

1-1-2013

Examining the career experiences among Oregon female school superintendents

Heather Hutchinson Cordie
George Fox University

This research is a product of the Doctor of Education (EdD) program at George Fox University. [Find out more](#) about the program.

Recommended Citation

Cordie, Heather Hutchinson, "Examining the career experiences among Oregon female school superintendents" (2013). *Doctor of Education (EdD)*. Paper 20.
<http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/edd/20>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Education at Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Doctor of Education (EdD) by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ George Fox University.

EXAMINING THE CAREER EXPERIENCES AMONG OREGON FEMALE SCHOOL
SUPERINTENDENTS

By

Heather Hutchinson Cordie

FACULTY RESEARCH COMMITTEE:

Chair: Terry Huffman, Ph.D.

Members: Scot Headley, Ph.D. and Marc Shelton, Ed.D.

Presented to the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department

of George Fox University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

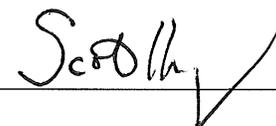
Doctor of Education

March 18, 2013

George Fox University
School of Education
Newberg, Oregon

“EXAMINING THE CAREER EXPERIENCES AMONG OREGON FEMALE SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENTS,” a Doctoral research project prepared by HEATHER H. CORDIE in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Education degree in the Educational Foundations and Leadership Department.

This dissertation has been approved and accepted by:

<u>4/11/13</u>	<u></u>	Committee Chair
Date	Terry Huffman, PhD	Professor of Education
<u>4/9/13</u>	<u></u>	
Date	Scot Headley, PhD	Professor of Education
<u>4/9/13</u>	<u></u>	
Date	Marc Shelton, EdD	Professor of Education

ABSTRACT

Despite representing the majority of the teaching ranks in our K-12 public school systems, women continue to be underrepresented in the position of K-12 superintendent. Women make-up approximately 65% of the educational workforce, yet they only fill about 14% of the superintendent positions (Brunner, 2000). Research indicates that women experience different career paths from their male counterparts, their opportunities to benefit from mentors and other, formal/informal support structures are quite different, and the definition and description of their role varies considerably as they ascend to the role of superintendent. This study explores the experiences of four women who serve as superintendents in Oregon. Of interest are the career trajectories and experiences of these four women as they ascended to the superintendency. Data were collected using a purposive sampling strategy.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Work and research of this sort takes the support, guidance, sacrifice and contributions of many people, who live and serve in a variety of roles. In my case, at the top of that long list is my husband, Tony Cordie, whose strength, patience, encouragement and belief in me were sometimes the only things that pushed me through some of the challenges I faced in this journey. The depths of my appreciation for his love and support know no bounds and I adore and cherish him with all of my heart. My sons, Tanner Kern Scheibner and Zachary Nolan Scheibner, have been so very patient with me (and sometimes my lack of involvement in their lives) as I have pursued this degree while also serving in a very demanding role as a K-12 superintendent of schools. Boys, I love you so very much and I am so thankful for such kind, patient, supportive and caring children. You are amazing young men and will do wonderful things in your lives. My parents, my sister, my closest friends and colleagues, in addition to my school board of directors, each supported and encouraged me in this endeavor, whether they knew it or not, and I am grateful for having them in my life. Also present along the path of this journey were the faculty that supported me, and I thank them for their wisdom and for their belief in me and my passion around this topic. Specifically, Terry Huffman, Marc Shelton and Scott Headley, whose guidance and direction I will never forget and will always remain grateful. Finally, to each of the four superintendents interviewed during this research, though they remain anonymous, I am humbled to have been blessed by learning your stories. I consider it an honor to serve and lead alongside such strong, brilliant women.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1	1
Introduction.....	1
Statement of the Problem.....	2
Research Questions.....	3
Key Terms.....	3
Limitations and Delimitations.....	4
Bracketing.....	4
CHAPTER 2	6
Review of the Literature	6
The Career Path to the Superintendency.....	6
The Role of Mentoring and Support Systems and the Superintendent.....	9
Leadership Role of Female Superintendents	13
Conclusions from the Literature Review	15
CHAPTER 3	17
Methods.....	17
Sampling Strategy, Participants, and Research Design	17
Research Ethics.....	18
Data Collection and Analytical Procedures	19
Role of the Researcher and Potential Contributions of the Research.....	20

CHAPTER 4	22
Findings.....	22
Superintendent 1 (S1)	22
Superintendent 2 (S2)	27
Superintendent 3 (S3)	33
Superintendent 4 (S4)	38
CHAPTER 5	44
Discussion.....	44
Research Question #1	45
Research Question #2	48
Research Question #3	50
Suggestion for Future Research and Implications for Scholarship.....	52
Implications for Educational Professionals	54
Conclusions.....	55
REFERENCES	57
APPENDIX A Guide Questions	61
APPENDIX B Letter of Consent	62

Chapter 1

Introduction

The role of American school superintendent has historically been a position that is dominated by white males (Brunner, 1998; Polka, Litchka, & Davis, 2008). While women have comprised a very high percentage of the teacher ranks, the percentage of women in the role of superintendent does not reflect that same distribution. As early education became more feminized through an increasing number of female teachers, administrative positions were viewed as a way for men to stay in education (Montz & Wanat, 2008). Indeed, “Of the 13,728 school superintendents in the United States, 11,744 are men and 1,984 are women” (Glass, 2000, p. 28). The U.S. Census Bureau has identified the superintendency as the most male-dominated executive position of any profession in the United States (Bjork, 2000; de Santa Ana, 2008; Dobie & Hummel, 2001; Polka et al., 2008; Skrla, 2000a; Skrla & Reyes, 2000).

Changes are occurring. The American Association of School Administrators (2010) conducted their decennial study on public school leadership and noted 24.1% of the respondents were women, up from 13.2% in 2000. The notion that women teach and men manage is a theme that has emerged in various bodies of research (Skrla & Reyes, 2000; Tallerico & Blount, 2004). While the majority of the superintendencies are filled by white males there are data from a study conducted by Glass and Franceschini, (as cited by Derrington & Sharratt, 2008) indicating that the percentage of female superintendents nationwide increased from approximately 12% in the late 1990s to 22% in 2006. They also calculate that at the current rate of average annual increase, by 2035 we will see a 50-50 gender ratio in superintendents.

It is important to understand the factors that may help female superintendents achieve that ratio and to even accelerate the rate of growth as well to help ensure success in their role. As such, there are important academic and practical implications in exploring the factors related to the female superintendency. Nevertheless, men continue to dominate educational administration, particularly the superintendency, the percentage of women in these jobs is increasing (Reed & Patterson, 2007).

Brunner (1996) suggests that women “stalk” the superintendency as they attempt to move into positions typically filled by men and that they tend to approach those positions somewhat warily and, thus, are rarely hired for those positions. They state, “...in fact, about ninety-three percent of the time the position is filled by a man” (p. 2). In this case, the term “stalk” refers to a rather tenuous and precarious approach taken by women as they identify and then attempt to assume roles they believe will help better position them to ascend to the superintendency. This “stalking” process is one by which women study and prepare for the position only to find that a staggeringly high percentage of the time the position is filled by a man (Brunner, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to examine the career experiences of four female school superintendents. Specifically, I will use personal interviews to explore the nature of the career path, mentoring elements and support structures, and the manner in which they define their roles. An objective of the investigation is to gain understanding about the dynamics articulated by the participants who have entered the superintendency.

Research Questions

Based on the nature of this study I posed general research questions while anticipating greater levels of specificity to emerge. Thus, associated with the identified problem, the following research questions were examined:

Research Question #1

What is the nature of the career path of the participant?

Research Question #2

What mentoring elements and support structures did the participant experience in her ascension to the superintendency?

Research Question #3

In what manner does the participant define her role as a superintendent in Oregon?

Key Terms

Career Path: For purposes of this study, this refers to the roles, responsibilities and assignments that one has assumed, or filled, over the course of her career in education.

Leadership Role: The way in which a superintendent describes her function(s) within a K-12 school district.

Mentor: A wise and trusted counselor, teacher, influential supporter.

School Boards: The elected body (typically consisting of five, seven or nine members) that hires the district's superintendent and creates policy.

Superintendent: The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the school district and is hired by the school board to manage the administrative affairs of the district.

Support Structure: An individual, group, and/or network for which an aspiring superintendent can rely upon for collegiality, trust and assistance.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study involved interviews with women currently serving in the role of superintendent. While the detailed information expected from those interviews provided a great deal of insight into the career paths, mentoring and support structures, and roles performed by these female superintendents, it is recognized that a limitation of the study is the inability to generalize the findings to the larger superintendent group in Oregon and the United States.

Though the small sample size can clearly be viewed as a limitation, it is expected that it will also provide a much more detailed and thorough look at the experiences of the female superintendents. It should be noted that these details would likely not be possible via a survey or other method of gathering information.

While the limitations are linked most closely with the ability to generalize the findings out to the larger group, there are also a number of important delimitations. The focus of this study is limited to superintendents in a specific geographic area, specifically the Willamette Valley located in Oregon. Additionally, the number of superintendents who were interviewed, as well as the fact that only superintendents from Oregon were interviewed, are delimitations.

Bracketing

It is important to acknowledge the current position within which I serve and the potential for prior relationships between the four participants and me. As already noted within this study, I am female and currently serve in the role of K-12 superintendent within a 5,000-student public

school district in the state of Oregon. Additionally, due to the relative scarcity of women in these roles, it is likely that I have already had some level of a relationship established with the participants.

I took deliberate care to elicit feedback from my committee chair in the refinement of my research and interview questions. Any prior relationships that existed between and among the participants and I potentially led to a more honest and open conversation about their experiences as they ascended to the superintendency.

Chapter 2

Review of the Literature

The structure of the review of literature includes a summary of the existing research related to the career path to the superintendency, the role of mentoring and support systems to the superintendent, and the leadership role of female superintendents.

The Career Path to the Superintendency

Although they begin their careers with similar entry points, education administrators travel different paths toward the superintendency relative to their individual and organizational situations (Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). The majority of superintendents got where they are by following one of two career paths: from teacher to principal to superintendent, or from teacher to principal to central office administrator to superintendent (Natale, 1992). It is possible that for women the path to the superintendency varies from that of their male counterparts long before the role is assumed. Nevertheless, almost all superintendents come from the teaching profession (McCabe, 2001). That is, there is a body of research suggesting that the recruitment process is the genesis for the path to differentiate between male and female superintendent candidates and that school boards are sometimes reluctant to hire women superintendents (Glass, 2000). The process of identifying the best candidates permits those that are a part of the search process to have predispositions about the qualities and traits they want to be evident in the candidate they select (Newton, 2006). Moreover, research also suggests that announcements for superintendent vacancies that focus on and require administrative experience overlook other curriculum-related leadership experience that are often held by women. More closely evaluating the recruitment

message and how it may affect the advancement of women is critical because although women make-up approximately 65% of the educational workforce, they only fill about 14% of the superintendent positions (Brunner, 2000).

While the recruitment and headhunting processes for the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of school districts may play a role in the reason why there are proportionately so few females assuming those roles, it certainly is not the sole reason for the low numbers. In 1997, an Indiana study involving all 15 of that state's female superintendents found that the participants represented all types and sizes of school districts. Of special note is that many of the female superintendents did not encounter an experience common among their male counterparts – namely, applying for a large number of superintendencies prior to actually being employed in the position they currently held. Many had been promoted internally to the top administrative position by the school board with no formal search process being conducted. These experiences seem to reinforce the notion that women benefit from having the opportunity to serve and prove themselves in other highly-visible positions other than the superintendency (Kowalski & Stouder, 1999).

Various models have been offered to explain why there are so few women filling the role of superintendent. Sharp, Malone, Walter, and Supley (2004) suggest that one perspective comes from the psychological point of view that attempts to explain the gender segregation. That is, many different researchers identified theories directly linked to psychological barriers among women that led to low numbers within the superintendency. Another perspective is linked to the limited opportunities available for women and that the limitations are experienced more from external versus internal obstacles. A third approach, as explained by Glass (2000), suggests that

society as a whole is to blame and that the societal roles expectations of women largely influence why there are so few women in the role of superintendent.

Glass (2000) identifies seven reasons why females fall behind their male counterparts in top district positions. One of those reasons relates to the fact that women are not in positions normally leading to the superintendency. Specifically, women tend to have leadership experiences in the district office that are very different from men; women often fill curriculum-related roles while men have more experience in fiscal or human-resource positions (Brunner & Kim, 2010). Women are more inclined to stay in their teaching assignments longer than their male counterparts before applying for administrative positions (Glass, 2000; Grogan, 2008; Grogan, & Brunner, 2005; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). School boards frequently use fiscal and human-resource related experiences as a key criterion in hiring superintendents. They often do not see women superintendents as being strong managers nor do they view women superintendents as being capable of handling the district's fiscal resources. As a result, they lean toward identifying candidates with more managerial experience as opposed to curriculum experience (Glass, 2000; Logan, 2000).

The typical route for men to the superintendency is secondary teacher, athletic coach, assistant secondary principal, secondary principal and then superintendent. On the other hand, typical pathway for women is moving from the positions of elementary or secondary teacher, club advisor, elementary principal, director/coordinator, assistant/associate superintendent and then superintendent (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Natale, 1992; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). Most notable, female superintendents are more likely to enter the position from an assistant superintendent post while their male counterparts tend to rise from a principal position. In fact, nearly 53% of male superintendents have done so (Pascopella, 2008; Yong-

Lyun & Brunner, 2009). Today, approximately 75% of elementary classroom teachers are women. Yet, nearly 75% of superintendents did not teach at the elementary level prior to working as a central office administrator or superintendent (Glass, 2000; Sharp, et al., 2004). Most superintendents started in secondary education which allows greater access to their district-wide participation, coaching roles, and opportunities for advancement (de Santa Ana, 2008; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). Additionally, very few women apply for and are hired to high school principalships. However, that is the primary position from which one ascends to the superintendency (Sharp et al., 2004).

There is also another issue at play as it relates to the career path of a female superintendent. Because there are few female superintendents, there are also few sage and experienced women in educational administration to offer support systems to aspiring female administrators (Washington, Miller, & Fiene, 2007). It has been argued that, “A mentor – someone with professional experience – is of paramount importance to navigating the path to the superintendency” (de Santa Ana, 2008, p. 26).

Mentoring and positive networks serve at least two purposes. First, professional and personal relationships assist in ascending to the role of superintendent. Second, once securing the position, these relationships provide support as the politics of the work become more and more prevalent and demanding.

The Role of Mentoring and Support Systems and the Superintendent

Existing research has identified the absence of formal and informal mentors and support systems/networks for female administrators while also documenting how critical those elements of support are to the accession of women into administrative roles (Dobie & Hummel, 2001;

FeKula & Roberts, 2005; Kamler, 2006; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Polka et al., 2008; Sharp et al., 2004). A common theme in the literature on female superintendents is that mentorship proves to be very helpful to success in the role. Banuelos (2008) stated, "Appropriate mentorship for women is an important aspect of creating success for new superintendents" (p. 30). She also added that the chance to "voice concerns and solve problems with a confidant will help women...resolve job concerns" (p. 30). The mentoring system for women is less-developed compared to men and "in general, men have traditionally been more successful than women in establishing and maintaining professional connections..." (Raskin, Haar & Robicheau, 2010, p. 159). Brunner and Grogan (2005) stated that the superintendency is a lonely profession that can be "dangerously stressful without adequate relief systems" and went further to state that women who serve in the role of superintendent must network (p. 49).

Not only does the absence of strong mentors and network systems leave female administrators without critical connections and support, but a study of female superintendents in Georgia suggests that the lack of the "buddy system" in which men refer their male comrades to other jobs works to the disadvantage of potential female administrators (Davis, 2007). In effect, the exclusion from the "good old boy network" serves as a serious barrier to female superintendent advancement. Sherman, Munoz, and Pankake (2008) acknowledge that traditionally mentoring in educational administration has been viewed as an "old boy network." They define this system as, "consisting of older male executives and male professors who typically prefer protégés who are junior versions of themselves..." (p. 245). Tallerico (2000) identifies women's "access to informal networks of influential others..." (p. 21) as a factor that differentially affects males' and females' career development. Is the glaring omission of female mentors and role models due to the fact that there are proportionately so few women in the role

of superintendent? Sherman and colleagues (2008) suggest the mere fact that men continue to hold the majority of the superintendencies places women at an immediate disadvantage when it comes to identifying and securing mentors and mentoring processes.

Frequently women are simply excluded from professional networks. Scholars have discussed the importance of sponsorship for women's access to administrative positions and concluded that, "Establishing relationships with sponsors is more difficult for women because mentoring dyads are generally within gender and race. Therefore, females tend to be excluded from these supports, which appear to be crucial to advancement" (Miller, Washington, & Fiene, 2006, p. 228).

While it is clear that there is a direct correlation between the low occurrences of female superintendents and the low number of female mentors, some research evidence indicates that women might not be the best role models and mentors for other women. Reed and Patterson (2007) studied 15 female superintendents in New York State. Through personal interviews they concluded that women do not necessarily know *how* to mentor other women and those relationships often become more competitive rather than one of a guiding or assistive nature. This study also revealed that most of the mentors for those 15 female superintendents were men. Interestingly, those male mentors were not always involved in the field of education. Mentors can truly come in many forms. For instance, one participant shared that her mentor was the school attorney and was someone with whom she could share ideas.

In another study of 15 female superintendents from a southwestern state, Dana and Bourisaw (2006) noted that it appeared as though female superintendents had negative stereotypes about other female educational leaders. They found that not all gender bias comes

from men in the educational leadership ranks and strong evidence suggests “women do not support other women in getting and keeping a superintendency...” (p. 29).

In response to the need for structured mentor opportunities for women (as well as people of color) and an awareness of the high percentage of graying, male superintendents that are approaching retirement, Kamler (2006), with support from grant funding and the Long Island, New York superintendents’ council, developed a mentoring network called the Aspiring Superintendents’ Study Group. This program was designed to provide a collaborative structure in order to identify emerging leaders and promote their interest in becoming superintendents. This model offers many elements from within that could potentially be replicated by other organizations as a means to create and support female superintendents and central office administrators. Specifically, the model was created to support practicing administrators and encourage aspiring administrators. It was conceived as an inclusive mentoring network in which invited, aspiring administrators could interact with superintendents who would provide inspiration and support to promote interest in the superintendency. Additionally, it included a career development component of mentoring in addition to assisting aspirants in their acquisition of additional knowledge and skills needed in preparing for the superintendency.

Although not fully conclusive, the majority of the research reviewed indicates that the lack of female mentors and networking opportunities for aspiring female superintendents and for females already serving in the role of superintendent, serve as barriers to the success of women in educational administration. It also appears as though there is substantial evidence that networking and connection-building offer a way for female superintendents to advance and enhance their career opportunities (Raskin et al., 2010).

Leadership Role of Female Superintendents

Women frequently view educational leadership differently than men. Generally, they consider two characteristics as vital in advancing to the superintendency: interpersonal skills, and knowledge of curriculum and instruction (Montz & Wanat, 2008). While the majority of women in education have assumed teaching roles and the majority of men in education have ascended to leadership roles, it is important to acknowledge some common themes that have emerged in the literature as it relates to the feminine leadership characteristics and ethics of women who do aspire to and fill the role of superintendent.

A multi-site case study examining Kentucky's female superintendents provides insight on the characteristics that have emerged as specific to female superintendents. As a result of that study, Washington et al. (2007) identified four patterns related to the professional work of female superintendents: an instructional focus for the district; professional knowledge and experience; putting children first; and being a change agent. All participants saw the superintendent as instructional leaders who are teachers at heart. In fact, most women superintendents believe their boards hired them to be instructional leaders rather than managers (Glass, 2000; Grogan & Brunner, 2005). They articulated their success by the growth of student achievement as opposed to building projects. When other central office administrators and board members were interviewed about the leadership characteristics of female superintendents they commented on their collaboration, their focus on children first and that they were curriculum centered. Data in that study indicated that these women spent 35% of their time visiting schools. These data are consistent with other research indicating the primary reason women pursue administrative credentials is because of the ability to improve student achievement (Young, 2001).

One factor linked closely to both career path and role definition is that of the length of tenure, or the number of years served, for most superintendents. Pascopella (2011) notes that research conducted by McREL, a nonprofit research group based in Denver, indicates a more lengthy superintendent tenure has a positive effect on student achievement and found a positive correlation between longevity and academic achievement.

Skrla (2000b) addressed the social construction of the role of public school superintendent being congruent with masculine characteristics as opposed to those that are more feminine in nature. Tallerico and Blount (2004) explain that school leadership is conceptualized in ways that emphasize competition and authority (stereotypically male characteristics) rather than collaboration and service (which are more closely linked to female administrators). Additionally, board members can't see women superintendents as being strong managers or capable of managing district finances (Glass, 2000; Logan, 2000). The Kentucky study of female superintendents indicates that the participants noted that the ability to manage the district finances was perceived as a male "stronghold" (Washington et al., 2007, p. 6). The women in that study revealed that, while they sought every possible opportunity to participate in the fiscal processes, they were confident enough in their leadership styles to encourage a collaborative setting where the right people were brought to the table to engage in the necessary discussions about finance. In other words, they did not feel as though they had to have all of the answers.

While the literature appears to indicate that female administrators generally possess such characteristics as collaboration, reflective decision-making, and putting children first (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Pascopella, 2008), it is also important to note that another theme frequently recurs in the literature. Specifically, consistently researchers note the presence of strong ethics demonstrated in the ability to take a stand for what is right for the students. The

Kentucky study of female superintendents found that the participants emphasized priorities on instruction, children, and compassion for people. Likely because the female superintendent is not part of the good old boy network she may be more inclined to do what is right even if that means firing someone once deemed as untouchable (Washington et al., 2007).

Conclusions from the Literature Review

The research examined in this literature review indicates that women and men follow different paths as they aim to the position of superintendent and that a critical component for success for any aspiring superintendent, male or female, is the availability of strong, influential mentors and/or networks that can provide guidance and support. While the paths are very different, they are also very closely linked to the recruitment messages that boards and headhunters relay to prospective candidates. That is, the recruitment message in many instances reflects the qualities and characteristics that are typically seen in male superintendents as opposed to female superintendents.

The leadership characteristics of female superintendents are most frequently described as instructional leader, collaborator, and community-builder. Moreover, these common characteristics of female superintendents frequently differ from their male counterparts. It is important to note that, while the research does indicate some common themes and trends in those leadership qualities and characteristics, there certainly are men in the superintendency who possess the ability to lead with their heart, focus on collaboration, and be centered on curriculum, instruction and student achievement.

Over the years there has been more and more research specifically related to women in educational leadership roles. Initially most of the research was conducted among job applicants

rather than those holding the office of superintendent (Reed & Patterson, 2007). In recent years, the focus of studies related to female superintendents has shifted. As the percentage of women in those roles continues to increase there will be emergent opportunities for meaningful, additional research on the topic.

Chapter 3

Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine the career experiences of four female school superintendents. Specifically, I used personal interviews to explore the nature of the career path, mentoring elements and support structures, and the manner in which they define their roles among a sample of Oregon superintendents. An objective of the investigation was to gain understanding about the dynamics articulated by the participants who have entered the superintendency.

As a means to guide this investigation, the study attempted to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What is the nature of the career path of the participant?
- 2) What mentoring elements and support structures did the participant experience in her ascension to the superintendency?
- 3) In what manner does the participant define her role as a superintendent in Oregon?

Sampling Strategy, Participants, and Research Design

A purposive sampling strategy involving four women currently serving in the role of Oregon, K-12 superintendent was incorporated into this research. A purposive sample is appropriate for this study because participants were deliberately recruited based on my appreciation that the participants have met the key criteria necessary to adequately answer the research questions.

Moreover, there are a limited number of female superintendents in Oregon from which to sample, therefore, emphasis was not placed on size or location within the state, of the school district. Specifically, there are currently 46 of the 197 Oregon school districts that are led by female superintendents and I used two primary characteristics in the selection of the interviewees; the length of time serving in the role of superintendent, that is, one in at least her second superintendency and one in her first year in addition to a large and small district superintendents identified within the sample group. I currently serve as an Oregon K-12 superintendent and have access to potential participants who also serve in that role. As a result, recruitment occurred during regular monthly and quarterly opportunities.

A qualitative research approach using personal interviews was the design of this study. Personal interviews were conducted with each participant and lasted approximately 60 to 90 minutes in length. A series of guide question were asked to each participant with subsequent probes as necessary (see Appendix A). Interviews were recorded and later transcribed in order to analyze and code the collected data.

Research Ethics

Informed consent was obtained via a letter of consent given to each prospective participant (see Appendix B). Those agreeing to participate in the study signed the letter of consent, as did the researcher.

Data derived from the interviews were analyzed and presented in an anonymous fashion and no individual is personally identified. All personal information and identities are kept confidential, thus anonymity and confidentiality of the participants is ensured.

In order to reduce the risk to the participants, all research materials (i.e., audio recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) are locked in separate, secure locations for a period of three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials. After a period of three years I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

Data Collection and Analytical Procedures

Data were collected through personal interviews with each of the participants. I also kept extensive field notes on each interview. The transcripts of the interviews and my field notes constituted the sources of data. As mentioned above, the interviews were recorded and transcribed in order to allow for data analysis. Careful analysis of the data was critical in order to best identify themes that emerged throughout the responses. In order to efficiently and effectively analyze the data, a coding strategy was developed as a means to identify prevailing themes common to the participants. The coding process consisted of the following three general analytical steps:

- Initial coding: the initial reading of transcripts, field notes, etc. in order to identify key ideas or patterns.
- Focused coding: the refining of the initial coding with the intent of identifying emerging themes.
- Thematic Coding: the analysis of the data in an attempt to look for connections between themes.

The data analysis focused on the search for prominent themes that emerged from within the participants' responses. These themes provided answers to the research questions outlined previously in this study.

Role of the Researcher and Potential Contributions of the Research

I chose to embark upon this study as a requirement towards completion of the Doctor of Education degree through George Fox University. The topic under investigation is one that is of personal and professional interest. On a personal level, I have a passion for mentoring, supporting and growing educational leaders – both male and female – and understanding more about the experiences of current, “sitting” superintendents will provide me with insights as I work with aspiring administrators.

Professionally, I currently am serving as a superintendent of a K-12 school district in the state of Oregon. Obviously, I am intimately aware of my experiences as I ascended to the lead role and I am very interested in the experiences of other women who have also done so. The percentage of female superintendents is not proportionate to the number of women who serve as teachers. Knowing more about the challenges and experiences female superintendents have encountered should enhance my ability to better prepare female administrators for the role of superintendent.

Based on the existing literature we do not know a great deal about the experiences of female superintendents as it relates to career paths, mentoring and support structures, and the role that women in that lead position assume. The information gleaned from the personal interviews that will be conducted within the framework of this study will contribute to the existing literature. Lastly, because we do not have an especially keen awareness of the experiences

female superintendents encounter as they ascend to the superintendency, there will be practical contributions to education and educational leadership as a result of conducting this study and delving into detailed scenarios via personal interviews.

Chapter 4

Findings

I pursued this study in order to gain insight on the career experiences of female superintendents who serve in the state of Oregon. Four participants were selected and interviewed, based upon the length of time they have served as superintendent and the size of the district within which they serve. It was of special importance to identify at least one participant in her first year of her first superintendency and at least one other participant who has served in at least two, different superintendencies. This chapter introduces the four participants, provides information about their career paths, their experiences with mentors and other support structures, and their own definition of their role as superintendent of a K-12 public school district.

Superintendent 1 (S1)

S1 is currently serving in the first year of her first superintendency. She is 45 years old and is leading a district with an approximate K-12 enrollment of 5,100. Along with being new to the lead role, she is also new to the state of Oregon. In the past she spent time as a teacher and administrator in both Texas and Colorado. During the interview, S1 spent a great deal of time explaining her experiences as a student and the challenges she faced as one identified as “talented and gifted.” Those experiences propelled her into a degree in education with a strong desire to teach science and math, eventually obtaining an English Language Learner (ELL) endorsement. She possesses an undeniable passion related to social equity and the traditionally under-served. She completed high school and college earlier than most and at age 20 began teaching middle school with one period at the end of the day in a high school.

Over the course of her eleven year teaching career, she taught everything from 3rd grade through Advanced Placement (AP) courses at the high school level. Though she loved teaching, S1 shared experiences from her teaching tenure within which her administrator(s) identified her as a teacher leader and encouraged her to take on some informal leadership responsibilities. At the end of her 11th year as a teacher, an administrator in her district asked her to develop and lead professional development around math and science education as the new science standards were beginning to unfold. This then advanced S1 to the next step in her career path which was an appointment/promotion to the position of Curriculum Coordinator at the district office level. Her content area responsibilities included math and science in addition to overseeing the “Gifted Education” program.

S1 served in the position of Curriculum Coordinator in that Texas school district for only one year at which time she and her spouse, a native of Colorado, moved there in order for her to pursue her doctorate degree. Upon moving to Colorado she interviewed for, was offered, and accepted the position of Director of Advanced Academic Services (Math and Science) in the Boulder Valley School District. In that district-level role she ran the Gifted and Talented Program, Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate and all of the remaining programs that were designed for highly-able students and/or advanced academic pursuit – including overseeing all of the magnet schools. She served in this role for three years and noted having experienced some wonderfully diverse opportunities from the creation of model schools, to the creation of laboratory classrooms where people could observe differentiated instruction taking place.

It was after three years in this Director-level position where S1’s career path took an unusual turn. As a reminder, she was promoted directly to the district-level from the position of

classroom teacher; no building-level administrator experience (principal, associate principal, and the like) served as a stepping stone prior to being promoted to the district level. At this point in her career, and still being relatively young (compared to the norm) to serve as an administrator at the district-level, she began getting restless and found herself missing the energy and activity that are present at the building level – where the students are found. S1 commented, “...I had to get back to a building; I didn’t feel the energy of the kids at the district office. It felt ‘flat’ and I wasn’t ready for that.” That led to the next step along her career path, which included being a K-5 principal of a Gifted and Talented Magnet School within a neighboring district.

Her principalship started with opening the magnet school with a mere 158 students, hired all of the staff and built the program to also include grades 6-8; nine years later, enrollment was at capacity of 775 with a wait list of over 400. S1 shared that within those nine years as principal she completed her doctorate and then, especially once the program was off-and-running, she was frequently asked by her superintendent to take on additional, district-level leadership responsibilities such as leading the Civil Rights audit being conducted by the Department of Justice. It was at that the successful close of the audit, she felt her job as K-8 principal had run its course and was then promoted to the position of Executive Director of Specialized Student Populations within the same district she served as principal. She served in that role for two years; during her second year realized that she then was ready to begin the pursuit of her first superintendency.

As S1 shared of the experiences she encountered as she traversed the path that ultimately led to the position of superintendent, she frequently noted various junctures at which an administrator in her district saw leadership skills and talent within her which led to them offering her additional opportunities or tasks beyond the assignment within which she was serving. As

appreciative as she was for those leadership opportunities, she was not able to provide me with people who served as mentors to her along the way. Interestingly enough, when pressed to identify a mentor(s) who supported, guided and encouraged her along the way, S1 noted that those people in her career did not exist. She shared that she felt support from many, but to identify a mentor was near to impossible. When asked how she dealt with the challenges and potential obstacles, she quickly stated that, "... I have always been driven to conduct research, search out those who know more than I on a given topic, and find answers to the questions that would arise" – almost in lieu of the presence of mentor(s) and possible support that could come from a relationship of that nature. When pressed further to identify other support structures that have been present in her life, S1 fondly described her grandmother and the primary influence and support shown to her over the years. She summarized her words of wisdom and encouragement as, "strength that was about not letting anybody tell you that you can't do something and don't let anybody keep you from succeeding – you do what you need to do, get the job done and don't let anybody tell you are not capable." S1 noted that those "core values stuck with me and now I am really good at proving people wrong!"

Once I had a complete understanding of S1's career path and lack of experiences with mentors or other support structures, we began delving deeply into the nature of her first superintendency. When asked to provide a description of her role as superintendent, S1 responded without hesitation, explaining that she is "...the Chief of all Learning and Instruction, first. What we do to deliver instruction for kids is my number one priority and my number one job."

As I continued to learn more about how S1 defined her role as superintendent, a key element of that understanding was the link with her leadership style. As we discussed her

leadership style, she explained that she tends to be a transformational leader who is brought into a role to build systems that don't currently exist or to address challenges within a system. She noted that she is typically viewed as a change agent especially when it relates to employee performance. She has very high levels of expectations of her team members and believes that one of the most important things she can do is hire really good people. She commented that she has mentioned to others, "...in a kind of tongue-in-cheek kind of way, that I recognize that I am not a good leader for mediocre employees...I expect really high levels of performance out of the people around me." She maintains that she builds a team representing diverse perspectives and empowers those around her in a collaborative way, to be actively involved in decision making. She said that, "I'm not directive, I don't make decisions in isolation and I'm a verbal processor so tend to bring people together and ask for their input and their guidance."

It is clear from analyzing the career path experienced by S1 that her experiences have been solely in the area of instruction and instructional leadership with no formal experiences relative to the operations (finance, human resources, etc.) side of school districts. When asked how much time she spends, if any, in schools each week she did some quick calculations in her head and then stated that she is in every school at least one hour every week and usually it is closer to two hours; her average time in schools each week is between 15 and 25 hours. This is a very high number relative to the amount of time in a week. Thus she often engages in other work in the "off" hours. Obviously, her routine makes for very long days and weeks. She commented about that time in schools, stating, "...because I spend so much time in schools, I have to find time to do the other work outside of that, [*laughter*] which is why we in these roles have such long hours!"

When asked if there are areas within her role as superintendent that she feels least knowledgeable or experienced, S1 noted issues related to finance and business. She shared that some of that lack of experience is directly related to being in a new state but that even if that were not the case those areas are the ones within which she is least comfortable. She also indicated that, "...building Board relations [because that had never been part of her previous jobs] is an area I'm learning more about – about how to be that partner with the Board in a way that I didn't know how to do." She made it clear that, because she knows her strengths, she is very purposeful about building a team that employs experts in those areas within which she may not be as well-versed.

At the conclusion of our time together I asked S1 what advice she has for the next generation of women who follow us and aspire to someday be a school superintendent. Her response was quick and decisive as she said, "First of all, know who are." When pressed further about what that means to her, she shared, "...to me it's about knowing what you stand for and knowing what you believe in. You need to know who you are as a leader – what do you believe in, what's your style, what's your voice? Then be true to those things." She commented additionally saying, "Don't try to be what you're not because, in the end, the only person frustrated by it is going to be you, and so I would say if you know that then you can make the right decisions about where you need to go because you'll always keep your core values true to your decision-making."

Superintendent 2 (S2)

S2 is also currently serving in her first superintendency, a position she has held for ten years. She was 51 years old when she started as superintendent; her district has an approximate

K-12 enrollment of 10,700 and she has recently announced that at the end of this school year, she will be retiring. She speaks fondly of her years as a teacher and notes that her career began as a special education teacher and that assignment was followed by various elementary, self-contained classroom, teaching assignments. S2 commented, "...within all of those roles, I just always was involved in leadership. When I was a special ed teacher was the time when special ed law was passed – that was the beginning of Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)...there were no model IEPs so as soon as the law passed I was one of the people on the design team around that. When I was a regular ed teacher we would have grade-level meetings, and I would end up either leading them or facilitating them. So I think I always had some natural leadership skills or at least a willingness to step up, from the very beginning."

Towards the end of her years as a teacher she was encouraged to apply for a position at the district level, in the same district she had been teaching; the position was Assistant Director of Human Resources. When asked why she thought others encouraged her to apply, S2 stated, "I think I was respected by my principals and respected by other teachers in the district, along with district office administrators." She applied for the position, as did her principal and the principal at the high school, and soon learned that she had earned the position and would be promoted to the district office from the classroom. As she was reflecting upon that time in her career she remembered how surprised others were that she got the job as opposed to the others and shared a funny side note, "...you know, they say high school principals and mayors are the most influential...so people were pretty shocked that I got that job as opposed to them."

S2 served as Assistant Director of Human Resources for two years, while at the same time was put in charge of At-Risk programs. She noted that was an important assignment as it "...was the first time others saw how I could develop programs or my understanding of

curriculum – particularly, for kids who struggle.” As S2 reflected on her career trajectory that led her to the district office from the classroom, she referred fondly to the HR Director who hired her into that position and noted, “...he was a mentor to me even though back then we didn’t really talk about or use the word ‘mentor’; he was certainly invested in my success and gave me a lot of advice. One thing he told me was that I needed to think about how long I was going to stay in HR because, clearly, I was an instructional leader, and if you stay too long in HR, you’ll start losing that skill as an instructional leader. He also really pushed hard for women to be in Rotary, and I was the second woman in this whole area to get into a Rotary Club and he was...really facilitating that.”

While serving in the Assistant Director role, S2 was invited to be a part of a neighboring district’s Cadre linked directly to group process; the Cadre was connected to work being done at a local university and typically only administrators from that school district participated -- until S2 was asked to participate and was the only ‘outside’ person who was invited. As she talked about that opportunity she noted that the Cadre definitely served as a support structure for her as she traversed through her administrative career. Not only did the other members serve as support, but the content and expertise to which she was being exposed, was also supportive in nature. It was partially through the work she did within the Cadre that led her to the next step in her career trajectory – Staff Developer in the district who sponsored the Cadre.

S2 was about 30 years old when she became Staff Developer and had already completed her doctoral degree in her late twenties while still was a classroom teacher. After serving as Staff Developer for two years she was promoted to the position of Director of Special Education, where she served another five years. When given the opportunity to move into the Director role, S2 remembers her superintendent at the time asking her, “So what do you want to be when you

grow up?” S2 replied that she had an interest in special education as she had started out as a special education teacher and “...I thought being a Special Education Director is not an easy job so it would be a good job – and so I applied – and got it.”

While serving as an administrator in that neighboring district she also had a female superintendent and noted, “...someone said once (about my superintendent) that you learn the best of what to do and the best of what not to do and she had some incredibly great skills and some things I would never want to be like. She wasn’t my direct supervisor, the Assistant Superintendent was my supervisor and was always very supportive of me but there was never formal mentorship.” It wasn’t much later her supervisor, the Assistant Superintendent, moved on to another district and assumed the role of superintendent. He eventually had an open assistant superintendent position which S2 applied for and got, this then took her to the next step in her career – Assistant Superintendent responsible for supervision of the instruction department, the technology director, the coordinator of curriculum and a some secretarial staff members. She served as assistant for four years before her career took a slightly atypical turn.

It was at this time in her career that S2 turned her focus on the university level and became the director of an administrative licensure program; this was a non-tenured, program faculty position where she served for six years. When asked if it was difficult leaving the K-12 setting that she had known her entire career, S2 commented, “No, you know, I was ready...I didn’t really think about superintendencies. I didn’t see myself as ready, although maybe I was. So I felt very much like I do now, heading into retirement, that I’d like to go deeper and I thought it would be great to just be at a university and teach.” S2 reflected on the fact that in all of the positions she had been assigned, “...I think I had people who were invested in my success because they saw I was good.” In fact, a department head at the university where she was

leading the administrator licensure program, visited with her about the fact that because she wasn't in a tenured position nor did she serve as a researcher, there likely was a glass ceiling for her. In the meantime the position of superintendent (ironically in the same district where she started her career as a teacher) became open. It is both her first and her only superintendency and the one from which she will be retiring this year.

As S2 was asked to reflect back on her career in order to identify mentors and support structures that possibly aided or assisted her along the way she reiterated that the Cadre was key in her growth and that it clearly was a support structure to/for her along the way. Additionally, she noted that the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) also played a large role. Specifically, she noted an academy that COSA offered within which one would participate in a three or four-day simulation where, "...you acted like a principal and people would be evaluating you and then would give you a score and the score would tell you what you needed to work on." When asked to specifically reflect on people in her life that were clearly significant relative to mentoring she commented that, "...many people were very helpful and very invested in me...I think they were more like my supervisors and they were helpful and they were invested in me but I don't think they mentored me."

After listening to the career trajectory experienced by S2, it became evident that she did not ever serve as a principal or building administrator; she ascended directly from the classroom to the district office. When asked if that lack of building-level administrative experience has been a factor at all, S2 responded, "You know, the only time it was a factor was when I ...was applying for the superintendent position and the search committee wanted someone with principal experience, until the search person was able to get them to realize that they might be limiting themselves if that was part of the requirements." She added, "I try to be in schools all

the time. I don't think you can ever understand anything as well as if you do the job but, you know, people have never said 'You'd be better if you had been a principal' – I have never heard that conversation.”

At this point I had a very clear understanding of S2's career path and experiences and began learning more about how she defined her role as superintendent and how she described her leadership style. Upon being asked about her role, S2 quickly stated, "...I think my job is to make kids successful, to hold high expectations for all kids, and to create systems and values and beliefs that made the system operate so you could get there together.” S2 noted that she is in schools an average of eight hours per week and described a leadership style that is all about instructional leadership and is collaborative in nature. She noted, "I really do believe in partnership, I believe in transparency, and I believe in high expectations.” She also added that, "...I think because I'm such a facilitative leader, my weakest skill is that sense of command, though that has changed over the years. I've learned to have more of a sense of command and to compliment my skill set with that.”

The experiences related by S2 has had are primarily in the area of instruction, except for a brief stint as Assistant Director of Human Resources. When asked what, if any, areas she feels least confident or knowledgeable, she stated, "Well, I've never thought of myself as a finance person. I conceptually am very good about money but the detail I don't know nor do I care to know.” She added, "...a lot of the management stuff was not my strong suit but I never saw that it needed to be. I just saw that I needed to have good people in place there.”

As our interview concluded, I asked S2 what advice she has for the next generation of aspiring women superintendents. She replied stating, "I think every superintendent needs a strong instructional background. I would say...don't isolate yourself with women. Make sure

you're engaged with men in the same role because I do think...if you work closely with men you can see some of the skills that they have by virtue of being raised that gender that would be very helpful for women to know." Lastly, S2 emphasized the importance of always being a learner. Indeed, her parting words of advice were, "...read, read, read...that reading is really what helps me get my new ideas."

Superintendent 3 (S3)

S3 is currently serving in her fourth year as superintendent in a district with a K-12 enrollment of approximately 5,400 students. This is her first superintendency and she was 51 years old when she entered into this position. She was an elementary teacher for nine years, prior to her transition into administration, and at the beginning of our interview she stated, "First of all, I'll just say I wanted to be a teacher since I was in the 5th grade. So that was a pathway I was on from the very beginning." That point of clarity will be important, especially as I share more about her ascendancy to the superintendency, her challenges with family versus advancing in her career, and the occasional questioning of herself as she sometimes struggled with whether or not she was "smart enough."

During S3's years as an elementary school teacher, she was given multiple opportunities to teach at various grade levels; from her first full-time teaching assignment in a 3rd grade classroom in a year-round school in California, to 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 6th, and Junior Primary assignments shortly thereafter. She noted that she always wanted to "...be a plain old teacher." What she soon realized, however, is that she was, "...never a plain old teacher because I was always intrigued by other things that were going on." In virtually all of her teaching assignments she assumed either formal teacher leadership roles, as identified and requested by her

administrator, or informal teacher leadership roles as she followed her curiosity and intrinsic desire to learn more about and then implement various programs and studies.

During her last four years of teaching S3 was approached by her principal about a quasi-administrative role that he saw as an opportunity for her while also coming to some very clear revelations about what her personal life and her family was (or was not) going to look like. It was then that she and her husband became increasingly aware of the fact that their struggles to have children were becoming more pervasive. It was also the same time she began pursuing her master's degree and administrative licensure. As S3 looked back on that time in her career and personal life she was reminded that her principal saw more for her. She stated, "I guess what made him a mentor was that he kept encouraging me to be better than I could see myself...he had a bigger vision for me than I had for myself." Once she finished her administrative program, an instructor from one of her courses (who also was superintendent in a neighboring district) encouraged her to apply for a middle school assistant principal in another neighboring, rural district. She applied for that position, got the job and not too long after her appointment, that school was labeled the most dangerous school in Oregon. She served in that position for one year and found herself facing health issues related to 14 hour work days, coupled with the daily challenges and obstacles faced by that school.

After that first year she moved on to become a principal of an elementary school in a nearby district. At the time of her appointment that elementary school not only was the poorest school in that district but also the lowest performing. However, by year three they were the highest performing school and she remained there for three more years. During both of her building-level administrative assignments she also was responsible for various district-level roles

and responsibilities, including oversight of the Talented and Gifted program and the facilitation of the language arts adoption.

It was also during her elementary tenure that her superintendent, who she refers to fondly as a pivotal mentor all throughout her career, encouraged her to obtain her superintendent license. When I asked her if she did so because she knew she wanted to someday be a superintendent, she stated, "...a mentor of mine told me once that sometimes you need to trust other people" and she went further to add, "...and I discovered that he was right, and that I usually had a smaller vision for myself than other people who were mentoring me." As S3 struggled to imagine herself with the leadership characteristics necessary to be a superintendent, others around her continued to encourage her while emphasizing her strong leadership skills. It was also during her final years as elementary principal that she began having opportunities to be a part of some of the work being done at the state level and was appointed by the Governor as a member of the Quality Education Commission.

A poignant element of S3's story is that it was at this time in her life, and after 22 years of marriage, that she and her husband decided to adopt two babies. Her husband stayed home with the children while she pursued the next step in her career. This was also when the same mentor/superintendent who encouraged her to get her superintendent's license also encouraged her to take her 12 weeks of maternity leave and to take the time to enjoy the family she and her husband had for so long desired. S3 follow his advice, stepped away from her career for 12 weeks and helped her husband acclimate to being a "stay-home" dad.

Once back to work she found herself reporting to an interim superintendent and an opportunity to move from elementary principal to the middle school, to no avail. Later, she came to understand that there was a Board member who was not supportive of promoting her

because of S3's ethnicity. S3 notes that experience as the first within which she was painfully aware of some of the prejudices that existed in our state.

By then S3 was being recruited to a much larger district by a superintendent with whom she had served on the Quality Education Commission. Ultimately, he gave her the position of Director for Student Achievement (which she filled for five years). This position afforded her the opportunity to design a large part of the job description. She found herself once again responsible for TAG, leading an upcoming language arts and social studies adoption (which gave her the opportunity to work with high school teachers), while also working on her doctorate at the neighboring University. S3 was 49 years old when she completed her doctorate in Educational Leadership. It was shortly thereafter that she applied for, and earned, her first superintendency – within which, she is currently in year four.

At that point I had a better understanding of S3's career path and some of the struggles and racial barriers she experienced along the way. When I asked her to do some additional reflection on the mentors in her career she spoke about specific conversations that she and "key" mentors – all of whom were men – had along the way. She described specific coaching conversations that helped to prepare her for interviews. She also described, upon her first superintendency, being coached and mentored around negotiating her first contract – a task that was, understandably, foreign to her at that time. When reflecting on what her mentors have done to support her and her success, she said, "I have been aware all along, and I have watched what they've done for me and I've tried to duplicate that, and I do – there are many people I have tried to mentor along the way. Actually, a lot of them have been women, which is really interesting because my mentors were not women." When asked about why she thought men had served in those mentors roles, she responded, "I have reflected on why a lot of the people that have helped

me have been men, and I think part of that is because in a lot of the roles I've been in, there haven't been very many women – there haven't been very many women that have higher roles. So, if I waited for women to help me, there wouldn't have been any.” She went further to say, “I do think it's my responsibility to mentor others. I think my role, especially as a superintendent, is to create an organization that eventually doesn't really need me.” When asked about other support structures present in her career, she noted, “...they were all informal. They were the ones I reached out to. What has been very apparent to me all along the way is that there were not those formal support structures available.”

When asked to describe her leadership style, S3 noted that one of her biggest strengths is, “...I am good at helping people understand what their strengths are and their passion, and trying to connect their strengths and passion to the work that needs to get done.” She went further to describe her leadership style as, “...visionary. I love to come up with ideas. I like to think about the big picture. I like to get people really excited and motivated and inspired to do something.”

It was then that we transitioned into the definition she has of her role as a female superintendent in Oregon. She noted that her role is to, “...set the vision, to build community around that vision, to align the people and the skill sets with the work that needs to get done – to continue to press and support.” Her passion and experiences have always been around instruction, and in her role as superintendent she is in schools and classrooms an average of eight hours per week. She clearly is most confident around issues related to teaching and learning and when asked about what areas within her current role with which she feels least comfortable, she noted that the first is, “Working with my board.” She added that, “Even though I'd had some experiences, I was not prepared for the depths of dysfunction that could happen in a board and how to rescue that. And the other elements are the politics around the board and the community,

along with the whole budgeting piece. I still don't think I know the whole business part of it very well." When pressed to describe her strategy for dealing specifically with those areas of budget and business components, S3 stated, "First I had to find a strong person who knew it way better than anybody I could imagine, who would teach me and empower me. I don't have to be the expert, but I need to find the right person who is."

At the conclusion of our time together I asked S3 what advice she has for aspiring female school superintendents. She thought for a moment and said, "First of all, I would tell them that they can do it. They are smart enough." She went on to reflect on what one of her cherished mentors said to her when she and her husband were getting ready to adopt. He said, "I don't think you want to do that right now – be a mom and be a superintendent – because you are always going to feel guilty."

S3 went on to say that she doesn't think that statement is true and would want women aspiring to the superintendency to know that. She added, "We as women know how to figure that out. We know how to find that balance. We know how to prioritize things and I think people have seen nothing yet as to when women are going to really dominate those leadership roles." Her final words on that topic were, "I would say the world needs us. It needs nurturers in those top leadership positions, people who know how to multitask, who know how to nurture and take care of people while at the same time, being strong leaders."

Superintendent 4 (S4)

S3 is 56 years old and is serving in her seventeenth year as a public school superintendent. She has held that position in three different districts, in three different states. The enrollment of the district within which she currently fills the role of superintendent is

approximately 40,000. Her first superintendency was in a district of approximately 5,500 students in the state of Colorado and her second superintendency was in Tennessee and was a district with approximately 29,000 students enrolled. When asked to share her story, she began by making it very clear that she "...always knew she wanted to be a teacher, but remembers wanting to be one specifically, since the 4th grade." Education was her first and only major in college and she was so driven in her desire to become a teacher that she finished her bachelor's degree in just three years. S3 describes herself as very goal-driven and that description is clearly brought to the surface as she describes her quick and concise ascension from teacher, to counselor to administrator; she was only 39 years old when she earned her first superintendency. She was 28 years old when she earned her doctorate degree.

After approximately five years serving as an elementary teacher and then a school counselor, S4 approached her superintendent (in a very large district, where something like that was not common practice) about her desire to have the opportunity for an administrative internship. Though the internship did not come to fruition, a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) position was created, with an emphasis on health and wellness. This position required S4 to lead the efforts of the district, relative to health curriculum, while also working within the human resources department in order to create and deliver a wellness program for staff. After serving in the TOSA role for not quite one full year, she was promoted to the position of Supervisor of Staff Development, a role within which she served for four years. S4 noted that as she moved from TOSA to her staff development position (and reported to a newly-hired female assistant superintendent) she experienced her first mentor-mentee relationship. She reflected that her female assistant superintendent mentor (and supervisor) was, "...very, very direct and assertive and knew exactly what she wanted. She didn't always tell me what I wanted to hear,

and for the pleaser within me that wasn't always easy. Sometimes she was hard on me which would sometimes make me teary and really frustrated – and then I would go home and work myself to death until I got it right!” S4 also reflected fondly on the fact that this supervisor and mentor made sure she knew that she could do anything and everything she wanted to in her career and that nothing could stop her.

It was at this point in her ascension to the superintendency that her career trajectory took an unexpected turn; she became principal of an elementary school for four years. During the last two of those years she also was responsible for administering the alternative middle school. When asked why she took what some may see as a step backward in her career – as she moved from the district office to a principalship – she explained, “I thought I needed school experience, not necessarily just for the resume. I do think you can be a good superintendent without having school experience, but you'd better be dang sure you've got somebody right next to you that has it.”

After four years in a principalship, S4 went back to a district office assignment in another district; she was hired as the Director of Curriculum and served in that role for a very short amount of time before being named as the Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction. It was at this point in her career that she identified the second mentor in her life and career – the superintendent who hired her to the curriculum director position. She noted that their relationship was not one that is typical of a mentor-mentee. Specifically, he had personality traits that made it very difficult to predict how he would respond, at any given time, to one's work. Though there were many challenging elements that existed within their working relationship, S4 notes that she, “...did learn a lot about boardsmanship from him, in fact, he

actually was probably better with the board than he was his own staff.” Two and one-half years later she moved on to her first superintendency at the age of 39.

After spending ample time working to clearly understand S4’s career path and mentors, we further discussed other support structures that have been evident throughout her career that have assisted and supported her in her ascension to the superintendency. There were two groups she identified: the Superintendent’s Council in the first state she served as superintendent, along with a Superintendent’s Vision and Policy Group in her current position. Within both structures, there exists a network of other superintendents with whom S4 could discuss challenges and glean support. I asked S4 to reflect on her deliberate and swift ascension to the superintendency. When asked whether or not she believed she would be a superintendent even without the influences of her mentors she said, “I think I probably would have gotten here anyway. I just don’t know if the path would have felt the same.”

There was more about S4’s ascension to the superintendency that she wanted to be sure I understood. She shared that in her first two superintendencies, she was the first female superintendent that both districts ever had, “...and in both cases there was a very strong female board member that I think helped the board and the community accept the first female superintendent.” This reflection is particularly noteworthy and is a topic that should be delved into more deeply in other pieces of research. It will be important to have a better understanding of the influences within the make-up of a board of directors, gender differences, and the nature of the search process and how those factors may, or may not, have an effect on the candidate ultimately selected. Lastly, she wanted to share with me how important she thinks mobility is for one to ascend through her career path. She went further to say, “...the more mobile you are, the

easier it is to influence your career path.” This is evident in her movement among and between several states in various parts of the country.

When asked to describe her leadership style S4 noted, “I think I build a really good team – that’s my strength. I am good at recognizing talent and I think I’m very good at getting the team to stay balanced. I try not to be all affect and facilitation. But I also think that there is a real responsibility for me to keep the team balanced. I’m very direct. I process things quickly. People will either describe me as motivating or invigorating or you could say I create too much tension in the room because I’m always trying to hurry everybody along. Every strength is a weakness.”

As we shifted our conversation to definition of roles, I asked her how she would define her role as a female superintendent in Oregon. She stated, “I think the superintendent of a district this size is more like a CEO or a – maybe a statesman. I still hope that I’m an instructional leader but I think when you’re in a smaller district they count on you to be an instructional leader on a daily basis. When you are in a larger district you have lots of instructional leaders around you and below you. So they count on you to be more about setting the path for the future of the company, so to speak, not just the day to day operations.” I wondered, too, if there was an area S4 wished she would have had more experience in that would have helped her be even better prepared for that first superintendency. She noted, “I don’t have any traditional business training linked to finance, but I don’t think I need it. You just have to be sure to put a team in place that has that expertise within it.” She also reflected on the fact that she wished that she would have had the opportunity to learn earlier on about boardmanship and all of the nuances within those relationships.

At the end of the interview I had the opportunity to ask S4 the same question with which I concluded the other three interviews; I wanted to know what advice she would give to the next generation of women who follow us, who aspire to someday be a school superintendent. S4 clearly needed very little time to think about her response before she said, “First, I would tell them – you can do it! I can help you figure out how to do it or somebody else can. Please ask for advice because men do it all the time. I used to think men were just being nice to each other because they play golf together, but they actually use a network to get where they want to go. Women don’t learn that innately, for whatever reasons. Second, I would say to be very specific about a network of support inside and outside of your district. Third, I would remind all female administrators to pick whatever boundaries/balance are necessary and try and stay in that structure – there will be plenty of nights where you will stay awake all night worrying about something you can’t control and we have to have a way to always remember who we are, as individuals.”

Chapter 5

Discussion

This qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews to obtain data about the career experiences of four Oregon female school superintendents. After conducting and transcribing the interviews, I engaged in a coding process which involved three general analytical steps: initial coding, focused coding and thematic coding. These analytical steps were used in order to identify prominent themes within the interview data. In this chapter, I apply the information gleaned from the participants to the three research questions that have guided this examination. I will also connect the insights gained from my research to the existing literature and discuss potential implications for action and further research.

When initially conceptualizing this study, and then later steps pursuing it, the following three research questions guided my work:

Research Question #1

What is the nature of the career path of the participant?

Research Question #2

What mentoring elements and support structures did the participant experience in her ascension to the superintendency?

Research Question #3

In what manner does the participant define her role as a superintendent in Oregon?

Preparation for interviewing the four participants included creation of a series of guide questions. Each interview lasted from 60-90 minutes, depending on the level of detail provided by the participant and, though the list of guide questions is extensive, all three research questions

were addressed by nearly all of the participants within their answers to the first guide question asked of them. As the interviews ensued, I interjected clarifying and/or follow-up questions as needed.

Research Question #1

What is the nature of the career path of the participant?

Natale (1992) identified two career paths that are followed by the majority of superintendents' ascension to the position: from teacher to principal to superintendent, or from teacher to principal to central office administrator to superintendent. The typical route for men to the superintendency is secondary teacher, athletic coach, assistant secondary principal, secondary principal and then superintendent. On the other hand, a typical route for women is moving from the positions of elementary or secondary teacher, club advisor, elementary principal, director/coordinator, assistant/associate superintendent and then superintendent (Brunner & Kim, 2010; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Natale, 1992; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). Those trends have come to bear as the career paths of four superintendents were analyzed during the course of this study.

In all four of the cases studied here, the women began their careers in education as elementary teachers. Some of them were also given assignments as an elementary special education teacher or elementary counselor, but none of them were ever assigned to the secondary level in any full-time capacity. The exceptions included a brief assignment for S1 as principal of a K-8 building which started as a K-5 magnet school and grew from there and a two-year assignment (while also serving as elementary principal) and S4's experience in administering an alternative middle school. In addition to the formal positions within which they served, all of the

participants reflected back on the early years of their careers with distinct memories of being interested in "...the bigger picture – not just what was happening in my classroom." S2 commented, "... when we had grade-level meetings...I would end up either leading them or facilitating them so I think I always had some natural leadership skills or at least a willingness to step up from the very beginning." Others among the participants shared similar experiences as part of their stories. All four participants proceeded on either to the elementary principalship or ascended immediately to the district office holding a director or coordinator role. In two cases there was a move directly from teacher to district office. Ultimately, as with S1 and S4, their career paths took a bit of an atypical turn as they left a district-level assignment and went back to the building level to serve as principal in order to "...have building-level leadership experience."

Research indicates that nearly 75% of superintendents did not teach at the elementary level prior to working as a central office administrator or superintendent (Glass, 2000; Sharp, et al., 2004). The participants interviewed in this study clearly do not reflect that statistic. Additionally, very few women apply for and are hired to high school principalships. However, that is the primary position from which one ascends to the superintendency (Sharp et al., 2004). None of the four interviewees held high school principalships at any point in their careers. This is particularly noteworthy as it aligns clearly with the research that supports the two distinct paths for men and women.

All of the participants' district-level experiences and assignments were specifically related to teaching and learning with the exception of S2, serving for one brief period in human resources. Glass (2000) suggests that one reason females fall behind their male counterparts in top district positions is the fact that women tend to have leadership experiences in the district office that are very different from men. Women often fill curriculum-related roles while men

have more experience in fiscal or human-resource positions (Brunner & Kim, 2010). The findings revealed in my interviews with the four participants in this study support that trend.

All four participants were asked to reflect on what, if any, areas of the superintendency they felt least knowledgeable and/or experienced; each indicated that one of those areas would be finance and the business aspects of the position. Of note is that each of them followed that statement with a clear reminder that they need not be experts in those fiscal and business-related areas but they must be sure to hire individuals into those roles with the necessary attributes as their areas of strength. That is, several of them emphasized the notion that they need not be the experts in everything but that they must assemble a team who has diverse skillsets and abilities.

Lastly, as noted in the review of the literature, women are more inclined to stay in teaching assignments longer than their male counterparts before applying for administrative position (Glass, 2000; Grogan, 2008; Grogan & Brunner, 2005; Montz & Wanat, 2008; Yong-Lyun & Brunner, 2009). My study revealed the number of years in teaching prior to becoming an administrator, ranging from 5-11 years. My literature review did not reveal the average number of years served as teachers, by their male counterparts; therefore, I am unable to determine whether or not the 5-11 years range is lengthier or briefer than that of men who ascend to the superintendency.

In summary, all four participants began their careers as elementary teachers who assumed informal leadership roles from the very beginning of their careers, and from that point on primarily held positions within which their focus on was on teaching and learning as opposed to the managerial experiences in finance and human resources as typically reported by their male counterparts. Lastly, prior to ascending to the district-level none of the participants (except for

S2's assignment as a K-8 principal) assumed full-time roles – either teaching or administrative – at the secondary level.

Research Question #2

What mentoring elements and support structures did the participant experience in her ascension to the superintendency?

There is substantial research that indicates the importance of and need for mentorships and support systems as women ascend from teacher through the administrative ranks and on to the superintendency. While that research is compelling, equally as compelling is the apparent lack of those support systems and mentors for females. The literature outlines two periods in which a mentor is important: 1) as one ascends through his/her career, and 2) as one serves in the superintendency – a position that because of its design, leaves those serving within it, lonely and with very few people with whom they can talk. Brunner and Grogan (2005) stated that the superintendency is a lonely profession that can be “dangerously stressful without adequate relief systems” and go further to claim that women who serve in the role of superintendent must network (p.49). The focus within this portion of my study is on the mentoring and support structures experiences related by the four participants as they traversed from the role of teacher to the position of superintendent. Just as each of the four participants' career paths took slightly different courses, there were also four different experiences with mentors.

While two superintendents (S3 and S4) could immediately identify one or two people who they considered influential mentors within their careers, their stories shed light on the fact that those experiences were few (relative to frequency of exposure men have to mentors and networks) and far between. As those relationships were described there was clearly a sense of

respect and on some level, appreciation and affection, for those who took the time and the energy to help S3 and S4 maneuver through their careers and promotions. Of importance is the fact that not all of those mentors always effused warm and supportive mentoring strategies but sometimes quite the contrary was true. Specifically, S4 described her first mentor-mentee relationship as one within which her mentor (and supervisor) "...didn't always tell me what I wanted to hear, and for the pleaser within me, that wasn't always easy." S4 also remembered fondly, that that mentor made sure she knew that she could do anything and everything she wanted to in her career and that nothing could stop her. S4 is still – all these years later – in contact with her first mentor.

While S3 enjoyed several mentors (some of them supervisors) along her trajectory to superintendent she did find it interesting to reflect on the fact that, while she has taken it upon herself to mentor women, her mentors have been men. When asked why she thought that to be the case she indicated that in the roles within which she has served, there haven't been many women and, "...if I waited for women to help me, there wouldn't have been any."

S2 had a different set of experiences. She noted that over the course of her career she can remember and identify supervisors who clearly supported and encouraged her. S2 commented that many people assisted and supported her and were invested in her but none were clearly identified mentors but rather, individuals who cared about her success. While S2 couldn't clearly identify individuals who served as mentors along the way, she and S4 very succinctly described professional organizations and cadres that served as pivotal supports to them along the way. This will be of particular import later in this chapter when I suggest future research and implications for scholarship.

Lastly, one participant interviewed (S1) was not able to identify any specific individuals that mentored her along the way. While she did reflect on the influence of her grandmother and the affect she had on her growth and development into a strong, female leader, S1 seemed to be driven primarily by a very strong, intrinsic motivation to obtain the goals she set for herself.

In summarizing the responses to this second research question I can't help but wonder how different, if at all, the answers would have been should I have asked four male superintendents, the same question? Would I have been met with the same hesitation that was either followed with a detailing of a few mentors, at best – or the converse, which was a hesitation followed by the realization that there truly were no mentors experienced along the way? A theme emerged from the interviews supporting the current research that suggests females are not privy to the “old boy network” and the “buddy system” (Davis, 2007). These interviews also reveal that there were very few mentors for the four participants who were women; the majority of the mentors identified were men.

Research Question #3

In what manner does the participant define her role as a superintendent in Oregon?

Women view educational leadership differently than men. Generally, they consider two characteristics as vital in advancing to the superintendency: interpersonal skills, and knowledge of curriculum and instruction (Montz & Wanat, 2008). Without a doubt, all four participants identified their roles as instructional leaders, team-builders and facilitators. Each of the superintendents noted instructional leadership as one, if not the, primary role held in their positions. The only divergence from that thinking came from the participant serving in the largest of the four districts where her role is more of CEO – guiding and creating the path and

vision for those other leaders around her. Their focus on instructional leadership is reflected, in part, by the priority they put on being in schools and classrooms with average hours per week ranging from eight to 25. The exception is with S4, who spends an average of one to two hours per week in schools; the difference between S4 and the others is directly related to the size of the district she leads. As noted earlier, S4 considers herself an instructional leader though in a district with an enrollment of 40,000, that looks different than it does within a smaller district. Thus, she regarded her role often most often as that of a CEO. As is often the case, the role of superintendent is filled by individuals who predominantly have managerial experiences (human resources and finance); in scenarios such as those, spending time in schools/classrooms and staying tuned-in to the teaching and learning taking place is not a priority. That is one of the primary differences between men and women in the superintendency, as documented in this research effort.

It is near to impossible to talk about one's leadership role without also spending time discussing one's leadership style. As the interviews with the four participants ensued, several leadership styles and characteristics emerged as consistent: team-builder, facilitative leader, collaborative, responsible for aligning strengths with assignments, all the while having high-expectations of those around them. Each participant interviewed stressed the importance of decision-making processes that involve and include different experiences from teammates. They each also stressed the importance of keeping students at the center of their thinking as they lead their districts.

In summarizing the answers gleaned in response to this third research question, it is interesting to note that regardless of the size of the district, each participant identified their leadership style and characteristics very similarly. Each of them places an emphasis on their

team-building skills, creating a culture of collaboration and teamwork, and the importance of finding people with the necessary skill sets to fill integral positions on the administrative team. Three of the participants lead districts that have only a difference of approximately 5,000 students and each of them clearly defined themselves as instructional leaders; the participant who leads a much larger district has always assumed instructional roles during her ascension to the superintendency.

Suggestions for Future Research and Implications for Scholarship

The data obtained through these interviews contain much that is consistent with the existing literature. Nevertheless, issues unique to the four participants certainly exist. As the number of female superintendents leading public school districts in the United States continues to increase, there will no doubt be additional opportunities for further research related to their experiences as they ascended to the lead role. If an opportunity arises to recreate or augment this project, a possible approach would be to increase the number of participants involved in the study. By increasing the number of participants, the researcher would be able to more confidently generalize her findings to the larger population. Additionally, broadening the study to specifically and purposefully include districts in diverse geographic locations could possibly enhance the data gathered and would shine a light on any differences experienced by women who lead and serve in different locations. Specifically, one could delve more deeply into comparing experiences of female superintendents serving in rural, remote settings with their counterparts in more urban and suburban settings.

As the number of female superintendents continues to increase, opportunities and avenues for additional scholarly exploration should also increase. Another such avenue of

exploration related to this study is considering the make-up and composition of the school district's Board of Directors and if there is evidence that the gender make-up of the Board could have any direct correlation with the gender of the superintendent hired to lead that district. As noted earlier in this study, S4 identified her first two superintendencies as being the first female superintendent hired in each of those districts. She also noted that in both cases there was a very strong female board member who quite likely helped the board and the community accept their first female superintendent. Is this phenomenon common? A further study focusing on board composition related to the hiring of the superintendent could help answer that question.

Another element tacitly related to the composition of the board, is the process the board follows in the recruitment of their superintendent. Specifically, there is some research revealed in my literature review that indicates some boards could, inadvertently, be affecting the type of candidate that applies for their open superintendency. If the recruiting process focuses more on the search for a manager – one with experience in finance, operations and management – the chances are that the candidate meeting those qualifications will be male. On the contrary, if the search focus on a collaborative, instructional leader with experiences that reflect those qualities – the chances would be more likely that the majority of the candidates meeting those qualifications will be female. The make-up of the board, coupled with the superintendent recruiting process could be a study that would have the potential of examining much more closely the elements in play prior to the superintendent ever being selected.

Lastly, each of the four participants in this study have a doctorate degree; two of whom earned those degrees while still in their 20s and the other two who earned them later in their career. Further investigation into the education level of male and female superintendents and the

reasons behind those degrees – or lack thereof – would also be a noteworthy follow-up to this project.

Implications for Educational Professionals

All four of the participants interviewed began their careers as classroom and special education teachers or counselors at the elementary level. While this phenomenon is clearly supported in the research related to the career paths typically experienced by women in the superintendency, it is important to remember that approximately 75% of elementary classroom teachers are women. Yet nearly 75% of superintendents did not teach at the elementary level prior to working as a central office administrator or superintendent (Glass, 2000; Sharp, et al., 2004).

The challenge this presents for educational professionals, specifically those of us who serve in the role of superintendency or other administrative positions and afforded the opportunity to mentor aspiring administrators is identifying purposeful and meaningful ways in which we can help empower women who currently serve in teaching positions that do not typically lead to the superintendency. Women and men in educational leadership roles must be intentional about reaching out to female teachers – regardless of the grade level to whom they teach – who possess and demonstrate informally or formally, leadership skills with and among their teacher colleagues. It is too often the case that those female teachers, unassumingly taking on informal leadership roles, do not even realize the potential within them; it is the job of the administrators around them, and most specifically female administrators, to help recognize and acknowledge the leadership potential within. To help those teachers, some of whom are aspiring administrators and other who are not, envision what is possible for them in their careers. To help them feel confident in the recognition that there is someone there to assist them and who will

guide and support them along the way. They need to recognize that there are those who will come alongside them as they experience the challenges that exist relative to being a professional, a wife or partner, a caregiver to elderly parents, a mother; a realization that being an administrator and a nurturer within our families need not be mutually exclusive. As is evidenced in the data gleaned from the interview, it is too often the case that when a female does experience the opportunity to be mentored by one who is truly invested in her success, that mentor is typically a man. Women administrators must stop feeling threatened by others who are aspiring to their position. We must be confident in our place in education reach out to other women; it should be our duty to do so for the generation of female administrators who follow us.

Lastly, as educational professionals, it is necessary that the professional organizations within our state that were created to support administrators take a more proactive role in the mentoring and supporting of female administrators aspiring to be superintendents or female teachers aspiring to be administrators. Professional organizations such as the Confederation of Oregon School Administrators (COSA) should take a purposeful and deliberate approach to mentorship. The model that presently exists matches those currently new to administration with someone who is typically retired; the match that occurs does not seem to be based on personal qualities and experiences but rather, a random assignment with little or no meaningful connections. Additionally, Northwest Women in Educational Administration (NWEA), an affiliate of COSA, could also provide a positive service for mentoring female administrators. How can one expect a strong mentoring relationship to occur or exist if, at best, the conditions used to identify that partnership are random and nonsensical?

Conclusions

The four participants interviewed in this study took a great deal of time out of their hectic and challenging schedules, and opened the story books of their careers as they shared their experiences and journeys with me. For some of them, that story included some very personal and sometimes almost palpable experiences that could not be separated out from their professional experiences. For others, that was not the case, but what was true for each of them as they talked -- was what sometimes seemed to be possibly a rare time for their own reflection; a rare chunk of time within which they could sit, be still, reflect and share the experiences and struggles they experienced that contributed to their success and ultimately their ascension to the role of superintendent.

The interviews described in this project revealed some experiences that had nothing to do with being a woman in the superintendency, and other experiences that had everything to do with being a woman in the superintendency. From issues of race, to relationship challenges; from struggles with balancing the responsibilities of a family, to the joy of being a woman in this challenging role – each and every participant shared, in one way or another, her desire to help pay forward the successes she has enjoyed. I had the amazing privilege of listening to and learning from each of these brilliant and humble women as I sat with them during the interviews. I am filled with a sense of honor in serving alongside them and came away with a renewed focus on what I must do as an individual and as a superintendent to support the next generation of female administrators.

I hope that by pursuing this study more attention will be focused on specific steps that can be taken to support aspiring female superintendents. Because the career paths are so different for men and women aspiring to the role of superintendent, we must be intentional about “growing” administrators and cautious about not overlooking capable leaders who currently

serve in roles that typically do not lead to the superintendency. We need to focus actionable steps that will eliminate barriers for women while at the same time putting support structures in place to assist them in navigating what can sometimes be a very challenging journey.

References

- Banuelos, M. V. (2008). Breaking the silence: Gender bias in the top ranks. *Leadership*, 38(1), 28-30.
- Bjork, L. (2000). Introduction: Women in the superintendency -- advances in research and theory. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(1), 5-15.
- Brunner, C. C. (1996). *Developing women leaders: The art of "stalking" the superintendency*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators San Diego, CA, March 8-11, 1996.
- Brunner, C. C. (1998). Women superintendents: Strategies for success. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 36(2), 160-182.
- Brunner, C. C. (2000). Unsettled moments in settled discourse: Women superintendents' experiences of inequality. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36(1), 76-116.
- Brunner, C. C. & Kim, Y.-L. (2010). Are women prepared to be school superintendents? An essay on the myths and misunderstandings. *Journal of Research on Leadership Education*, 5(8), 276-309.
- Dana, J. A. & Bourisaw, D. M. (2006). Overlooked leaders. *American School Board Journal*, 193(6), 27-30.
- de Santa Ana, T. M. (2008). Opening up the superintendency. *Leadership*, 38(1), 24-27.
- Derrington, M. L. & Sharratt, G. (2008). Female superintendents: Breaking barriers and challenging life styles. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, 75, 8-12.
- Dobie, D. F. & Hummel, B. (2001). Successful women superintendents in a gender-biased profession. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 34(2), 22-28.

- FeKula, M. J. & Roberts, L. (2005). Why do fewer women than men pursue the superintendency? *International Journal of Educational Reform*, 14(2), 219-231.
- Glass, T. E. (2000). Where are all the women superintendents? *School Administrator*, 57(6), 28-32.
- Grogan, M. (2008). The short tenure of a woman superintendent: A clash of gender and politics. *Part of a special issue: Women in Educational Leadership*, 18(6), 634-660.
- Grogan, M. & Brunner, C. (2005). Women leading systems: What the latest facts and figures say about women in the superintendency today. *School Administrator*, 62(2), 46.
- Kamler, E. (2006). The aspiring superintendents' study group: Investigating a mentoring network for school leaders. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning*, 14(3), 297-316.
- Kowalski, T. J., McCord, R. S., Peterson, G. J., Young, I. P. & Ellerson, N. M. (2010). The American school superintendent: 2010 decennial study. *American Association of School Administrators*.
- Kowalski, T. J. & Stouder, J. G. (1999). Female experiences related to becoming a superintendent. *Contemporary Education*, 70(4), 32.
- Logan, J. P. (2000). An educational leadership challenge: Refocusing gender equity strategies. *The AASA Professor*, Available: <http://www.aasa.org/tap/summer99logan.htm>.
- McCabe, D. H. (2001). Metaphorical descriptions of the role of women school superintendents. *Education*, 121, 690.
- Miller, S. K., Washington, Y. C., & Fiene, J. R. (2006). Female Superintendents: Historic Barriers and Prospects for the Future. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 4(4), 219-242.

- Montz, C. B. & Wanat, C. L. (2008). Slow path to the superintendency: Women's social networks and negotiation skills. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 6, 29-47.
- Natale, J. A. (1992). Up the career ladder. *The Executive Educator*, 16-20.
- Newton, R. M. (2006). Does recruitment message content normalize the superintendency as male? *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 42(551), 551-574.
- Pascopella, A. (2011). Superintendent staying power. (special report). *District Administration*, 31-40.
- Pascopella, A. (2008). State of the superintendency. (cover story). *District Administration*, 44(2), 32-36.
- Polka, W., Litchka, P., & Davis, S. W. (2008). Female superintendents and the professional victim syndrome: Preparing current and aspiring superintendents to cope and succeed. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 6(4), 293-311.
- Raskin, C. F., Haar, J. M., & Robicheau, J. (2010). Voices of women in the field creating conversations: A networking approach for women leaders. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 8(3), 159-165.
- Reed, D., & Patterson, J. (2007). Voices of resilience from successful female superintendents. *Women in Educational Leadership*, 5(2), 89-100.
- Sharp, W. L., Malone, B. G., Walter, J. K., & Supley, M. L. (2004). A three-state study of female superintendents. *Educational Research Quarterly*, 27(3), 22-37.
- Sherman, W. H., Munoz, A. J., & Pankake, A. (2008). The great divide: Women's experiences with mentoring. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 6(4), 239-259.

- Skrla, L. (2000a). Mourning silence: Women superintendents (and a researcher) rethink speaking up and speaking out. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies*, 13(6), 611-628.
- Skrla, L. (2000b). The social construction of gender in the superintendency. *Journal of Education Policy*, 15(3), 293-316.
- Skrla, L. & Reyes, P. (2000). Sexism, silence, and solutions: Women superintendents speak up and speak out. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36, 44.
- Tallerico, M. (2000). Gaining access to the superintendency: Headhunting, gender, and color. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 36, 18-43.
- Tallerico, M., & Blount, J. M. (2004). Women and the superintendency: Insights from theory and history. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 40(5), 633-662.
- Washington, Y. C., Miller, S. K., & Fiene, J. R. (2007). Their work, identity, and entry to the profession. *Journal of Women in Educational Leadership*, 5, 263-283.
- Yong-Lyun, K. & Brunner, C. C. (2009). School administrators' career mobility to the superintendency: Gender differences in career development. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 47(1), 75-107.

Appendix A

Guide Questions

An Examination of the Career Experiences of Four Female School Superintendents

1. Please tell me about your “story” – that is, what is your background and how did you ascend to the superintendency?
2. What have been your experiences as it relates to mentors (both formal and informal) and support structures from which you benefited as you ascended to the superintendency?
3. What positions did you hold at the various steps within your career? Did you start as a teacher? If so, how many years and at what level? How did you transition into administrative positions? Within what administrative positions did you serve?
4. How do you describe your role as superintendent?
5. How do you describe your leadership style?
6. What advice would you give to women who aspire to be a school superintendent?

Appendix B

Letter of Consent

An Examination of the Career Experiences of Four Female School Superintendents

Dear Oregon School Superintendent,

My name is Heather Cordie and I am a doctoral student in Educational Leadership at George Fox University. I am conducting research on the career experiences of female school superintendents. You are invited to engage in a 90 minute-long personal interview regarding your career path (or trajectory), the mentoring elements and support structures that existed in your ascension to the superintendency, and your views related to your roles and therefore your leadership style. The questions relate to your first-hand experiences as you went from teacher to administrator and ultimately, to the position of superintendent.

My hope is that the findings provide insight into the experiences of females as they aspired to the role of superintendent.

The risks associated with this research are minimal. The personal interview questions are non-invasive and are intended to offer you the opportunity to reflect upon, and share, your experiences and perceptions. Please be aware that your participation is completely voluntary and you may decline to continue at anytime or decline to answer any question(s) at your discretion.

The results of this study will only be used for research purposes, primarily, for the dissertation required for the completion of my doctoral program. Information will be analyzed and presented in an anonymous fashion and no individual will be personally identified. All personal information and identities will be kept confidential.

All research materials (i.e., audio recordings, transcriptions, and signed consent forms) will be locked in separate, secure locations for a period of three years. I will be the only individual who will have access to these materials and after three years, I will personally destroy all relevant materials and delete the audio recordings.

Thank you for considering participation in this study. If you have any questions regarding this research, please contact me at (503) 953-XXXX. If you have any additional questions you may contact my committee chair, Dr. Terry Huffman at (503) 554-XXXX.

If you understand the use of this research and agree to participate, please sign below.

Participant signature _____

Researcher signature _____