed how it resonated with her that in a classroom, high expectations could be achieved and celebrated in a nurturing atmosphere. Up until the point when she had this particular teacher, Tonia had only experienced motivation for high achievement and high expectations as a result of fear. Sara stated that she owed her very life to teachers and the fact that they taught her the meaning of love and courage, and gave her the confidence and support she needed in order to improve herself. Teachers helped to build characteristics that she lacked due to the neglect she experienced elsewhere in her personal life:

Teachers saved my life. They helped me and taught me about things that I was not exposed to. They taught me about love and gave me the positive guidance that I lacked at home. They all stepped in and literally saved my life. My fifth grade teacher was pivotal. He taught me that men could be good and that I was scholarly. My English teacher taught me that I was smart. My math teacher told me that I was talented and that I could do anything that I wanted to do. He gave me the courage and confidence I needed in order to realize I could make a difference.

It is interesting to note that for two of the three female superintendents in the urban setting (Mary and Morgan) there was not a defining role model mentioned in terms of the building of personal attributes in relation to any career, much less a career in education. Margo, the other
urban superintendent interviewed, however, made comments that gave insight into not only the impact her mother had on her as a role model for a work ethic, but also her strength of character as an African American female:

Watching my mother with 8 children and no help, I observed a strong female figure. That was monumental. Although I did not receive much emotional support at home, she was a role model on how to be strong. I lived with my aunt for a while and she was a professor, which reinforced the strong female role model. Both my mom and my aunt, so what I knew about women in the family is that they were strong and in pretty strong, although not palpable, positions.

This comment is telling of the compelling impact a female role model can have not only in terms of gender, but also in terms of race. Margo grew up in a culture where females were strong and the obvious leader of the family, unlike many of the other superintendents that were interviewed. Other superintendents spent their childhoods in a traditional family structure where their fathers were involved, present, and the stronger decision-maker of the family. Margo’s description of the role of her mother within the family unit and her ultimate appointment to an urban school district as superintendent is reflective of study reported in chapter 2 by Tallerico and Burstyn describing the phenomenon of increased number of female African American superintendents in the urban context. For the superintendents interviewed, there was a stated range of individuals that had a positive and lasting impact on them in terms of their drive to succeed and their particular chosen career path.

**Educational context.** All of the female superintendents attended rural schools during their formative years with the exception of the three suburban superintendents; Sara, Sherry, and Susan all attended urban schools as children. Admittedly the demographics in Indiana have changed
since these women were children, but it is interesting to note that even though being a female superintendent in a suburban school district in Indiana is uncommon, it is even more unusual that of the women interviewed, the only three individuals attending urban schools during their formative years later became superintendents in suburban school districts.

Because the development of gender-related perceptions can be rooted in experiences occurring during the formative years, it was valuable to ask the women about those encounters and/or incidents. Three themes emerged as a result of the interview. In the first category, *Personal/Family Environment*, the women discussed subtle messages and/or comments made at home or within their family environment that they perceived to be gender-related. The *Educational Environment* category reveals gender-related incidents remembered by the women within the school environment. In the third category, *Individual Experiences*, the women describe particular events that had a very crucial impact on them in terms of gender.

**Gender Messages Perceived Within the Personal/Family Environment**

Although many of the female superintendents grew up before Title IX, it is notable that some of the women interviewed did not disclose any events and/or messages that came to mind in relation to their gender and the lack of opportunity and/or the presence of discrimination during their formative years. Rose, Robin, Tera, Tina, Susan, and Morgan all indicated that there were no such messages sent or received in their personal and/or home life that they can remember. As noted earlier, however, these women did not interpret their parent’s comments about pursuing historically female traditional careers as a “gender message.”

A few comments about gender messages in their personal/home lives while growing up, however, were very pro-female and describe an almost liberal feminism supportive approach. Rita, for example, stated that her parents instilled in her that her success was not dependent on a
man, and that she was responsible for herself, “My folks said to me, ‘You must always [emphasis added] prepare yourself to be successful with or without a husband or a man in your life.’”

Some of these women could not express exact moments or words stated by their parents, but could articulate subtle messages that were intrinsically communicated. Tonia indicated that watching and observing the males in her life and their roles, she learned early on that if she wanted to succeed, she would have to be better than a man:

Obviously it has always been kind of a man’s world. I think the competitive part in me just said, “You know, if a man can do it so can I.” I also thought that women could do it better sometimes because we come from a different perspective. Throughout my career, for example, I have felt that cognitively I was equal with a man, but I had to work harder to achieve more, prove that I was better, in order to get to the point that I wanted to get to.

Tonia went on to describe how her competitive nature developed as she watched and observed events and opportunities during her formative years. Although she could not be specific, she expressed the message she internalized in terms of a “man’s world” versus a “woman’s world.” Her desire to compete in this context, she believed, indirectly led to her becoming a superintendent.

Sara, due to the circumstances in her dysfunctional and abusive home environment, received the message every day that women were inferior to men in every way. She, along with Sherry and Tonia, remarked that she learned that men and women were assigned different roles in society. The subtle message of different roles for men and for women is parallel to the Women’s Place Model as a viable explanation for the lack of female superintendents.

Mary and Margo stated that their gender message was that the African American female in the family is the strongest and the true core of the family. Although never outwardly stated within
the family unit, the female parent in these homes had a major impact on the development of Mary and Margo’s perception of their race and their role as females within the family structure.

**Gender Messages Perceived in the Educational Environment**

The women superintendents named varying indirect messages in terms of gender during their public educational environment from their formative years. Rita, Rose and Susan stated that they “noticed” from grade school and on, that there were no female administrators. Mary and Rita stated that their memories in terms of gender within their educational environment center around the positive female teacher support they experienced during their formative years. From serving as a mentor/role model in terms of their school success, to providing emotional support and confidence, female teachers were a positive source of gender messages for most of the women superintendents. Mary and Rita observed successful women specifically in their roles as teachers, mothers, wives, and disciplinarians, which provided them with a sense of confidence, independence, and integrity.

Attending grade school and/or high school before the implementation of Title IX, however, four out of the 12 women cited sports discrimination as the main gender message during their formative years. Not only did they remember that there were different rules for boys and girls within the same sport, but they also commented that boys and girls were not given the same opportunity to play the same sport. Co-ed activities were not permitted. Tina described it in this way:

*We didn’t have IHSAA sanctions for females. I was a female athlete, but I don’t ever remember thinking it was problem. We didn’t play other teams outside of school, we played our things and the boys played theirs. As I look back on it now, I can tell you that it certainly was an issue, but at the time I didn’t really think about the fact that we were not*
playing the same as the guys. I just never viewed it as different. At this point I will tell you, “Heck yes that was absolutely wrong.”

It was evident that Tina had never, until the interview, cognitively realized that she had experienced gender discrimination in terms of athletics during her formative years in public education. It was intriguing to her that she and her family simply accepted the fact that girls athletics were different from boys athletics, yet knew that her parents were verbally supportive of her progressing academically and socially, with no reference to her gender.

**Individual Gender Experiences Critical to Each Superintendent**

When asked what was substantial to them in terms of gender during their formative years, the female superintendents described a range of events that occurred during school to events that took place within their homes and communities. Rita and Tera immediately described the day they were told that they did not have to wear dresses to school anymore. They discussed how excited they were to be able to wear slacks or jeans. Tera stated:

I can remember I was in the 7th grade and the principal came on the intercom and said, “The school board has made the decision that beginning on such and such date the girls can wear slacks to school.” It was huge! Huge! [emphasis added]. I can remember going home to my mother and saying, ‘I have to have slacks!’ [emphasis added]. My mother sewed. She made some pant suits. You couldn’t wear jeans. We just felt such freedom. No hose, no garters. It was like a cultural event. By the time I graduated we were wearing jeans and everybody had the same dress code.

Not only does this statement reveal how far women have come in terms of the societal climate in public education, it also captures how meaningful it was to women experiencing this clothing liberation. Tera was very animated as she told this story, and her eyes sparkled as she
tried to put into words what it was like to live through this time period in her school. She felt emancipated and saw this incident and the fast progression of appropriate attire for females in her school as a springboard for the release of other gender-related conformities.

Sara, Sherry, and Rita also commented that while growing up they slowly began to realize that there were separate roles for boys and girls within her community. Although they could not identify these observations as gender discrimination at the time in which they occurred, they noted that as they look back on it today, it certainly was. Sherry described how she was not permitted to go to work at the family business like her brother, but was made to stay home and help her mother iron: “On Mondays we did the laundry and the ironing. My mother would be ironing and I would help. I would think, ‘Really? Really?’ [emphasis added]. So I asked my Dad why I couldn’t go to the store and work.”

Sherry went on to describe how her father relented and allowed her to work in the grocery. Her thought at the time was that she was not allowed to work in the store because she was too young, not because of her gender. As she reflected on the situation, however, she realized that gender was a component, as women were expected to iron and “take care of their husband’s needs” during that time period. The Women’s Role Model certainly comes into play with Sherry. She spoke very fondly of her father, however, and was adamant about the opportunities he presented for her, the faith he had in her, and the support and motivation he inspired in her, claiming that those actions were the foundation for the successes she experienced throughout her lifetime.

Rita also added an intriguing event that was an eye-opener for her in terms of gender. At age five she was hospitalized and by chance was attended to by a female doctor. She stated that the encounter with that female doctor resonated in her memory forever:

My hospital room was right across from the nurse’s station. It was the first time I had ever
met a woman doctor. I was astounded. I can remember at age 5 being in great awe of this woman. I was shocked because I just didn’t know that women could be doctors. I can still remember, my gosh it has been 57 years now, how that revelation hit me.

Although brought up in a home environment where she was constantly assured that her future did not depend on a man in her life and that she was responsible for herself, and although very young when this incident occurred, Rita’s perception was that there were roles in society for men and roles in society for women. She would encounter more gender role incidents later in her professional career.

Sara was quick to remember that her first positive experiences with any male figure occurred in elementary school. Because of her home life and background, she developed very negative perceptions of males in general, and it was during the elementary years that Sara first realized that male figures could offer support and/or genuine concern for her success and worth as a human being. She spoke fondly of male teachers she had during that time and how they encouraged her to do her best and praised her for her efforts. Mary also talked about the emotional support the female teachers in particular provided for her during her elementary years. Mary’s personal home life did not provide her with a great deal of emotional support, and the female teachers filled that gap for her.

The childhoods of these women helped to develop their perceptions in terms of decision-making and their self-efficacy. The choices they made in relation to identifying their passion, the choices they made that encompassed their own assessment of their abilities, and the choices they made later on in their lives in terms of blending their personal options and their career opportunities, all played a major role in their individual career paths.
Pathways to the Superintendency

It has been noted that historically, the typical pathway to the superintendency is different for females than for males. Utilizing the definition cited earlier of the traditional and nontraditional pathways of the 12 women interviewed, 33% (Rita, Rose, Sara, and Susan) reached the superintendency via the non-traditional method, and 67% (Robin, Tonia, Tera, Tina, Sherry, Mary, Margo, and Morgan) reached the superintendency by way of the traditional method. This data mirrors the quantitative data of 35.5% nontraditional and 64.5% traditional.

The pathways for the women interviewed, although traditional in terms of occupying a central office position between the principalship and superintendency, were quite varied. All 67% were assistant superintendents, but in addition to being a principal or assistant principal at multiple levels (elementary, middle, or high school level) these women held previous positions such as interim superintendent, district technology integration specialist, deputy superintendent, educational consultant, and/or district curriculum specialist. The women taking the non-traditional pathway progressed to the superintendency directly from a principal’s position. One explanation for this is that within a rural school district, seldom is any position between principal and superintendent available. Another, as noted earlier, is that many times principals are assigned other central office duties that prepare them for the superintendency. Within the town, suburban, and urban contexts there are potentially more available positions on the way to the superintendency.

The specific pathway taken by these women is important to identify because it is a result of the decisions they made in terms of opportunity, timing, personal preferences, professional knowledge, collegial support, and political influence. It was important to explore the career opportunities and decisions, as they were critical to the description of their ascendency to the
superintendency.

Career Opportunities and Decisions

Along their journey to the superintendency, the respondents were either presented career opportunities or developed their own career opportunities. This part of the research investigated respondents’ perceptions of those opportunities and how their decisions were shaped by such opportunities. The interpretation of the earlier survey data is that the inability, unwillingness, or pressure to relocate or not relocate did not play a role in the decision to accept or not accept a superintendent decision. A study of the qualitative data however, presented a different result. Only Tera and Margo did not mention relocation as an issue in taking advantage of a career opportunity in terms of any administrative position or supervisory position in public education, nor did they mention relocation as a condition in any superintendent position decision. Other superintendents related individual circumstances that did, indeed, involve relocating in some fashion. Rita actually applied for a superintendent position she later went on to accept because she had relocated to the area due to her husband’s career choice. Rose did not accept a principal’s position because it would involve relocation, and she had family obligations where she currently lived. Robin did not accept her first superintendent offer because her husband simply refused to move. Tina relocated to a specific area due to an illness in the family, and subsequently applied for and accepted a principal position. Sherry changed locations due to her husband’s career change and went from a position as a principal to assistant superintendent at the new location. Finally, Mary discussed her husband’s relocation as the basis for applying for and accepting a supervisor of special education position. Although not all superintendent positions held by the women involved the relocation factor, the positions leading to the superintendency did involve the relocation factor for the majority of the women interviewed. It can be concluded, that although not
conveyed in the quantitative data, the narrative portion of the research did reveal that family obligations and family relationships, combined with relocation circumstances were a reported factor for 12 administrative positions among the 12 superintendents interviewed, and for the superintendent position specifically, family, wife, and mother roles was substantial only to superintendents now serving in the rural area. In considering this data, however, it should be noted that the relocation factor for men, and their willingness to compromise their professional goals for their wives, is absent from the research.

The decision on whether or not to move to another administrative position was also impacted by the role of a mentor or colleague. Many of the women were recruited and/or urged by both male and female mentors to pursue a particular position that led to the superintendency, or were guided in their choices in terms of pursuing higher education that would help qualify them for an administrative position or a superintendent position. A total of 16 moves to an administrative position were made among the 12 women in terms of any administrative position due to being recruited, and six superintendent positions resulted due to collegial relationships and networking. It is notable, however, that five of these positions were in the urban area.

For Robin and Rita, making a move was due to leaving a difficult work situation. Three moves were made because of this reason generally in the administrative field, and one participant went on to be a superintendent from leaving a difficult work situation.

Sara and Rita commented on how they did not take advantage of opportunities because they were not aware of other positions in educational administration that would be open to them. The lack of knowledge and/or avenue of opportunity for any administrative position was contributed to poor college guidance and the continued observance of all males in administration.

Interestingly, Tonia, Tera, and Tina, reported that the basis of their career opportunities
were the result of fate. All three contributed their administrative path and resulting superintendency to unpredictable circumstances, timing and specific needs of the district, the incompetency of the administrator and/or superintendent they followed, and/or “being at the right place at the right time.” Tonia described it this way: “The former superintendent was not personable and did not value relationships. My style is just different. Fate and timing is everything.”

Three superintendents were forced to make career changes because they were released of their duties due to a reduction in force and/or having their contract bought out. These events occurred in general administrative positions and one superintendent position.

Tina, now serving as a superintendent in a town district, accepted a superintendent position because the offer presented to her by the school Board of that particular district included the funding for her educational advancement as a term of her contract.

Sara, Sherry, Susan, Mary, Margo, and Morgan all stated that they actively pursued any administrative position or the superintendent position because of their need for professional and/or personal fulfillment. Six positions within the general administrative field were pursued for this reason, and 4 superintendent positions were pursued, with three of those being in the urban context. When considering the conscious pursuit of only the superintendent position specifically based on the individual need to fulfill a professional goal, only 4 positions (one suburban and three urban) were a result of that quest.

It can be deduced that whether traditional or non-traditional, the pathway to the superintendency and the resulting administrative position appointments for many of the women are perceived to be a result of circumstances beyond their control. They spoke more of the events happening around them, the choices of other people in their personal and professional lives, and
the part fate had played in their lives as a catalyst for them moving into educational administration generally, and then on to the superintendency.

In light of these particular comments made by the women, it was important to understand if there was any connection between the events and conversations that took place that may have influenced that perception and their view of any gender-based occurrences along their career pathway to the superintendency.

Gender-Based Experiences and Obstacles

In Chapter 2 specific gender-based theories, insights, and/or events that may serve as rationale for these perceptions were explained. The women interviewed expanded on many of these concepts by describing in their own words their justification for those perceptions.

Male Traditional Role vs. Female Traditional Role – Women’s Place Model

Four women indicated they were influenced by society’s perception of the traditional female model. Rita accepted that she could not be a social studies teacher because her professor told her “Honey, you have to be a man and a coach to be a social studies teacher.” Her career and professional goals were sidetracked for almost 10 years because she accepted this perception of her role as a female. Rose commented, “Everybody doesn’t pick up and leave when Mom gets a new job like they do when Dad does.” This particular comment highlights the perception that the female role is to follow the spouse and/or significant other for career opportunities if they involve a move for the family, but that the same consideration is not given when for females. Tina indicated that if a female in a committed relationship were to be a superintendent, it would take a strong and confident partner to not be intimidated by public scrutiny, community politics, or the acceptance of the realization that they could be relocated at any time.

These comments are examples of how these women either consciously or subconsciously
internalized the concept that there were certain roles and expectations present in society for each gender. When asked if gender role perceptions was a factor in relation to their career opportunities and choices, the women strongly indicated “no” on the quantitative data, but made comments in interviews revealing otherwise. In addition to the seemingly reported defined separation of specific roles, the observance of actual events that fed the acceptance of gender bias was also described.

**Board/Community Culture, Perceptions, and Interview Procedures – Discrimination Model**

Community and board perceptions also played a role in placing females in superintendent positions, according to the participants. A female from every educational context made comments indicating they experienced and were affected by the community culture and perceptions of the school board at some point in their professional career and ascent to the superintendency. Many of these comments were revealed as a result of remarks made in their interviews for the positions, but some were a result of directives and/or events conducted by the board.

Rita reported that the following comments were made during her interviews for the superintendent position: “Principals wear suits not dresses,” and “You are a woman.” Rose offered the following: “Do you think you can handle those big high school boys?” was a question I was asked during the interview. I think they probably did not ask the male candidates that question.” Sara disclosed the following statement made during one of her interviews: “You are just too pretty for us.” They would never tell a man they were not going to hire him because he was too handsome.” Sara detailed an interview question that she described as a “bait” for women in superintendent interviews and gave insight into how females must be more strategic during the interview in order to be offered a position:

At an interview for superintendent one of the board members asked the question, “What are
you most proud of?” Typically that question is a bait for women because it leads to your children if you are a female or a mother, if you answer that question in the way the board thinks you may as a woman. The board wants the school to come first in your life. When I answered the question I answered it in terms of what I was most proud of professionally. The board member asked, “Why did you answer the question that way and nothing to do with your family?” I remember very clearly stating, “I thought this was an interview for a superintendent’s position.

For women, the interview process and questioning for the superintendent position can be very different than what would be expected at a male interview. The comments of these former candidates emphasize that point.

Examples that the female superintendents perceived the culture of the community and the board to be an obstacle in terms of gender can also be disclosed. Rita and Rose indicated that they were brought into the superintendent position to “fire” an employee that the board wanted released. Their perception was that as a female, the board felt they could pressure them into doing what they wanted more easily than they could a male. Tera commented on a remark that was made at a public board meeting she was attending where the president of the board stated to the public they were hiring the female candidate because she brought cookies to the interview. Although it was not her being hired, she commented that it really impacted her. Her thought was that it was a terrible first impression for the female superintendent in her new job, and that she couldn’t believe the board president had made the statement. Tina made the following comment in relation to her perception of the community culture where she serves as superintendent:

You know that I will have to tell you, and you will have to take this information and put it wherever you want it, I think that the only gender issue I ever feel...to be honest with you, I
think sometimes that if I were married that I would not be so viciously attacked. I have been attacked because of the decisions I have had to make. I really wonder about that sometimes. If there were a man that showed up at ballgames with me or something that way, would I have to take this much abuse? I really feel that if people knew I had somebody, that whole “male protector” thing in my life, people would not have come at me so strong.

Although superintendents of both genders deal with public scrutiny, this comment is telling in terms of the internal conflict experienced by many female superintendents. Although a skillful, knowledgeable individual in a position of high authority and supervision, Tera reverted back to the societal perceptions of the expectations of a female in terms of marriage conformity in order to explain the unethical actions of other people in terms of her job performance. It also speaks to the community view to be suspicious of unmarried women, perhaps in terms of their sexuality.

Morgan revealed an event that encompassed the culture in terms of ethnic and gender cultural expectations:

There were two female candidates for three high school principal positions and neither one of us got a position. There was a Hispanic male and he had an “in.” The superintendent at that time was Hispanic and so that was tough. But then the assistant superintendent called me in and he said, “Look, I can guarantee you that I can give you a middle school principalship.” I said no. Politically he was just trying to get me out of the mix because he knew I was a top candidate because of my credentials, and he didn’t want to fight that battle.

Finally, an example of the depths of the board culture in terms of females in the superintendent position can be better appreciated by the account of the following event from Sara:
A board member that was defeated at the election prior to my hiring was planning the
demise of any superintendent that came in, and particularly any female. He made that
known in the community. He wanted the assistant principal to be the superintendent. They
had this plan and it didn’t work out that way. Ever since then he has, and he is one of my
board members now by the way, and he is always against a female in there. I just know
that. I just show him respect. He has always done everything he can and still does so all
along the way because he blames the females on the previous board for not hiring the male
that he wanted. The first female they hired actually quit in the same day because she found
out all of this. His thought was for him to get back on the board and get the male the job.
She had a good job where she was, and they told her that as soon as the current
superintendent retired she would be named superintendent where she was. So she resigned
the same day she was named. She found out about the great plot and made a wiser choice.
It has not been easy my entire life. I did not know all of this at the very beginning. I know
there are always maggots wherever you go, but the search team did not tell me anything
either. But what happened was the two females that were on the board when I was hired
got defeated in the next election. He went after their character and told the public their
behavior was why he was defeated in the last election. There were vicious rumors. It was
bad. So they got off and he got on. I learned more about what was going on then, but
remember you are there to do a job for kids. So you just go about doing that. Just being
under that ‘hit list’ of his all the time and he was working on having a majority of the board
to sway their support so that he could get the job done. What he found along the way was
that I was competent. Very competent. That made it much more difficult for him to
succeed. So you really, really, have to learn politics. I say you have to learn how to swim
with the sharks but don’t let them eat you. He actually tried to kill me. I am serious. I kid you not. I am actually very serious about this. He was so angry that the male did not get the job of superintendent...one day, early on...believe me he has tried many ways...but this one sent me over the edge of shock. Whenever he read in the paper about a superintendent in trouble, he tried to apply that to me. There was an incident with a superintendent that had a social gathering with drinking at her house for principals and it ended up not well. So my board member read that, and I know how he operates, so at a meeting for board members there was a banquet with alcohol. I am not friendly with him, but I am professional. So there is no reason for him to be chummy with me. He is not chummy with me, and I am not chummy with him. So this particular night after this story came out, I came into the banquet meeting about 5 minutes late, and he actually stands up and comes to greet me. That was my first clue because that never happens. He said to me, “The open bar is about to close, do you want me to go and get you a drink?” Now I do not drink at any of my work functions. Ever. Never. I wasn’t really thinking about the recent incident in the paper with the other superintendent, I just knew better. I told him, “No thank you” multiple times. He asked me several times. He said three or four times, “They are going to close the bar in a few minutes are you sure you don’t want me to get you a drink?” It was very premeditated. Then he wanders off to the bar and brings two drinks and sets them in front of me and says, “I thought you might like these.” Two. Two drinks in front of me. Now you tell me what that meant? I drive myself. So he was counting on me getting a DUI or killed. Because if you drink and drive, you run the risk of killing others and yourself. That really happened. There is still a gender problem for sure. Although it would be very difficult to prove the suggested motives of the male board
member, the incident certainly brings to light the extent a board member may go to in order to get their favorite candidate elected, regardless of gender. Taking that into consideration, however, the perception of this incident can be directly traced to gender because according to Sara, the male board member made it public that his superintendent candidate was better simply because the present superintendent was female. The cultural expectations of a particular school directly impacts the board’s perspective and is representative of the individuals that make up the board. It appears that the cultural norms of that particular school district had a negative effect on Sara simply because she was female. In addition, Sara’s perception of the incident only further deteriorated her relationship with that board member, making her job more difficult. It also appears, however, that her awareness of these norms and the understanding of their controversial relationship has been a key to her survival and quantified success in the position.

**Good Ol’ Boy Network – Discrimination Model**

A number of the females interviewed reported that throughout their career they had encountered the Good Ol’ Boy Network. Although more within the rural context reported experiencing this difficulty, there were examples noted in the suburban and urban contexts as well. Rita indicated that she had interviewed 35 times for a high school principal position early in her career and that 34 of those positions were filled by men. Having witnessed males in all administrative positions, and especially moving from the high school position directly to the superintendency, Robin recounted an event where she was touring the high school of a district where she was being interviewed for a superintendent position:

I observed a conversation between the board president and the current male high school principal at one of my superintendent interviews. As we went into the building, the high school principal said directly to the board president, “You should have offered the job to
me.” The board member stated, “You didn’t apply.” The principal stated, “I should not have to.”

The idea that an individual, male or female, is entitled to a position in any profession is adversarial. The encounter Robin described, however, is supportive of the research in that the perceived and documented career path for men is different from women in school administration. This event also confirms the existence of the culture of the Good Ol’ Boy networking politics, where it is expected that men moving to the principal position will then progress to the superintendent position.

Superintendents in the urban area also had experiences that exhibited the concept of the Good Ol’ Boys Club. Mary reported the following:

First of all, there are men who feel they should have been appointed to a job because they were the high school principal or they were an assistant superintendent. They didn’t have the credentials, but still felt entitled. I battle that kind of situation, and I am always trying to figure out what step am I on? Am I one step ahead? Because as you know when you have this Good Ol’ Boys network you never know; you never know where you, as a female, are in the network.

Mary brings to light the predicament of females in relation to trying to understand and cope with the Good Ol’ Boys phenomenon. By acknowledging the existence of such a quandary, there is hope that it could be better understood and perhaps penetrated to some extent.

Margo’s observance of the overrepresentation of males in the field suggests that the Good Ol’ Boy network still exists in Indiana public education. When I spoke with Margo, we were in a meeting room at a professional conference for superintendents. As we discussed the topic of gender in the superintendency, she suddenly stated: “If you look around you in this room…what
do you see? The Good Ol’ Boys Club is alive and well.” The room was predominantly white middle-aged men. Margo was simply stating the obvious in order to support her perception.

The Good Ol’ Boys club was reported in the suburban context also. Sara offered the following:

As I look back on it, when a woman is not selected for some obscure reason, really it is because she is a woman. Like they might tell you it is because they don’t have the right experience at the high school level, or entry level of some kind, when really it is because they are female. They hired males without high school experience or entry level experience.

Whether through observation or individual experiences all respondents faced barriers on their road to the superintendency that were reflective of the cultural and board expectations in terms of the societal interpretation of the female role. Their comments suggest that they were indeed affected by these experiences, and that they had an impact on the choices they made in terms of their career choices.

Taking into account the series of events, obstacles, and opportunities that led to the superintendent position for these women, it seemed appropriate to discuss how the respondents perceived the role of a female superintendent within each specific educational context.

**Perceptions of Female Roles within Specific Educational Contexts**

When asked if the role of a female superintendent is different depending on the educational context in which they serve, 50% (6) of the women responded *no*, stating that gender had no impact on the specific roles in a rural, town, suburban, and/or urban setting. Any differences could be traced to infrastructure, logistics, tax base, resources, and land mass. As they went on to expand on their answers, however, their words stated otherwise. Robin stated that her perception
was that the sports piece is different for her and other women superintendents because it is not high on their agenda, whereas the sports program is a focus for a male superintendent, regardless of the particular context. (It should be stated, however, that because there is a focus on sports in high schools generally in Indiana, it is difficult to ascertain if this observation is representative of the sample). Susan stated that she displayed more confidence in her role so that her male colleagues would perceive her as being successful. Morgan revealed that her observation was that female roles are the same everywhere in reference to the issue of too much board micromanaging, and that conversations with her male superintendent colleagues indicated that men in any context do not have to confront that issue as much. The other respondents agreed that roles are different for females within the contexts for various reasons. Rita was expected to join the Rotary as a part of her role, but was denied membership because she was a female. Tera stated that as she observed her male colleagues in other educational contexts she received more community examination than they did, and that she was expected to attend more events. Sara reported that all of the roles in the different educational contexts are politically and culturally driven, and that all females, when compared to males, have to compromise something in order to be successful. Sherry stated that politics are different and that the politics of each context define the roles, but that her observation was that she and her female colleagues have to be more skilled, more visionary, and more articulate than men in order to manipulate the politics within each of those contexts.

The women superintendents did not differentiate between educational contexts in relation to the female role. Their discussions were based on their individual observations and all gender collegial relationships as the foundation for accounting for the differences in the functioning of the male superintendent in comparison to the female superintendent, regardless of the educational context in which they serve.
Results Summary

When asked specifically about gender and the impact it had on their journey to the superintendency, the connections were not readily admitted by the individuals on the survey. Responses to the interview questions, however, indicated a relationship. Table 4.2, for example, overwhelmingly demonstrates that participants did not think that race, gender, and lack of male interest was in any way related to why women were superintendents in particular educational contexts. The responses from the women interviewed and now serving in these contexts, however, detailed thoughts and perceptions that suggested race, gender, and lack of male interest do have an influence on why women are superintendents in particular contexts. There was convergence between qualitative and quantitative findings in that these women did not aspire to be superintendents because of their lack of knowledge of the opportunity, but as their professional careers began to unfold, many of the women did report gender-related obstacles to the superintendency not revealed in the survey data. Finally, the quantitative analysis communicated that the women believed their obtainment of the superintendent position was based primarily on their merit and successful experiences within their previous jobs, but the qualitative data disclosed remarks that openly divulged the appointments could have been related to gender and/or their race.

In reference to applying and/or accepting positions the survey data and the interview data matched on the point that women do not apply to rural districts because of the perceptions of the school boards and the community norms of those areas. Although more prominent in the rural context, both sets of data agree that the inability/unwillingness to relocate is a major factor for women in considering the acceptance of a superintendent position.

Although the quantitative data was much less revealing, the qualitative data gathered supports the research, especially in terms of the three models described. The Meritocracy Model,
the Discrimination Model, and the Women’s Place Model all emerged as obstacles for women currently serving as superintendent in Indiana. Comparing the results of the quantitative data and the qualitative data allows for a deeper understanding of the underrepresentation of female superintendents in Indiana. As revealed throughout this chapter, the comparison of the two sets of data exposed conflict. The fact that the participants were cautious in their written responses but disclosed more intimate thoughts in the interviews could be due to my role as the researcher and their feelings of security within the interview atmosphere. Regardless, because a portion of the data is conflictual, it creates further questions in relation to the phenomenon, and helps to inform and generate some overall conclusions.
Chapter 5

Conclusions

This chapter presents a summary that addresses the research questions present earlier:

How do female superintendents in Indiana describe their ascendency to the position of superintendent within their particular educational context?

How do female superintendents in Indiana differ in their ascendency to the superintendency according to the educational context in which they serve?

First, the results of each research question according to educational context will be described. An explanation of the link between feminist theory explained in the literature review and the research will follow. Lastly, the conclusion will offer implications for policy, practice, and theory that are supported by the research.

How do female superintendents in Indiana describe their ascendency to the position of superintendent within their particular educational context?

Rural

The ascendency to the superintendency for rural female superintendents can be described as nontraditional. Typically rural respondents achieved the superintendancy directly from a principal position. Many of the women serving in the rural districts valued the demographic setting, security, and familiarity of the culture of the particular context. Having worked within the district as a teacher and building administrator, having lived in the community, and having proved themselves over the years, these women were able to build trust and develop relationships that helped to propel them to their first superintendent position.

Other factors influenced the ascendency to the superintendent position for females serving rural districts. Although not revealed in the quantitative data, qualitative data described race as a
factor in successfully obtaining superintendent positions in rural districts, as well as relocation concerns. The race was reflective of the particular race of the community in which they served. The needs of the family and desires of children, spouses, and elderly parents played a key role in the development of the professional pathway for rural female superintendents because these rural participants perceived these issues to be a higher priority in terms of career opportunity and choices. Both sets of data, however, confirmed that the respondents from the rural context heavily consider the agendas of the school board and/or selection committee when making decisions on whether or not to move on to the superintendency.

Rural participants indicated that they never aspired to be a superintendent. They were not aware that such an opportunity could exist for them, even though they were raised in households that nurtured their independence and career seeking aspirations. Although higher education and professional careers were a main theme supported within the household, more typically traditional female roles for these careers were expected and advocated. This was a common response from all superintendents in all contexts.

Gender also played a role in their journeys. Although, again, not indicated in the quantitative data, qualitative data exposed professional, personal, and social events for rural superintendents that unfolded in ways that were influenced by cultural perceptions and expectations of gender role conformity. Although this suggestion surfaced in all contexts, rural superintendents in particular were very descriptive of events especially early in their lives and then throughout their careers that were altered based on their gender. Their ability to understand and manipulate this concept helped to shape their professional decision-making and subtly move them in the direction of the superintendency.
Town

Superintendents from town districts typically reach the top level of administration in a school district via the traditional pathway. Having held more types of positions in education than individuals in the rural districts before becoming superintendents, the observations of participants’ journeys were more diverse. Having experienced the positions such as Assistant Superintendent, Curriculum Director, and/or Technology Integration Specialist, town participants were able to gain more administrative experience within the central office environment. This allowed them to have a more clear perception of the job responsibilities of superintendent.

Not consciously seeking the superintendent position, town superintendents indicated that ending up as a superintendent was either the result of local circumstances, or the encouragement and/or pushing of educational administrator mentors they had worked with, both male and female, later on in their teaching career. For superintendents in the town context reaching the level of superintendency happened because of a combination of professional events occurring around them for which they had little control, and their individual professional choices, career experiences, and evidence of leadership skills. Many of the participants from the town districts indicated that the recruitment of mentors and networking with colleagues resulted in their appointment as superintendent. They also cited unusual circumstances with the administrative office along with the failures and negligence of duties on the part of the district leader and how those events coincided with the successes they had experienced in their particular roles at that particular time as important events leading to the superintendency.

Like rural superintendents, however, the quantitative data did not coincide with the qualitative data when considering gender as an element in their ascendency to the superintendency. For example, 100% of the town superintendents indicated in the quantitative data that gender
played no part in their ascendency to the superintendency. The qualitative data, however revealed childhood experiences where gender discrimination was experienced, described career choices that were made based on the expectations of the traditional female role within the family unit, and related perceptions of different expectations within specific job functions due to their gender. Town participants described experiences throughout their life that transpired in a way that were influenced based on their gender and shaped their professional decision-making, contrary to the quantitative data.

Similar to the rural superintendents, town superintendents reported that their journey to the superintendency was influenced by their ability to relate to the demographics of the area. Although operating in many different roles within this specific educational context, town superintendents saw their knowledge of and stability within the town districts as important to their route to the superintendency.

**Suburban**

None of the female superintendents in the suburban context expressed early desire or intention of becoming a superintendent. Suburban leaders occupied many levels of educational positions before becoming superintendents. The descriptions of their journeys, however, were the most contradictory in relation to gender and their specific professional pathways. Quantitative analysis revealed that gender was not an issue, but the qualitative data detailed many interview procedures, political events, and professional incidents that emphasized their gender as an element in their road to the superintendency. Participants appeared to have struggled with gender differences more than superintendents from other contexts in relation to their journey as they delicately maneuvered their way through obtaining positions that ultimately led to the superintendency. This could be due to the fact that suburban positions are more competitive in
terms of gender appointment (Yeakey, Johnston, & Adkinson, 1986; Tallerico & Burstyn, 1996) and the number of available positions within the suburban context. Suburban superintendents were more cognizant of the gender obstacles they faced in both making and creating career opportunities.

When exploring the collection of the quantitative data of all of the participants in terms of obstacles, the biggest challenge to the superintendency reported within the suburban context was the lack of confidence and aspiration levels. Although this was not a major issue reported specifically by the suburban participants, the addition of the qualitative data helped to shed light on the suburban participants’ interpretation of their professional path in terms of confidence and aspiration levels to the superintendency within the suburban context. In the qualitative data suburban participants cited the unawareness of their potential to be a superintendent, and their detailed descriptions of their lack of ambition to seek the superintendent position.

**Urban**

Urban superintendents reported that their relatability to the demographics within this educational context was a key component to a superintendent appointment in an urban district. Although not readily disclosed qualitatively, the quantitative data indicated that race was a component to their journey and ultimate position of superintendent. Women of color made up 80% of the total urban participants, and 67% of the urban participants interviewed for the qualitative data. Similar to superintendents from other contexts, though the urban participants did not ambitiously seek out the superintendency, they certainly made visionary career decisions along a traditional route that kept them on a direct path to the position.

Similar to the females in the other contexts, urban superintendents divulged gender related experiences that conflicted with the quantitative data. Qualitative data described incidents and
observations for the urban superintendents that were gender based and consequently had an effect on career decisions, while the quantitative data overwhelmingly indicated otherwise. Although acutely aware of the seemingly competitive environment they were in all along their professional journey in terms of males and females in the superintendency, urban superintendents approached their contributions to their profession on a more global level, giving little thought to any type of obstacles they may have faced along the way.

Urban participants, just as was with town participants, indicated that they ended up at the superintendent level as the result of being recruited and encouraged by colleagues. Networking and various career positions enabled them to advance in their careers. As they moved through their positions they were able to gain more experiences and develop relationships with more people within the profession. Their more expansive background at various levels resulted in more opportunity for advancement to the superintendency.

Although total participants responses indicated that the main reason female superintendents are not applying to urban districts is relocation, urban participants indicated in both the quantitative data and the qualitative data that they were very mobile and often embraced relocation. They were very comfortable with transitioning from one area to another, and consider it simply as an aspect of their job. It should be noted, however, that a concept not addressed in this study is that participants from the rural, town, and suburban districts may have been content in their present position, opting not to pursue or take a position that would move them further away from direct contact with students. The journeys of the urban superintendents were substantially more diverse than superintendents serving in other educational contexts in terms of experiences both inside and outside of the public educational environment. The urban superintendents reported experiencing leadership positions and the superintendency in other states, had held leadership positions within
educational consulting or state created organizations, and had worked in the public sector in leadership positions.

**How do female superintendents in Indiana differ in their ascendency to the superintendency according to the educational context in which they serve?**

The female participants in Indiana serving in the rural contexts experience a different pathway to the superintendency than the individuals serving in town, suburban, and urban contexts. Rural superintendents move up through the district based on their track record and reputation in the community, moving from a principal position directly to the superintendency. The ultimate appointment to superintendency for rural superintendents is often the result of the lack of leadership positions between the principalship and superintendency. Town, suburban, and urban district superintendents, however occupied various levels of leadership between the principal and superintendent position citing their pathway as more traditional in nature.

There is evidence that race and relatability to demographics could be a clear component to the superintendency, especially for the participants in the rural and urban districts. Although the data were conflictual in terms of quantitative and qualitative, racial compatibility emerged as an issue. In the quantitative data, participants reported that their race was not a factor in hiring decisions (rural 94%, and urban 100%), yet qualitative data exposed clear evidence that women of color and Caucasian women experienced events that described their particular race to be a positive component to their appointment as superintendent.

The qualitative data indicated the presence of challenges in terms of gender in all contexts. Again, this was not revealed in the quantitative data. The participants in all contexts of the qualitative data discussed how they observed or experienced challenges that were representative of the Women’s Place Model, the Discrimination Model, and the Meritocracy Model (the three
barrier models reported by Miller, Washington, and Fiene in Chapter 2). Acceptance of female roles in terms of the female position within the family unit, traditional professional career options for women, and the lack of positive mentors, especially in the rural context exist as examples of the Women’s Place Model. Reflective of the Discrimination Model is the quantitative information reported by all participants that indicated the perceptions of the school board was a deterrent in the application to rural schools. Although not described in the quantitative data, participants also reported types of challenges that were mostly representative of the Discrimination Model in the qualitative data. Participants, particularly those in rural and suburban contexts, told stories of gender-biased remarks and interview questions from board school members. Another example of the Discrimination Model can be found in the urban context qualitative data, where statements were made in relation to witnessing the Good Ol’ Boy system. All participants in the qualitative data remarked that the clear statistics, regardless of educational context, along with their professional observations, indicate that there is a gender discrepancy within the superintendency in Indiana (79% male, 22% female). There were multiple comments concerning aspiration levels from all participants, however, that were reflective of the Meritocracy Model. The awareness that there was a possibility or an opportunity to be a superintendent was non-existent. In the town and rural contexts, in particular, qualitative data revealed the participants belief that they must appear to be twice as good as men in order to obtain equal status within their jobs is also reflective of the Meritocracy Model. Finally, the evidence of the Meritocracy Model can be seen in the quantitative data where the historical and present absence of females in the superintendency presented the participants with observational learning that potentially affected their self-efficacy rating and their ability to reach the goal of becoming a superintendent.
Relationship to Feminist Theories

Although it could be argued that this study reflects a combination of all four of the feminist theories cited in the review of the literature, the social and liberal perspectives are more germane to this particular study. The social theory focuses on the oppression of women due to the cultural perception of their roles as wife, mother, caretaker of the home, and a member of the working class. The research captured evidence of these types of oppression within specific educational contexts. The liberal theory is based on the idea that women are oppressed because they lack opportunity socially, economically, and politically. The data collected also documented descriptions of oppressions that are reflective of this view.

Social Theory

The social theory explains the current state of female oppression as the result of the relationship between gender and class. Both the statistical data and qualitative data provide explanations that are supportive of this theory. The simple statistics of the historical and current data of the number of female superintendents compared to the number of male superintendents is reflective of a class issue. Nationally, over a period of 100 years from 1910 to 2010 (Figure 2.2) females in the superintendency have never risen above 24% when compared to males. The perception that society expects family/personal obligations to be a higher priority over career relocation for women when compared to men mirrors the data found in the research. The superintendents especially in the rural area expressed this conflict, grouping themselves in a separate category. African American women of the study can be considered a separate class because their gender and their color had an impact on the location (urban) of their superintendency and their professional status. In addition, all three of the obstacle models described in chapter 2 illustrated the social implications explained in the socialist theory. Both the quantitative data and
the qualitative data exposed professional conflicts and lack of professional opportunities for females as a result of societal female role expectations, community/political norms, and personal responsibilities based on their gender. For example, both sets of data for the rural superintendents described the reluctance to relocate as an issue when seeking the superintendency. One of the female role expectations cited in the social theory is family obligations and the woman’s role to be the primary childcare provider and mate supporter. In addition, the paradox between a majority of the teachers within the educational profession being female and the consistently low number of female superintendents presents a separation of class between males and females for consideration. The awareness of the impact of the relationship between gender and social norms helps to increase the understanding of the feminist social theory.

**Liberal Theory**

The liberal theory bases female oppression on the premise that females are judged by male standards. Since males have conducted a large portion of the research on this topic, the current available information may be biased (Blount, 1998; Brunner, 2000; Chase, 1995; Dunlap & Smuck, 1995). My research and mixed-method approach supported this theory and afforded the opportunity to collect data not presented from the perception of male standards. As the researcher, I am a female superintendent. Although it could be argued that my research could be biased because I am a female superintendent conducting the research, the environment in which the qualitative data was collected was more candid due to my shared gender and position. The individual experiences of the participants could be justly reported due to involvement of the researcher and is parallel to the viewpoint of the liberal theory. Also reflective of the liberal approach is the participants’ consistent reports of lack of opportunity. Whether obvious to the respondents or not, lack of legislation and implementation of legislation (Title IX) played a role in
the appointment of female superintendents in Indiana, also reflective of the liberal feminist theory. It was substantiated that there was the perception that the lack of opportunity existed in both the quantitative data and the qualitative data, and the historical research documented legislation (Title IX) that opened the doors for women and educational administrative positions that lead to the superintendency position (Mertz, 2006). Finally, the liberal theory celebrates the skills and abilities of the individual woman. By conducting one on one interviews with the women, the unique responses of each participant helped to shape the research in a way that portrayed the core concepts of the liberal feminism theory. The value of applying the feminist liberal theory to research has been increased due to the study.

**Implications**

Female disproportionate representation in the position of superintendent of public school districts in the state of Indiana has historically been and continues to be an issue worthy of further investigation. In order to truly increase the depth of knowledge as to why this phenomenon continues to plague the state and the country, more research needs to be conducted by women. As women of all educational contexts make their way to the superintendency through a minefield of social/political guidelines, limited professional opportunities, and challenging personal decisions simply because of their gender, students are not educated equitably. Students are not being afforded the diversity or quality of educational experience they deserve. Grogan advised that “until there is a more equitable distribution of women in the highest levels of educational leadership, we are sending a message that says women’s leadership is still not much valued” (2005, pg. 26). Approximately one half of any student classroom in Indiana is female. By not giving female students the opportunity to observe female superintendents as role models we are limiting female students’ viewpoint of career possibilities. This hold true for female students in
relation to female superintendents, and it also speaks to females in any type of authoritative position.

Not only does the lack of female leadership in districts impact the students in the classroom, it also impacts the entire field of educational leadership. The absence of women in the environment of policy changes, decisions, and practice in the field could result in educational change that is lacking in the input of skillful and knowledgeable individuals. The development of appropriate structures and support systems to promote gender equity in educational leadership is critical because the most effective leaders need to be in those roles regardless of their gender. Districts can benefit by capitalizing on the advantages of different perspectives, and only then will the best decisions be made in terms of effective change in education and the enhancement of educational outcomes.

In order for these structures and systems to be developed a new understanding of leadership in terms of gender must occur. Continuing to research this topic will increase the understanding of the issues, but the research must also focus on topics that give within-group consideration. “It cannot be unilaterally assumed that experiences of women based on their social and ethnic location are the same or similar” (Fitzgerald, 2003, pg.23). Studies conducted in this way will help to ensure quality gender representation and avoid invalid or erroneous comparisons. Further study in this manner would be a catalyst for the development of a new understanding in terms of educational leadership and perhaps enhance the value in mixed method research.

Studies on gender issues in educational leadership must be better supported by professional organizations and educational institutions. Data collection procedures along with the inclusion of additional variables within the research (such as gender) must be better reported and more highly examined in studies about educational leadership. Communicating the awareness of this need to
our national, federal, and state organizations, along with institutions of higher education, will result in higher quality research. Educational bodies can then prepare prospective and practicing leaders in way that will maximize the possibility of a population of school leaders that are more diverse.

As a result of this study there are more questions that need to be explored. The major theme throughout all contexts was that what women were willing to report on paper and what they divulged in a more comfortable environment was strikingly different. This calls attention to the fact that women do not feel comfortable documenting aspects of their work environment within the field of public educational leadership, and are very guarded in relation to what they are willing to reveal. Without authentic information, strategies to address the issue of gender equity in the superintendency will be difficult to identify and implement. More qualitative data needs to be researched and shared.

Additional focus on differential pathways to the superintendency for males and females is worth further investigation. With the exception of rural female superintendents, studies need to ask why (in the town, suburban, and rural districts) women move from the principal position to the superintendent position at a slower rate than men. Although a limitation of this study was the comparison of women to men, research on this topic would add valuable information to the help explain the lack of female superintendents and their less gradual ascendency to the position.

Questions concerning the selection process and appointment procedures in terms of gender equity need to be researched. The types of questions and comments in interviews that reflect personal gender bias need to be researched and reported so as to educate school boards in their quest to locate the right candidates for their superintendent positions, regardless of gender. Not only is their gender inequity in the superintendency in Indiana, gender inequity exists within specific educational contexts in Indiana. Questioning how particular contexts can recruit and
attract more female candidates would add knowledge and valuable information to the discrepancy.

Information revealed by the sample participants prompts a final question that would add tremendous information to this phenomenon. The question could be asked as to why some communities, school boards, and school districts continue to place female superintendents in a category different from men, with separate expectations to define them as a qualified candidate for the superintendency and/or successful leader of a school district. Although not heavily explored in this study, research in this manner would help to answer many questions concerning gender equity and the female pursuit of and appointment to the superintendency.
APPENDIX A: Survey Instrument

DEMOGRAPHICS

Name:

Age:

Ethnicity:

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

School Corporation:

School corporation educational context:
- Rural
- Town
- Suburban
- Urban

PROFESSIONAL HISTORY

Number of years in current position:
Total number of superintendent positions held:

Please complete the following questions related to your superintendent positions.

SUPERINTENDENT POSITION #1

School Corporation Name of Superintendent Position #1

School corporation educational context of position #1

☐ Rural
☐ Town
☐ Suburban
☐ Urban

A reason why I accepted my first position as superintendent was my inability to relocate.

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
The urbanicity of my first superintendent position was desirable.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason why I was offered my first superintendent position was the lack of male interest and male candidates applying for the position.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason why I was offered my first superintendent position is my ethnicity.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
A reason why I was offered my first superintendent position is my gender.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason why I was offered my first superintendency was the evidence of my leadership skills in previously held positions.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason why I was offered my first superintendency was the school board's perception of my ability to relate to the demographic population of that particular school corporation.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
A reason why I was offered my first superintendent position was my experience at multiple levels within school district/districts.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

In how many corporations have you served as superintendent?

- Only one superintendent position
- Two superintendent positions
- More than two superintendent positions

PREVIOUS POSITION

What was your most recent position before being hired to your current position as superintendent?

- Title of Position
- Number of Years
- Educational Context
Other previous positions before being hired for your first superintendent position:

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<td>Title of Position</td>
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<td>Educational Context</td>
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Please rank order from 1 to 7 the obstacles that you perceive to have prolonged or historically prevented you from APPLYING for a position as a superintendent.

- Unwillingness/inability to relocate
- Necessity of a longer and more varied career path
- Perceptions and/or agendas of school board or selection consultant
- Particular demographic needs and location of the school corporation
- Lack of confidence and/or aspiration levels
- Willingness to live within the social expectations of the female role
- The organizational structure of the school corporation that valued middle and high school administrative experience over elementary/central office directorship experience

Please indicate the educational context corresponding to each particular obstacle rank ordered in the previous question.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Educational context</th>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Town</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
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Please rank order from 1 to 7 the obstacles that you perceive to have prolonged or historically impacted your decision on whether or not to ACCEPT a position as a superintendent.

1. Unwillingness/ inability to relocate
2. Necessity of a longer and more varied career path
3. Perceptions and/or agendas of school board or selection consultant
4. Particular demographic needs and location of the school corporation
5. Lack of confidence and/or aspiration levels
6. Willingness to live within the social expectations of the female role
7. The organizational structure of the school corporation that valued middle and high school administrative experience over elementary/central office directorship experience

Please indicate the educational context corresponding to each particular obstacle rank ordered in the previous question.

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As a child, adolescent, or young adult what were your thoughts about educational leadership? Did you ever dream of becoming a superintendent? Why or Why not?
Are there any events in your college career or professional employment path that you experienced before becoming a superintendent that were significant to your current philosophy on gender in educational leadership roles? If so, please explain.

Do you perceive there to be a relationship between legislative changes such as No Child Left Behind and Title IX and female superintendency placement? If so, please explain.

Would you be open to an interview to further discuss your thoughts and perceptions in relation to the female superintendency in Indiana?

☐ Yes
☐ No

Thank you for taking my survey. If you have questions or concerns about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact me at any of the following address: candis.haskell@bsu.edu, candis.haskell@sspencer.k12.in.us, Work Number: 812-649-2591.

SUPERINTENDENT POSITION #2
School Corporation name of superintendent position #2:

School Corporation educational context of position #2:
- Rural
- Town
- Suburban
- Urban

A reason I accepted my second position as superintendent was my inability to relocate.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

The urbanicity of my second superintendent position was desirable.
- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
A reason I was offered my second superintendent position was the lack of male interest and male candidates applying for the position.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my second superintendent position is my ethnicity.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my second superintendent position is my gender.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
A reason I was offered my second superintendency was the evidence of my leadership skills in previously held positions.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my second superintendency was the school board's perception of my ability to relate to the demographic population of that particular school corporation.

- Strong Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my second superintendent position was my experience at multiple levels within school district/districts.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
SUPERINTENDENT POSITION #3

School Corporation name of Superintendent Position #3:

[Blank space]

School corporation educational context of position #3

- Rural
- Town
- Suburban
- Urban

A reason I accepted my third position as superintendent was my inability to relocate.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

[Blank space]

The urbanicity of my third superintendent position was desirable.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

[Blank space]
A reason I was offered my third superintendent position was the lack of male interest and male candidates applying for the position.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my third superintendent position is my ethnicity.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my third superintendent position is my gender.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
A reason I was offered my third superintendency was the evidence of my leadership skills in previously held positions.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my third superintendency was the school board's perception of my ability to relate to the demographic population of that particular school corporation.

- Strong Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:

A reason I was offered my third superintendent position was my experience at multiple levels within school district/districts.

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Please explain your answer:
APPENDIX B: E-mail #1

Dear Superintendent______________,

As a doctoral candidate at Ball State University, I am collecting data for my dissertation study. My topic of the contextual analysis of females journey to the superintendency has led me to send you this email.

If you would like to help me collect the vital data I need in order to conduct the study, please answer the questions on the following survey link and return it to me by May 30, 2014. There are closed and open-ended questions on the survey, but it should take no longer than 10-15 minutes to complete.

http://miller.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?Q_SS=e5vQRXJFu7WavGt_cShqmmn859ESaAt&_=1

Thank you, in advance, for your willingness to complete the survey.

Candis Haskell, Superintendent
South Spencer County School District
Work Phone – 812-649-2591
Cell Phone – 812-599-1212
Email Address – Candis.Haskell@sspencer.k12.in.us
Dear Superintendent ________________,

Recently a link to a survey was emailed to you asking you to complete the questions on the survey. The questions were created as result of a research study I am conducting regarding the contextual analysis of females journey to the superintendency in Indiana. As I have yet to receive a response from you, this is a gentle reminder asking you to access the survey link and complete the survey. With a limited number of eligible participants, it is crucial that I receive as many responses as possible.

I thank you for your willingness to help and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Candis Haskell, Superintendent  
South Spencer County School District  
Work Phone – 812-649-2591  
Cell Phone – 812-599-1213  
Email Address – Candis.Haskell@sspencer.k12.in.us
Dear Superintendent ________________.

It was a pleasure to speak to you on the telephone today about your willingness to respond to the survey I previously sent about a study I am conducting about the contextual analysis of females journey to the superintendency in Indiana. Thank you very much for agreeing to complete the survey.

The link to the survey is:

http://miller.az1.qualtrics.com/SE/?Q_SS=e5vQRXJFy7WavGt_cShqmmn859ESSaAt&_=1

I look forward to receiving your feedback.

Sincerely

Candis Haskell, Superintendent
South Spencer County School District

Work Phone – 812-649-2591
Cell Phone – 812-599-1213
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APPENDIX E

A Contextual Analysis of Females Journey to the Superintendency in Indiana

Adult consent form

Study title: A contextual analysis of females journey to the superintendency in Indiana by Candis Haskell (primary investigator)

Study purpose and rationale: The purpose of the research project is to examine the phenomenon of location and quantity of female superintendents in Indiana. From this research educators will become more aware of the lack of diversity in the superintendent position in Indiana, and individuals will be motivated to increase their recruitment and hiring of female superintendents within the state in within specific demographical locations.

Inclusion/exclusion criteria: To be eligible to participate in the study you must be a female and you must currently be serving as superintendent in the state of Indiana.

Participation procedures and duration: For this study you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview with the primary investigator about your experiences leading to the superintendency, your observations in relation to your current superintendent position, and your perceptions of your superintendency within specific educational contexts.

Audio recording: The interviews will be audio taped for purposes of accuracy. The recording will be used as part of my dissertation research and to ensure that I have accurately transcribed your comments. Only I will have access to the recordings, and all recordings will be stored on a password-protected laptop that will also be stored in a locked cabinet in my office. Once transcribed, a pseudonym will be attached to the transcript so that no identifiable information will be associated with the comments. All recordings will be destroyed once the study is completed. “Do I have your permission to tape this interview?”

Data confidentiality: All data will be maintained as confidential and no identifying information such as names will appear in any publication or presentation of data.

Storage of data: Paper data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in the primary investigator’s office. The primary investigator will have access to the data at all times. The data will also be entered into a software program and stored on the primary investigator’s password-protected computer. The data will be retained for 10 years in order to assist in a follow-up study.

Risks: There are no anticipated risks for participating in this study.

Benefits: There are no anticipated benefits for participating in this study.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw your permission at any time for any reason without penalty or prejudice from the
investigator. Please feel free to ask any questions of the investigator before signing this informed consent form and at any time during the study.

IRB contact information: For questions about your rights as a research subject, please contact Director, Office of Research Integrity, Ball State University, Muncie, IN 47306, (765) 285-5070, irb@bsu.edu

Study title: A contextual analysis of females journey to the superintendency in Indiana by Candis Haskell (primary investigator).

Adult Consent: I agree to participate in this research project titled, “Female Superintendents in Indiana; Exploring the Educational Contexts in Which They Serve.” I have had the study explained to me and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I have read the description of this project and give my consent to participate. I understand that I will receive a copy of this informed consent form to keep for future reference.

__________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s Signature                       Date
APPENDIX F: Interview Protocol

A Contextual Analysis of Females Journey to the Superintendency In Indiana

Superintendent interview protocol form

Date____________________

Time____________________

Educational Context_____________

Interviewee_______________

Release form signed? _____

Thank you for taking the time to interview with me, (name of interviewee). In researching the journey to and placement of women in the position of public school superintendent in the state of Indiana, I would like to gain a better understanding of why there are so few women superintendents, and how the unbalanced placement of these women in particular educational contexts (urban, suburban, town, rural) is achieved. The information collected from this interview will be used as a part of my dissertation and will remain confidential.

I am looking forward to learning from your thoughts and ideas about how you came to be in your present position, and the valuable experiences you have benefited from along the way. If I happen to ask any questions that you would prefer not to answer for any reason, please let me know and we will move on to the next question. Do you have any questions for me before we begin? Thank you again, for your assistance in my research. Here we go……..

Early Background

1. Please tell me about your family and background.

2. Do you have any significant memories that helped define who you are today?

3. What experiences in your early background helped shape your current philosophy on education?

4. Who was your role model? Why?

Educational Experiences

1. Please describe your elementary school, middle and high school experience in terms of educational context and what you remember most about those formative years.
2. What were your perceptions of your educational environment growing up in terms of gender?

3. Describe any college experiences that were significant in your life in terms of guiding you to your current career choice.

4. Do you remember a time when you began to formulate professional goals for yourself that ultimately resulted in your current position? When was that and what were your goals? How and/or did those goals change? Why?

5. Take me through the timeline and description of your career opportunities, employment choices, and employment rejections. Were there obstacles? If so, what were they? What were opportunities that seemed “rare” at the time? Why or why did you not take advantage of those opportunities?

**Current Superintendency**

1. In your appointment to your current superintendency, what are the biggest successes you’ve had? What are the biggest challenges you’ve faced?

2. How do you think your role is different from other women serving in an urban school district in Indiana?

3. How do you think your role is different from other women serving in a rural district in Indiana?

4. How do you think your role is different from other women serving in a town district in Indiana?

5. How do you think your role is different from other women serving in a suburban school district in Indiana?

6. What are your thoughts in relation to the role gender and social perceptions play in the placement of women superintendents in urban, rural, town, and/or suburban school systems?

7. What is your perception of the relationship between the size or the location of a school district and whether or not a female has a greater chance of becoming a superintendent?

8. How would you advise women aspiring to be a superintendent in Indiana? Would your advice differ based on educational context? How would you advise them to obtain a superintendent position in a rural, town, suburban, or urban area?

9. Research indicates there are three explanations for the specific locations of female superintendents. They are the following:
1. Inability to relocate.
2. Lack of male interest and application to rural and urban schools gives more opportunity for women to become superintendent in those particular educational contexts.
3. African American women are heavily recruited to urban schools due to the demographic make-up of urban schools and the perceived need on how to meet the cultural needs of that particular school system.

What are your thoughts on these three explanations for the locality of female superintendents in Indiana?
References


An impossible job? The view from the urban superintendent’s chair. Seattle, Washington: Center on Reinventing Public Education.


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Tallerico, M. (2000). Gaining access to the superintendency: Headhunting, gender, and


University of Saskatchewan.


